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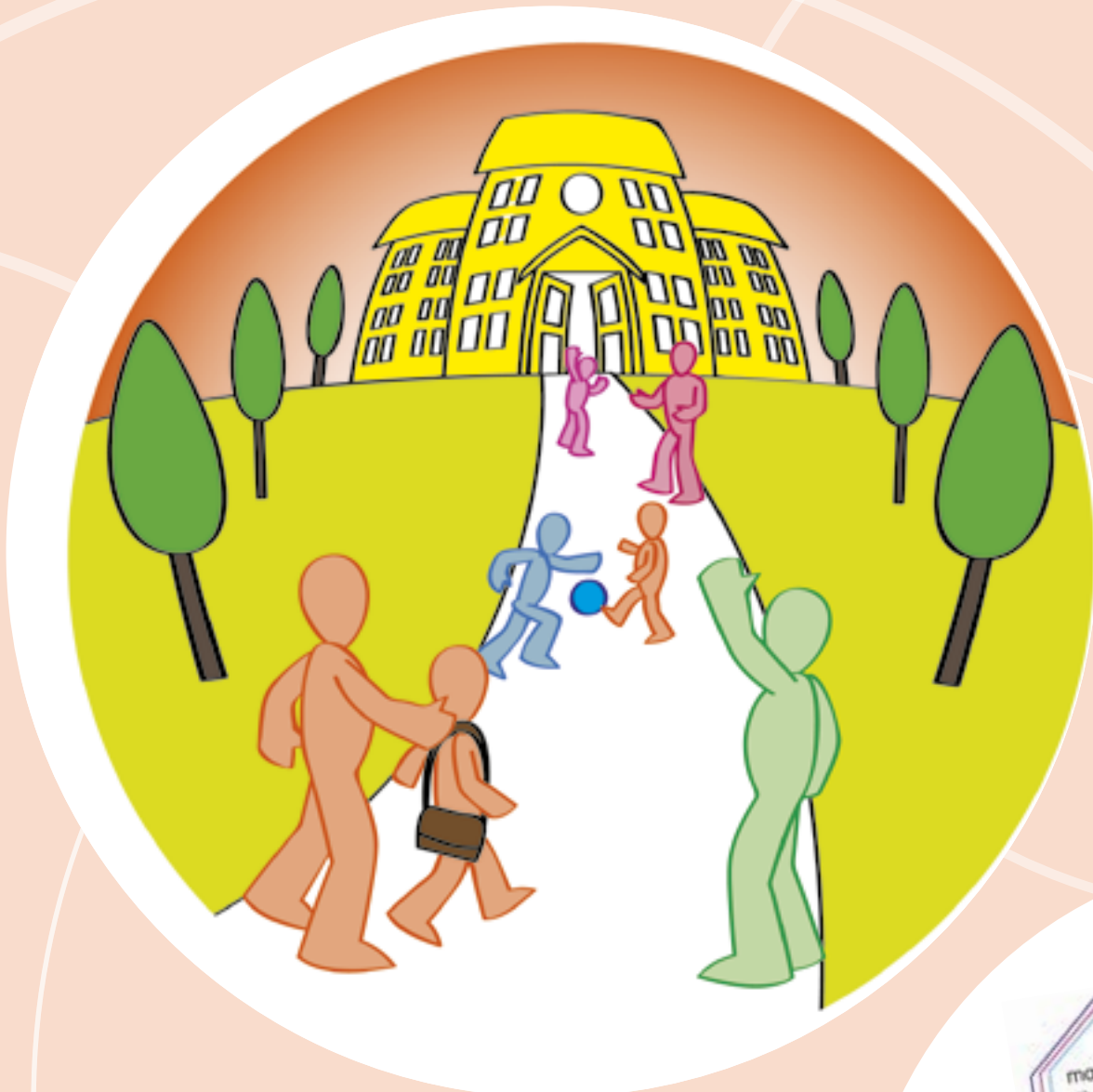
Theme 3: Welcoming families to engage with the school
Resources 1–9

mae addysg yn dechrau **yn y cartref** education begins **at home**

Audience

Primary, secondary and special schools in Wales, nursery settings and pupil referral units.

Overview

This is the third of five themes contained within the Welsh Government's *FaCE the challenge together: Family and community engagement toolkit for schools in Wales*. The toolkit is designed to provide practical support for schools in Wales to help them develop and strengthen their approach to family and community engagement.

The resources within this theme focus on the importance of welcoming families to engage with the school and foster the development of mutual trust and respect between both parties. The resources provide helpful tips on how to establish and maintain effective two-way communication.

Action required

For use in planning interventions to raise the attainment of learners living in poverty.

Further information

Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

Learner Wellbeing Branch
Education and Public Services Group
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Tel: 029 2082 3630

e-mail:
wellbeingshare@wales.gsi.gov.uk

This document along with other relevant guidance can be accessed from the Learning Wales website at
learning.gov.wales/deprivation

Related documents

Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools **(2014)**

www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/
schoolshome/deprivation/rewriting-the-future-schools/?lang=en

Rewriting the Future 2015: A Year On **(2015)**

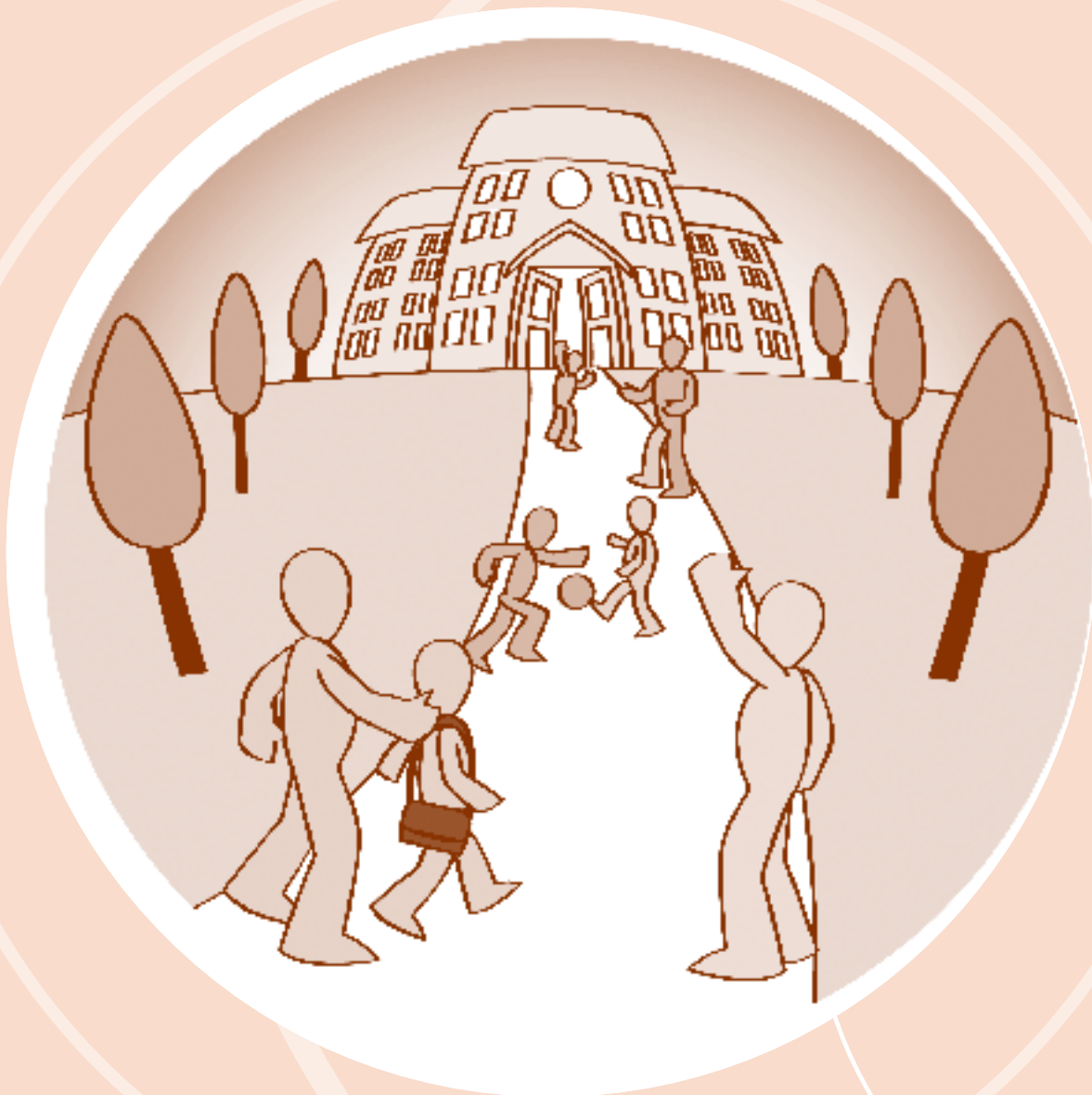www.gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150630-rewriting-the-future-a-year-on-e.pdf

Contents

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Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 1
A welcoming school

This resource contains the following.

- A strategy to make families welcome.
- Creating a good first impression and a welcoming space.
- Creating opportunities for families to get involved in school life.
- Some ideas for school activities to welcome families.
- Safeguarding.
- Checklist – A welcoming school.

" Building home–school links through out of hours clubs, parenting classes, extended schools and outreach work can lead to improvements in completion of homework, learning behaviours and improved attendance."

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011)
Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary, Department for Education (England)

A strategy to make families welcome

Welcoming families into your school and encouraging them to get involved in school life can be an important first step in working with families to help them support their child's learning. There are also other benefits to the school of having families involved in school life in general, for example:

- volunteering
- enrichment of the curriculum
- easier handing of complaints and fewer incidents of abusive behaviour towards staff.

Every parent/carer wants the best for their child but may, for a variety of reasons, find that there are barriers that currently prevent them from engaging with the school. The key to overcoming some of these barriers is to create engagement opportunities during which relationships can be built by using open, reflective and empathetic listening, and then using what is learned to provide better support.

From formal parents'/carers' evenings, telephone conversations and interviews, to informal school-sponsored family events such as summer fairs, sports days and informal schoolyard chats, school staff have many occasions to engage directly with parents/carers and gain a deeper understanding of their worlds.

Good strategies to build collaborative relationships are based on the following principles.

1. Start from, and build on, the cultural values of families (rather than starting from the cultural values of schools).
2. Base your approach on an understanding of the potential barriers to engagement.
3. Stress personal contact with families.

4. Foster communication with families.

5. Create a warm environment for parents/carers.

6. Keep focused on the end goal: helping parents/carers to support their child's learning.

This resource **A welcoming school** covers two aspects:

* **creating a good first impression and a welcoming space**

* **creating opportunities for families to get involved in school life.**

There are other resources in this toolkit that could be useful in developing your strategy, and these are highlighted in the text below.

Creating a good first impression and a welcoming space

The design of the school entrance can encourage parents/carers to come into the building and, once inside, help make the experience a positive one. The initial impression can determine whether a parent/carer feels comfortable enough to return or decides to avoid the school whenever possible. Here are some ideas.

* Make the school entrance welcoming and easy to find.

* Post signs to show newcomers how to get to the office to sign in and how to find particular classrooms.

* Make sure the receptionist is on board with the important role they play in family engagement.

* Be blunt – hang a sign on the first day of school saying "We welcome our new families".

* Post notices about parent/carer group meetings and events around the school where parents/carers are most likely to see them.

* Provide a comfortable reception area, that could have a welcome mural or posters, possibly developed with families, in all the languages represented in the school. See the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit on how you could make this welcome an inclusive one, especially for your under-represented groups.

* Open up a space in the school on a regular basis for parents/carers to meet, mingle, have tea, etc.

* If space and resources allow, create parent/carer facilities within the school, such as a dedicated room for adult education classes (e.g. IT, English), governors' meetings or other community activities, to be used both during and outside normal school hours. If possible, in primary schools provide adult-sized chairs.

The Victoria State Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning has published a *Welcoming Walk through the School* tool. This describes an exercise that school staff can do with family members to better understand how others see the school and whether it can be made more inviting. This can be found online at www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/management/Pages/familypartnerparticipating.aspx.

Creating opportunities for families to get involved in school life

Although the first impression of the school is important, the primary determinant of whether families feel welcomed and motivated to be involved is the nature of the ongoing contact that they have with school staff and whether the school provides a good range of opportunities for them to be involved.

Probably the best approach to welcoming families is to create opportunities for personal contact. The simplest step for early years and primary settings is to make sure that staff are available and approachable for families at drop off/pick up times at the school gate. Secondary schools may well have to rely more on indirect communications with families – see the **Methods of communicating** resource (Theme 3: Resource 5) in this toolkit.

It is also a good idea to reach out to families as early as possible in the school year. Let them know that they are active and valued partners in their child's education. Some schools organise 'meet the family, meet the teacher days' at transition points, where adults wear name tags showing where they teach/where their children are. Other schools have organised 'boo hoo breakfasts' for parents/carers of children having their first day at school (see also the material in the **Transitions** resource (Theme 3: Resource 4) in this toolkit).

It is important to be sensitive to family and cultural differences, understand the barriers to engagement from the families' perspective, and to plan your engagement and support with this in mind. You may find the material in the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit useful. Remember that acceptance of differences in families is essential for each child and parent/carer to feel a sense of belonging to the school family.

Learners play a role in encouraging (or, occasionally, discouraging) their parents/carers to get involved with the school. Once they are made aware of how important it is that their parents/carers get involved they often have a host of good ideas about how this could be done. They often know what would work best for their parents/carers and their families.

Above all, make your engagement enjoyable. Are there are opportunities to take part that don't need much skill or confidence? Creating opportunities for families to volunteer to help or join in with one-off things with no long-term commitment will often yield a wide variety of skills (or network of contacts) and will help ensure parents/carers/families are able to contribute at the level they feel comfortable with.

Some ideas for school activities to welcome families

You will want to consult with your own families to get an idea of the types of activities that would work for them. However, here are some ideas to start you off. See also the ideas for learning-based activities contained within the three **Engagement for learning** resources (Theme 4: Resources 1, 2 and 3) in this toolkit (for Foundation Phase, primary and secondary schools) and also the **Family Learning Programmes (FLPs)** resource (Theme 4: Resource 5) in this toolkit.

Consider running some of these away from the school site in order to attract those who, for whatever reason, will not come into the school.

• **Boo hoo breakfast** – a welcome session on the first day of school for Reception age children, followed by a breakfast for parents/carers.

- **Information fairs** – these inform families of all the support and activities that will be on offer that term/academic year, providing refreshments, and taster activities. Invite families to sign up to family learning programmes (FLPs), or adult community learning opportunities, or your social media network.

- **Gardening/outdoor space project** – if health and safety considerations and premises management policies permit, invite family members to volunteer to help out in the school garden or on a project to revamp the school play equipment.

- **Redecorating classrooms** – if health and safety considerations and premises management policies permit, recruit volunteers to help out over a weekend to revamp a classroom. You could try to target parents/carers who have useful skills for the project and who you have previously struggled to engage with.

- **Family arts and crafts night** – an evening of creative projects using recycled materials to inspire imagination while working on a joint family project.

- **Family games around the world night** – families spend an evening playing favourite board games. Participants receive a 'passport' and travel from station to station playing international games – dominoes in China, backgammon in Greece, mancala in Africa, etc. They have their 'passports' stamped as they go and celebrate their return home to Wales.

- **Parent/carer partner session** – invite parents/carers to engage with the curriculum by joining their child in class for a parent/carer partner session working on history, science, etc.

- **Summer fair** – a summer fair but treated as a family engagement event rather than as a fundraiser; adults wear nametags indicating their child's class, adult–child games are run.

- **Geography night** – games and activities focusing on a country or region, e.g. building a relief map, creating flip books, quiz to win globe or atlas, with parents/carers from different countries bringing in food/clothing/other items to showcase.

- **Hobby night** – families demonstrate a shared hobby and engage with other families.

- **Get moving!** – an evening of active games and healthy fun.

- **Seed money** – give £1 to each family in the school and a few weeks and challenge them to make the money grow in order to raise funds for the school. Help families club together on projects, e.g. to buy a bucket and sponge and raise money through washing cars, or buy ingredients to make and sell cakes.

- **Book club/multilingual reading club** – set up a regular afternoon reading club for families and children, reading then discussing a particular book. Any child can attend, providing they have read the book and bring an adult with them who has also read it. Children and parents/carers are told there will be no homework, no book reports and no wrong answers. Discussions run as long as 45 minutes for older children. Younger children take part in a shorter discussion followed by activities related to the book. In multilingual reading clubs there would be interpreters present to translate (recruited from the parent/carer body), plus dual language story packs to use at home. This could be run away from the school, e.g. at the local library, community centre, church, etc.

- **An auction of promises** – auction off jobs promised by children (e.g. cleaning the car, tidying up) or free activities offered by the school (e.g. IT time) to the bidding audience. Family members pay for the items with, for example, a bid of five hours of bedtime reading.

Safeguarding

It is essential to follow safeguarding guidance and use appropriate risk assessments when conducting activities that involve parents/carers working with learners or when opening the school to members of the community.

Welsh Government guidance on safeguarding in schools – *Keeping learners safe* (2015) – is available from Welsh Government at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/keeping-learners-safe/?lang=en.

The Estyn *Safeguarding Good Practice Guide* is available from www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-explained/safeguarding.

The link between family engagement and school improvement

Comparing surveys from Chicago's top 30 high-performing schools and bottom 30 low-performing schools, Payne and Kaba (1999) found that the **relationships** that schools are able to build within and outside of the school indicate a school's viability for **successful school improvement**. In the high-performing schools, school staff understood and promoted the concept of relationship building on every level: staff-to-staff, staff-to-family, and staff-to-community. Within these schools, it was the relationships among the groups that fostered and promoted improvement.

In the low-performing schools, there was limited appreciation for relationships at the schools or with the surrounding families and communities. The lack of relationships and shared efforts appeared to inhibit or stall a cohesive or focused improvement effort. The authors determined that it was the social trust between groups and individuals that translated into capital, which in turn lead to school improvement and student achievement.

Payne, C. M. and Kaba, M. (1999) S*o much reform, so little change: Building-level obstacles to urban school reform*.

A community working together to help the school

Parents/carers at a primary school decided to tidy up the playground over the summer holidays. This included painting the markings in the playground, some inside painting and tidying the woodland garden area.

They put up a poster in a local shop asking for volunteers as well as sending a note home with the children. The work happened over several weekends and there were many helpers.

- The people who took part included a lot of parents/carers who did not have time to help on a regular basis or through the week.

- Some older children who were now at secondary school came along to help.

- Other people who were not parents/carers of children at the school came because they were keen to help or because they were friends with one of the parents/carers.

- Some people were there on most days.

- Others just came for a few hours on one day.

- People did different tasks.

- Some people handed in food, so everyone could share sandwiches and home baking each day.

- One person took lots of photographs. They were all posted up inside the school and some of the best and funniest went into the window of the local shop with a big thank you sign.

Checklist – A welcoming school

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take	Who will implement? What resources are needed?	How will impact be measured?
Is the school welcoming to parents/carers in terms of how it looks? Is there a special area for parents/carers in the school, or a comfortable reception area?			
Is the welcome created an inclusive one (e.g. welcoming the extended family, in the different languages spoken at home, and with easy access for those with disabilities)?			
Have you asked families and learners for their ideas on family involvement?			
Do security systems inadvertently make the school less welcoming (e.g. leaving parents/carers standing outside a locked door for several minutes)?			
Are staff available and approachable for families at school drop off/pick up times? Do staff greet families in a welcoming way?			
Do teachers engage with parents/carers in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis in order to build a positive relationship?			
Do you have a range of ways for families and staff to meet and share ideas about ways people could support the school, and of how the school could support the community?			
Are there fun activities to take part in and let people get to know each other outside the school (e.g. a barbecue in the summer)? Can people get to and from these on public transport (e.g. check/provide bus timetable)?			

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take	Who will implement? What resources are needed?	How will impact be measured?
Are these social events inclusive? Not too expensive? Could you provide more early morning and evening opportunities to attract parents/carers who work full time (e.g. family breakfast events)?			
Could you attract more families in by doubling or even tripling up on the reason why parents/carers are coming in (e.g. coffee evening combined with parents'/carers' evening)?			
Do you make use of a buddy system, drawing on parents/carers from the community who are eager to come into school to support those who want to come in but are not at ease or confident enough to come alone? (This can be a valuable tool to break down barriers and promote inclusion.)			
Are there opportunities for families to volunteer to help with one-off things with no long-term commitment? Are there are opportunities to take part that don't need much skill or confidence?			
Is the school aware of any specific skills that parents/carers have and are they encouraged to share skills and experience in the school setting? (The **Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit could be useful here.)			

Are you also considering:

- [ ] how to get to know your families to understand their preferences and circumstances (**Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit)

- [ ] how to communicate with families, including through new technologies (**Methods of communicating** resource (Theme 3: Resource 5) in this toolkit)

- [ ] how to best use parents'/carers' evenings (**Rethinking parents'/carers' evenings** resource (Theme 3: Resource 6) in this toolkit)

- [ ] particular efforts to welcome extended families and particular groups of families resource (**Reaching all families** (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit)

- [ ] particular efforts at transition points (**Transitions** resource (Theme 3: Resource 4) in this toolkit)

- [ ] empowering the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to help with family and community engagement, and to act as a channel through which families can express their views (**Parent/carer groups and the voices of parents/carers** resource (Theme 3: Resource 7) in this toolkit)

- [ ] how to ensure that school costs do not inadvertently prevent some families and learners from getting involved with the school resource (**Costs of education** (Theme 3: Resource 8) in this toolkit)?

" Simply being involved with the school has little effect on individual attainment unless there are direct and explicit connections to learning. "
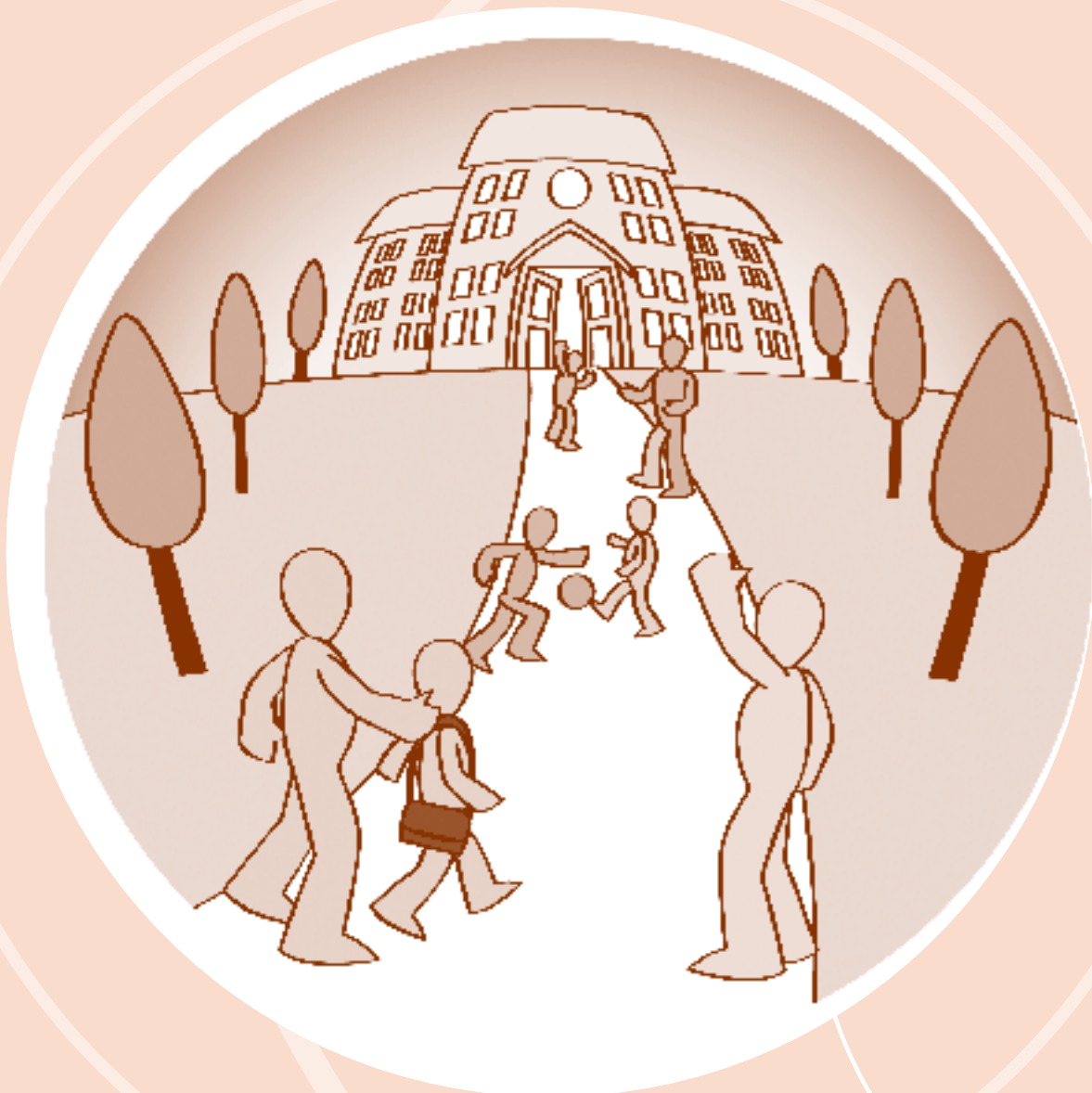
Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996)
Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement, Sociology of Education

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 2
Getting to know your families

This resource contains the following.

- Why get to know your families?
- Information you might want to gather.
- Top tips/don't forget …
- Example of a parent/carer survey conducted by the PTA or parent/carer group.
- Workshop activity – Developing a skills poster.
- Example of a learner–family profile.

Why get to know your families?

Each family is different and an effective family engagement strategy depends on a good understanding of the needs and circumstances of those families. If you can develop this knowledge, then you will be better able to:

- understand how the family currently supports learning in the home and their aspirations for their child's education

- devise a communications strategy based on families' preferences and know which family members you need to be communicating with (e.g. separated parents, stepparents, older siblings, carers, grandparents)

> " Parental engagement interventions are more likely to be effective if they are informed by a comprehensive needs analysis and are targeted at particular groups of parents."
>
> Goodall and Vorhaus (2011)
> *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary*, Department for Education (England).

- identify issues (through sensitive questioning) that could potentially form a barrier to engagement and a barrier to families supporting their child's learning; these might include poverty, disabilities, health problems, caring responsibilities, living distance away, home language, divorce, grandparents as main carer, absent father, family member in prison, bereavement, low literacy levels, parents/carers working night shifts, etc.

- identify family skills and interests, hobbies, networks, etc. that could potentially be brought to the school. You will then be able to ask parents/carers directly whether they can help out (making sure they know their help will be valued), which can be a great icebreaker to get them involved in school life, e.g. bring cat and kittens in to school, help move furniture, help paint a shed, come and tell a class about your job, etc.

- design better interventions to help families support their child's learning, by taking into account their different needs, wants and barriers. This will give you the best chance of reaping rewards in terms of raised standards.

Information you might want to gather

As suggested in the previous paragraphs, schools might decide to gather information on family circumstances and issues that may affect a child's learning, and also on family skills and interests, and communication preferences.

You may also want to give priority to finding out what parents/carers already spontaneously do to support their children's learning in the home, their goals for their child's education, and the kind of support they would like to receive from the school.

You will want to find a way of recording and storing some of this valuable information – enabling you to pass it to other teachers and staff as the child moves up through the school (or on to a new school).

An example learner–family profile template is provided on page 24, that you might want to use. Perhaps preferably you would adapt an existing database. Whichever data collection method you use, you should check carefully that you are operating within the current legal protocols covering data protection.

There are a variety of techniques schools could use to gather this information, shown below. Of these, only home visits or other one-to-one meetings would be a suitable method for identifying sensitive family issues.

> " I think the best way so far for us to learn more about our families has simply been to talk more to parents and carers, entering into a relationship that is based on outcomes for their children and the role that they can play."
>
> A school deputy head.

- **Parent/carer survey** – Although the ideal technique for collecting information is via face-to-face meetings, these do take time. Increasingly, schools use parent/carer surveys (online and hardcopy) to gather information. An example questionnaire is provided on page 18, designed for use by a member of the PTA who goes around surveying parents/carers while they are in the school for the parents'/carers' evening or other school event. You will want to amend the survey so that it asks the questions you want to ask. Also remember to consider how to overcome any literacy/language barriers. Remember that only some families will respond to a written survey – you will need to adopt a different approach for others.

- **Parents'/carers' evening or discussions with teachers** – Allow time at parents'/carers' evenings to get to know your families. You might also consider asking parents/carers/ families to complete the learner–family profile (or an amended version) while they are waiting for an appointment with the teacher.

- **Parent/carer workshop** – Consider asking your PTA to host a workshop. There is an example of this on page 22 of this resource, and an alternative one in the **A welcoming school** resource (Theme 3: Resource 1) in this toolkit. You will want to consider how to get a representative group of families at the meeting – some families are much more likely to attend than others, and it is probably those who are least likely to attend that will provide you with the crucial information on how to improve your engagement. Consider holding the workshop off-site at a community venue – this can help you reach families who, for whatever reason, don't feel comfortable coming into the school.

- **Home visits** – some schools make very effective use of home visits undertaken by appropriately trained family engagement officers rather than teaching staff. These can be especially effective for engaging with families who, for whatever reason, dislike coming into the school. Home visits are discussed further in the **Transitions** resource (Theme 3: Resource 4) in this toolkit.

Top tips/don't forget …

- Collect information sensitively – parents/carers won't appreciate being asked directly about some things (e.g. poverty) so use your judgement about what to include.

- Protect personal information and data carefully.

- Use the information gathering as an engagement activity in its own right – it is best if it is a positive experience. Use it to communicate the message that family engagement is valued by the school.

- Once you have gathered the information, use it. It will strengthen the school's approach to family and community engagement (FaCE).

- Look to see who is missing from your database. It will be harder to get information on some families than others, but at the very least this will identify that you may need to adopt a different approach in order to engage with these families.

- Pass information on to colleagues when a learner moves up a class, or even up a school (following data protection protocols of course) – they will also appreciate the knowledge and understanding you have gained about their learner's families.

Example of a parent/carer survey conducted by the PTA or parent/carer group

Purpose

To conduct a survey via one-to-one conversations with parents/carers at a parents'/carers' evening, informal school events, at the school gate, or other venue to identify:

- views on activities that the school might offer to help them support their child's learning
- the skills and experience parents/carers have that they could offer to the school
- the times that best suit parents/carers for involvement with the school
- communications preferences.

Who will be involved?

PTA members, headteacher, family members attending parents'/carers' evening.

Reaching all families

It is worth considering different options that could help you reach out beyond the families who are already engaging frequently with the school. Could you make use of informal networks? Could you run the survey at more informal school events?

Introduction

Hello. I wonder if you could spare a few minutes. My name is ………………………………….... and I'm a member of the PTA.

One of the things we do as a PTA is to help build stronger home–school links to support all the children at the school. We know that everyone is busy but it would really help us if you could answer a few questions, about how you would like the school to work with you, and any skills and interests you have that you might be willing to contribute to the school.

By answering this you are not making any commitment and you don't have to take part but it would really help us to plan activities for parents/carers and children in the future. [If a parent/carer refuses, offer them the form to fill in at home and return to school if this is what they would prefer.]

Question 1: Please tell me your name and which classes your children are in.

Parent's/carer's name	Child(ren)/class(es)

Question 2: Support that could be offered by the school

Do you think you would be interested in coming to any of the following events that the school could offer?

☐ What is my child learning in school? The curriculum explained.

☐ Reading tips – How to teach your child reading skills.

☐ Family learning mathematics games workshop.

☐ Practicing positive discipline.

☐ Parents/carers as coaches for happy healthy children.

☐ Surviving teenage turmoil.

☐ What next? Family advice on post-16 choices.

Question 3: Skills and interests

Do you think you have any particular interests, experiences or skills that could help the school in any way? Or do wider family members (e.g. grandparents, older siblings, partners) have any skills and interests that they might be able to bring to the school? For example:

• things that you do at home, e.g. cooking, DIY, sewing or craft activities, gardening, decorating

• skills that you use at work, e.g. IT skills, typing, web design, catering

• interests or hobbies, sports activities, or arts and music skills that you could share.

Respondent	Other family member (name):
Skills and interests	Skills and interests

Question 4: Time

We know that all parents/carers are very busy people but we would like to ask if you have any time that you could spare to support the school or support school activities. We are not looking for any major commitment but just to get an idea of what times suit people best.

What time would suit you best?

- [ ] Before school.
- [ ] Immediately after school.
- [ ] During the school day.
- [ ] Evenings [if yes, please state start time and finish time].
- [ ] Weekends.

Is there anything that would help you attend at any time (e.g. transport, childcare, translation)?

_____

If you are interested in getting involved would you rather just do something:

- [ ] occasionally (say once a term)?
- [ ] regularly?

How much time do you feel you would be able to offer? [Even ten minutes can be useful.]

_____

Question 5: Communications preferences

The school regularly sends out information for parents and carers, sometimes every day. What is the best way for us to keep in touch with you?

- [ ] Letter in school bag.
- [ ] Letters on website.
- [ ] E-mail.
- [ ] Text to mobile.
- [ ] Twitter.
- [ ] Face-to-face at school pick up time.

The school also holds parents'/carers' evenings twice a year. Do you have any suggestions on where and when these could be held to make it easier for you to attend?

_____

_____

Who else in your wider family needs to receive this information/needs to be invited to parents'/carers' evenings?

Relation:	Relation:	Relation:
Name:	Name:	Name:
Contact:	Contact:	Contact:

Are there any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make about the school or the PTA?

_____

_____

Thank you very much.

Here are the contact details for the school and for the PTA should you ever want to get in touch with us (provide a card or say that details are on website/on noticeboard).

One of the things we would like to do is to share the information you have given us today with the school to help us to plan future activities. Are you happy for us to do this?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, could you please sign this form to show that you are happy for this information to be shared.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Workshop activity – Developing a skills poster

Purpose

This activity helps to:

- identify the skills, experience and qualities that people bring to a group

- develop people's confidence in using those skills

- work together as a team.

Who will be involved?

- Parent/carer group/PTA, teachers.

- Parents/carers, perhaps from a target group (see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit) or a general invite.

Step 1: Setting up the exercise

Nominate a group leader to take people through the exercise. The group leader displays a poster (example on page 23) and outlines the task, explaining what each heading means.

What's my identity? – this is a 'Who am I?' type question and can include anything people feel is important about them, e.g. what is their job, do they have any children, are they a good listener, are they a problem solver?

What are my hobbies, interests and passions? – this should list all the person's hobbies and interests, as much as possible.

What are my skills, talents and resources? – list all those things the person can do, is good at, and enjoys. Also list all the people the person knows who might come in handy, along with any equipment or resources they have access to, e.g. they drive a car, own some disco lights, have first aid training, are good at woodwork, or know a lot of the other parents/carers.

What would I like to gain? – encourage people to think about what they would like to get out of their involvement with the school, e.g. do they want to meet people and have fun, learn how to support their children learn, learn a new skill themselves (like IT) or to join in with family learning programmes (FLPs), or might they be interested in improving their own literacy and numeracy skills?

Step 2: Making the poster (allow 30 minutes for each person to fill in their poster)

- Organise people into pairs. It is helpful if they can work with someone they feel comfortable with.

- Give everyone a blank version of the poster.

- Ask them to fill the poster prompted by questions from their working partner if they get stuck. Ask open questions, e.g. 'How would you describe yourself?'. Add their name.

- Answers can be written or drawn, e.g. a flowerpot or a spade could be used to depict a keen gardener or a peaked mountain for a walker.

Step 3: Sharing and displaying the posters

After everyone has finished their work, hang the posters on the wall and let people walk round to see what others have put up. In an informal way, people get the chance to see what the skills and contribution of other parents/carers might be.

Step 4: Use the information and feedback

Let everyone know how the information has been used/will be used, and celebrate the benefits of joint projects and activities that have been enriched by parent/carer involvement.

Identity

Hobbies, interests and passions

?

Skills, talents and resources

What I would like to gain

Example of a learner–family profile

Learner name:	
Form tutor:	Year:
	Pastoral key worker:

Eligible for free school meals (eFSM) ☐	Young carer ☐	Looked after child ☐	Additional learning needs (ALN) ☐	More able and talented learner ☐

Details of any medical conditions:	
	Main school contact:
	Pastoral key worker:

Does the learner have siblings in the school? ☐	Name:	
	Year:	

Family information

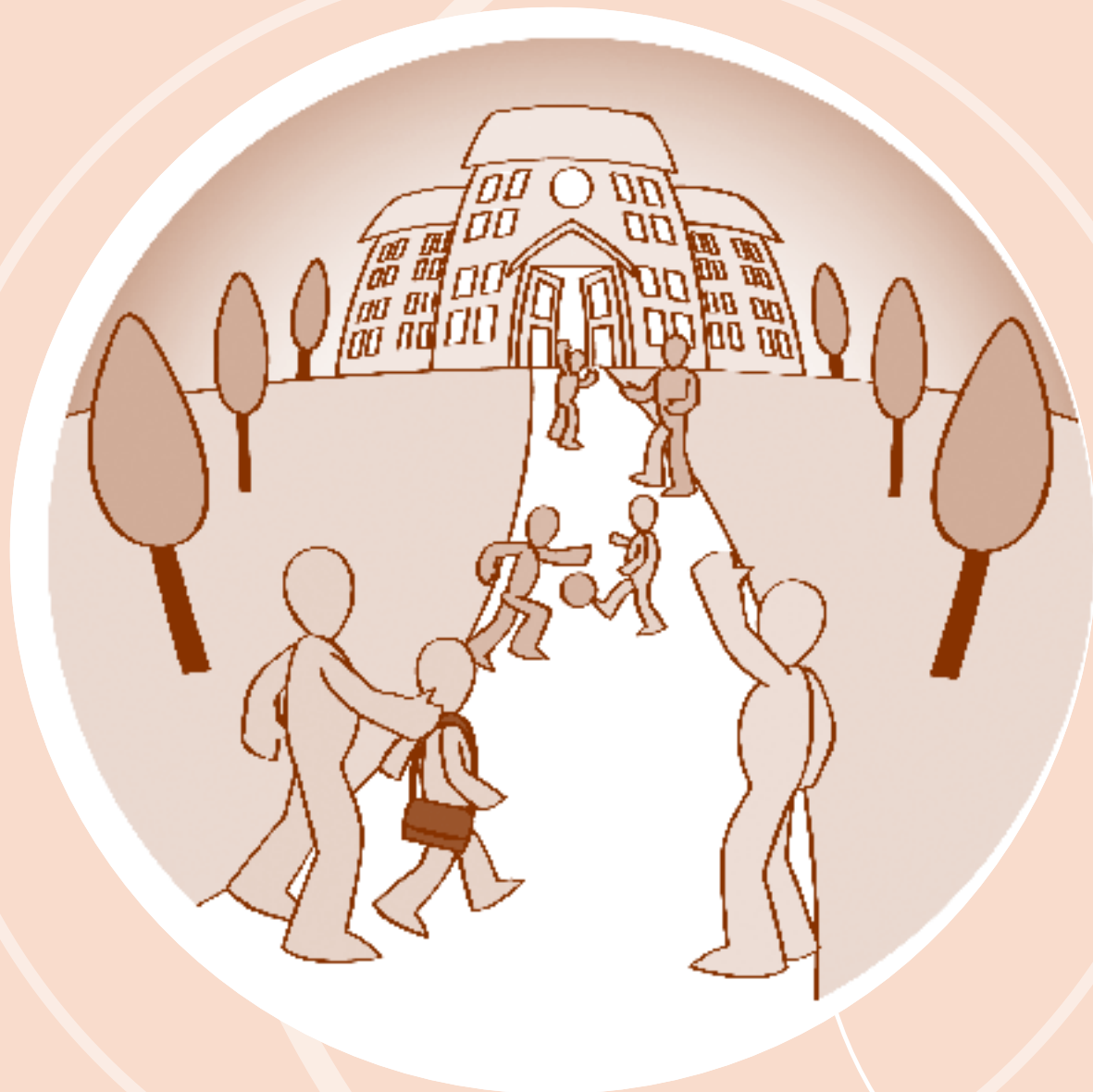| Name/relationship to child	Preferred methods of communication	Emergency contact	Those to receive progress reports	Those to receive school information
Main carer	Letter in school bag/telephone/in person/e-mail/text/social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)/letter by post			
Other family member	Via main carer/letter in school bag/telephone/in person/e-mail/text/social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)/letter by post			
Other family member	Via main carer/letter in school bag/telephone/in person/e-mail/text/social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)/letter by post			
Other family member	Via main carer/letter in school bag/telephone/in person/e-mail/text/social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)/letter by post			

Parents/carers separated or divorced?

If yes, do both have access?

Do parents/carers need to be sent school information separately?

Eligibility for free school meals

Currently [ ] Previously [ ]

Families First Vulnerability Indicator

High [ ] Medium [ ] Low [ ]

Consider via named key worker only? [ ]

Other issues to be considered when working with this family

Types of contact made with the family

- Parents'/carers' evening [ ]
- School assemblies [ ]
- Concerts [ ]
- Sports/leisure events [ ]
- Home visits [ ]
- Pastoral meetings/meetings with family engagement officer [ ]
- Family learning activities [ ]
- PTA/friends group [ ]
- Volunteering in school [ ]
- Paid work in school [ ]
- Other

Family member	Skills and interests	How they have/could they be involved with the school?

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 3
Reaching all families

This resource contains the following.

- Equality, equity and the importance of reaching all families.

- Who tends to be under-represented?

- Understanding barriers to engagement.

- What parents/carers want.

- Twenty ideas for increasing 'inclusivity'.

- Twenty ideas for when you are struggling to engage.

- Checklist – Prompts for reflective thinking.

- More on families of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM).

- More on lone parents/carers.

- More on dads and grandparents.

- More on carers of looked after children.

- More on minority ethnic groups, including Gypsy and Travellers.

- More on families of learners with additional learning needs (ALN).

Equality, equity and the importance of reaching all families

It hardly needs saying that we want all children to get a good start in life, and that we want all children to have an equal chance. Because family support for learning can have a big impact on children's outcomes, it is crucial that schools try to reach all families in order to help them provide that support for learning.

Different families have different needs and barriers to engagement, and they need the right type and amount of support in order to engage with their child's learning. Treating all families equally (e.g. offering a family learning programme (FLP) to all families) is not enough: families that are already engaged with learning will respond, while those that are less engaged are less likely to.

As the picture (right) illustrates, what we actually need to aim for is 'equity' – the provision of different types and amounts of support to different families so that, as a result, all children are given the best and equal chance of receiving the support for learning at home that they need. Equity requires schools to understand the different needs and barriers to engagement that families face, and to adjust the support they provide accordingly.
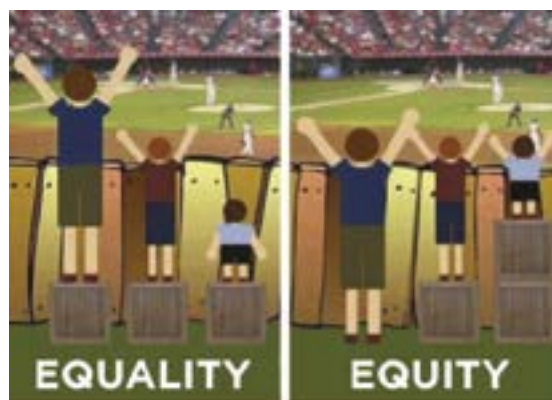
The school may inadvertently be creating barriers to engagement for some groups of families and there are many relatively easy steps that schools can take to overcome these – see **Twenty ideas for increasing 'inclusivity'** in this resource (page 31).

Most schools will have had experience of families that appear (in the eyes of the school at least) to be persistently refusing to engage, or who may even engage in an inappropriate or aggressive way. Developing a working relationship in these cases is more challenging for schools, and yet schools have most to gain with precisely these families. Attendance and attainment can be improved, and negative experiences that can greatly affect staff, such as having to deal with abusive behaviour from parents/carers, can be reduced.

No family should be considered as being beyond reach – but they certainly might need a different approach before they will come to parents'/carers' evenings, turn up to school events, and respond to communications and invitations from the school. Even for families that face significant barriers and have more complex needs there are many relatively straightforward things that schools can do to gradually open up avenues through which the school can involve them and help them to support their child's learning – see **Twenty ideas for when you are struggling to engage** in this resource (page 33).

Who tends to be under-represented?

Groups that on average tend to find it more difficult to engage with schools are:

- low-income families
- dads
- grandparents
- lone parents/carers
- Gypsy and Traveller families
- carers of looked after children (LAC)
- parents/carers with poor health
- parents/carers of poor attendees or those at risk of exclusion
- families with English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- full-time workers
- families living at a distance from the school.

Schools can find ways of becoming more inclusive for these groups through an understanding of their barriers to engagement – some general barriers are described below, while more specific barriers for particular groups are discussed in the sections at the end of this resource.

Understanding barriers to engagement

Some of the barriers to engagement for families include the following.

- **Time pressures of family life** – parents/carers are busy people. They might be working full time or part time, bringing up young children on their own, or have more than one child attending different schools or nurseries.

- **Family circumstances** – families come in all shapes and sizes and have different needs. Parents/carers may find it particularly difficult to attend meetings if they have a child who is disabled, have a baby or other caring responsibilities, work shifts or work away

from home, have a complex family structure with parents/carers who are separated; some might have new partners. Parents/carers may not be fluent in English or Welsh or have low literacy levels.

Parents/carers may also be overwhelmed by other issues going on in their lives and have little energy or 'mental space' to give to anything else, e.g. as a result of poverty, health issues, general anxiety, post-natal depression or other mental health issues, or, in rarer cases, drug and alcohol abuse or domestic violence.

The impact of poverty on family life is especially pertinent since an estimated 200,000 children in Wales come from families in poverty.

- **Geography and physical barriers** – parents/carers and learners who have to travel some distance to the school may have difficulty with transport, parking or have to walk through unsafe areas. Parents/carers who do not live with the learners may live a considerable distance away. There may be physical barriers for those with disabilities or health problems.

- **Lack of confidence** – parents/carers may feel uncomfortable in school surroundings for a number of reasons. It may bring back unpleasant memories of their own school days. Some may feel that their own lack of knowledge or skills puts them at a disadvantage. Some parents/carers may have difficulty themselves with reading or writing. They may fear being judged by other parents/carers or practitioners. They may feel that there is no place for them in the school or that the school is not welcoming. Some men may feel out of place and that they don't have a role because many activities held during the day are mainly attended by women.

- **Suspicion and mistrust** – parents/carers may believe they won't be taken seriously by the school, fear being seen to 'need help' or to be a 'bad parent/carer', or have had previous negative experiences of engaging with either their child's or their own school.

- **Unfamiliarity** – some families may feel put off by culture clashes between the school and home (especially if the school culture is predominantly middle class). Many parents/carers view PTAs as 'closed', cliquey', 'elitist', 'formal' or otherwise. The school itself can feel too unfamiliar and 'not for people like them'– they might not see themselves as the right kind of person to be involved. These perceptions can be a real barrier to schools' overtures to getting them more involved in their child's learning.

Schools can inadvertently create additional barriers by:

- not providing a range of opportunities through which parents/carers can engage

- not communicating well with parents/carers

- variation in the attitudes of different teachers, with some not as welcoming as others, and not encouraging parents/carers to be more involved

- not providing a welcoming entrance/entry system to the school.

Additional barriers can come into play in secondary schools, for example:

- secondary schools tend to be larger and further from home

- learners have more than one teacher – schools are more confusing for both parents/carers and new students

- parents/carers are more likely to be in full-time employment

- children are beginning to establish a sense of separation from their parents/carers.

What parents/carers want

A survey of UK parents in 2010 found that about 40 per cent of parents feel 'very involved' in their child's learning. A third of parents would like to get more involved in their child's school life in future, particularly those that are currently less involved (notably non-resident parents, fathers and parents of children with special educational needs (SEN)).

At parents'/carers' evenings, the two questions that parents/carers ask most frequently are:

- What is my child learning at school?

- How can I help at home?

A report by the General Teaching Council England[1] found that parents wanted:

- focused information on their child or child's class – what they are doing on a monthly basis

- opportunities for more frequent and informal communications – not just at parents' evenings – that open up dialogue between them and teaching staff, to stop issues building up and allow information of a different kind to be exchanged.

Estyn[2] reports that where there is good practice in planning parental involvement, schools understand that parents:

- like to be involved in their child's school

- want the school to know them personally as individuals and be kept well informed about the progress made by their children

- need clear information about day-to-day matters that affect their children

- feel more confident if they know the staff and have a basic understanding of the curriculum

- are willing to support school events and provide practical help abut are less likely to join a committee

- become more supportive the more that they are involved, particularly if they have attended training events

- like to have clear rules for their children that are applied consistently.

Australian research[3] found that parents were looking for the following qualities in secondary schools:

- a committed and effective teaching staff and a safe working environment — no bullying, drugs or harassment

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[1] GTC (2010) *Research for Teachers: Deprivation and education.*

[2] Estyn (2009) *Good practice in parental involvement in primary schools.*

[3] www.goodschools.com.au/choosing-a-school/what-do-parents-want

- individual attention given to students; with staff noticing and taking action should any problems arise

- promotion of democratic values and positive steps to create a place in which staff and students treat each other with respect

- an environment in which their child can develop social competencies — they want the young adult emerging from secondary school to be articulate, to be able to make and keep friends, and to know how to behave appropriately in different situations.

What will be essential in your efforts to reach particular families is to **find out from them what their own wants and needs are**, so that you can take these into account when designing intentions to engage with them as partners and encourage them to support their child's learning.

Twenty ideas for increasing 'inclusivity'

These activities are designed to increase the 'joining process' for under-represented groups (**Theme 3** of this toolkit). Schools can use this as the foundation on which to build engagement to support children's learning (**Theme 4** of this toolkit).

1. **Send a clear message** – that family involvement, by all families, is welcomed and valued by the school.

2. **Choose your target groups and track progress** – work out who your under-represented groups are – which of the groups mentioned in this resource are less visible in your school/at your school events, or less likely to respond to communications – then choose which of these you are going to focus on. Develop a system so that you can track and assess how you get on.

3. **Put yourself in their shoes** – consult with your target group about ways in which your premises can be made to look and feel more welcoming (e.g. to men and fathers) and on how they would like to be welcomed/invited to get involved in school life. Find out about the barriers they face – see also the **A welcoming school** resource (Theme 3: Resouce 1) in this toolkit.

4. **Design school events and communications around families' needs, wants and preferences** – ask your target groups how and when they would best like to engage with the school, and most importantly, the kind of support they would like from the school to help them support their child's learning. You can then plan the type and timing of engagement opportunities you offer and your communication methods, so that they match up with your target group's interests and needs – see the **Getting to know your families** (Theme 3: Resource 2) and **Methods of communicating** (Theme 3: Resource 5) resources in this toolkit.

5. **Target family learning activities at less represented groups** – see ideas for learning activities in **Theme 4** of this toolkit, and adapt these specifically to suit your target audience.

6. **Just ask!** – extend an informal and friendly personal invitation to a learning activity, or ask for their help to share their interests or skills (e.g. music, sports, gardening, etc.) with a

class or on a school project – see the **Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit. Alternatively, you could invite target families to a beach school/forest school session, providing free lunch and transport.

7. **Ask your PTA or parent/carer group to help** – by using their informal networks, or by trying to recruit new members from under-represented groups

8. **Ask your parent/carer group to develop a buddy or 'bring a friend' system** – where those who are not at ease or confident coming in on their own can be accompanied by someone who is more confident. This can be a valuable tool to break down barriers and promote inclusion.

9. **Ask community groups to help** – work with community organisations to encourage particular target groups to engage with school life – see the **Developing community partnerships** resource (Theme 5: Resource 1) and **Multi-agency working** resource (Theme 5: Resource 2) in this toolkit.

10. **Work with Communities First** – if your school is in a Communities First cluster then you may be able to develop a joint project to engage your target groups – see the **Developing community partnerships** resource (Theme 5: Resource 1) in this toolkit.

11. **Include the wider family** – make sure that dads, grandparents and other carers know they are included – 'Dear parents' sometimes tends to mean 'Dear mums'.

12. **Provide free tickets/reduce prices** – ensure you are not inadvertently creating a barrier to involvement for poorer families by pricing tickets too high for activities or school social events – see the **Costs of education** resource (Theme 3: Resource 8) in this toolkit.

13. **Ideas for cheap summer activities** – hold an event that explores cheap ways for families to get out and have fun (and learn!) over the summer holidays; this is an example of designing a social event around family needs.

14. **Translation** – recruit bilingual community members to support parents/carers for whom English/Welsh is not their first language in communicating with the school.

15. **Multilingual reading club** – set up a regular afternoon reading club for parents/carers and children with interpreters present to translate, plus dual language story packs to use at home.

16. **'Challenge dad' or 'Men behaving dadly' activity** – involving them creating something with their children (robot, go-cart or animation), run a cookery class for dads and children in the run up to Mothers' Day, or hold a dads and children sports evening with quiz beforehand.

17. **An auction of promises** – auction off jobs promised by children (e.g. cleaning the car, tidying up) or free activities offered by the school (e.g. IT time) to the bidding audience. Family members can pay for the items with, for example, a bid of five hours of bedtime reading.

18. **Invite grandparents** – to an annual grandparents event (there is a Grandparents Day each September); involve them in an activity to create a family tree; or ask them to help out on a local history project to talk about life in the local area when they were young.

19. **Celebrate Gypsy and Traveller culture** – use resources on the Learning Wales website at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources/browse-all/travelling-together/?lang=en to promote the integration of Gypsy and Traveller culture into the curriculum – a first step towards encouraging Gypsy and Traveller families to engage with the school.

20. **Specialist sessions for additional learning needs (ALN) learners and their families** – for example, sessions demonstrating skills such as signing in a cookery session so that learners can learn life skills, families see how they can support them in this skill while at the same time practising useful communications skills such as signing.

Twenty ideas for when you are struggling to engage

The ideas below may be useful when you are struggling to engage with some specific families.

1. **Know who they are and assess progress** – set up a system through which you can identify your target families and track how you get on. Each of these families will be unique and probably require a tailored engagement approach.

2. **Identify early** – gather information from feeder schools (or nurseries) or via multi-agency working to help you identify early the families which might need a tailored approach and get started on efforts to welcome and engage them as early as possible.

3. **Have a consistent key worker** – provide your target families with a consistent named point of contact with the school, and ensure that this key worker, often a non-teaching member of staff, is clear about the reasons for engaging with the family, and has the right skills (e.g. family facilitation) – see **FaCE staff roles** resource (Theme 2: Resource 2) and **Development needs analysis** resource (Theme 2: Resource 1) in this toolkit.

> " The parent who will not engage is often the most difficult barrier to overcome. School staff work hard to foster positive parental involvement … They may, however, also need to challenge a parent's conduct or behaviour if it is putting their child at risk. This fine balance is made even more difficult if they can no longer have a dialogue with the parent. "
>
> Sara Rogers (2009)
> Education Child Protection Manager, Cambridgeshire Local Safeguarding Children Board.

4. **Support the key worker with supervision** – either in school or via a network, formally or informally. Engagement work with families facing multiple problems can sometimes be difficult, harrowing and exhausting. Supervision can help staff to off-load safely and to think through if and how to alter their approach in particular cases – see **FaCE staff roles** resource (Theme 2: Resource 2) in this toolkit.

5. **Put yourself in their shoes** – think of the barriers to engagement from the parent's/carer's perspective – what might it feel like to be approached by the school? – then try to work out how some of these barriers could be overcome. Try to find out from these families what the barriers are from their perspective. It is important to remain sensitive, non-judgemental and kind in your approach. Virtually all parents/carers fundamentally want what is best for their child.

6. **Personal invitations to family learning activities** – discretely tailor events to the needs of your target families, and extend a personal and friendly invitation to them – but make sure it is done in a way that doesn't label them as a group of 'rubbish parents/carers' – see **Theme 4** of this toolkit. Consider holding these events at venues outside the school.

7. **Recruit by expectation not invitation** – hold, and convey, the expectation that parents/carers will want to collaborate with you in order to help their children progress in school.

8. **Provide refreshments** – tea, coffee and food can help people to relax and provide an easy ice-breaker, while also adding to 'your offer'.

9. **Home visits** – some schools make very effective use of home visits for target families, undertaken by appropriately trained family engagement officers, especially at or before transition points (such as entry to primary or secondary school).

> " Parents are not marginalised by lack of desire for their children to succeed. This is sometimes easily forgotten by frustrated teachers … as they observe dysfunctional families making choices for themselves and their children that clearly diminish the child's chances of success. "
>
> Verstappen, P. (2012)
> *Engaging Hard-to-reach Families: How English schools create effective home-school partnership*

10. **Use a collaborative approach** – professionals using the collaborative approach engage in dialogue with the client about the nature of the issue (the barrier preventing the parent/carer from engaging with the school or engaging with their child's learning), the parent's/carer's goal regarding relationships, and the options for solving the problem.

11. **Identify if and where learners are blocking engagement** – and if so, work with the learner and family to overcome this, perhaps using a collaborative approach.

12. **Multi-agency working** – use a Team Around the Family (TAF) approach to engage with and support families who are facing problems – see the **Multi-agency working** resource (Theme 5: Resource 2) in this toolkit.

13. **Be seen to handle complaints well** – when things go wrong it is important to have clear arrangements so that staff and parents/carers can resolve issues together, with support if necessary. Mediation is a useful conflict resolution technique – see the **Handling conflicts and complaints** resource (Theme 3: Resource 9) in this toolkit.

14. **Don't give up!** – developing an effective relationship with some families will take time and persistence. Keep trying to canvass opinion and keep inviting them, even if they turn you down. The relationship will need time to develop, in order to build trust and self-esteem, and allay fears, anxieties or misapprehensions about engaging with the school.

You may also want to consider whether to draw on services offered by the third or private sectors to help you engage with target families. They can bring to the table FaCE expertise, and have the added advantage of having a degree of distance from the school (possibly even

a separate venue in the community). They may already have key workers operating in your local area.

Welsh Government has produced a catalogue of programmes that schools could use (and pay for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) where appropriate) – *Interventions that really work: third and private sector resources for schools tackling deprivation*, **published on** learning.gov.wales/deprivation. This catalogue includes the following details on programmes.

15. **Achievement for All** – a two-year whole-improvement framework to improve outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, including family engagement work.

16. **Families and Schools Together (FAST)** – delivered by Save the Children, this is an eight-week rapid intervention with the families of children aged three to eight years. It is primarily a parenting programme which supports families by encouraging good behaviour and a positive attitude to school and learning. It helps parents/carers to get more involved in their child's education so they can support learning and development at home. Families attend weekly two-and-a-half-hour sessions including discussions, games, singing and group activities, along with a family meal. The group sessions are followed up by monthly meetings run by families who have already graduated from the FAST Programme.

17. **Family Learning Signature** – this is a tool to engage families in thinking about learning, and how, as a family, they can better support learning in the home. The process stimulates family engagement with their children's learning, and strengthens the family–school relationship.

18. **Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities** – a 13-week parenting programme, for use in early years, primary or secondary schools, that has been used with families from a wide range of backgrounds, including from marginalised communities, and those with drugs, alcohol or violence issues. It is designed to promote protective factors associated with good parenting and better outcomes for children.

19. **Nurture Groups** – a specialist form of provision in early years, primary and secondary schools for learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, that also helps to build bridges with families and engage them with their child's learning.

20. **Bespoke projects** – you might want to also consider commissioning a bespoke project from third sector organisations.

    • **Barnardo's** offer a range of school-based interventions, including family support services, early years, specialist services for fostered and adopted children, children of offenders, young carers and more.

    • **CaST Cymru** offer pre-designed and bespoke programmes for FaCE.

    • **Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services** identify and facilitate partnerships for youth services.

Information for schools who are considering buying in third or private sector services to help them tackle the impacts of deprivation on educational attainment is available at learning.gov.wales.

Checklist – Prompts for reflective thinking

Becoming more inclusive

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
☐ Have you identified the groups (e.g. dads, grandparents, families with English as an Additional Language (EAL)) who are currently less engaged, and chosen which ones to target?	
☐ Have you thought through the potential barriers to engagement for your target groups, and designed some actions to take to help overcome these barriers?	
☐ Have you considered the potential barriers caused by school costs? (See the **Costs of education** resource (Theme 3: Resource 8) in this toolkit.)	
☐ Have you set up a system in order to track progress in engaging with your target groups?	
☐ Could you ask your target groups what might help make it easier for them to be involved in/welcomed at the school?	
☐ Could you ask learners for their ideas and help in getting families involved? They will probably have some good ideas.	
☐ Have you recruited your PTA/parent/carer group to help you in your efforts to engage with your target groups?	
☐ Have you put in place some engagement activities specifically designed around your target groups? Do these include engagement for learning activities?	
☐ Are there any local community organisations who could help you engage with your target groups? And could your parent/carer group help you work with these?	

When you are struggling to reach some families

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
☐ Do you know who your target families are, and do you track your progress on engaging with them?	
☐ Do you have a named key worker for these families who can form a consistent point of contact with the school? Does this person have the right family facilitation skills? Are they provided with suitable supervision support?	
☐ Would you say that you take a 'never give up' attitude to engaging with these families?	
☐ Have you tried using home visits?	
☐ Have you considered working in partnership with the third sector on efforts to engage with your target families?	
☐ Could multi-agency working (e.g. with partners in a Team Around the Family) help you to engage with these families?	

More on families of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM)

Parents/carers living in poverty are often facing their own difficulties and stresses. Beyond the considerable financial strains, they are also more likely than average to experience relationship problems, poor living conditions, and poorer physical and mental health.

Over 200,000 children in Wales are thought to be living in poverty. Less than half of these are identifiable through being eligible for free school meals (eFSM), although these eFSM learners are more likely to be living in severe poverty.

Poverty, and the stress, ill-health and poor living conditions associated with it, affect parenting behaviours and make it difficult for parents/carers to provide the right conditions, opportunities and positive feedback to support and encourage children to learn. In particular, mothers exposed to persistent economic hardship are more likely to experience continued stress, which in turn is associated with less involved parent/carer–child interactions and reduced cognitive stimulation for their children.

Parents/carers living in poverty are also more likely to have low literacy levels themselves, and more likely to have had a negative experience during their own schooling, presenting additional barriers to engagement with school life.

Further information on how best to engage with families living in poverty is available from Save the Children at www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/hopes-and-expectations-how-families-living-severe-poverty-engage-anti, from Barnardo's (e.g. Reaching Families in Need) at www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/policy_research_unit/research_and_publications.htm and others (e.g. Children and Young People's Strategy Unit within the City and County of Swansea: *'Making ends meet' Engaging children, young people and families in tackling poverty*).

More on lone parents/carers

Surveys have found that lone parents/carers are less likely to feel very involved in their children's education, and are less likely to say that they feel very confident in talking to teachers at their child's school.

Single parents/carers are more likely to be excluded from engagement activities because of time pressures or practical considerations such as childcare – providing crèche facilities could help.

Lone parents/carers are also more likely to be living in poverty. Researchers from Loughborough University calculated that 71 per cent of lone parents are living off inadequate incomes.

More on dads and grandparents

Most schools find it harder to contact and involve dads than with mums. There are:

• working dads who do not drop off/pick up their children from school

• absent dads who do not regularly see their children, or separated fathers who only see their children at weekends

- dads who have hitherto seen school involvement as the mum's responsibility or may view school settings as 'heavily feminised' or reading and writing as a 'girl thing'.

Schools will want to consider how they can overcome some of these barriers, because:

- dads have a critical role to play in ensuring positive learning outcomes for their children. Research indicates a statistically significant impact during both primary and secondary schools, and for daughters as well as sons. There is evidence that children benefit most from a 'double dose' combined parental influence (perhaps triple with grandparents)

- seeing their dads or grandparents actively and positively engaged with the school can encourage children to feel more attached to the school themselves

- many dads are already involved in their child's learning at home (e.g. modelling reading behaviour, helping with homework) but 25 per cent of children have never seen their dad reading

- dads (and grandparents too) can also act as a buffer when mothering fails or mums are not available.

The Fatherhood Institute has a short guide with tips and a checklist for engaging dads in parenting programmes which is available online at www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/uploads/publications/444.pdf. They also have a free online course 'Dads Included' which provides information on what a father-inclusive service in early years and health settings looks like, and how to achieve it and is available at www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/sector/sector-content/training.

A booklet, *Including Fathers in Early Years Services: Positive practice for professionals*, produced by Children in Wales, provides practical examples of projects in Wales working successfully with fathers. It is available online at www.childreninwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/fathers-guidance-english-web.pdf.

The Grandparents' Association also has a number of factsheets that can be downloaded from their website at www.grandparents-association.org.uk/kc/kinship-carers.html.

More on carers of looked after children

Children who are looked after (LAC) may be cared for in their own home, a foster home, residential unit or residential school. Looked after children and young people face barriers to achieving success in education and it is vital that schools know who their LAC learners are and that they keep in contact with the appropriate carer, who may be a relative carer, foster carer, or a local authority carer.

Care planning for LAC learners should clarify who is taking responsibility for keeping in contact with the school and helping the child with their education. Careful planning and effective joint working between carers/social workers and teachers is of equal importance.

Schools could, with their local authority and perhaps in their school cluster, run a session for carers and foster parents that emphasises the importance of pro-active engagement with schools and post-16 education providers in order to promote the educational needs of children who are looked after.

Prompts for schools working with looked after children

☐ Are your records of information about the young person's personal details accurate and up to date?

☐ Are your contact details for parents, residential staff, foster carers, relative carers and social workers accurate and up to date?

☐ Do you know which of these contacts is your primary contact (as identified in the child or young person's care plan)?

☐ Are there systems in place to ensure these records are treated sensitively and confidentially?

☐ Does the school consult and communicate with parents, social workers, foster and relative carers and others?

☐ Does the school link with carers to provide information and support to looked after young people on issues such as careers, further and higher education, and funding for education/training?

☐ Does the school support carers to ensure there are suitable arrangements for study and completing homework?

☐ Do the arrangements for parents'/carers' evenings include relative carers, foster carers and residential staff?

☐ Are invitations and communications handled sensitively?

More on minority ethnic groups, including Gypsy and Traveller families[4]

Minority ethnic parents/carers face a number of different barriers including discrimination, language and cultural barriers. This is especially true of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking families, whose problems may be compounded by the traumatic circumstances in which they have left their home country. Research has also found that minority ethnic parents/carers report fewer than average support networks, which may leave them feeling isolated.

Suggested strategies for working with minority ethnic families are:

- avoid making assumptions and stereotyping
- ensure services are culturally sensitive and challenge racism and negative stereotypes
- ensure staff have relevant skills and training – relationships with staff and the quality of interpersonal and group facilitation skills have been found to be particularly important in successful engagement of minority ethnic parents/carers
- if possible employ a staff mix whose ethnic diversity reflects the local community
- recruit members of the local community, either in formal roles or peer support groups
- use staff with sufficient credibility and trustworthiness in relation to the parent's/carer's background

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[4] From Welsh Government guidance *Parenting in Wales* (2014) available at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/?lang=en.

learning.gov.wales/deprivation

- if possible use venues familiar to minority ethnic populations

- when using interpreters ensure that core principles and messages to parents/carers are interpreted in a consistent way

- monitor service uptake of ethnic minority communities.

Gypsies and Travellers

In many respects Gypsies and Travellers are the most discriminated against minority ethnic group in Wales. Research has found that there was an emphasis by them on: a strong family unit, very strong extended families, value placed on education within the family unit, strict cultural traditions and a sense of pride in their cultural identity. Research has also found that families may be reluctant to use public services for fear of stigma and prejudice, have a lack of trust in service providers and may also have limited literacy.

The Welsh Government published '*Travelling to a Better Future' – Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan*[5] in 2011 which identified key actions around the two main areas for improving educational attainment – attendance and retention.

A 2014 **research report**[6] about engaging families of Gypsy and Traveller learners looked at the barriers to engaging and retaining this group of learners in education and includes examples of best practice. It found the most important factor affecting attendance was the learner's perception of school, which was connected to anxiety and distinct cultural values. Best practice described the importance of access, inclusion, safety and trust, partnerships and expectations within the context of the role of schools. Some of the key successful practices include:

- establishing relationships early on, building over time

- encouraging Gypsy and Traveller learners to make friends with their non-traveller peers

- adopting a whole-family approach, building relationships with the family and the wider community including regular dialogue

- using multi-agency working and close liaison with the education welfare officer

- generating a good understanding of and interest in Gypsy and Traveller culture in the school

- where possible, dedicating resources to outreach work

- collaboration between primary and secondary schools to secure transfer

- adopting flexibility to meet the needs of Gypsy and Traveller learners including making available extra-curricular learning opportunities

- providing work-related/vocational opportunities within the curriculum.

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[5] gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communitycohesion/gypsytravellers/?lang=en
[6] www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/gypsy-traveller-education/?lang=en

One first step towards encouraging Gypsy and Traveller families to engage with the school could be to use resources on Learning Wales at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources/browse-all/travelling-together/?lang=en to promote the integration of Gypsy and Traveller culture into the curriculum.

Further information is available on the Travelling Ahead website run by Save the Children, which has a toolkit section for professionals working with the Gypsy and Traveller community available at www.travellingahead.org.uk/?s=toolkit.

More on families of learners with additional learning needs (ALN)

Families of learners with additional learning needs (ALN) are not necessarily under-represented in school life, but it is very important that the school is able to engage with them well. Finding out your child has ALN can be difficult and bewildering, parents/carers need support, information and advice. Families with disabled children are more likely to be experiencing financial difficulties because of the higher costs involved in bringing up a child with a disability and the loss of income in many cases as one parent/carer needs to give up work.

When learners have ALN, parents/carers may themselves have to learn new skills such as how to communicate using sign language and how to use technological aides. Parents/carers need support from schools to provide them with the necessary skills.

Suggested strategies include the following.

- Parents/carers with ALN children often have many appointments so arrange multi-agency meetings that have a clear focus on areas identified through person-centred planning.

- Providing flexible training in specialist programmes so that parents/carers can develop the skills they need to support their child, e.g. Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), sign-along sign language, Incredible Years, Early Bird.

- Use home visits to support families, e.g. speech therapist and school staff work with parents/carers together at home to develop consistency of communication and behavioural approaches.

- Arrange for informal support, e.g. through coffee mornings, aromatherapy sessions, etc. so that parents/carers are able to talk with other like-minded parents/carers and share some of the same issues.

- Get parent/carer input on their needs, using questionnaires and website links so parents/carers can ask for specific support, e.g. what sort of apps to buy for their child's IT device for birthday, what's available at transition, etc.

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 4
Transitions

This resource contains the following.

- The importance of family engagement during transition.
- Ideas for family engagement during transitions.
- Sample questionnaires for learners and parents/carers at transition phases.

The importance of family engagement during transition

Promoting proactive family engagement with learning should be an activity for schools throughout the year. However, at transition, between schools, and between key stages and school years, engagement becomes more critical as it is known to be a 'protective factor'.

- Learners with families who take an interest, provide support and encourage autonomy are likely to adjust better to the transition.

- Conversely, for learners whose families take less interest, especially those receiving free school meals, those with poor prior attainment, low self-esteem and/or from minority ethnic backgrounds, transition from primary to secondary school (towards the end of Year 6) can be particularly difficult, and can result in a drop in attainment[7].

> "Family-based support is one of the most significant contributors to children's continued success in the education system, particularly during periods of educational transition."
>
> Harris and Goodall (2009)
> *Helping Families Support Children's Success at School*, Save the Children.

Transition into primary school

Starting primary school is a big step for any child and their family. Their degree of 'readiness to learn' will have a big impact on their first impressions of school, and can also have a lasting impact on their educational attainment. Early years settings and primary schools can work both with families and with each other to help smooth the transition and encourage more families to support their children to be 'ready to learn'.

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[7] www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/investigating-drop-attainment-during-transition-phase-focus-child-poverty/?lang=en

What does 'ready to learn' mean?

Children age four tend to settle more quickly in school if they:

- have enough language to express themselves and ask questions (early language skills)
- can listen to and follow instructions
- can get along with other children, sharing and taking turns
- go to the toilet and get dressed by themselves
- cope with being away from their parents/carers
- are interested in stories, songs and rhymes, drawing and making things
- have some familiarity with letters and numbers
- are curious about the world, with a desire to learn.

Not all children starting school will be able to do all of these things. Teachers are skilled at helping children progress at their own rate.

Transition into secondary school

The move to secondary school is also a big step that can result in a drop in attainment. Some learners 'get lost' in the larger school. One of the key skills that learners need in order to negotiate the transition is the ability to organise themselves and take responsibility. They also need to have an opportunity to talk through their worries about the transition. Common worries expressed by learners are:

- whether they will be bullied at the new school and whether they will make friends
- finding their way around and coping with their new journey to school
- whether they will be able to keep up with the work.

It is worth mentioning that parents/carers can also feel lost at this point, with the change from the smaller, familiar setting of the primary to the large, bewildering systems of the secondary school.

Primary and secondary schools can do much to smooth this transition if they work with both families and each other during this period.

Transition out of secondary school

Leaving school can be both exciting and stressful, and young people will be faced with making many important choices about what they will do next, as well as potential worries about money, finding a job and starting to live independently. Support for this transition can come from several sources – friends, careers advisors, teachers, youth workers – but families still can and do play a very important role in helping their child to think through their options. Learners with less supportive parents/carers are less likely to go on to post-16 learning. Many families however – especially those from deprived backgrounds – find it hard at this stage to provide the support that learners need. The school can provide a lot of help by facilitating and providing the right opportunities and guidance for these discussions.

Ideas for family engagement during transitions

Schools should always hold meetings for families well before key points of transition. These are very important opportunities for parents/carers to learn about their child's transition and how they can support their child through it. Children may not always be keen to discuss their learning with others, but helping them to be open and discuss any concerns they have with teachers and their parents/carers can play an important part in enabling them to find the best path and move successfully to the next stage.

It helps children and young people at all transitions if parents/carers:

- talk with them about what is going to happen

- encourage them to ask questions

- encourage them to talk about any concerns or anxieties

- listen carefully to their concerns and consider sharing them with other relevant people

- help them to become familiar with the new setting.

The following interventions can encourage family engagement during transition phases.

- **Informal 'meet the teacher/meet the family' sessions** – arrange more social events close to the transition to develop relationships while sharing information on the curriculum, on expectations of behaviour (attendance, getting to school on time) and on how families can best support their child's learning – see the **A welcoming school** resource (Theme 3: Resource 1) and the three resources in this toolkit on engagement for learning **Foundation Phase – Engagement for learning, Primary age 7–11 – Engagement for learning**, and **Secondary schools – Engagement for learning** (Theme 4: Resources 1, 2 and 3). Meeting parents and carers as soon as possible will help to smooth the transition and ensure teaching staff are better prepared to meet a child's needs. For pre-school children, this can help parents/carers understand what is meant by being 'ready to learn' (see box on page 45).

  Consider inviting current parents/carers along to these events to either be involved in these activities or to organise them: parent–parent/carer–carer and student–student interaction is very powerful and helps to overcome some of the barriers. Also consider holding at least one event away from the school site to allow the inclusion of those parents/carers/families who will not go to the school site.

- **Formal induction days/open evenings** – inviting learners and their parents/carers to attend meetings with a particular focus on the transition to secondary school will help ease anxieties about moving on. Make sure parents/carers have an early opportunity to discuss progress and transition issues with secondary school staff.

- **Information fairs** – inform families of all the support and activities that will be on offer that term/academic year, providing refreshments and taster activities. Invite families to sign up to family learning programmes (FLPs), or adult community learning opportunities, or your social media network.

- **Guides for learners and their families** – think about what information your new entrants will need (ask learners and families for feedback on what, in retrospect, helped them

and what they would have liked to have known). Include a message about the value the school places on family engagement, information about what their children will be learning, how families can best support that learning, and pastoral support available. Make this available on the school's website.

- **Working with families to boost 'readiness to learn'** – readiness for school is a particular challenge for schools in areas with high levels of deprivation. Primary schools and nursery settings may be able to work together to support families to get their children 'ready to learn', especially if they are linked to Flying Start centres – see the **Foundation Phase – Engagement for learning** resource (Theme 4: Resource 1) in this toolkit where 'readiness to learn' is discussed further, and also Welsh Government's Flying Start guidance at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/help/flyingstart/?lang=en.

When a school is not connected to a Flying Start setting, it can be hard to contact parents/carers prior to admission (which can happen at the last minute) and schools may need to rely on the work of other agencies and community partners to develop readiness to learn in their community – see also the **Multi-agency working** (Theme 5: Resource 2) and **Developing community partnerships** (Theme 5: Resource 1) resources in this toolkit.

- **Home visits** – consider suggesting/conducting home visits for some families who may have mobility or travel problems and for those that you might otherwise struggle to engage with – see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit.

- **Peer-to-peer mentoring** – consider having Year 7 learners visiting Year 6 learners' primary schools (with parents/carers present), speaking formally and informally about transition. Some schools use post-transition mentoring where older learners mentor Year 7 learners.

- **Additional support** – for learners who require it, consider putting specific arrangements in place to support them for the first half-term following transition.

- **Sharing of information** – during any transition, but particularly for learners transferring from or to secondary school, it is important that the receiving teacher/school has the information they need to plan for meeting the individual needs of their new learners. This helps maintain the momentum of learners' learning and also saves teachers' time. Useful information might include:

  – attainment data

  – well-being and behavioural issues

  – additional learning needs (ALN)

  – information about the family, and any issues with family engagement in their previous class/school – see information that could be passed on in the **Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit.

All data sharing should adhere to the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) framework (see box on page 48).

- **Gathering information from learners and their parents/carers either side of the transition** – some schools use questionnaires to gather additional information, especially over the Year 6/Year 7 transition. Some example questionnaires are included at the end of this resource. Remember though that this will not be sufficient alone, as 17 per cent of adults do not have the literacy skills themselves to fill in such forms.

- **Transitions policy** – outline the role of staff, parents/carers and learners in the transition process, and set an expectation for active work between primary and secondary schools with clear roles and responsibilities. Consider whether your school would benefit from having an identified 'transition champion' (a named individual with responsibility for effective transition).

Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) Framework

The Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) provides a framework for service-providing organisations directly concerned with the health, education, safety, and social well-being of people in Wales.

The framework facilitates this by establishing agreed requirements and mechanisms for the exchange of personal information between service providers.

All Welsh local authorities, health boards/trusts, police forces, fire services, a large number of charities and voluntary sector organisations are signatories. Many schools, GP practices, housing associations and some private sector organisations have also signed the Accord.

More information is available at www.waspi.org.

Sample questionnaires for learners and parents/carers at transition phases

The following questionnaires (pages 49–55) are designed for learners and parents/carers to complete before and after the primary/secondary transition to start off discussions between learners and their families, and between the learners and school staff, which can help to smooth the transition. The information gathered can also help schools identify any ongoing needs.

Previous research suggests that although the situation is improving, some parents/carers are still not sharing important information about their children that schools need to know. The completed questionnaires also provide a means for parents/carers to communicate their own particular views and establish a platform for further discussion.

Getting ready for secondary school – Questionnaire for Year 6 learners

Learner's name: ……………………………………………………………………

As I am getting ready to move onto Year 7, I am looking forward to …

As I am getting ready to move onto Year 7, I am worried about …

I think it would help my move to secondary school if…

Moving on to secondary school – Questionnaire for parents/carers of Year 6 learners

Learner's name: ………………………………………………………………………

What is your child looking forward to about starting secondary school?

Does your child have any particular worries about starting secondary school?

Do you have any concerns about your child starting secondary school?

Who would you like to speak to about your child's transition to secondary school? Please tick below.

☐ Class teacher.

☐ Special educational needs coordinator (SENCo).

☐ Headteacher.

☐ Parent/carer support adviser.

☐ A specific member of staff (please state) ……………………

Thank you all for completing this questionnaire and returning it to me by

………………………………………

Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 – Questionnaire for Year 7 learner

Learner's name: ……………………………………………………………… (optional)

1. Which primary school did you attend?

2. How confident and ready did you feel about the move to secondary school? (You can tick more than one.)

☐ I had a good idea what it was going to be like.

☐ I was a bit confused about what it was going to be like.

☐ I had no idea what it was going to be like.

☐ I felt excited.

☐ I felt nervous.

☐ I felt worried.

☐ Other (please state) ……………………………………………………………………………………

3. Did any of these things help you feel ready for the move? (Please tick.)

	Didn't go/ do this	Did this but it didn't help much	Did this and it was OK	Did this and it really helped
Meeting at your primary school				
Induction day				
Social event				
My mentor (older learner)				
Other (please state)				

4. What else could have been done to help you be prepared for the move?

5. What are the two best things about our school?

6. If you could change anything about our school what would it be?

Thank you all for completing this questionnaire and returning it to me by

……………………………………

Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 – Questionnaire for parents/carers of Year 7 learners

1. Learner's name ……………………………………… (optional)

2. What was their previous school?

3. Did any of these things help you feel ready for the move? (Please tick.)

	Didn't go/ do this	Did this but it didn't help much	Did this and it was OK	Did this and it really helped
Meeting at the primary school				
Induction day				
Parent/carer meeting after induction day				
Drop-in session at the school				
Other (please state)				

4. How well prepared do you think your child was for transition to secondary school? (Please tick.)

☐ Well prepared.

☐ Quite well prepared.

☐ Not prepared enough.

5. How well prepared were you for your child's transition to secondary school? (Please tick.)

☐ Well prepared.

☐ Quite well prepared.

☐ Not prepared enough.

6. Did you receive enough information about the transition process?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If the answer is no, what else would you have liked?

7. How well has your child settled at this school? (Please tick.)

☐ Very well.

☐ Everything seems ok.

☐ I have a few concerns.

☐ My child is not happy.

8. How is your child finding the work in lessons? (Please tick.)

☐ Too difficult.

☐ Pitched at the right level.

☐ Too easy (they were doing harder work at primary school).

9. Are you happy with the amount of homework your child is receiving? (Please tick.)

☐ Yes, enough to challenge but not over the top.

☐ OK, most week's homework is about right.

☐ No, my child is struggling to keep up with the amount given.

☐ No, I see very little homework.

10. **What else could we have done to make the transition easier for your child?**

11. **What else could we have done to make the transition easier for you?**

12. **What is the most important thing you think parents/carers need to know before their child comes to Year 7?**

13. **If you have any concerns, or your child is not happy, please add your comments here.**

14. **Any other comments:**

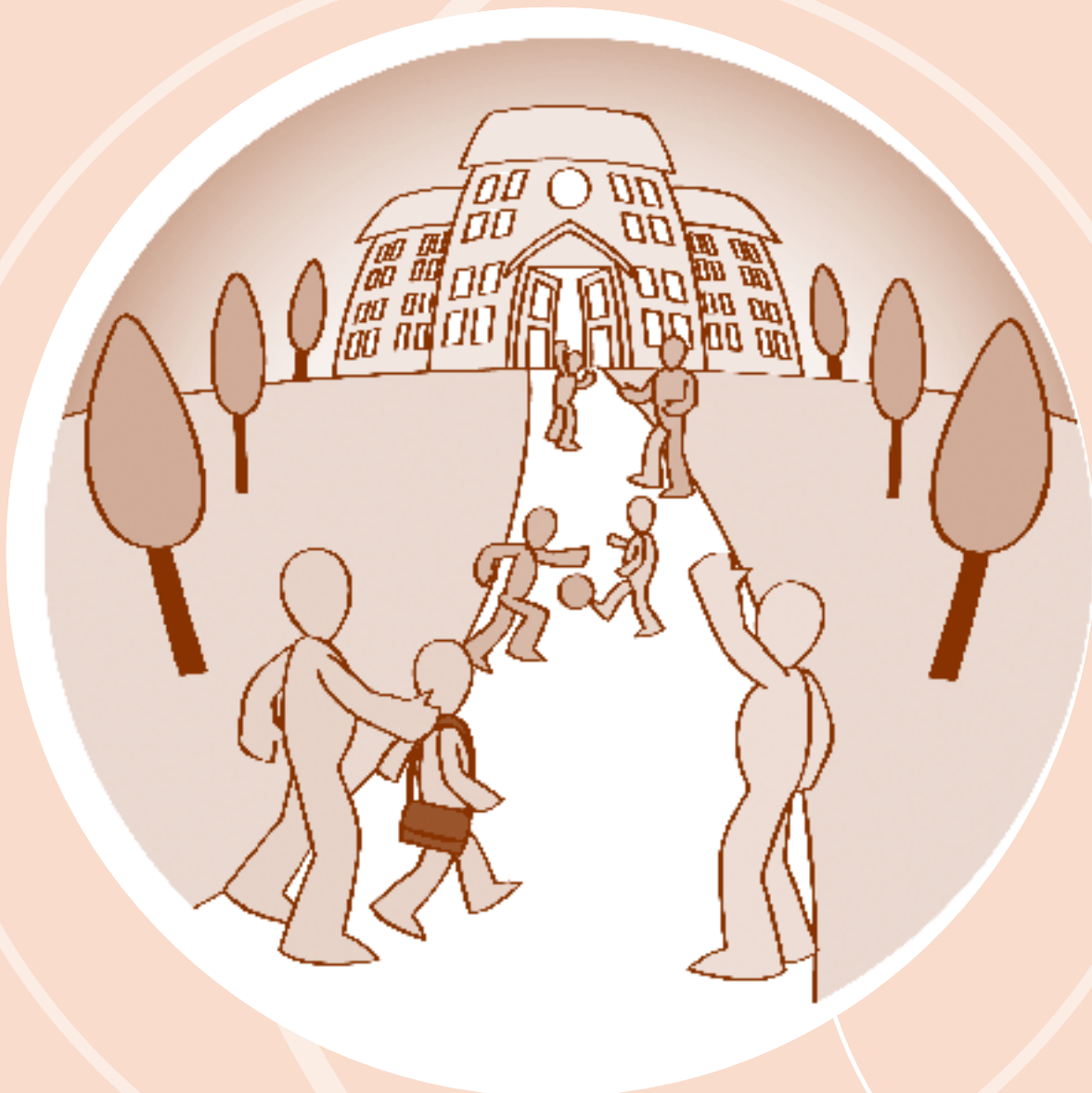Thank you all for completing this questionnaire.

Please return to …………………………………………………… (e-mail) or to the school office by

………………………………… (date)

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 5
Methods of communicating

This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.

- The importance of face-to-face communication.

- Website, texts and e-mail.

- Social media.

- Online data and virtual learning environments (VLEs).

- Two-way communication.

- Activity – Thinking through methods of communicating.

Introduction

Both schools and parents/carers agree that the basis for developing positive relationships is good communication.

Every school has a range of different types of information that they need to convey to families, and a variety of communication platforms they use (see table).

Formal methods such as parents'/carers' evenings need to be supplemented by informal opportunities such as contact at the school gate and social events in order to build relationships (with the ultimate goal of improving educational and well-being outcomes for learners).

" Parental engagement with children's learning is effectively supported when parents receive clear, specific, targeted information from schools. "

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011)
Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary, Department for Education (England)

There are an increasing number of innovative communication platforms that schools can use. It will be worth putting some thought into whether any new or different methods could improve your communications, and whether the existing methods inadvertently put some parents/carers at a disadvantage.

Type of information	Speed	Potential communication platforms
Urgent school information, e.g. school closure.	Urgent	Local radio, school website, Hwb, texts, social media, push apps such as Schoop and ParentHub, e-mail.
Notifying parents/carers if child is ill/has accident/particular incident occurs.	Urgent	Telephone, e-mail, texts, app for private two-way communication such as Schoop and ParentHub.
Issue at school with child's learning or behaviour.	Quick	One-to-one meetings, telephone.

Type of information	Speed	Potential communication platforms
Weekly information, e.g. homework assignments, reminders, request for help/resources/money/etc.	Quick	E-mail, texts, school website, Hwb, virtual learning environment (VLE), social media, letter in school bag, homework diary or student planner, push apps such as Schoop and ParentHub.
Personal requests for help or invitations to school activities.	Quick	Face-to-face meetings, telephone, e-mail.
Start of school year information, school calendar.	Quick	School website, Hwb, e-mail, social media, letter in school bag, push apps such as Schoop and ParentHub, e-mail.
Child's progress.	Routine	One-to-one meetings, written reports, VLE, Hwb.
Information on how families can support their child's learning.	Routine	One-to-one meetings, homework diary or student planner, letter in school bag, school website, social media, Schoop app, school events and activities.
Messages about the school's ethos, including valuing family engagement.	Routine	Ongoing messaging, posters, one-to-one meetings, school events and activities.

The importance of face-to-face communication

Face-to-face communication is the single most important method you can use in order to develop family engagement, because more than other forms of communication it:

- helps you get your message across more reliably – body language, tone of voice and other visual and verbal cues all help, and you can pick up on much more from your audience this way too

- helps to develop relationships and build trust

- overcomes issues of low literacy among families

- is the only method suitable for teasing out sensitive issues and overcoming emotive and complex problems

- overcomes the problem that some families do not have internet access

- may be the only method, for some families, that they feel comfortable with

- is impossible to ignore – families are much more likely to ignore a letter or e-mail

- helps parents/carers feel more valued as you are putting time into speaking with them individually.

> " I think the best way so far for us is simply by talking more to parents and carers, entering into a relationship that is based on outcomes for their children and the role that they can play."
>
> Deputy head, primary school.

Good face-to-face meetings are:

- informal, friendly, non-judgemental

- readily available, at the start and finish of school day and at school social events

- available via other networks, e.g. PTA, governing body

- also available at neutral venues and with mediators if needed – see the **Handling conflicts and complaints** resource (Theme 3: Resource 9) in this toolkit.

Website, texts and e-mails

Websites are the go-to place for parents/carers to find out essential school information but are not so good for conveying urgent information.

Push apps allow learners who subscribe to get notified of new information on the website without them having to visit it, e.g. Schoop and ParentHub. Like e-mail and texts they are a quick and cheap way of sending out information and they will help to overcome the problem that letters get left at the bottom of school bags. The use of text messaging alerts regarding learner absence and school closures are examples. Many parents/carers indicate that they value messages by text as these are more timely and likely to be read.

E-mails and texts can also be a convenient way for families to contact the school – parents/carers can send a message even if they have no credit for telephone calls. Here are some things to consider.

For sending information out

- Have you got the right people on the distribution list? For example, are dads, carers, grandparents included?

- Are your texts, e-mail messages and website easy to read, jargon free, and do they take into consideration that some adults have low literacy levels?

- Do you make written information attractive and easy to read, using colour and pictures where possible?

- Are your messages available in the languages spoken by families at the school? Is there a way of ensuring that all messages get translated where this is needed?

- How will you get the same information to families with no internet access?

- Have you systematically surveyed the families of the school to ask how they would prefer to be contacted? How often will you update this? (See the **Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit.)

- How will you know if and when you can stop using letters and just rely on e-mail and texts?

- Do you use your website as an opportunity to send clear messages about the school ethos, expectations about behaviour, and also to show that family engagement is valued by the school?

- Does your website provide:
  - contact points?
  - complaints procedure?
  - links to information, e.g. how families can best support child's learning, link to local authority family information services?
  - a school calendar and recent school letters?
  - photos, video, blogs, etc.?
  - links to the Welsh Government 'Education begins at home' campaign (see the campaign website at www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/education-begins-at-home/?lang=en)?
  - links to Welsh Government information for parents at www.wales.gov.uk/schoolsinfo4parents?

For receiving information back

- Do families have an easy route to contacting the school by e-mail or text?
- Will the messages reach the right people at the right time?

Social media

Social media technologies can be harnessed in order to communicate with families, for instance through the use of school blogs and podcasts, apps, Facebook and Twitter, in order to reach at a distance those who are unable or unwilling to engage with the school in person.

Social media can be a quick and cheap way of sending out information. They can also be a useful and cheap way for families to contact the school.

There are guides around for teachers on how they can use Twitter and Facebook, e.g. www.edudemic.com/guides/guide-to-twitter and www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-safety/introducing-a-facebook-guide-for-educators-and-community-leaders/625839830770136.

Social media can also be used to involve the community in learning, e.g. through sharing videos of storytelling and mathematics techniques, or blogging advice on how to support children's learning[8].

There are also a number of apps that are now available free of charge to support active communication between schools and families around achievement and behaviour. One example is 'Schoop', which is being used by many schools in Wales. It sends out alerts to parents'/carers' phones, tailored to the children's year group and class. Two examples of the use of 'Schoop' are shown in the box on page 61. Another such app is 'Class dojo' where learners score points for their behaviour (the behaviours determined by the teacher) and reports can be easily e-mailed back to families, e.g. once a week. Social media apps for schools is a fast growing area of development and we will be seeing more and more apps in future.

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[8] Estyn best practice case study of Cogan Nursery School, Vale of Glamorgan, published at www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/289079.7/sharing-learning-through-social-media/?navmap=33,53,158

Things to consider include the following.

- Social media can leave teachers vulnerable unless they follow some simple precautions around privacy and conduct – teaching unions have issued guidance, such as www.nasuwt. org.uk/InformationandAdvice/Professionalissues/SocialNetworking/NASUWT_007513.

- What types of communication do you want to use social media for – sending out important messages vs. receiving information from parents/carers vs. helping families to support learning?

- What could you use the different platforms for? Instant messaging, Facebook page, blog, podcast/video podcast, Skype, apps?

- Not all families will use all media platforms, so how will information flow be duplicated over different platforms in order to reach everyone?

- For Facebook or Twitter, is one school account best or do you need different accounts for different purposes? Are the main messages easily located?

- For Facebook or Twitter, don't be afraid to get into conversation with parents/carers, but also don't feel obliged to respond to every comment.

Using social media messaging services to engage parents/carers

Wick and Marcross Church in Wales Primary School in the Vale of Glamorgan is one of the many schools taking part in the 'Big Maths – Beat That' Programme. When the school started the programme they shared each week's number facts that needed to be learnt for each group with their parents/carers via the school website.

Each week children tracked their own progress – trying to beat their own weekly score and staff also tracked class average progress. At the very start of the programme there were some very big gains, but during the last year progress had begun to plateau, with classes making an average gain of under 1.0 per week.

Since using the messaging app Schoop to publish the 'Learn it Tasks' as an alert that goes directly to the parents'/carers' phones and mobile devices, each class has shown dramatic results in its weekly rate of improvement as evidenced in the table below.

Year 2	2.3
Year 3	3.3
Year 4	1.7
Year 5	3.1
Year 6	7.5

Parents/carers have commented that they feel communication with the school is very good.

Here is an example of a messaging app alert posted by Barry Island Primary School, praised by Estyn for its 'outstanding use of social media' (see 'Snapshot' on page 18 of the main FaCE guidance document).

Newsletter Friday 5th June 2015

05/06/2015

Year 5 and 6 had a fantastic opportunity this week to go surfing at Whitmore Bay. The lifeguards taught the children all about beach safety and the dangers to look out for. They learnt about respecting the water and making sensible choices. The children used boards to rescue each other and developed their confidence in [...]

Read more

Online data and virtual learning environments (VLEs)

In addition to the normal details which should be available via the website, schools may want to consider whether to provide parents/carers with online information on their child's progress. Projects in the USA suggest that simply providing parents/carers with the opportunity to view their child's progress data online may motivate young people do better in secondary school.

Hwb+ is the Welsh Government's fully bilingual learning platform which has the capability to provide an individual and customisable solution for every school in Wales, offering:

- a public-facing website
- virtual classroom tools
- announcements and events
- blogs, wikis and forums
- a personalised user interface
- access to Office 365 (which includes Outlook e-mail, video conferencing via Lync, an e-Portfolio and streaming of core Office apps including Word, Excel and PowerPoint).

Hwb+ will see the potential for schools to subscribe to provisioning for parent/carer accounts on the platform. This will allow parents/carers to access specific information on their children and further enhance home–school links. Hwb and Hwb+ can be accessed at hwb.wales.gov.uk.

Two-way communication

Don't forget that though the school may have many important messages to convey, and points it wishes for parents/carers to take note of, communication (dialogue), as opposed to information provision, is a two-way process (see diagram on page 63) and schools will need to always consider how best to respond to parents'/carers' communications too.
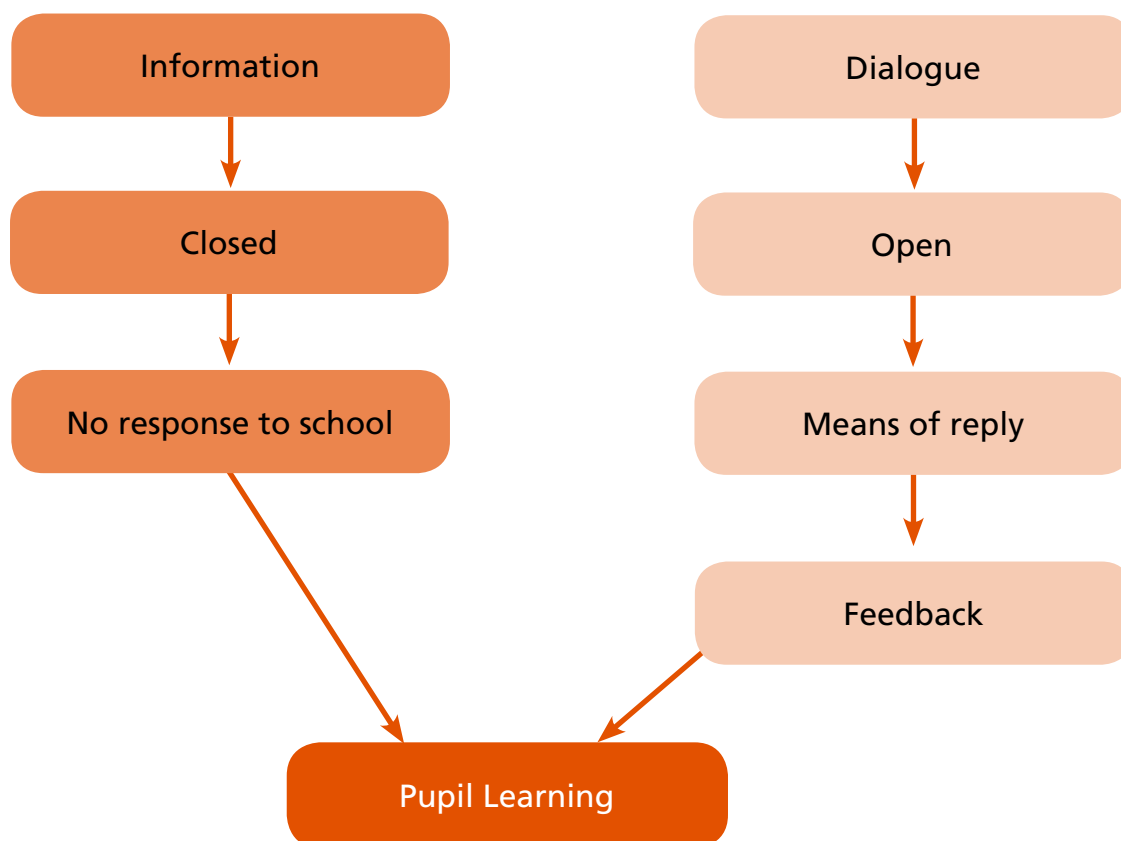
A 'You said – we did' format of your response can help – parents/carers often report that their comments go unheard, when in fact schools have acted on the comments, but haven't completed the feedback loop to let them know.

In responding to parents/carers:

- respond in an appropriate format – sometimes an 'in kind' Facebook reply might be ok, there are times when you will need to post 'Will follow this up in person Mr Smith' and speak to the parent/carer in person, over the telephone or by letter

- respond in an appropriate timescale – it might not be possible to respond as quickly as parents/carers would like, but if there will be a delay in replying, it is sensible to let the parent/carer know you are looking into the matter

- an opportunity is provided – if a parent/carer is reaching out to the school by contacting you, there may be opportunities to use this to engage them further.

It is also important for schools to provide a channel through which:

- parent/carer voices can be heard – see the **Parent/carer groups and voices of parents/carers** resource (Theme 3: Resource 7) in this toolkit

- families can make complaints – see the **Handling conflict and complaints** resource (Theme 3: Resource 9) in this toolkit.

```
Information          Dialogue
    ↓                    ↓
  Closed               Open
    ↓                    ↓
No response to      Means of reply
   school                ↓
    ↓                 Feedback
         Pupil Learning
```

'Types of communication with parents', from Harris and Goodall (2007) *Do Parents Know They Matter?* DCSF Research Report (http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6639/1/DCSF-RW004.pdf). Reproduced with kind permission of the authors.

Activity – Thinking through methods of communicating

Purpose: to reflect on the current communications channels used by your school and how you might want to tweak them.

Who should be involved: school staff, parent/carer group/PTA members, parents/carers, possibly learners.

Step 1: Current methods

In a small group (or several small groups) work through the table (page 65) looking at the different types of information that the school needs to convey, identifying the current communication methods used.

Step 2: Is it working?

Discuss whether the current method is working. Take into consideration any information you have on families' communications preferences – see the **Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit. Rate the current method between 0 and 5, with top score of 5 if the messages are reaching the target audience AND tailored to family preferences AND the messaging and language/tone is right.

Step 3: Do we need to change anything?

For those areas that score poorly, discuss whether the existing communications channel could be used more effectively through a few tweaks (e.g. send letters out earlier, update e-mail list) or whether a different or supplementary communications channel would be more effective. Summarise any planned changes into an action plan.

Step 4: Report back

Report back to families on any proposed changes and ask for their views.

Type of information we want to convey	Current method(s)	Any problems? Is anyone missed out? Does the information arrive in time?	Rating 0–5	How could communication be improved?
Urgent school information, e.g. school closure.	Local radio, school website, Hwb, texts, social media, push apps such as Schoop and ParentHub, e-mail.			
Notifying parents/carers if child is ill/has accident/particular incident occurs.	Telephone, e-mail, texts, app for private two-way communication such as Schoop and ParentHub.			
Issue at school with child's learning or behaviour.	One-to-one meetings, telephone.			
Weekly information, e.g. homework assignments, reminders, request for help/resources/money/etc.	E-mail, texts, school website, Hwb, VLE, social media, letter in school bag, homework diary or student planner, push apps such as Schoop and ParentHub.			
Personal requests for help or invitations to school activities.	Face to face, telephone, e-mail.			
Start of school year information, school calendar.	School website, Hwb, e-mail, social media, letter in school bag, push apps such as Schoop and ParentHub, e-mail.			
Child's progress.	One-to-one meetings, written reports, VLE, Hwb.			
Information on how families can support their child's learning.	One-to-one meetings, homework diary or student planner, letter in school bag, school website, social media, Schoop ap, school events and activities.			

Type of information we want to convey	Current method(s)	Any problems? Is anyone missed out? Does the information arrive in time?	Rating 0–5	How could communication be improved?
Messages about the school's ethos, including valuing family engagement.	Ongoing messaging, posters, one-to-one meetings, school events and activities.			
Other.				

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 6
Rethinking parents'/carers' evenings

This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.
- Rethinking the content.
- Rethinking the logistics.
- Activity – Conduct a survey about parents'/carers' evenings.

Introduction

The focus of this FaCE toolkit is to support schools in their efforts to help families actively support their child's learning. Parents'/carers' evenings provide an opportunity to engage with families on this issue, but you may want to think through whether the changing format of these discussions could help you engage more productively with families.

Schools must provide parents/carers with a report each year on their child's progress including details of their child's achievements and progress in each Area of Learning, and also provide at least one opportunity for parents/carers to discuss their child's progress with a teacher[9]. This discussion does not necessarily have to be in the form of a parents'/carers' evening, although the majority of schools do hold two or more parents'/carers' evenings per year where parents/carers meet members of staff to discuss the child's progress, usually for between 5 and 15 minutes per teacher.

Looking at internet blogs and forums however it is apparent that at least some teachers and parents/carers find the experience both stressful and unsatisfying.

Some schools are rethinking the format of the opportunities they provide for parent/carer–teacher discussions. A change in format and content of those discussions can not only improve attendance rates, but also provide better opportunities to:

- engage with families to develop a positive, partnership relationship
- discuss the learner's progress and future academic programme – this can be taken further to involve the learner and their family in goal setting
- communicate the ways in which families can support that learning
- work together to address particular issues.

This resource contains checklists to help you think through whether you might want to change two aspects of parent/carer–teacher discussions: the **content** and the **logistics**. Your families' views are important too. There is a parent/carer survey activity at the end of this resource that you could adapt/use to gauge what families would like out of your parents'/carers' evenings.

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[9] www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2011/1943/introduction/made

Rethinking content

The content that you aim to cover at a parents'/carers' evening, and the way in which it is conveyed, will have an impact on:

- the extent to which families feel engaged as partners in their child's learning

- the extent which teachers are able to receive information back from families, e.g. information that can help teachers get a better understanding of the factors affecting an individual learner's progress

- the extent to which learners and their families can be involved in reflecting on progress and in setting goals.

The checklist below is designed to help you think through the information exchange you want to achieve – you will then be able to consider whether the parents'/carers' evening does or could provide the right opportunity or whether alternative opportunities need to be developed.

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
☐ **Reporting on academic progress** Communicating academic progress is usually the purpose of parents'/carers' evenings. Is the information you provide comprehensible to everyone? Is there more you could do to help families interpret the information you are providing them? Is the tone right? Do you help families to understand how they could help to address any issues that you have identified in the child's academic progress? What about for those parents/carers with English as Additional Language (EAL) or who have low literacy?	
☐ **Communicating what families can do** Do you/could you use parents'/carers' evenings to communicate the best things that families can do to support learning? (See **Introduction to Theme 4** in this toolkit.) Is there a way you could provide this information to families while they are waiting to see the teacher? For situations where families are apparently failing to provide a good home learning environment, or where there are particular behavioural or attendance issues, do you provide other opportunities for parent/carer–teacher discussions to take place?	
☐ **Understanding factors affecting individual learners** Does your current set up for parents'/carers' evenings allow enough time and space for a parent/carer to be forthcoming about factors at home that might be affecting a learner's progress?	

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
Involving learners and families in goal setting Some schools have 'goal-setting' evenings rather than parents'/carers' evenings – using a *'Visible Learning'*[10] approach based on research findings of John Hattie. Learners are supported to assess their own performance, and bring their parents/carers to the goal-setting evening where, with the support of a teacher, they explain to their parents/carers what they can do, and what they aim to achieve by the end of the academic year. Because the learners themselves are leading the evening, this can result in a high degree of engagement from parents/carers, while also encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning.	
Providing what information and feedback that parents/carers want Parents/carers may well come to parents'/carers' evenings wanting to get other information, e.g. wanting to know whether their child is behaving well, how their child is doing relative to other children, whether the teacher knows their child and that they can they trust the school to care for their them, whether behavioural issues are dealt with fairly, why their child is in a lower stream, etc. – see also the **What parents/carers want** section in the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit. They may also come with information that they want to convey to teachers, or have bigger issues that they want to address, such as bullying. You may want to consider conducting a parent/carer survey (see activity at the end of this resource) to gauge the type of information families are generally seeking to receive and convey at parents'/carers' evenings. You may also want to consider whether you provide enough other opportunities for families to raise issues that require more time and space for discussion than parents'/carers' evenings allow (see the logistics checklist on page 72).	
Communicating the school ethos and expectations of behaviour Do you or could you use the parents'/carers' evenings to convey messages to families about the school ethos, the value the school places upon engagement with families, or the expectations the school has around behaviour and attendance?	

[10] www.visible-learning.org

learning.gov.wales/deprivation

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
Difficult conversations Teachers are likely sometimes to have to deal with pushy or aggressive parents/carers or to have difficult conversations with parents/carers at parents'/carers' evenings. Do you provide enough training for staff on how to handle these situations? (See also the **Development needs analysis for delivering FaCE** resource (Theme 2: Resource 1) in this toolkit.) Is there an appropriate process in place for staff to follow should a difficult situation arise during a parents'/carers' evening?	

Rethinking logistics

The logistics of parent/carer–teacher discussions (e.g. scheduling, location, time allotted per discussion, frequency) can affect which families attend, and also the content and depth of discussions that can take place. Some teachers report that it is the very families with whom a discussion is most needed that fail to turn up to parents'/carers' evenings, in which case a different approach (at least for these families) may be required. The logistics also have a big impact on whether your staff dread or welcome the prospect of an impending parents'/carers' evening.

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
Staff feedback How do your teachers feel about the current format? Is the parents'/carers' evening a stressful and dissatisfying experience or a positive and rewarding one? Have you asked your staff for comments and suggestions on the format?	
Parent/carer feedback If you are trying out a new format, have you asked families for their feedback and taken this into account? Have you kept families in the loop about how you are responding to their suggestions?	
Time allotted Having decided on the content you would like to be able to cover during the parent/carer–teacher discussions, do you need to rethink the time slot (5–15 minutes) offered? Do your families know that there are other opportunities to discuss larger issues with staff outside parents'/carers' evenings?	
Scheduling What is the attendance rate like for your current parents'/carers' evenings? Are there some families who find it hard to attend? Might you be able to increase attendance by changing the timing? Could you offer a regular drop-in surgery (where parents/carers don't have to make an appointment) or offer greater choice of times to parents/carers? Would it be useful to conduct a parent/carer survey to find out what timings would suit them best?	
Venue Could the venue for the discussions be off-putting for some families? Some schools now use community venues instead for their parents'/carer's evenings, which can help encourage parents/carers who have had particularly negative experiences of schooling themselves to attend.	

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
☐ **Inclusivity** Is there practical support you could provide to help some groups of parents/carers attend parents'/carers' evenings (e.g. someone organising lifts for them, a crèche facility, setting up a buddy system for those families who are anxious about coming into school)? Do you need to provide translation facilities for some families?	
☐ **Combining with other activities** Could you 'double up' your parents'/carers' evening with another activity in order to improve attendance? For example, by combining it with a coffee evening organised by the parent/carer group, a family workshop training parents/carers to teach specific reading skills to their children[11], a Family Learning Signature workshop or a goal-setting evening?	
☐ **Open door policy** How do you provide other opportunities for parent/carer–teacher discussions? Do you have an 'open door' policy? Could these arrangements be improved?	
☐ **Non-attending families** Do you have a group of specific families who have rarely or never attended parents'/carers' evenings? Do you follow up on these non-attending families to provide them with another opportunity? Could you take a different approach to these families, e.g. home visits? (See the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit.)	

Case study – Ebbw Fawr Learning Community

As a school with over 25 per cent of its learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM), we wanted to strengthen the links with parents and carers who historically were 'hard to reach'. Looking at the attendance figures for recent parent/carer consultation evenings, we saw that there were a specific group of parents/carers who did not come to the school on these evenings. It was no surprise that these families were also the ones who would benefit the most from strengthened links with the school, creating greater dialogue and support. We also wanted to introduce a series of initiatives aimed at addressing adult literacy, tackling low aspirations and supporting home learning. If these initiatives were to be successful, parental engagement was vital.

[11] Training parents/carers on how to teach reading skills can be more than twice as effective as encouraging parents/carers to listen to their children read, especially if they are trained to use the same techniques as the school (e.g. phonics).

What did we do?

We quickly realised that if parents/carers weren't going to come to us, then we needed to go to them. Assistant Director leading on Challenge Cymru initiatives Anthony Ager created a 'drop-in surgery' called 'chat@EFLC' in the Learning Action Centre in the middle of Ebbw Vale. This gave the school a base every Friday afternoon (which coincided with market day) where parents/carers were able to speak to someone from the school about any issues or concerns in an environment that was welcoming and unthreatening. It was also a way for us to give information regarding different events that were coming up and to provide specific learning resources that could be used at home. Since its inception at the start of September, chat@EFLC also hosts representatives from Families First and the local housing association Tai Calon, which gives parents/carers the opportunity to discuss issues not only to do with school, but other issues which may also be having a negative effect on their child's welfare. This approach has ensured that there are a range of professionals on hand every week who are able to offer all manner of support without a parent/carer feeling the need to make an appointment.

What difference did it make?

We have seen over 60 parents/carers of children from all key stages since the start of the project. As well as having the drop-in element, we also make specific appointments to target parents/carers of learners who we feel we need to engage with in a greater way. This has seen a marked increase in the attendance at our other support events including a skills evening for parents/carers, looking at improving levels of literacy and numeracy, a university taster evening aimed at raising aspirations, and a revision support evening for our Key Stage 4 learners and parents/carers.

In Year 11, we have a group of 30 'target learners'. By using chat@EFLC, we have been able to meet with the parents/carers of these learners and provide specific support for individual learners, putting into place strategies to address underperformance. Improvements have already been seen in our most recent performance data.

In the future, we will continue to use chat@EFLC to strengthen links with the community, but also to provide extra support and information for parents/carers of learners from our feeder schools as part of our ongoing transition programme.

Contact details

Anthony Ager, Assistant Director, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community.

aager@ebbwfawr.co.uk

Activity – Conduct a survey about parents'/carers' evenings

See also the example of a parent/carer survey conducted at a parents'/carers' evening provided in the **Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit.

Purpose: to gather information that can be used to make sure that parents'/carers' evenings are as useful and convenient as possible for families. This survey could be conducted at the school gate, at a school social event, or at a parents'/carers' evening, or otherwise sent out by e-mail/letter in the school bag. It will be particularly important to try to gather the views of those families who do not regularly attend parents'/carers' evenings, and extra efforts may be needed to reach them. To keep parents'/carers' views confidential the survey would need to be conducted by the parent/carer group or PTA.

Who should be involved: school staff (to help amend/design the questionnaire), members of the parent/carer group/PTA to conduct the survey, and parents/carers.

Step 1

Plan and design the survey with input from parents/carers (via a parent/carer group).

Step 2

Conduct the survey, either face-to-face or by e-mail/letter, taking extra steps to get responses from families who less regularly attend parents'/carers' evenings.

Step 3

Analyse the findings. Hold discussions between the parent/carer group, headteacher and other school staff about what actions could be taken.

Step 4

Report back to staff and families the results and actions that will be taken.

Introduction

Hello. I wonder if you could spare a few minutes. My name is …………………………………
and I'm a member of the PTA. Parents'/carers' evenings are held each term. We want to be
sure that these are as useful for you as possible. We would appreciate any suggestions you
have to make these meetings convenient for you and your children. Please tell us your
views – this survey is completely confidential.

Question 1: How regularly would you say you attend parents'/carers' evenings?

☐ Always.

☐ Sometimes.

☐ Rarely, if ever.

Question 2: How useful do you find the parents'/carers' evenings?

☐ Very useful.

☐ OK.

☐ Not very useful.

Question 3: Current timing

Parents'/carers' evenings are usually held on a weekday evening from 4.00–6.00pm in the middle of the autumn
and summer terms. How convenient is this time for you?

☐ Convenient.

☐ OK.

☐ Inconvenient.

Question 4: Possible improvements

If the school offered any of the following, would it make a **big** difference to whether or not you attend
parents'/carers' evenings? (Tick for 'yes', cross for 'no' or leave blank for 'not much difference'.)

☐ Held in evenings 7.00–9.00pm.   ☐ Held at the community centre.

☐ Held during school hours.   ☐ Crèche facilities.

☐ Choice of dates, families picking two per year.   ☐ Car pool to share lifts.

☐ Monthly drop-in surgery.   ☐ Translation facilities.

☐ Held in school classrooms instead of the school hall.   ☐ Coffee evening at the same time.

☐ Held at the church hall.

Question 5: What are you looking for?

At parents'/carers' evenings, what information are you looking for from the teacher(s)? What kind of information do you want to make teachers aware of?

Information looked for during parents'/carers' evenings

Information you want to convey to teachers at parents'/carers' evenings?

Question 6

Would you say that you get the information you are looking for/contribute the information you want to share with teachers at parents'/carers' evenings?

☐ Always.

☐ Sometimes.

☐ Rarely, if ever.

Question 7

Is there anything else you think the school could improve about the current arrangements for parents'/carers' evenings or any other comments that you'd like to share?

Suggestions

Thank you very much. Please return to .... by ....

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 7
Parent/carer groups and the voices of parents/carers
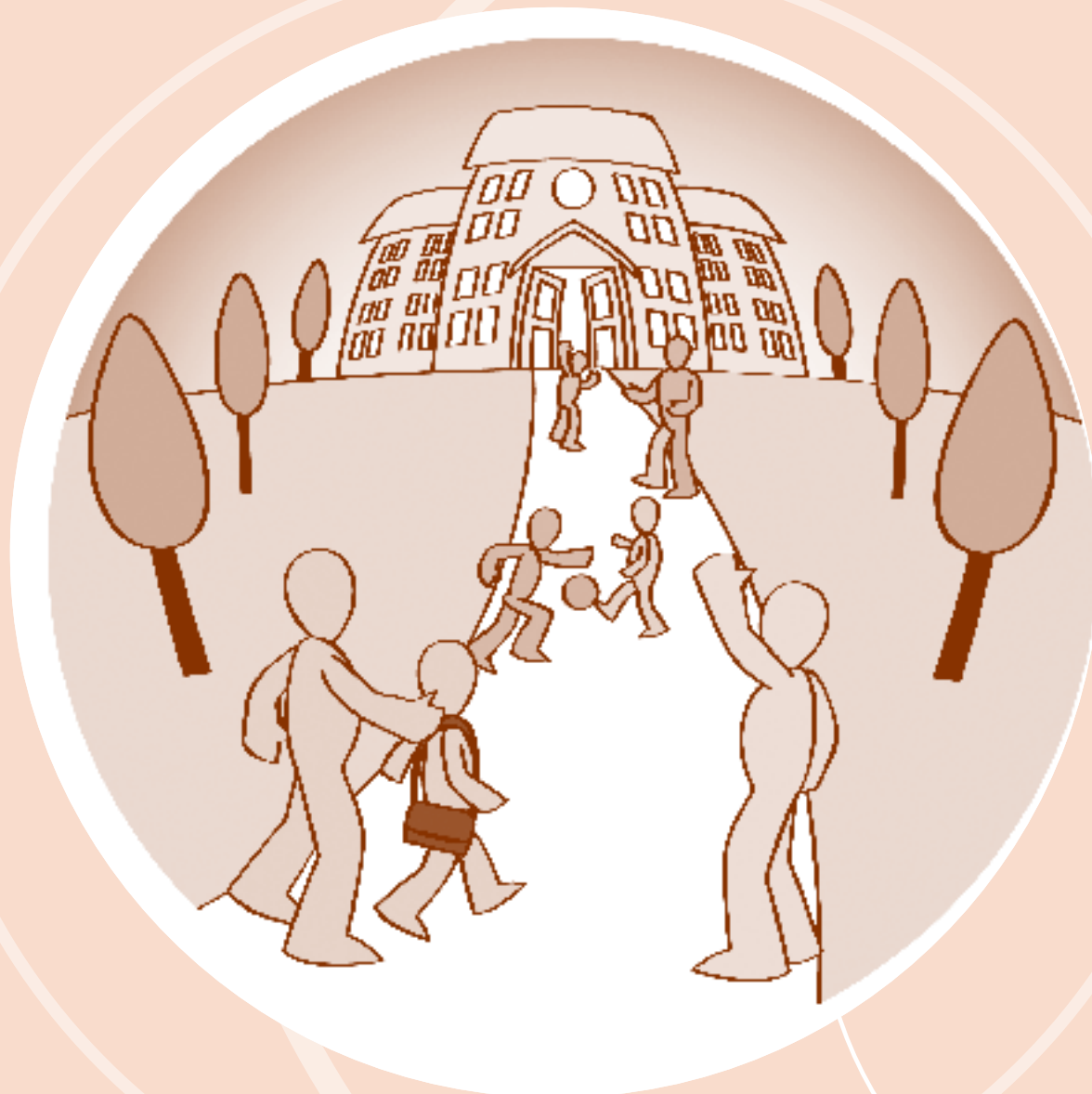
This resource contains the following.

- Empowering your parent/carer group to expand its remit.
- Parent/carer voices and co-production.
- Parent/carer voices and bullying.
- Safeguarding.
- Sources of further help and information.
- Checklist – Role of the parent/carer group and hearing parent/carer voices.
- Activity – Open space event building relationships among schools and families.
- Co-production checklist – To what extent are groups currently involved in decision making in your school?

Empowering your parent/carer group to expand its remit

Traditionally, parent/carer groups have focused on fundraising and organising social events, but there are other things that they can do as shown below, all of which can play a really valuable role in helping the school to engage families as partners in their children's learning.

- **Networking** – parent/carer groups can help the school to communicate with a network of parents/carers, by word of mouth, at the school gate, or more formally through a newsletter. They may find it easier than the school to reach and engage with some families. Some parent/carer groups already have engagement as their top priority – the focus for any social event is to engage all parents/carers – fundraising then happens as a natural by-product.

- **Volunteering** – parent/carer groups can recruit and organise parent/carer help and support for the school. Many already do this for school social events – but equally volunteers could help the school to run family learning activities.

- **Supporting learning at home** – some parent/carer groups take more of a lead in engaging families with learning, providing information and ideas to families about how to assist students at home, e.g. by distributing information about the curriculum, providing materials to families to help their children learn, or leading the organisation of family learning events.

- **Supporting good parenting** – some groups provide workshops and information to build parenting skills, such as coaching, setting limits, helping families establish good home environments to support learning. They might draw on parenting support expertise from other public sector agencies or the third sector, or use a more DIY self-help approach. The Welsh Government 2014 document *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support* publication[12] provides lots of useful information on best practice for parenting support.

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[12] www.wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/?lang=en

- **Decision making** – for some groups the focus is on including parents/carers in school decisions, and allowing 'parent/carer voices' to be heard – an essential component of a successful FaCE strategy.

- **Collaborating with the community** – many groups reach out to local businesses and organisations and attract resources and services from the community to strengthen schools. They could also be involved in helping to develop community partnership projects that are focused on learning outcomes for children.

To summarise, schools can find a great deal of support from an active parent/carer group because they:

- can tap into parent/carer networks which can reach families that the school might otherwise struggle to engage with

- have many links to community bodies

- can provide buddy-systems, car pools and translation that can encourage under-represented families into school

- are well-placed to design engagement efforts from a families' perspective

- bring energy and resources to develop and run social events

- have a useful 'distance' from the school which can build bridges to families who are less confident or anxious about engaging with the school.

> " The parent council we set up nearly a year ago now has changed over the short time it has been running. At the meetings, they discuss how to reach other parents and carers who don't often attend by finding out what might attract them into school … They are very good at networking now and providing us with information we need to organise suitable social and other family learning events."
>
> Deputy head, primary school, Scotland.

Parent/carer voices and co-production

Co-production is a way of achieving better outcomes by sharing power and responsibility. During co-production, all stakeholders are involved in the planning and development of services. It is becoming increasing popular as a means of engaging all parties in the school planning process.

As a starting point you could use the co-production checklist provided at the end of this resource to identify the extent to which specific groups are already involved in decision making in your school. More information about co-production is available at http://coproductionnetwork.com/page/about-coproduction and www.timebanking.org/about/co-production-and-timebanking.

Parent/carer voices and bullying

In a recent report[13] Estyn emphasised the role that parents/carers can play in helping schools to develop their approach to tackling bullying. They recommended that schools:

R1 raise awareness of bullying on the grounds of protected characteristics with pupils, parents, staff, and governors

R2 consult pupils, parents, and others, to identify the extent and nature of bullying in the school and to agree the contents of strategic equality plans.

There is a case study on page 82 showing how parents/carers can be involved.

Safeguarding

It is essential to follow safeguarding guidance and use appropriate risk assessments when conducting activities that involve parents/carers working with learners or when opening the school to members of the community.

Welsh Government guidance (2015) on safeguarding in schools – *Keeping learners safe* – is available on the Welsh Government website at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/keeping-learners-safe/?lang=en. The Estyn *Safeguarding Good Practice Guide* is available from www.estyn.gov.uk.

Sources of further help and information

PTA UK is a network of parent associations in the UK and provides support materials to PTAs. Their website can be viewed at www.pta.org.uk.

Scotland has produced many resources to support schools in setting up a parent council. The primary purpose of parent councils is to enable parent/carer voices to be heard in school decision making. Guidance can be found at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/09153454/9. The National Standards for Community Engagement developed by the Scottish Executive include good practice which people may find helpful and can be viewed online at www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf.

The PTO Today is an American organisation for parent groups, and has produced a guide called *Parent Involvement Toolkit* (www.ptotoday.com/parent-involvement). This is a guide for parent–teacher organisations in the United States, and includes 'The 10 traits of highly effective parent groups' as well as many suggestions on how to increase the numbers of parents actively involved in parent groups and in school life.

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[13] www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/315915.6/action-on-bullying-june-2014/?navmap=30,163

Case study – Maindee Primary School successfully promotes an understanding of race in a changing cultural landscape

This case study is taken from the Estyn publication *Action on bullying: A review of the effectiveness of action taken by schools to address bullying on the grounds of pupils' protected characteristics* (2014) available at www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/315915.6/action-on-bullying-june-2014/?navmap=30,163.

Context

Maindee Primary School is in Newport. The school caters for pupils from three to eleven years of age. There are currently around 430 pupils on roll, including around 64 in the nursery classes. Around 32% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified around 17% of pupils as having additional learning needs. Around 89% of pupils come from an ethnic minority background. A minority of pupils receive support for English as an additional language.

Strategy

The school is well known in the locality for its work to promote community cohesion and welcome children from multicultural backgrounds. Traditionally, around 85% of pupils have come from Asian backgrounds, mainly Pakistani or Bangladeshi. Recently the school's population has changed. Currently a quarter of the school population come from eastern European families, the largest group being Roma. Most of these pupils arrive at the school with limited skills in English. The school has identified the need to address the cultural shift in its intake. Leaders have worked with its second generation Asian parents to develop an understanding of Romani culture and traditions.

Action

The school organises coffee mornings and information sessions for parents of many different cultures. Translators are on hand to support parents in seven different languages.

Alongside work to celebrate Asian culture and festivals, the school has worked to develop a shared understanding of Romani culture. A recent festival included a horse and 'varda'[14] taking up residence on the school field. Pupils attended workshops to explore aspects of Romani culture, including artefacts and traditions.

In Romani culture, boys particularly are encouraged to solve their own disputes physically, and shake hands afterwards. This is not acceptable in school. Therefore, the school explains restorative justice to parents and pupils so that they learn that pupils, supported by adults, talk and express their feelings to resolve disputes. On occasions, the school's leaders have needed to call parents to school specifically to remind them of its rules on resolving disputes. The school has clear and consistent systems to deal with reported or observed bullying. Where incidents cause concern, the school invites parents into school to discuss their child's behaviour. The school provides translators to support these meetings.

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[14] Gypsy waggon or caravan.

Outcomes

The school has established a rich and inclusive ethos that celebrates equality and diversity well. The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) group supports parents in developing an understanding of the Welsh education system effectively. Ninety-seven parents attended the most recent information morning.

Pupils have a rich and varied curriculum that includes aspects of many different cultures and traditions.

Pupils report that there are very few instances of bullying. They are confident that staff will sort out occasional name calling or physical aggression quickly and effectively. Staff are well informed about the protected characteristics. As a result, they are open and honest in dealing with pupils and responding to their questions and discussions. They are proactive in dealing with bullying.

Checklist – Role of the parent/carer group and hearing parent/carer voices

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
☐ **Keenness of parents/carers to join the current parent/carer group** Is your group lively and does it involve the majority of parents/carers, or does it struggle to get enough parents/carers to volunteer? If the latter is the case, have you or they tried to find out from families why they haven't volunteered, and thought through how the group could change its format to make it more appealing? Would it help to go for a bigger, less formal group of volunteers who help out on a more occasional basis, rather than a smaller more formal group who have to commit themselves to a lot of meetings and work?	
☐ **Inclusivity of the parent/carer group** Does the membership of the current parent/carer group represent well the whole parent/carer body? Are there representatives from your target family groups? (See the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit.)	
☐ **Remit of the parent/carer group** Has your parent/carer group consulted with parents/carers on what it should have as its priorities? Does the school want to encourage and empower the parent/carer group to focus on any of the following? • Engaging with all parents/carers. • Helping the school engage with its target families that it otherwise struggles to engage with. • Organising family learning events and parenting workshops. • Organising volunteering. • Engaging parents/carers in school decision making (e.g. helping with consultations on particular issues, or getting parent/carer voices heard at governor meetings and meetings with school staff). • Engaging with the community.	
☐ **Support and empowerment of the parent/carer group** If the parent/carer group is thinking of expanding its remit, can you offer any support and learning opportunities to help? Are there any professional learning opportunities (e.g. those relating to FaCE) that could be offered to group members? (See also the **Development needs analysis for delivering FaCE** resource (Theme 2: Resource 1) in this toolkit.)	

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
Parent/carer voices Does or could your parent/carer group provide a channel through which families can raise issues with the school? Do they or could they help with consultations on particular issues (such as the school development plan – see the **School development plans** resource (Theme 1: Resource 1) in this toolkit) – or getting parent/carer voices heard at governor meetings and meetings with school staff? And more generally, consider the following. • Are families involved in deciding what the topics of discussions/consultations are? • Do all families have the opportunity to contribute/are all families able to be involved in ways that are accessible to them? • Is information available in the languages used by families at the school or do families know they can access translators? • Can families contribute in different ways, e.g. text, e-mail, letter, telephone? • How will people know if their ideas and views have led to changes?	

Activity – Open space event building relationships among schools and families

Purpose: a first step in building relationships among schools and families as well gathering beliefs and information from the school community on a specific topic. This process can be used to:

- explore the perceptions of the school community on a given issue

- garner support for future improvement efforts

- open the door for inviting family and community members to participate as partners in later efforts

- help to create a feeling that the school is welcoming and interested in the experience and beliefs of all those who live and work in the school community.

If you need information or buy-in on a topic different from the one suggested, create new questions to refocus this activity. You may wish to consider hosting this workshop specifically for one of your target groups of families.

Who should be involved: community member(s), family members and learners, headteacher, teaching and non-teaching staff, representatives from the PTA or other parent/carer group.

Step 1

Choose a topic that will open up discussions that will enable you to get to know your families better, e.g. 'What we want for our learners'. Convene a meeting for families taking care to get a representative group (not just the families who already regularly engage with the school) – see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit).

Set the meeting up to be informal, friendly and inclusive. Invite school staff, family members, learners and community members to attend. Be sure to take advantage of the contacts that people in your parent/carer group have in the community. Consider using a 'buddy system'. Provide refreshments.

Step 2

Divide the participants into groups of four or five and give each group a question to discuss, e.g. 'What do we want for our learners?'. Find ways of getting the discussion going in each group and let everyone have a say.

Step 3

Ask each group of four or five to join a second group and again discuss this question. Ask this second group to record what they have discussed and heard on chart paper and post it up on the wall.

Step 4

Ask the second group if they have heard something that they would not have considered before this discussion, and record the responses on chart paper and post it up on the wall.

Step 5

Allow time for mingling so that everyone can share the ideas.

Step 6

Bring everyone back together and ask if they have seen patterns or common threads across all of the discussions. Record these responses on chart paper and post it on the walls. You could have a follow up discussion, e.g. 'How could the school and families work together?'.

Step 7

Thank everyone for coming, extend a welcome to be involved in the school, say what you would like to happen next. (Possibly use a parent/carer questionnaire here to gather some useful information – see the **Getting to know your families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 2) in this toolkit). Close the meeting.

Step 8

Be sure to share a report communicating the key points of the responses and the meeting in general.

Step 9

Build on the momentum gained. Invite families to another opportunity to be involved in the school.

Co-production checklist – To what extent are groups currently involved in decision making in your school?

Please indicate the level of involvement of each of the groups below in the decision-making process.

Nature of decision — For example, development of the school development plan.

Nature of decision	Not involved at present	Informed of decisions	Asked to comment after the event	Consulted by survey, questionnaire, etc.	Involved in planning meetings	Involved in planning meetings with evidence of influence on decisions made
PTA or parent/carer group	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parents/carers as a whole	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School council	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learners as a whole	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Please indicate which community groups.						
Other agencies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Please indicate which agencies.						

learning.gov.wales/deprivation

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 8
Costs of education

This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.

- Reminder of the regulations.

- Activity – Can we reduce the risk that costs act as a barrier to family engagement?

Introduction

Costs imposed by schools on families can be a significant source of concern for parents/carers and can lead to the isolation and sometimes stigmatisation of children whose families cannot meet these costs.

These costs can also act as a barrier to family engagement as they can sour home–school relationships and also prevent families attending school social events and other engagement activities.

All of the following can result in costs being incurred by families (not all are imposed by the school):

- uniform

- school meals

- snacks at school

- school trips in school time including special events like end-of-term outing to the cinema

- school residential trips

- materials needed for the classroom (stationery, PE kit, bags, but also materials for particular lessons such as cookery, arts and crafts)

- materials and home equipment needed to complete homework

- revision books

- materials needed to take part in extracurricular activities (additional sports kit, travel to events, musical instruments)

- transport to and from school and out-of-hours school activities

- outfits/costumes for special events in school

- costs of attending social events, and items on sale at these events (e.g. raffle tickets, refreshments).

A survey of parents commissioned by the NASUWT teaching union found that:

- 33 per cent think uniform is unaffordable

- 36 per cent think the costs of educational visits are unaffordable

- 20 per cent think the cost of school equipment is unaffordable.

Reminder of the regulations

Welsh Government provides guidance for governing bodies on their charging policy which can be viewed online at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/charging forschoolactivities/?lang=en. Some of the points highlighted by the guidance are noted below.

Schools may not impose a charge for education or visits that occur wholly or mainly during school hours or are part of the curriculum.

Where activity is offered outside of the school day and is not part of the national curriculum, schools may levy a charge only where this is permitted by the governing body's charging policy.

Schools should consider the cost of board and lodging of residential trips and whether they are affordable to ensure that residential trips are not too expensive for the majority of learners' families.

Learners whose parents/carers are in receipt of various benefits (including Universal Credit) can claim free board and lodging on residential trips.

Schools may wish to use their discretion and remit in full or in part, the cost of optional extras for trips, materials, books, instruments and equipment in certain circumstances where families on low incomes encounter difficulty paying for such things.

Activity: Can we reduce the risk that costs act as a barrier to family engagement?

Purpose: to get a picture of the school-related costs that your families are asked to meet, and consider whether some of these could be reduced for all or for some families.

Who should be involved: governor(s), school staff and representatives from the PTA or other parent/carer group. Possibly a wider group of parents/carers and learners.

Step 1

Working in a small groups, use the template on pages 93 to 95 (or a variation of it) to estimate how much (maximum) a family might pay out per child per year.

Then add these estimates up – what does the total look like for one child or two children? Do you feel this is affordable for families on an average income? Do you feel this is affordable for poorer families?

Remember that an estimated 200,000 children (one in three) in Wales are thought to be living in poverty, and less than half of these are identifiable through being eligible for free school meals (eFSM). An estimated 100,000 children living in poverty have at least one parent/carer who is in work.

Step 2

Next, complete the second and third columns of the table. Consider what you already do to keep costs low for all families and for poorer families. Is there anything else you could do?

Step 3

Lastly, have a more general discussion about your reflections on the exercise, and how you intend to take forward any actions identified.

Potential cost	Indication of maximum cost family might pay for one child in one school year	Do we, or could we, reduce the costs imposed for ALL families? (Example of questions you might be asking are listed.)	Do we, or could we, reduce the impact of costs for LOW INCOME families? (Example of questions you might be asking are listed.)
Uniform	For example: how much for six school sweatshirts with logo?	• Can we relax rules around school blazer? • Can we provide logos that parents/carers sew on themselves? • Could we run a second-hand uniform sale?	• Can we promote the School Uniform Grant better?
School meals, snacks at school	For example: £440 for meals, £195 for snacks @£1 per day.	• Are we happy with the snacks on sale?	• Can we promote free school meals better? • Can we reduce the stigma of free school meals, e.g. by using a cashless system?
Voluntary contributions for trips in school time including special events like end-of-term outing to the cinema	For example: £10 school buses, £8 pantomime, £4 cinema, £3 contribution to party.	• Should we rethink the trips that we offer so that they are less expensive to run so need smaller contributions?	• Is it clear that these are voluntary contributions rather than required costs? • Can families opt out of contributions without risk that they/their child will be stigmatised?
School residential trips	For example: £800 skiing trip.	• Should we rethink the trips that we offer so that they are less expensive and more inclusive?	• Do all learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) know that their fees can be paid for by the school/local authority? • Can we subsidise costs for other learners?

Potential cost	Indication of maximum cost family might pay for one child in one school year	Do we, or could we, reduce the costs imposed for ALL families? (Example of questions you might be asking are listed.)	Do we, or could we, reduce the impact of costs for LOW INCOME families? (Example of questions you might be asking are listed.)
Materials needed for the classroom (stationery, PE kit, bags, but also materials for particular lessons such as cookery, arts and crafts)	For example: £10 stationery, £50 trainers, £10 PE top.	• Are we complying with the law by ensuring that there is no charge, e.g. for materials for cookery lessons? • Could we organise a second-hand PE kit sale?	• Could we discretely help meet some of the costs for stationery/PE kit? • Do we discourage learners from having expensive brand trainers? Do we take enough steps to ensure that bullying does not occur, including over trainers?
Materials and home equipment needed to complete homework; revision books	For example: laptop for child (spread over four years) £100, revision books, internet connection at home.	• Are we signposting parents/carers to free resources, e.g. SumDog, ELearning Foundation?	• What can we do to support learners whose families cannot afford a laptop/internet connection/quiet place for learner to study? A homework club? • Do we provide reading books for learners to take home? • For craft projects, can we provide the materials required for homework?
Materials needed to take part in extracurricular activities (additional sports kit, travel to events, musical instruments) and school events (outfits/costumes)	For example: team football kit, overnight stay for swimming gala, £20 outfit for international day, £10 black top for school concert.	• Should we rethink the activities/trips that we offer so that they are less expensive and more inclusive? • Can we choose cheaper outfits/costumes for school events?	• Can we make these voluntary contributions rather than required costs? • Do we, or could we, subsidise the costs of extracurricular activities for some learners? (Note that Welsh Government has published guidance on using the Pupil Deprivation Grant to fund arts activities[15].)

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[15] *Using the Pupil Deprivation Grant in support of arts and cultural activity: Guidance for practitioners* available on www.gov.wales/learning.

Potential cost	Indication of maximum cost family might pay for one child in one school year	Do we, or could we, reduce the costs imposed for ALL families? (Example of questions you might be asking are listed.)	Do we, or could we, reduce the impact of costs for LOW INCOME families? (Example of questions you might be asking are listed.)
Transport to and from school and out-of-hours school activities	For example: bus fare home after after-school club.	• Can we promote walking and cycling to school? • Can we rethink timings of after-school clubs to tie in with public transport times?	• Is there anything we could do particularly for learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) to ensure transport costs are not a barrier to their participation?
Costs of attending social events, and items on sale at these events (e.g. raffle tickets, refreshments)	For example: £4 Christmas concert, £5 BBQ, £10 book fair, £4 coffee evening.	• Are our social events primarily about engagement or primarily about fundraising? Is this the balance we want? (See the **Parent/carer groups and voices of parents/carers** resource (Theme 3: Resource 7) in this toolkit.) • Could we think of fundraising from elsewhere, not just parents/carers?	• Are our ticket prices likely to prevent some families from attending, e.g. the school concert? • Could we ask instead for voluntary contributions?
Total costs	**What is the total cost for one child?** **For two children?**	**Does this feel affordable for families on an average income with two children in school?**	• Might the costs be putting too much strain on finances of poorer families? • Can we support poorer families in other ways (e.g. ideas for cheap activities during summer holidays, cooking on a budget)?

3

Family and community engagement toolkit
Theme 3: Resource 9
Handling conflict and complaints
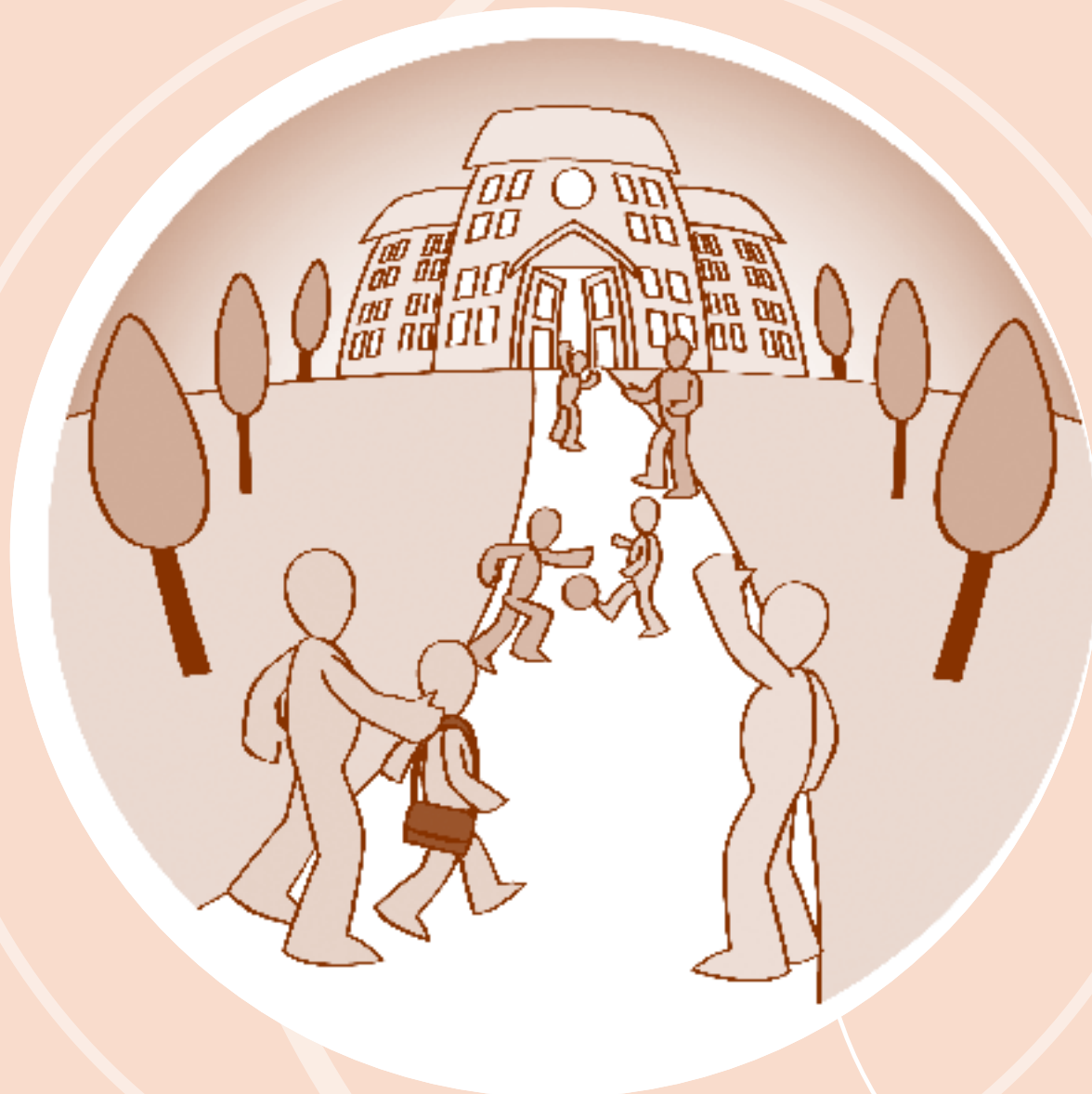
This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.

- Reminder of regulations.

- Top ten tips.

- Other resolution approaches – Mediation.

- Other resolution approaches – restorative practice.

- Dealing with bullying.

- Handling serious allegations.

- Checklist – Handling complaints.

Introduction

No matter how strong partnerships are, and how good strategies and policies are, things can still go wrong. It is important, therefore, to have clear arrangements in place so that staff and parents/carers can resolve issues together, with support if necessary.

> " There is evidence of a high level of dissatisfaction amongst parents/carers about complaints handling."
>
> *Complaints procedures for school governing bodies in Wales* (2012)

How you learn from complaints, and make improvements as a result of complaints, says a lot about your school and local authority. Handling complaints well helps to foster trust between home and school as it shows that you:

- listen to parents'/carers' views and take them seriously

- learn from your mistakes and are continually trying to improve.

Conversely, a failure to handle complaints well can quickly undermine family engagement efforts as it leaves families feeling that they are not taken seriously.

> " There are two things headteachers should do when they get a complaint: listen, and imagine what it would be like being in the parent's shoes."
>
> A headteacher.

Reminder of regulations

The governing bodies of all maintained schools in Wales, including nursery schools, are required by law to establish and publish a procedure for dealing with complaints about the school. Welsh Government guidance including a model complaints procedure is available at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/circulars/schoolcomplaints/?lang=en.

Top ten tips

1. In order to maintain positive relationships, it is usually better for all parties if parental complaints/concerns can be resolved at school level as quickly as possible.

2. Keep it simple – avoid long forms.

3. Use one point of contact.

4. Use face-to-face contact and the telephone – don't automatically send a letter; most parents/carers like to talk.

5. Listen for positive comments made and feed them back.

6. Find out straight away what would help.

7. Be clear what solutions you can offer.

8. Where appropriate, a quick apology is better than a long letter.

9. Give personal and specific replies – a standard reply will only make things worse.

10. Let parents/carers know about improvements made as a result of their complaints.

Other resolution approaches – Mediation

Mediation refers to a process conducted by a qualified and neutral mediator to resolve a disagreement between a parent/carer and the school. It is described in the 2010 Welsh Government publication *Practical approaches to behaviour management in the classroom* which is available online at www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/100824practicalen.pdf.

Many schools and local authorities are now using mediation and other resolution approaches to resolve families' concerns. While it is accepted there will be times when some complaints will require an investigative approach, very often a more successful, less emotionally damaging and faster outcome can be achieved, to the satisfaction of both parties, by people coming together and talking about their concerns with the support of a third party.

The Welsh Government publication referred to above also contains more on home–school behavioural agreements and an introduction to restorative practice.

" [What I liked about mediation was…] having someone neutral that does not side with anyone. It let me see it was better to be open with parents and carers. If I listen to their point of view, they are more likely to listen to mine."

Headteacher.

" [What I liked about mediation was…] being taken seriously. It helped the headteacher listen to my point of view. It helped my child be happier."

Parent/carer.

Mediation with parents/carers

A parent was badly bullied at her primary and secondary school, which left her scarred as an adult. This affected her relationship with the school for her own children and led to her becoming banned from the premises for abusive behaviour.

This ban affected her son, whose behaviour deteriorated since, in his eyes, the school was not dealing with the matter well. The school staff were also deeply affected. The Leadership Team felt it had failed by not being able to resolve problems, but also found that contacting the parent about her child, who was at risk of exclusion, became an impossible task and one that was feared by school staff, and even avoided at times.

It was not until the extent of this parent's bullying came to light that the problem was rectified. Through careful mediation with the parent, tentative steps towards building a relationship were made, which benefited the child enormously.

Other resolution approaches – Restorative practice

If complaints by families arise because of a dispute between two learners, then restorative practice can help to resolve the situation. Guidance is available on Learning Wales at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources/browse-all/restorative-practice/?lang=en and from the Youth Justice Board website at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/youth-justice-board-for-england-and-wales.

" Unlike punitive approaches, in which a third party acts as judge, jury and executioner, restorative practice predicates upon ownership of behaviour and conflict resting with those directly involved, who also retain responsibility for resolution of the problem."

CfBT Education Trust, *Restorative Practice in Schools* (2009)

Dealing with bullying

Concerns and complaints expressed by families centre on bullying. Welsh Government has published guidance to both schools and parents/carers on how they can tackle this issue which is available online at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/circulars/antibullying/?lang=en and www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/is-your-child-being-bullied/?lang=en.

Handling serious allegations

The Welsh Government guidance *Safeguarding children in education: handling allegations of abuse against teachers and other staff* (2014) is available on learning.gov.wales.

Checklist – Handling complaints

Prompts for reflective thinking	Actions to take
☐ Are staff encouraged to have a positive attitude towards parental complaints/concerns?	
☐ Are parents/carers and staff aware of your complaints procedure? (It is a statutory requirement that it is publicised.) Are parents/carers encouraged to make complaints or raise their concerns early?	
☐ Does your procedure follow the model procedure described in the Welsh Government guidance? Could it be improved?	
☐ Do you make your complaints procedure available in a variety of formats? Are these easy to access, well publicised and easy to understand and follow? Can parents/carers raise a concern with a member of the staff in the way that is easiest for them, either in person, by e-mail, by telephone, or in writing?	
☐ Does your procedure include reference to 'putting things right' and offering an apology when appropriate?	
☐ Does your procedure reassure parents/carers that: • their rights to confidentiality will be respected and next steps discussed? • they, or their children, will not suffer by way of repercussion or discrimination as a result of making a complaint?	
☐ Have you considered using mediation to resolve some complaints between families and school? Do you have access to a trained mediator?	
☐ Have you considered using restorative practice to resolve some complaints between learners? Has appropriate training been put in place?	
☐ Do school staff have access to appropriate development opportunities for handling concerns or complaints (e.g. family facilitation or mediation skills)?	
☐ Are there arrangements in place to give feedback to parents/carers who make complaints?	
☐ Does your anti-bullying policy meet regulatory requirements and best practice?	

learning.gov.wales/deprivation