

Staff wellbeing and parental engagement.

Improving the educational and life outcomes for pupils is at the centre of a school's purpose and drives those who work and volunteer in education. Parents of students are even more invested in ensuring their child or children are given the best possible start in life, but despite this shared goal and passion, parental interaction can be a significant source of stress for school staff. It can also create potential negative effects for all involved, including students, in terms of both wellbeing as well as attainment.

It is therefore critical that schools adopt policies and a culture that minimises friction between staff and parents, whilst maximising the power of an engaged and supportive parent community. Parents understandably want to be involved in their child's education - and when care and consideration is given as to how best to achieve this, it leads to improved educational outcomes.



There are various potential causes of conflict or disconnection between a school and parents. Whilst any approach should be tailored to the needs and challenges of a particular school and its circumstances, there are several points that all governors should consider in this regard:

Seek advice and guidance

There are various organisations and sources of information to assist in developing a strategy for positively engaging with parents. Some examples include:

- Parentkind's [Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools](#)
- The NAHT's ['How to build effective home-school partnerships'](#)
- [Parent/Carer Engagement](#) advice from the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families
- The NGA's ['Parental Engagement: A guide for governing boards'](#)



Beyond this, your school may encounter specific issues or events that require a very particular approach or intervention, such as how [relationships education](#) is taught at your school. Ensure you are making use of all available resources when formulating your approach.

Effective communication

It is not enough, and in oftentimes it can be counter-productive, to simply 'broadcast' at parents. Schools' websites can be efficient and effective ways of communicating and presenting information, but a variety of channels should be used to ensure all parents are able to access and absorb information. Options should include social media groups, text message and even individual phone calls. Communication is also by definition two-way - parents should be given regular opportunities to provide feedback, ask questions and challenge decisions, including access to governors. Communication should be timely, consistent, accurate and considerate of its audience.

Boost positive parent voices

School leadership can often be overly focused on parental criticism and complaints even though these often represent a very small minority of view and experience. Whilst these criticisms should be taken seriously, SLT and governors should ensure staff are hearing all of the positive things parents are saying about the school. These can easily be shared at staff meetings, on message boards or a simple e-mail, and will reinforce positive internal messaging. Schools can also sign up to the [TAP](#) platform for free; this allows anyone to send a message of praise or thanks to a staff member at the school that SLT can share and even has a donation function.

Effective policies and procedures

Schools should have policies in place regarding expectations of parents - from codes of conduct to complaints procedures. These should be fit for purpose, regularly reviewed and easily accessible, potentially given to, and signed by, new parents as part of a pupil's induction. They should also be rigorously adhered to and enforced when required. This gives clarity to both parents and staff and allows for expectation management. It also allows an objective approach to be taken if and when there is conflict to resolve.

Training

External provision for parental engagement is available, including from [Parentkind](#). Schools can also conduct this themselves at an inset day, discussing hypothetical scenarios or even role-playing parent interactions. They should ensure staff are aware of conflict resolution strategies and de-escalation as well as school policies in this regard. This will make them more confident, ensure minor problems do not escalate, and that staff can protect themselves, pupils and the school in the event of a more serious issue.

Recognise and support specific parental needs

Some schools will have pupils whose particular family circumstances require specific engagement, from migrant families potentially struggling with English to the challenges for schools working with [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families](#). There may be need for some form of training to be offered to parents, be it working with those who may have had a poor experience of school themselves or who, for various reasons, may be less able to support their child's education, through to working closely with [parents of pupils with challenging behaviours](#).



Support home-learning

COVID-19 has thrown into sharp relief the importance of a positive home environment that is conducive to learning. Schools can maximise a child's learning by explaining to parents the important role they play. They should also encourage parents and equip them to be involved, coordinating with them over what is being taught and how they can support.

Encourage parental involvement

One of the greatest barriers to parents being more involved in schools is a lack of obvious avenues to do so, and the associated feeling of not necessarily being welcome. Schools should speak to parents about ways they can be involved, from speaking at a career's day to creating a school garden to [forming/joining a PTA](#). Being clear and open with parents about their involvement will give schools access to potential volunteers, fundraising opportunities and a closer link to parents' voices and opinions. Opportunities to become involved should be varied and diverse, aimed at including as many parents as possible. Whilst [PTA's are incredibly important](#), not all parents want or are able to involve themselves that way. The goal is to provide maximal opportunities to parents and access the widest possible pool of energy, skill and opinion.



If schools are successful in creating a positive relationship with the parents of their students, the results, both direct and indirect, can be tremendous. They can range from improved attendance and behaviour, to better wellbeing and educational results. Staff will feel more supported and able to focus on delivering for students, parents will feel welcome at the school and included in their child's life and education, and students themselves will enjoy coherence in messaging between school and home. The effects of failing to engage with parents can be equally damaging and undermine all of the hard work school staff are doing for our children and young people.

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