Parental engagement

A training toolkit full of useful resources for supporting parents with complex needs

Delivered by School-Home Support Services UK
SHS - Brief history

School–Home Support (SHS) was established in 1984, in a single school in east London where Bridget Cramp, an ex-Education Welfare Officer, Terry Farrell, Head of Year 7 and Peter Andrews, Head Teacher, did whatever was necessary to help many of the disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils make the most of their education.

This often meant visiting pupils outside school hours to build bridges between a difficult home life and school. Bridget, Terry and Peter soon saw that many schools needed this service. With tenacity and determination they approached charitable funders and were able to make the benefits of the SHS service available to other schools.

Today SHS is the leading independent provider of school-home support services which offer practical and emotional support for disadvantaged children and young people, and their families, across the country.

The SHS Training and Consultancy Service allows SHS to share with other agencies its 28 years of experience and good practice within the field of school-home support services.

For more information on SHS visit: www.shs.org.uk

If you have any queries regarding this toolkit please email: training@shs.org.uk
Contents

1 Introduction - how to use this toolkit
2 Parental engagement and involvement
3 Raising achievement
4 Effective communication
5 Managing transfer and transition
6 Parents as partners
7 Strategies for engagement
8 Evaluation
The ‘Parental engagement – training toolkit’ is a resource that has been developed for staff responsible for professional development within schools.

It provides them with interactive training materials to support and encourage parents to engage effectively with their child’s learning within their school community.
The toolkit is divided into seven sections:

Section 1
Parental involvement and engagement
Aim: develop an increased understanding of parental involvement and engagement for staff and volunteers working with schools.

Section 2
Raising achievement
Aim: to inform, identify and explore parental attitudes to attendance for learning. Develop strategies to support increased parental engagement in their child's learning attendance.

Section 3
Effective communication
Aim: to help schools understand and explore a number of different aspects and features for effective communication.

Section 4
Managing transfer and transition
Aim: to provide an overview of good practice principles for effective responses to children and young people's multiple transition issues relating to their education and learning environments.

Section 5
Parents as partners
Aim: to understand the importance of working with parents in partnership and to gain some practical ideas as to how to move this work forward within your setting.

Section 6
Strategies for engagement
Aim: gain practical skills and ideas to assist learners’ parental engagement work at a practitioner level and whole-school approach level.

Section 7
Evaluation
The final section of the toolkit contains evaluation and action planning resources. These help the teacher examine the current level of parental engagement activity within the school community against Ofsted’s criteria. They also enable the teacher to monitor progress and record actions/strategies for further development.
How to use this toolkit

Each section of the toolkit contains:

- **Session plan** – containing interactive activities exploring the theme of parental engagement.
- **Resources** – including video clips, PowerPoint slides, handouts and resource templates.
- **Background reading.**
- **Case studies** – both local and national.
- **Useful resources** – signposting to additional resources, websites and other agencies.

**Who the toolkit is for**
The toolkit is designed to be used by any professional involved in training staff to improve and support parental engagement within an educational setting.

Within the toolkit there are practical methods and good practice guides about how to develop effective partnerships with parents to engage with their child’s learning.

**Delivering the training**
Each section includes background reading information, structured session plans, resources and evaluation material.

**Grouping**
For each activity the suggested grouping is illustrated. If you are planning a full day session, do not simply leave participants in one place all day, sitting with those they know best. Take the opportunity to mix participants up and move them around for different activities. This gives them the opportunity to get to know others and to learn from different experiences and ways of working.

**Know the group**
You will need to consider the range of experience, skills, knowledge, understanding, qualifications and confidence in the group and make every effort to adjust and differentiate delivery to meet the needs of all participants.

**Setting ground rules**
Even if your group members are familiar with each other, it is still important to establish ground rules for your training to ensure you have created an effective learning environment, where each member of staff feels comfortable to learn and contribute within the session. Ground rules should cover all areas necessary to run the training in an efficient and effective way. Here are some examples:

- Listen, talk and discuss in a way that respects each individual.
- What is said in the room stays in the room.
- Everyone has a responsibility and a right to contribute.

**Timings**
Timings for slides and exercises are only suggested you may choose to allocate more or less time. However, you should ensure you are managing time carefully and can cover the learning objectives in the time you have available.

Each module is based on a 1.5-hour session. However, extension activities have been included in case you wish to develop the activity further.

Each session can be facilitated in succession for whole day inset training, or can be completed independently. However, we suggest you begin with Section 1: parental involvement and engagement, as this gives the participants the underpinning knowledge to support and examine the other sections within the toolkit.

**Materials needed**
Each section of the toolkit highlights the materials and equipment needed within each activity. For most sections you will need access to:

- Laptop and projector.
- Screen to project onto.
- Flip chart pads and pens.
- Note paper, pens and Post-it notes.

For further ideas and support please refer to the Setting ground rules resource.
How to use this toolkit

**Session plan analysis**

### Activity type/level
Some activities will have additional or advanced variations.

### Activity instructions for the teacher

#### Activity instructions for the learner

### Resources required
The appropriate resources required for the activity (PDF document, PowerPoint slide or video clip).

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### Identify the significance and importance of involving and engaging parents

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<tr>
<th>Activity number</th>
<th>Activity title</th>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
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#### Introduction

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Use information on Handout 5 (Setting the scene) to introduce this part of the activity.
- Display and read the quote on PowerPoint Slide 2.
- Circulate Handout 5 if further information is required.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
- Learners share initial thoughts and feelings raised by PowerPoint Slide 2.
- Learners share ideas raised by Handout 5.

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#### Basic activity

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Introduce the activity using one or two of the scenarios from Handout 6 (Benefits scenario cards). Highlight what are the potential benefits for child, parent or school.
- Facilitate feedback to the whole group.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
- Learners identify the benefits for:
  - Child.
  - Parent.
  - School.
- Learners feedback to whole group.

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#### Advanced activity

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Complete the Basic activity (left), but extended to include impact on attendance, behaviour and attainment.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
- Learners identify where the impact might be in terms of:
  - Attendance.
  - Behaviour.
  - Attainment.
- Learners feedback to whole group.

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### Resources required

- Handout 5 (Setting the scene)
- PowerPoint Slide 2
- Handout 6 (Benefits scenario cards)

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### Suggested group size

**Whole Group:** 30 mins

**Small Groups:** 15-20 mins

**Small Groups:** 15-20 mins

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### Suggested time to complete activity

Basic activity: 30 mins

Advanced activity: 15-20 mins

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### Section number and title

Section 1 Parental involvement and engagement

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**Page number**

Page 7
Involvement

When taking children out of school, a number of parents are included as additional helpers. Parents are invited to take part in a number of planned outings e.g. Visits to local museums and galleries. Parents organise a ‘walking bus’, so that children are safe when travelling to and from school. Parents have also organised a car sharing scheme.

The skills parents have are utilised in school, for example IT skills or drama sessions for staff and children.

Parents are invited to attend celebration events and performances held in school.

The more parents are engaged in the education of their children, the more likely their children are to succeed in the education system. School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement.


Handouts
File format: Adobe PDF

Printable handouts required to complete each activity. These include worksheets, case studies, checklists, further reading material for learners and guidance notes for teachers.

Each handout is clearly labelled at the bottom, indicating the section and activity it is linked to.

PowerPoint slides
File format: Microsoft PowerPoint

Presentation material containing information to support you when delivering the training.

Each slide is clearly labelled with the section and activity number along the bottom and slide number on the top right.

A projector is recommended to display the content at a reasonable size for everyone to see.

Video clips
File format: MP4

Designed to present information clearly and provide a greater level of stimulation for learners.

A web link to download the required video content can be found under the relevant activity. The videos are supplied within a compressed .zip file and will need to be extracted. Most computers will have software already installed for you to view the video clips, if you experience problems contact your IT department for further help.

The file size for each video clip can be quite large, it may take a few minutes to completely download the file depending on your internet connection speed.
Aim
To develop an increased understanding of parental involvement and engagement for staff and volunteers working with schools.

Objectives
1. Recognise the differences between parental ‘involvement’ and parental ‘engagement’.
2. Identify the significance and importance of involving and engaging parents.
3. Explore the range of opportunities to support parental involvement and engagement in school.
4. Examine the barriers to parental involvement and engagement.
5. Develop strategies to support and maintain effective parental engagement.
Introduction to parental engagement

Parents, carers and family members are by far the most important influences in their children’s lives. They mould how young people think about education, their future and society.

Therefore, their support for schools and engagement in learning are powerfully significant if the learning outcomes for each child in each school are to be more than just aspirations.

Parental engagement can be defined in a variety of ways. It can include the idea of parental involvement. However, parents can be involved in school activities without being engaged in their children’s learning. It is parental engagement in their children’s learning that brings about significant gains in achievement.

**To maximise these three areas, six elements must be promoted by schools:**

1. Communication between home and school has to be regular, two way and meaningful.
2. Responsible parenting must be promoted and supported. The family plays a key role in the child's educational upbringing, so a school must support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by the parent to fulfil their role.
3. Parents playing an integral role in assisting student learning. Students’ achievement increases when parents are actively involved in the learning process. Parents must be given the tools and means effectively to support their children's educational needs, including promoting certain behaviours (e.g. regular attendance).
4. Parents welcomed as volunteers in schools and therefore able to obtain a better understanding of learning processes.
5. Parents as full partners in the decisions that affect their children. Schools should actively enlist parent participation to represent a diverse student group in decision making.
6. Parents, school and community must collaborate in order to enhance student learning, strengthen families and improve schools.
What are the benefits of parental engagement?

For children:
- Increased school attendance.
- Improved attainment and achievement.
- Increased motivation.
- Higher levels of confidence and self-esteem.
- Better social skills.
- Improved behaviour.

For parents:
- Increased support for the school.
- Increased confidence and skills.
- Shared understanding of education.
- Raised aspirations.

"If we have the attitude that it doesn’t matter, why should they bother?"
(A parent)

For schools:
- Schools can access parents’ skills to complement teaching and learning.
- Behaviour and attendance improves.
- Higher pupil achievement.
- Improved teacher morale.
- Improved relationships between the school and local community.
- Better communication between school and home.

Strategies for engagement

1. **Reassure parents** who may not perceive themselves to be ‘clever enough’ to help their children with their school work, and who may feel defeated about becoming more involved, that they are doing the right thing for their children.

2. **Provide additional support** and guidance for parents in helping their children learn, particularly those parents who may have a ‘let them get on with it’ attitude, especially once children are in secondary education.

3. **Inform parents** about their child’s care and education so that they can support the child, even though the assumption may be that the child is ‘coping fine’ on their own.

4. **Provide information to all parents**, even those that live separately from the child. This is paramount and ensures that the parents are included.

5. **Think about how to involve grandparents** and other significant family members who may also have a ‘parenting’ function.

6. **Identify the barriers** preventing parents from engaging and what the school can do to break down these barriers (See Section 6: Strategies for engagement).
Welcome and ice breaker quiz
How important is it that parents are engaged in their children’s learning?

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Carry out standard housekeeping.
- Agree group ground rules and refer to learning agreement as necessary. Record on flip chart.
- Welcome and facilitate introductions: name, job role, and one expectation from today. Record on flip chart.
- Introduce aim and objectives of session and outline of day.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners contribute to agreeing group ground rules.
- Learners introduce themselves.
- Learners listen and ask questions.

**ICE BREAKER QUIZ**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the quiz and explain how to complete Handout 1 (ice breaker quiz).
- Explain to the participants that they are about to read statements based on the findings of research into parental involvement and engagement.
- Give the participants the answers and discuss.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners look at each statement with a partner. Using their experience within this field, which of the statements are likely to be true?

![Handout 1](image.png)

**General resources required for this Section:**
- Flip chart and paper
- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Blu-Tack or masking tape
- Handouts, PowerPoint slides and other specific resources as indicated under each activity.

**Notes**
Recognise the differences between parental ‘involvement’ and parental ‘engagement’

**Introduction**

- **10 MINS**
- **PAIRS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the session, summarising the key messages from the introduction.
- Show PowerPoint Slide 1.
- Refer to Handout 2 (Guidance notes for teacher).
- Be aware of the variety of definitions of parental engagement and ensure there is a shared definition within the group.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners read the two quotes and answer the question ‘why?’.
- Whole group share feedback.

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**Basic activity**

- **15-20 MINS**
- **PAIRS OR GROUP**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the first part of the activity, sorting statements under ‘parental involvement’ or ‘parental engagement’.
- Introduce second part of the activity, each group to prioritise top three and say why.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners sort the statements from Handout 3 (Statements for involvement/engagement).
- Learners select the top three that are the most important and which offer the best opportunities for (a) children and young people, (b) parents.
- Feedback to whole group.

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**Advanced activity**

- **15-20 MINS**
- **PAIRS OR GROUP**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce Handout 4 (Defining the difference scenario cards). Five case studies to consider about parental involvement and/or engagement.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners read the scenarios and discuss:
  (a) Where is there ‘involvement’?
  (b) Where is there ‘engagement’?
  (c) Do we need to differentiate?
  If so, how do we ensure schools and parents understand the difference?
Identify the significance and importance of involving and engaging parents

**Introduction**

10 MINS  |  WHOLE GROUP

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Use information on Handout 5 (Setting the scene) to introduce this part of the activity.
- Display and read the quote on PowerPoint Slide 2.
- Circulate Handout 5 if further information is required.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners share initial thoughts and feelings raised by PowerPoint Slide 2.
- Learners share ideas raised by Handout 5.

**Basic activity**

15-20 MINS  |  SMALL GROUPS

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the activity using one or two of the scenarios from Handout 6 (Benefits scenario cards). Highlight what are the potential benefits for child, parent or school.
- Facilitate feedback to the whole group.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners identify the benefits for:
  (a) Child.
  (b) Parent.
  (c) School.
- Learners feedback to whole group.

**Advanced activity**

15-20 MINS  |  SMALL GROUPS

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Complete the Basic activity (left), but extended to include impact on attendance, behaviour and attainment.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners identify where the impact might be in terms of:
  (a) Attendance.
  (b) Behaviour.
  (c) Attainment.
- Learners feedback to whole group.

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**Handout 5**
Setting the scene

**PowerPoint**
Slide 2

**Handout 6**
Benefits scenario cards
Explore the range of opportunities to support parental involvement and engagement in school

Introduction

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Introduce Video Clip 1 (Parents’ views from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets). This illustrates the parent’s perspective for disengagement.

LEARNING ACTIVITY
- Watch video.

Basic activity

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Discuss the video for a few minutes.
- Lead discussion with questions:
  Q. What was the key message in terms of how the school had achieved increased parental engagement?
  Q. How does this work in your school?
- Introduce Handout 7 (Parent friendly audit checklist).

LEARNING ACTIVITY
- Learners discuss what they have seen and respond to questions.
- Learners complete Handout 7.

Advanced activity

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Spend a few minutes reflecting on the video, with initial observations from learners.
- Introduce the activity.
- Ensure feedback is shared across the group.

LEARNING ACTIVITY
- With reference to the video, learners highlight examples of partnership working.
- Learners share examples of partnership working from their own experience.
- Learners consider what might have happened had the partnership not worked or what else they can put in place to strengthen the partnership.
Examine the barriers to parental involvement and engagement

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the session with a discussion on barriers to engagement.
- Refer to Handout 8 (Challenges to parental engagement) to prompt discussion.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners discuss barriers to engagement.
- Record points made on flip chart paper or Post-it notes.

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**20 MINS**  
**SMALL GROUPS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Briefly discuss the factors that impact on parents’ ability to engage using Handout 8 (Challenges to parental engagement).
- Divide learners into groups of four and five, ideally made up of people from different departments/schools.
- Set the following questions:
  Q. What do you consider to be the key barriers to parental engagement with children’s learning within your school community?
  Q. What are the biggest issues in your department/school?
- Introduce Handout 9 (Diamond template). Give each of the groups a full set of cards. Within the pack are a few blank cards enabling participants to add additional barriers.
- Each group will decide their top three issues that cause barriers. They then share with the whole group, explaining how they reached their decisions and how they prioritised one issue over another.
- Display PowerPoint Slides 3 and 4.
- Facilitate a whole group discussion to identify the key issues affecting their school community.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners read and discuss the full set of cards from Handout 8.
- Learners choose which issues are the most prominent within their school community.
- Learners place the cards in order of importance onto the diamond template from Handout 9.
- Each group feeds back their top three issues within their diamond. They should be prepared to give the reasons behind their decisions.
- Learners contribute to discussion.

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**Introduction**

**Basic activity**

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**Continue to Advanced activity**

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**Handout 8**  
Challenges to parental engagement

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**Handout 9**  
Diamond template

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**PowerPoint**  
Slides 3 - 4

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**Section 1**  
Parental involvement and engagement

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### Activity 4

**Examining the barriers to parental involvement and engagement** (cont.)

#### Advanced activity

- **10 MINS**
- **PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS**

#### TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Introduce the activity and Handout 8 (Challenges to parental engagement).
- Facilitate feedback and capture key points on flip chart.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITY:
- Learners take one of the challenges and share related experiences, then focus on possible solutions.
- Learners feedback to the whole group.
- Whole group are asked for any alternative solutions to challenges discussed.

### Notes

Handout 8

**Challenges to parental engagement**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Marital status</strong></th>
<th><strong>Language</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Employment</strong></th>
<th><strong>Whether there are other children at the school</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Family pressures</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teacher’s personality</strong></th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Parent’s apparent hostility to intervention and/or support</strong></th>
<th><strong>How long child has been at school</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Parent’s own educational experience</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teacher’s personality</strong></th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Children with additional/special needs</strong></th>
<th><strong>Changes in family life</strong></th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Teacher’s personality</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teacher’s personality</strong></th>
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Summarise learning from today.
Identify good practice for engaging parents and areas for development.
Distribute Plenary (Action planning template).

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
Identify the next steps post training, alongside any individual learning needs.
Learners use the Plenary to stimulate discussion.

Reference/further reading: Section 1
Section 2

Raising achievement

Aim

To inform, identify and explore parental attitudes to attendance for learning.

Develop strategies to support increased parental engagement in their child’s learning attendance.

Objectives

1. Review the significance and importance of promoting and supporting good attendance for learning.
2. Identify and examine the barriers to parental engagement to improve attendance.
3. Explore and share strategies to improve attendance for learning.
Engaging parents to raise achievement through attendance

There is never one reason why a child or young person’s attendance at school is poor. But there is irrefutable research evidence to suggest that the more time they spend in school, the better the learning outcomes are for that child or young person.

Children and young people with good attendance significantly outperform those with poor attendance at all ages and stages of learning.

By law, all children of compulsory school age (5-16) must receive a suitable full-time education. Full-time education is 25 hours of direct teaching and learning per week.

It is a parent’s legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives a suitable full-time education. This usually means registering their child at a school, but parents can make alternative arrangements e.g. home schooling.

Ensuring good attendance at school is an integral part of all schools’ and local authorities’ work, on the basis that good attendance:

- Promotes children’s welfare and safety.
- Ensures every child has access to their statutory entitlement to full-time education.
- Ensures successful learning outcomes for children and young people.
- Ensures access to the widest possible range of opportunities on leaving school.

Attendance and behaviour policy

All schools are required to have an Attendance and Behaviour policy. The guidance as to what is to be included in such a policy is set out by the Department for Education (DFE). It is the responsibility of the Head Teacher and school governors to ensure that the policy is available to all parents on registering their child at a school. Parents must be regularly informed of any revisions or updates that could impact on their role as parents to support good attendance and behaviour at school.

Setting targets

All schools set targets to reduce persistent absence. Every child or young person is expected to attend school for at least 95% of the academic year.

Children and young people’s attendance is recorded twice daily, usually at the beginning of the learning session each morning and afternoon. It is recorded as 5 sessions i.e. attending school for five full days. Children and young people attend school for 38 weeks a year (an academic year). To support good attendance, many schools have systems that can report absence by lesson or session, giving parents daily feedback on their child’s attendance, should it be required.

If a child or young person’s attendance at school is deemed to be a cause for concern or below target, the school will offer a range of support and intervention programmes to enable the child or young person and their parent/s to improve attendance.

The following training session offers an opportunity to share and develop ideas to deliver coherent and effective early intervention programmes that support children and their parents in achieving good attendance. If the intervention programmes are not successful, schools and local authorities are required to follow a legal process to address the situation. This could ultimately lead to a parent being summoned to court.
**Welcome and introductions**

**Introduction**

10 MINS  WHOLE GROUP

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Carry out standard housekeeping.
- Agree group ground rules and refer to learning agreement as necessary. Record on flip chart.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 1.
- Introduce aim and objectives of session and outline of day.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners contribute to agreeing group ground rules.
- Learners listen and ask questions.

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**Ice Breaker**

10 MINS  PAIRS

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Display PowerPoint Slide 2 and talk through the amusing excuses.
- Ask learners to introduce themselves to the person next to them and share a funny or unusual excuse they have heard from children, parents, staff or friends with regards to attendance.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners listen and ask questions.
- Learners introduce themselves to their partners by stating:
  1. Name.
  2. Role within educational setting.
  3. Funniest or most unusual attendance excuse they have heard.

**General resources required for this section:**
- White board
- Flip chart and paper
- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Blu-Tack or masking tape
- Handouts, PowerPoint slides and other specific resources as indicated under each activity.

**Notes**
Did you know?

**Did you know?**

It is a parent's legal, and therefore statutory responsibility, to provide a suitable education for their child.

It is a LA's responsibility to ensure there are sufficient school places to meet the needs of school-age (5–16) children.

It is a school's statutory responsibility to record children's attendance at school.

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**Activity**

10 MINS **WHOLE GROUP**

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**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**

- Introduce PowerPoint Slides 3 and 4 and distribute Handout 1 (Did you know?)
- Explain that poor attendance has a significant impact on a child/young person's learning and subsequent attainment. Therefore:
  1. It is a parent’s **legal, and therefore statutory responsibility**, to provide a suitable education for their child.
  2. It is a LA’s responsibility to ensure there are sufficient school places to meet the needs of school-age (5-6) children.
  3. It is a school’s statutory responsibility to record children’s attendance at school.
- Facilitate thought sharing and discussion, capturing key points on flip chart.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**

- Learners share initial thoughts based on:
  1. The correlation between attendance and attainment.
  2. The responsibilities placed on parents, schools and local authorities.
  3. The significance placed by Ofsted on parental engagement.

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**Top tip**

The Ofsted framework for 2012 will make judgements separately on behaviour and attendance, with particular focus on parents not traditionally engaged in school life.

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**Section** 2  Raising achievement

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Exploring the role

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Divide the group into pairs and ask learners to explain to their partner what they do to support attendance within their setting, concentrating on:
  1. Supporting learning.
  2. Engaging with parents.
- Each learner listens to their partner for two minutes.
- Invite learners to explore the range of roles/activities within the group that supports improving and maintaining good attendance levels.
- Facilitate whole group feedback.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners tell their partner, what they do to support attendance in their educational setting.
- Learners discuss how their role specifically supports the areas discussed in Handout 1 (Did you know?), as explored in Activity 1.
- Learners feedback to the whole group.

Headout 1
*Did you know?*
Identifying barriers to parental engagement – reasons for absence

**Activity 3**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Display PowerPoint Slide 5.
- Divide learners into small groups. Set the question:
  
  Q. What are the key reasons children and young people do not attend school?
- On completion of the task, learners take note of the other group’s responses.
- Highlight any ideas they have not discussed.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 6 and distribute Handout 2 (Exploring reasons for absence).
- Set the task of re-arranging the Post-it notes.
- Ask one member of the group to feedback the key points from completing this activity.
- Introduce Handout 3 (Absence from school) and summarise key findings of research.
- Facilitate discussion, comparing each group’s answers with the research findings.
- Identifying the differences and similarities in responses and suggest reasons for the differences referring back to the learners own educational settings.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners respond to the question by writing ideas on a Post-it note and placing on a sheet of flip chart paper.
- Learners walk around the room, reading the other group’s answers, taking note of any ideas that they have not recorded within their own group.
- Learners place Post-it notes onto the relevant segment of the Venn diagram, discussing the rationale for each decision.
- Nominated learner feedbacks to whole group.
- Learners read Handout 3 and then contribute to discussion.

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**Notes**
Identifying barriers to parental engagement – *The parent's perspective*

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce PowerPoint Slides 7 and 8.
- Distribute Handout 4 (Parents' and carers' attitudes towards school attendance).
- Divide the learners into four groups. Allocate one of the following areas to each group:
  1. Good communication.
  2. School-based support and initiatives.
  3. Joined up working – parental contracts/CAF.
  4. Multi-agency working.
- Ask a member of each group to feedback the key strategies from the discussion.
- Summarise and record key strategies identified to support each of the four areas.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners listen and reflect on findings of research on parents' and carers' attitudes towards school attendance and how they relate to their own educational setting.
- In groups learners discuss:
  1. Current strategies/initiatives used within setting to support this area.
  2. How successful the implementation has been of the initiative/strategy.
- Nominated learner feedbacks to the whole group.
Identifying barriers to parental engagement – **Strategies and solutions**

**Advanced activity**

**20 MINS**  
**WHOLE GROUP**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce Handout 5 (Case study).
- Ask learners individually to record their observations using the four areas explored in the last activity.
- Facilitate whole group discussion.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners read Handout 5 and make a note of:
  1. The successful strategies that engage parents.
  2. Any missed opportunities, referring to the four areas of best practice.
- Learners contribute to the discussion, sharing the key learning points.

**Notes**

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**Handout 5**  
**Case study**

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**Section 2**  
Raising achievement
Plenary

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Summarise learning from today.
- Identify good practice for engaging parents to support attendance and areas for development.
- Distribute Plenary (Action planning template).

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Identify the next steps post training alongside any individual learning needs.
- Learners use the Plenary to stimulate discussion.

**Reference/further reading:** Section 2
- Parents’ and carers’ attitudes towards school attendance
- Improving attendance - action points for schools and LAs
- Effective attendance practice in schools – an overview
- Absence from school: a study of its cause and effects in seven LAs
- [www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport)
Aim

To help schools understand and explore a number of different aspects and features for effective communication.

Objectives

1. Identify the purpose of effective communication.
2. Recognise the different features that support effective communication.
3. Understand the barriers.
4. Examine current forms of communication and ways to improve.
5. Develop next steps.
What is communication?

In its simplest form it is an exchange of information between two people, the process of sending messages that often require a response or which inform.

This can be done in an ever increasing number of different ways, for example through speech and body language, letters and phone calls or more advanced social media, including email, texting and Twitter.

A variety of formal and informal methods of communication are established in schools to inform parents about general information, events and the child’s academic performance, attendance and behaviour, as well as information relating to the school’s overall standards and performance.

However, research has confirmed that positive relationships and effective methods of communication greatly enhance and support a child’s learning and development potential.

The Children’s Workforce Development Council (2008) highlights effective communication and engagement as one of the six common core areas of skills and knowledge for the children’s workforce:

- **Effective communication and engagement**
  Good communication is central to working with children, young people and their families. It involves listening, questioning, understanding and responding to children, young people and those caring for them.

- **Skills**
  - Listening and building empathy.
  - Summarising and explaining.
  - Consulting and negotiating.

- **Knowledge**
  - How communication works.
  - Confidentiality and ethics.
  - Sources of support.
  - Importance of respect.

The importance of effective communication

Communication plays a major role in the relationship between school and families.

*Home-school communication is among the most important factors in developing strong relationships between teachers and families.*

( Epstein, J. (1996). Family/school/community partnerships: caring for the children we share)

*Information from school is the primary means parents have to understand their children’s level of success or failure in school.*

The purpose of effective communication

There is a significant amount of research to support the principle that positive communication with parents supports children’s learning in school:

“Parents and teachers consider communication the number one factor to increase trust.”


“Strong communication can also encourage higher and realistic parental expectations. When teachers and parents are on the “same page” they can engage in more individual and concrete discussion around student progress and develop realistic goals and plans of action that are linked to student achievement.”


Features that support effective communication

The capacity to communicate is at the heart of human experience and we use language, thought, feelings, creativity and movement to let others know about ourselves. Through communication we also develop our capacity to understand others and to understand the emotion behind the communication, which in turn helps to build positive relationships, resolve potential difficulties and create a shared understanding.

It is inevitable that communication includes emotions, and it is important to recognise the impact that various approaches, attitudes and behaviours may have. Effective listening is at the heart.

Understand the barriers

Communication can be complex and difficult and what is presented cannot be assumed to be the issue (or the cause).

Parents may have poor memories of school. Their children may not want them to be visible in school. It may be assumed that parents only get involved when there is a problem. They can’t access the right person or can’t physically get to school. These are just a selection of the kinds of barriers that practitioners and parents may face and which impact on the ability to communicate.

Ways to improve communication.

In order to facilitate change it is helpful to review and reflect on what is already in place and then to decide if something needs to be changed or new ways of working introduced. It is therefore necessary to identify what forms of communication are working well and then establish what can be changed according to priorities in the school. For example, parents engaging in children’s learning, parents as volunteers, ensuring communication methods are inclusive and accessible, and so on.

Tips for effective listening

- Focus on what the person is saying (speech, body language and other non-verbal cues).
- Avoid interrupting or making it personal to you. Allow the person to express fully what they want to say.
- Reflect back so that the person knows you have listened and provide a brief summary of what you have heard.
- Avoid judgements.
Welcome and introductions

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Carry out standard housekeeping.
- Agree group ground rules and refer to learning agreement as necessary. Record on flip chart.
- Welcome learners and facilitate introductions: name, job role and one expectation from today. Record on flip chart.
- Introduce aims and objectives of session. Use Handout 1 (Session introduction) to support session introduction.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
- Learners contribute to agreeing group ground rules.
- Learners introduce themselves and share expectations.
- Learners listen and ask questions.

General resources required for this section:
- Flip chart and paper
- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Blu-Tack or masking tape
- Handouts, PowerPoint slides and other specific resources as indicated under each activity.

Notes
Identify the purpose of effective communication

**Activity 1**

**Introduction**
- **10 MINS**
- **PAIRS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the session.
- Show PowerPoint Slide 1.
- Ask learners to discuss the statement in pairs and feedback as a group.
- Summarise key ideas on flip chart.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners discuss the statement ‘Good communication is when...’
- Whole group shares feedback.

**Basic activity**
- **15-20 MINS**
- **SMALL GROUPS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Divide the group into As and Bs.
- Show PowerPoint Slide 2.
- Ask each group to consider the question and record key points and top three answers on flip chart.
- Facilitate whole group feedback and identify the similarities and differences from the responses given.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners work in groups to discuss either question, record key points and feedback to whole group.
- Learners identify the top three answers.
- Whole group shares feedback.

**Advanced activity**
- **15-20 MINS**
- **PAIRS OR TRIOS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Divide learners into pairs or trios.
- Introduce Handout 2 (Statements).
- Facilitate whole group feedback and summarise key points to emphasise the purpose of effective communication.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners read the 12 statements, exemplify what the statement means (e.g. in practice) and decide which are the three or four most important.

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**Effective communication**

Delivered by SHS - www.shs.org.uk
Recognise the different features that support effective communication

Introduction

10 MINS  WHOLE GROUP

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
• Specify the links between this section and the previous activities.
• If appropriate, review key learning so far.

LEARNING ACTIVITY
• Learners listen and ask questions.

Basic activity

15-20 MINS  WHOLE GROUP

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
• Recap on the top three answers recorded on flip chart from Activity 1 - Basic Activity (PowerPoint Slide 2).
• Introduce Handout 3 (Features for effective listening).
• Facilitate whole group discussion. Check the ‘reality’; how do we manage when not all of these are possible?

LEARNING ACTIVITY
• Learners look at the pre-populated list on Handout 3 and add any additional features.
• Learners state why these are important and how they support effective communication.
• Whole group feedback.

Handout 3
Features for effective Listening

Notes
Recognise the different features that support effective communication

Activity 2

15-20 MINS  
SMALL GROUPS

TEACHING ACTIVITY:

- Generate a list of 'key features' for effective communication and state why, for example:

  Good listening skills: to understand fully the issues or concerns.

  Timely response: to ensure the recipient feels that they have been taken seriously or that someone is supporting them.

- Introduce Handout 4 (Effective listening)

- With reference to steps 1 to 5 ‘effective listening’ facilitate whole group discussion.

- Distribute Handout 5 (Using questions effectively) and allow time for reading.

- Facilitate feedback, enabling learners to draw on personal experience.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

- In small groups, learners first generate own list of ‘key features’ and/or what makes communication effective and then state why.

- Referring to Handout 4 and 5, whole group share experience and feedback.

Handout 4  
Effective listening

Handout 5  
Using questions effectively

Notes
Understand the barriers

Basic activity

15-20 mins  
Pairs

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Introduce Handout 6 (Barriers to communication cards) and explain the process of sorting into red, amber or green.
- Facilitate general feedback discussion.

LEARNING ACTIVITY
- Learners refer to Handout 6. Thinking about their educational settings, they classify the statements under the appropriate traffic light categories: red, amber or green.
- As a whole group, learners discuss the red and amber. What were the underlying issues that prompted them to categorise these as red or amber? What strategies would they use to break down the barriers?

Handout 6
Barriers to communication cards

Advanced activity

15-20 mins  
Small groups

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Distribute Handout 7 (Case study: Lizzie) or Handout 8 (Case study: Sean and Matt) to each group and introduce the activity.
- Facilitate whole group feedback and discussion.
- Support the activity with Handout 9 (Understanding conflict) and Handout 5 (Using questions effectively). Distribute Handout 10 (Flowchart of key questions) for supplementary reading after the session.

LEARNING ACTIVITY
- Referring to one of the two case studies, learners answer the question:
  Q. What are the barriers to communication and what other agencies or services (including statutory and voluntary) might they work with?
- As a whole group, learners share the key outcomes of the discussion. If appropriate, they draw up a list of contacts including local organisations and agencies.

Handout 7  
Case study: Lizzie

Handout 8  
Case study: Sean and Matt

Handout 9  
Understanding conflict

Handout 5  
Using questions effectively

Handout 10  
Flowchart of key questions

Top tip
This is a particularly important area and if necessary should be allocated more time.
Examine current forms of communication and ways to improve

**Basic activity**

- **25-30 MINS**
- **WHOLE GROUP**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the task, reviewing what is working well and how to improve.
- Be sure to focus on ‘what is working well’, including how do we know/where is the evidence? Then focus on what isn’t working so well and what learners could do to improve.
- Include monitoring and evaluation (evidence of impact).

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners discuss what communications systems and approaches are in place in their settings e.g. newsletters, displays, text messaging, website, homework diaries etc.
- Learners identify how communication could be improved. This may include discarding some approaches and piloting new ones.

**Advanced activity**

- **15-20 MINS**
- **PAIRS OR GROUP**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Complete Basic activity (left) but focus on complex needs and multi-agency working.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners discuss what communications systems and approaches are in place in their settings/cluster/multi-agency arrangements.
- Learners identify how communication could be improved. This may include discarding some approaches and piloting new ones.

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**Top Tip**

It is useful for schools and organisations to recognise what is already in place to support effective communication, at the same time reviewing what could be better. The activities listed here will inform learners in preparation of a review of communication approaches in their settings.
Plenary activity

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Summarise learning from today.
- Clarify understanding of effective communication with parental work.
- Distribute Plenary (Action planning template).

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Identify the next steps post training alongside any individual learning needs.
- Learners use the Plenary to stimulate discussion.

**Notes**
Managing transfer and transition
(Changes in school and in the home)

Aim
To provide an overview of good practice principles for effective responses to children and young people’s multiple transition issues relating to their education and learning environments.

Objectives
1. Identify barriers to effective transition.
2. Reflect on social issues and additional support needs affecting transition.
3. Understand multiple transition terms and issues.
4. Examine case studies to implement good practice principles.
Managing transfer and transition

There are well over 10 years of well documented practice and research about transition, so this section does not set out to claim to be radically new in introducing or tackling the issue.

Educational establishments already have transition policies/procedures in place and many resources to support transition practice have been developed and put to good use with excellent outcomes.

Therefore, this section is not about starting from scratch but about building onto good foundations, aiding schools to be more alert and work more effectively through support and intervention with children.

This section is innovative in that it collates a set of the most valuable and replicated principles pulled together from a broad base of practice guidance on transition relating to children and families with complex support or multi-faceted support needs.

**Defining ‘transitions in school and in the home’**

Transition and change in the context of school and home environments affecting education and learning cover a wide spectrum of issues and experiences in children and young people's lives, and those of their close family/caring environment.

The education sector tends to use the term ‘transition’ to refer to when a child moves from pre-school to primary school and then on to secondary school and then on to college or university, followed by the workplace. It is sometimes also referred to as ‘transfer’, a natural and healthy progression from one key stage to the next.

However, for many children, and for many reasons, transition is not straightforward and is often affected by personal matters, misconceptions or poorly organised transition practice.

**Successful transition**

Additional planning and provision by, and sometimes for, parents and educational establishments are integral to the process of successful ‘transition’. Failure to implement effective policy and strategy will not only risk being costly for the child and family, but also for the educational establishment.

Sharpe, C. et al (2006) in their report on successful transition to Year 1 highlighted that a well considered and planned induction makes the process easier and more successful for children, staff and parents. This induction needs to be supported by a School Transition Policy, ensuring the staff within the transition process, and with the full support of the school, are planning and delivering on strategies to offer effective induction.

Most important to the people interviewed in the report was continuity and communication; continuity of routines, teaching styles and behaviour management; communication of worries and other factors, support procedures and opportunities.
Promoting a 7-point plan

With a transition framework in place the general transition practice will show good results for children, families and for schools.

However, there will still be children who may not successfully navigate or engage with the transition programme without extra planning and support. In this case a longer programme of transition might be required. These children will usually have multiple transition issues which often means their parents will also have complex support needs.

Therefore carrying out a ‘multiple-issue check’ with all children identified as needing some individual transition programme will prove beneficial. This will result in having a clearer assessment of the need and level of transition support required.

Multiple-issue transition

This refers to when several combining issues create significant barriers and harmful effects on a child/young person’s wellbeing, learning development and future outcomes. The intervention is likely to include plans of engagement and work with the students and their parents.

Best practice

This is when policy and practice can be presented and delivered with a well managed and planned approach. This section aims to offer some insight into multiple-issues and offer a 7-point set of principles which act as a framework for learners to check their transition package by. This session will promote the seven principles shown opposite.

Whether learners on this course are involved in developing policy and practice documents, developing activities and support packages, facilitating education or support for children and families, consideration and implementation of these principles will guide consistent and effective identification, intervention, support and positive outcomes.

Rather than encouraging schools only to implement these principles when coming across complex support cases, this section will promote these principles as the starting point for reviewing the whole school and school partnership transition programme.

The 7-point plan

Key principles for managing transitional changes in school and in the home:

1. Knowledge and understanding of the transition issues.
2. Early identification and intervention.
3. Policy and procedures in place to support planning and activity (including induction).
4. Family support and parent involvement.
5. Inclusion and empowerment of children and young people.
6. Co-operation and partnership with other agencies.
7. Monitoring, evaluation, follow-on and closure.

See Handout 4 (7-point plan) for more information about the 7-point plan.
Objectives

1. Identify barriers to effective transition.
2. Reflect on social issues and additional support needs affecting transition.
3. Understand multiple transition terms and issues.
4. Examine case studies to implement good practice principles.

Activity

Introductions

5 MINS  WHOLE GROUP

TEACHING ACTIVITY:

• Display PowerPoint Slide 1 and introduce the aims for the session.
• Display PowerPoint Slide 2 and introduce the learning objectives for the session.
• Carry out standard housekeeping.
• Agree group ethos.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:

• Learners listen and ask questions.
• Learners contribute to agreeing group ethos.

General resources required for this Section:

- Flip chart and paper
- Pens
- Ball of lace/string
- Handouts, PowerPoint slides and other specific resources as indicated under each activity.

Notes
Identify barriers to effective transition

**Activity 1**

**10 MINS**  
**WHOLE GROUP**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**

- Ask the whole group to form a circle around you.
- Read out the scenario on Handout 1 (Tangled web activity) following the instructions to create a tangled web.
- Unravel the web as learners come up with solutions to the situation.
- Facilitate feedback about the effect of the exercise and highlight the purpose of the session.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**

- Learners form a circle around the trainer and give examples of barriers to smooth transition relating to the scenario, passing the ball of material to one another to create a tangled web.
- Learners then find solutions to unravel the web, letting go of their piece of the web guided by the teacher.
- Learners give feedback about the exercise and ask questions.

**Notes**

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**Scenario**

Ellie is in Year 6 and soon to move up to secondary school. She is frequently absent from school, is not reaching her potential because of this and problems at home. She is a caring a lot for both parents. She and her younger brother (James, 6) live with dad who has a drink problem. Dad got care of them when their mum left him because of his domestic violence, but the authorities thought Mum was more unstable. The children see Mum twice a week but Ellie makes meals and entertains James. But Mum is more interested in their schooling than Dad.
Reflecting on social issues and additional support needs affecting transition

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**

- Introduce Handout 2 (Statistics and quotes). Handing out one card to each learner, ask them in turn to read the information on their card.
- Ask for comments and questions, e.g:
  Q. How relevant are these statistics to your school?
  Q. How likely are children to disclose some of these issues at school?
  Q. How equipped is your school for responding to these issues?
- Explain how the next exercise will begin to explore a framework for developing plans and procedures, giving out Handout 2 and commenting on a couple of other points from the handout.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**

- Learners read out their statistics card.
- When all the cards have been read out, learners respond and ask questions.

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**Handout 2**

*Statistics and quotes*
Understanding multiple transition terms and issues

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Distribute Handout 3 (Issues affecting transition), show PowerPoint Slide 3 and define school transition.
- Show PowerPoint Slide 4 and define complex support needs.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 5 and define multiple issues.
- Divide learners into three smaller groups and introduce Handout 3 (Issues affecting transition). Each group is given the relevant scenario.
  - **Group 1:** transition from home to school and school to school.
  - **Group 2:** changes in home and community Environment.
  - **Group 3:** vulnerable family situations and other risk factors.
- Support each group if needed.
- Facilitate feedback, distribute Handout 4 (Principles for successful transition) and share some of the points.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners follow the presentation and then get into three small groups to complete Handout 3.
- Learners feedback to whole group and make notes on Handout 3.
- Learners receive Handout 4 for further reading.

**Notes**
Examining case studies to implement good practice principles

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**

- Introduce Handout 5 (7-point plan). Provide a summary of the seven points.
- Introduce Handout 6 (Case study 1), read out the case study and instruct learners to complete the questions.
- Divide learners into small groups, each taking either Handout 7 or 8 (Case study 2 or 3). It is fine for more than one group to do the same case study as this may bring out different ideas to address the issue.
- Support each group with their task.
- Facilitate feedback from each group. Guide the feedback to avoid repetition of information.
- Ask the group if the exercise was beneficial to them and summarises the purpose of the exercise and value of the principles.
- Introduce Handout 9 (Links to resources and services). Highlighting a few of the links and resources from the handout, ask the group if they know of other links and resources relevant to share. Allow time for learners to make notes.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**

- Learners complete the questions in Handout 6, guided by the teacher, and Handout 5.
- Learners get into smaller groups to complete Handout 7 or 8.
- Learners feedback to the whole group the points they list and issues which arise.
- Learners then receive Handout 9, scan through it and offer additional links and resources that they know of to the whole group.
Plenary

TEACHING ACTIVITY:

- Summarise learning from today.
- Identify good practice for engaging parents and areas for development.
- Hand out Plenary (Action planning template) and explain its purpose.
- Ask learners for questions and take key points from each learner.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:

- Identify the next steps post training alongside any individual learning needs.
- Learners use Plenary to stimulate discussion.
- Learners share one key learning point from the session.
- Learners complete relevant evaluation and monitoring forms.

Reference/further reading: Section 4
Sharpe, C., White, G., Burge, B., Eames, A., (2006), Making a Successful Transition to Year 1
Parents as partners

Aim

To understand the importance of working with parents in partnership and to gain some practical ideas as to how to move this work forward within your setting.

Objectives

1. Recognise the principles of partnership working
2. Review the significance/importance of ‘parents as partners’.
3. Identify the barriers to parental participation and explore strategies to overcome them.
4. Examine the different partnership models when working with parents and the implications of them upon relationships that are formed.
5. Develop strategies to improve parent consultation within the school community.
The importance of parents as partners

Parents create a learning environment which starts before birth and continues for many formative years.

It’s important to remember that more than 70% of children’s lives are spent both with their family and the wider community, which means that the opportunities for learning within these environments are both significant and enduring.

Therefore, it stands to reason that:

- Successful relationships between parents and educators can have long-lasting and beneficial effects on children’s learning and well-being.
- Successful relationships become partnerships when there is two-way communication, and when parents and practitioners really listen to each other and value each other’s views and support in achieving the best outcomes for each child.

(Effective practice: Parents as Partners. The Early Years Foundation Stage, 2007)

By developing effective partnerships with parents in order to enhance the learning and development of the children with whom they work, the outcomes for children are significant, even accounting for factors such as poverty and disadvantage.

Key quote

Parental involvement in the form of ‘at-home good parenting’ has a significant positive effect on children’s achievement and adjustment, even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range, the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.

(Desforges, 2003)
Defining parents as partners

Parental engagement within the life of your school can take a variety of forms, with differing levels of involvement and responsibility supported by the school community, and can include the following aspects:

Parents as welcome visitors
The first thing to establish with your parents is that they are welcomed in the school. Careful attention needs to be paid to the impression you give even before getting a parent over the threshold. The impression given from a welcoming reception area and the greetings from the reception staff are all extremely important.

Parents as interested parties
Acknowledging parents’ direct interest in the effectiveness of your school’s educational provision will pay dividends on all fronts. There are a number of areas in which this can be exploited positively, for example the delivery of an effective homework policy. By involving parents the benefits accrued could be:

- Designing homework with the intention of involving parents.
- Ensuring that parents are fully informed about how and when they should intervene at home.
- Making sure that parents know the school’s policy and the part that they can play in its delivery.
- Listening to what parents have to say about homework in practice.
- Involving them directly in any school homework support provision that the school runs.

A second possibility is that parents develop strategies that have motivated their own children and may be persuaded to share this good practice with other parents. They can also be encouraged to use these strategies to mentor other children in their child’s year. Teachers may want to use their skills in a consultative capacity by having regular discussions with parents who have had a positive effect on changing the attitude of their child and identifying strategies to support others, including the designing of teaching resources and sessions.

Parents as helpers
A natural next step is to try to engage the active involvement of parents as helpers in a variety of roles within the school.

First is the classroom helper; parents can be an extra pair of hands, ears and eyes in the classroom. They can assist with distributing books, listening to queries about written work and giving advice to children who are stuck. They can even help support group discussions and snuff out inappropriate behaviour before it has time to develop. This is not only of great benefit for the school, but also the parents, as being actively involved will boost their confidence and skills with supporting their own child with understanding the curriculum.

Parents can be brought into school life as helpers in other ways. For example if they are expert gardeners they may be able to inject a bit of life into the environment. Other parents might be better suited to help out in the school library or on school trips.

Assuming that you have developed a positive relationship with parents, there will be a lot of parental support taking place at home as well.

It is important to make some effort to ensure that this support is on the right lines, not just in terms of homework but also in terms of encouraging pupils’ commitment and concentration at key times and maintaining a positive attitude towards the school without blind subservience.

Supporting parents by running an information evening about certain key subjects will give you the opportunity to deliver plenty of advice, at the same time as informing parents of the initiatives happening at school.
Parents as fundraisers

It is an easy assumption to cast parents in the roles of fundraisers and this is usually the main function of a Parent Teacher Association.

Other parents may not have the requisite skills to become part of the fundraising team whilst others may be excellent bid writers. Other parents may have access to resources needed by the school. They may work for local employers who may be asked to sponsor the school or run fundraising enterprises on behalf of the school.

So this parental involvement may be seen as a way of accessing extra resources for the school to support the enrichment of the curriculum for their children.

Parents as future professionals

If your school is beginning to feel confident about its relationship with parents, and if the conditions are right, it is worth considering how you might offer opportunities for parents who wish to gain experience before starting a career in an educational setting – whether it be as a teacher, parent support advisor or teacher assistant. This type of support and mentoring has brought about a more skilled workforce in some schools.

If parents are already working in the school in various roles, they might welcome the opportunity to find out about what sort of training is required for jobs, depending on their level of qualification.

By showing an interest in their progress and welfare, the schools will benefit from their improved motivation and skills.

Parents as experts

Parents have expertise and they may be used to benefit the school. It is worth looking at the possibility of inviting parents to share their expertise with students in the classroom; they may be experts on certain topics, especially at senior level. Parents might be willing to speak about their vocation during career day. Listening to someone with first hand experience and knowledge can be very inspiring.

Parents as informed partners

The best relationship between school and parents is that of partners and it is towards this that your work should be striving. Key to this development is the effectiveness of your communication, for example developing a parent forum for parents to discuss issues affecting the school or a space for parents to work together, sharing common concerns and determining solutions.

At such meetings the group may choose to elect parent representatives to sit on a whole school parent council. This type of structure will make explicit the school commitment to working with parents as equal partners.

Curriculum workshops are another form of informing and empowering parents. Objectives for the sessions should be explicit, so parents are clear what they are getting into and do not build excessive hopes on an inappropriate basis. A series of workshops should be planned, well organised and interactive, where speakers are briefed and there are plenty of opportunities for questions and answers.

Parents as model learners

If the school opens its doors to the community, it is more likely that some of the new learners will be parents of pupils at the school. With a little encouragement these parent learners can be effective role models for their own children as well as other pupils and parents.
Parents in multiple roles
We should not try to pigeon-hole parents into one role, but to encourage engagement on several levels.

Parents in decision-making
First, there is consultation. Parents often see things from a practical angle whereas schools can sometimes get tied up with the policies and procedures. Consider consulting with them in regards to the school handbook, the content of the school-home agreement and the content and timings of parents’ evenings.

Secondly there is the facilitating role that schools can play in ensuring that parents have the opportunity to network with and to support each other, especially if they are dispersed over a large geographical range.

Ways to encourage parental networking
The following ideas demonstrate the school’s priority in listening to parent views in an attempt to make a productive dialogue:

- Ensure that parents’ email addresses are shared with fellow parents enabling speedy contact (if they have agreed to do this).
- Consider the use of Facebook as a medium of communication and networking among parents.
- Organise regular gatherings that take the form of a communal clinic. (Have you got a problem with the school? Come and tell us and share it with other parents).
- Initiate activities at which working parents, or parents who live far away from school, can attend and be part of the discussions with the school.
- Create parent forums, a parental dimension to the school council, or to go even further a parent representative on the school’s senior management team.
- Form action teams as a positive step towards active parental engagement.
- Involve parents as governors. Not all parents who are governors are parent governors. Many are community governors, or sponsor governors but parents are more likely to be active governors than say a local politician who may simply want this on their CV.

(Walton, M., Terms of engagement: strategies for involving parents in learning, Curriculum Briefing Vol 5 No 1, 2006)
Viewing all parents as potential partners

A successful journey up through the rungs of the ladder, to the empowerment of parents as partners in your setting, means having the ability and skills to engage with all parents, accounting for and according to their needs, abilities and starting points.

Reaching parents

Often school staff will talk about the difficulty of reaching all parents and we often hear the terms ‘families with complex needs’ or ‘parents who are hard to reach’. Labels can be harmful and minimising, with the potential to strip away the reality and detail of an individual family’s experience and current situation. They do not give us the detail of why some families are not engaging in the life of the school or their child’s education. If we don’t know why, we can’t put in place measures to support and encourage the resolution of the issue. So whilst these terms have become more and more common place, what do they actually mean and what do we mean when we refer to families as such?

Hard to reach

‘Hard to reach’ is often attributed to non-engaged parents where there are issues such as poverty and low aspiration, often with a negative view of the education system due to their own experiences of school as a young person.

It is also used to describe families who may have recently migrated to the area, who may have come from overseas and whose cultural experience and spoken language is very different from that of the community they have joined.

However, we could also talk about families in affluent areas, where both parents work, mortgages are high and the economy is uncertain. This can result in parents arguing and drinking more. They don’t have time to spend at the school gate and don’t keep teachers informed as to their child’s progress with reading and homework.

It is realistic to say that all three of these situation ‘types’ could be defined as complex needs, yet the support and resources they need to be able to engage may be very different, along with their ability to do so in terms of the different levels of involvement demonstrated within the Ladder of Participation. However, whilst the needs of these families may be very different, it is important to remember that factors such as mental health, domestic violence and substance misuse can be seen across the demographic range within society. These factors can affect both affluent and economically disadvantaged people alike with the potential to cut across cultures and ethnicity.

Solution

The key to the engagement of parents as partners is the ability of school staff to be able to meet parents ‘where they are’ on both an emotional and cognitive level. By building trusting relationships with parents based upon mutual respect and by providing strategies and levels upon which parents can become involved in school life and their child’s education, the issue of complex needs is investigated beyond the remit of a label. The true needs of a family can then be defined and supported in partnership with them.
A parent support adviser’s account of setting up a parent council

One of my tasks as a School-Home Support Parent Support Advisor based in an inner-city secondary school in the South-west was to support the setting up of a parent council and to act as the link person between the school and the new group.

The Parent Council (PC) has now been successfully running for a couple of years. With a healthy number of parents involved, the group is responsible for making suggestions and ideas with regard to issues that affect their children. Communication with the school, school meals and homework are key areas that parents have chosen to focus on.

The meetings are run by an elected Chair and Vice-chair and a minute-taker sends out minutes to all PC members whilst also reporting back to the governors. My role has developed into one of ‘Co-ordinator’; I hold agenda meetings with the Chair and Vice-chair, liaise with the Head Teacher and staff, introduce community and parent-focused news and opportunities, organise the resources for the meetings as well as creating promotional material and distributing it via newsletters, the website and at school meetings and events.

In addition, I communicate with all members of the PC and offer information and support as required. This can involve ensuring that all parents are clear about the role of the PC as well as to signpost parents to other meetings and staff as appropriate.

An example of a piece of work we did together is when parents were concerned about the quality and quantity of food provided by the external catering company responsible for school dinners. In response to a written invitation detailing the concerns, the manager of the school catering company came to a PC meeting. As a result of discussions at the meeting, the Parent Council parents were invited to try a school meal, subsequently preparing and submitting a report to the company which resulted in improvements to the menu as well as the organisation of the lunchtime period.

The Vice-chair, a mother of four children, has become a learning support assistant in school, working with Somali children. Through the PC she has set up a Somali Parent Group, an off-shoot of the PC that deals specifically with Somali parents’ issues (and there is now also a Polish Parent Group). Both groups have representation on the PC. The Chair of the PC has really grown in confidence and the role has been a big journey for her; she really wasn’t very engaged with school before and as a result of her involvement has become the voice of parents at school events and has also taken on a parent governor role in her younger child’s school. Other members of the PC have become much more involved and engaged in school events, taking responsibility for promoting activities and encouraging other parents to join in.

I enjoy the exchange of views.

I enjoy the opportunity to have our say as parents and feel part of proposing solutions.

There is a feeling of community and involvement.

I’ve met some new parents and have learnt about running a meeting.

I’ve gained confidence in speaking in a group.

I like that it brings parents together to look at different things that are going on at school.

It brings people together with similar aims to myself - all wanting the best for our children.

The Parent Council has been a huge success and the credit for this must lie with our School-Home Support Parent Support Advisor who has worked with our parents to develop their skills. Although still small in number, the Parent Council has developed into a confident group who express opinions, question policy and more importantly are strong supporters of the school.

Quotes from parents

Quote from a member of school staff

The Parent Council has been a huge success and the credit for this must lie with our School-Home Support Parent Support Advisor who has worked with our parents to develop their skills. Although still small in number, the Parent Council has developed into a confident group who express opinions, question policy and more importantly are strong supporters of the school.
Introductions

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Introduce the outline of the day.
- Introduce the learning objectives.
- Carry out standard housekeeping.
- Agree group ethos and ground rules.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
- Learners listen and ask questions.
- Learners contribute to agreeing group ethos and ground rules.

General resources required for this section:
- Flip chart and paper
- Pens
- Handouts, PowerPoint slides and other specific resources as indicated under each activity.

Notes
Parents must be aware of the high value we place upon their contribution.

Deputy Head, Alder Grange Secondary School

Recognising parents' expertise in their own lives, and emphasising partnerships by doing things with families rather than to them is crucial! Moran et al, 2004

It is vital that schools maintain the trust and confidence of parents who are our partners in educating children. Steer report, 2005

Recognise the principles of partnership working

**Basic activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Whole Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 MINS</td>
<td>Whole Group</td>
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**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the concept of parent partnership and the importance of it in raising children's achievement. Refer to Top tip (page 56) for guidance.
- Display PowerPoint Slides 1 and 2.
- Facilitate discussion and feedback.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners read PowerPoint Slides 1 and 2.
- Learners discuss the points raised and ask questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 MINS</td>
<td>Whole Group</td>
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**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Facilitate a thought-storm on ‘Understanding partnerships’.
- Record ideas on the flip chart.
- Prompt/scaffold any that are missed. (Use PowerPoint Slide 3 as a ‘check and balance’ in terms of what the group are feeding back to you.)
- When ideas have been exhausted, display PowerPoint Slide 3.
- Discuss words that the group have come up with and the words on PowerPoint Slide 3.

Q. Which words aren’t representative of ‘partnership’. Why aren’t they?

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners contribute to thought-storm.
- Learners listen and discuss.
- Further discussion based on new ideas revealed by PowerPoint Slide 3.
- Learners ask questions and seek clarification.

**Why parental engagement?**

Parents, carers and family members are by far the most important influence on their children’s lives. They influence how young people think about education, their future and society. Therefore their support for schools and engagement in learning is crucial. Harris, Professor A., Andrew-Power, K., Goodall, J. (2008), Do Parents Know They Matter?: Raising Achievement Through Parental Engagement
Recognise the principles of partnership working

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce Handout 1 (Terms of engagement) and summarise the key strategies for learners based on what you’ve read in the introduction.
- Explain that the first eight of the different types of parental engagement may be viewed as sitting on a continuum of engagement/partnership.
- Draw on flip chart a continuum line with ‘parents as welcome visitors’ on the far left and ‘parents in decision-making’ on the right.
- Divide the whole group into three separate groups.
- Distribute Handout 2 (Scenarios), one heading and its related statements for each group.
- Facilitate whole group discussion and feedback from each group on the outcome of the activity.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners listen to summary and explanation of continuum.
- Learners categorise their scenarios into ‘poor’, ‘OK’, ‘good’ and ‘excellent’ in relation to how well they seem to demonstrate partnership working. Learners to think about:
  - Q. Do any of these things happen in your setting?
  - Q. What view of the parent (continuum) does each scenario best relate to?
- Each group to feedback on the activity and resulting discussion to the whole group.

**Top tips**

Whilst Partnership working with parents is important, the ideal partnership is not a straightforward concept. The definition of a partnership is straightforward enough: ‘a two-way relationship with children’s parents and carers’. However, understanding what partnership means and how it can be interpreted and put into practice can be very complicated. There is a need to look at how partnerships are viewed from both parties’ perspectives.
Examine the different partnership models when working with parents and the implications of them upon relationships that are formed

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Introduce the potential barriers to parental engagement in education, referring to Handout 3 (Barriers to family involvement).
- If further exploration of ‘barriers’ would be useful, please see activities in Section 1 of this toolkit.
- Introduce three different models of partnership working as set out in Handout 4 (Different models of supporting partnership).

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners listen, and are encouraged to ask questions in order to clarify understanding.

**Basic activity**

- **TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
  - Divide learners into three groups.
  - Cut-up statements from Handout 4 (Different models of supporting partnership) and distribute to each group along with the three headings.
  - Set the task and facilitate whole group feedback.

- **LEARNING ACTIVITY**
  - Learners decide which statements go under each of the three headings.
  - Each group feedback there results to the whole group and learners discuss any differences in terms of categorisation.

**Advanced activity**

- **TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
  - Distribute one case study per group from Handout 5 (Case studies). If there are more than three small groups, each case study can be worked on by more than one group.
  - Link the feedback from each group into a discussion looking at the relationship between the practitioner/school staff and the parents within each of these models.

- **LEARNING ACTIVITY**
  - Learners examine each perspective within the case study they have been given, including ‘steps that were taken’, then identify and discuss examples of ‘expert’, ‘befriending’ or ‘partnership’ approaches that were used within each example by the professionals involved.
  - Whole group feedback and discussion.
Develop strategies to improve parent consultation and partnership working within the school community

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**

- Explain that in order to know what parents want and need, we need to find ways to work with them effectively.
- Introduce Handout 6 (Ladder of participation). It is another kind of continuum. Explain that the ‘Ladder of Participation’ model is one way of examining how engaged parents are within your setting.
- Introduce Handout 7 (Encouraging parent voice) and give a brief overview of the issues explained within it.
- Divide learners into small groups and give each group a large ‘Ladder of Participation’ drawn onto flip chart paper.
- Cut-up statements from Handout 8 (Scenarios), distribute to each group and set the task.
- Ask them to look at the types of activity incorporated into the next rung of the ladder in relation to where they currently are.
- Depending on whether you are training people from one setting or several, re-divide learners into groups with people from settings who are at the same self-identified level of the ladder.
- Ask each group to identify what the next steps might be in terms of progressing up the ladder.
- Suggest participants use Handout 1 (Terms of engagement) to help them with ideas.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**

- Whole group discussion about Handouts 6 and 7.
- Learners divide into smaller groups. They place each statement onto what they feel is the most appropriate rung of the ladder.
- In their groups, they identify where they feel their setting is currently in relation to the different rungs.
- Learners re-group into different smaller groups if necessary.
- Each learner writes down their three next steps individually on a piece of A4 paper, so that they can take this away from the session with them.

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**Notes**

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**Activity 3**

**25 MINS**

**SMALL GROUPS**

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### Plenary Activity

**10 MINS WHOLE GROUP**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Summarise learning from today’s session and identify effective full partnership working with parents.
- Ask each learner to feed back two areas for development that would support more effective partnership working within their setting.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Whole group listens.
- Individual learners feedback to whole group.

*Reference/further reading: Section 5*

Sharpe, C., White, G., Burge, B., Eames A. (2006), Making A Successful Transition To Year 1
Aim

Gain practical skills and ideas to assist learners’ parental engagement work at a practitioner level and whole-school approach level.

Objectives

1. Identify the key principles underlying effective parental engagement.
2. Identify barriers that may prevent parents and families from engaging.
3. Explore effective engagement strategies with parents from a practitioner perspective.
4. Develop a plan for sustaining parental engagement work within the school.
Principles and values underlying effective parental engagement

Key principles and values that underpin effective engagement work with parents include the following:

Trust
Trust is defined as the firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something. It is crucial for developing effective relationships with parents. Some strategies to assist in trust building include telling the truth, transparency, authenticity (i.e. being honest with yourself and others) and being reliable (i.e. being consistent between what you say and what you do).

Empathy
Empathy is the ability to recognise and, to some extent, share the feelings that are being experienced by another. In order to do this, the ability to listen to what people might be saying, both verbally and non-verbally is key. In some cases, silences can be an indicator of a powerful message.

Non-judgement
This involves avoiding making personal judgements about a parent, family, child or young person. There are almost always reasons and emotions behind words or behaviour that you find challenging. Remove judgemental thoughts about people and work to identify the reasons why they may be feeling, speaking or behaving in a particular way.

Respect
Respect denotes a positive feeling of esteem for a person. Respect can be due to the abilities of a person, or respect for their thoughts, motivations and values. Before being able to respect others, the first step is to respect yourself.

Families are unique and aren’t defined by the issues they may face. Recognising parents’ expertise in their own lives, and emphasising partnership by doing things with families rather than to them, is crucial.

(Moran et al, 2004)

Parents respond well to confident, well-informed practitioners, and need to feel that:

Parents would like:

• Their own views and knowledge about their child to be taken into account.
• To be in an equal relationship with practitioners.
• To be considered as active partners in all parts of the process.
• Not to feel indebted or obligated to practitioners.
• To keep a sense of control in dealing with any support provided.
• Not to feel stigmatised by asking for support.

What parents look for from the practitioners and the school:
Practical strategies for engaging parents

All school staff should understand the importance of parental engagement in children’s learning.

Parental engagement has been shown to significantly help to improve attendance, to address behavioural problems and to enhance attainment, three objectives that are vital to school and that often suffer due to problems relating to family life. Very often teachers do not have the time to address these issues because of their teaching workload.

It is particularly important for schools to have realistic expectations about parental engagement work. School staff should have clear expectations and understanding of the work of practitioners who work with parents.

It is also vital for practitioners to understand school processes, staffing structures, support and professional development for pastoral school staff and the wider resources available in the community for signposting and other services.

Some strategies that practitioners have used to embed themselves within the school have included:

• Talking to school staff.
• Organising a staff briefing about the role of the practitioner and of parental engagement.
• Enhancing referral processes within the school (e.g. identifying particular children and families that may need additional support).
• Finding out about other services and organisations within the local area that may deal with the issues for signposting (e.g. drug and alcohol, health, domestic violence, supplementary schools, family support, children’s centres etc).
• Sending letters home in book-bags introducing the parental/family support role in the school.
• Making small talk with parents at the school gates in the morning. This will not usually involve addressing issues immediately.

Often as a result of these initial activities, parents will start to become familiar with the face of the practitioner, and by being available during the times when parents are most likely to be in the school, the practitioner will be able to start the development of a relationship with parents.
Practical strategies for engaging parents (cont.)

Engaging parents through group work

Once clear expectations from the school have been agreed, and parents recognise the face of the practitioner, group strategies are often effective in bringing together parents and making initial contact.

The first step is to find out what parents are interested in by talking to them, and potentially carrying out a survey, as well as checking with local community providers for various activities.

**Following this, start to arrange some group activities:**

- Coffee mornings.
- Information on managing money.
- Taster sessions of Zumba, yoga and other activities.
- Advice on benefits.
- Cooking sessions or healthy eating sessions.
- Adult learning – such as English language courses in conjunction with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) providers, teaching assistant courses, parenting courses, family social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) workshops and other adult learning courses that can be provided by other agencies and organisations in your local area.
- Developing a ‘walking bus’ to pick up children on their way to school to ensure attendance and punctuality.
- Homework clubs for children and ‘keep up with your children’ courses for those parents who don’t feel confident in helping their children at home.
- Developing a peer support session for parents facing particular issues.

Encouraging peer support is important, and often asking those parents who do come to these events to bring another parent is an excellent strategy for peer support amongst parents, as well as increasing awareness of the services of the school and practitioner for parental and family support. Ensure that you have excellent refreshments!

**Fathers**

Stereotypically, mothers have tended to take on traditional roles within the family, where nurturing and educating children have largely lain in the mother’s domain. However, both parents are important in the educational outcomes of their children, particularly in the case of single dads or separated parents.

In most cases, it is important to find out how dads would like to be involved in their child’s school or learning. Usually this means asking them through surveys and speaking to them informally at the school gates or group events.

Strategies that have been helpful in some of SHS’s parental engagement work include practical activities that bring together fathers and their children.

**Examples include:**

- Go-kart making, which may involve inter-generational learning around numeracy skills for measuring and putting together parts of the go-kart.
- Landscaping, which might require numeracy skills for calculating measurements for volume and distance.
- Film clubs, which have included discussion about films after the session, providing a forum for parents and their children to develop an interest in the arts.
- Football clubs, excellent in encouraging team work and motor skills.
- Breakfast or ‘tea and toast’ clubs before school, particularly useful for those fathers who might be working.

Fathers are often more difficult to contact, since in general mothers tend to be the main care providers, including dropping off and picking up their children at school. In some cases, fathers do take on this role. There may be a key father, who is linked to other fathers, and it is usually a good idea to get this father involved, asking him to help promote any parent-child activities amongst his peers. Some practitioners have also used group events to bring fathers into the school; of particular interest are sporting events.
Practical strategies for engaging parents (cont.)

Work with individual families or parents, or complex cases

Often, work with individual families or parents involves referral by the school. Whilst each family may be experiencing different complex issues, it is important to gain the trust of parents.

Some strategies which SHS practitioners have used to deal with particular issues, both at school and in the home, have included:

- Assisting with applications for free school meals, uniform grants, benefits, housing, immigration and other financial aid. Whilst not always possible, this often cements a relationship with parents and helps to provide the conditions for children’s learning.

- Persistence – some parents will put up boundaries and reject a school or practitioner’s efforts at engagement. Put aside the human reaction to leave this parent out of engagement activities. Sometimes, parents are testing the practitioner or they may not wish to disclose issues immediately.

- Providing advice on parenting - whilst parenting classes exist, there may be many reasons why some parents are not able to come to the classes. Practitioners who are trained can offer their support and advice in a one-to-one session with parents.

- It is important to have an appropriate space where practitioners can meet with parents. This helps to ensure trust. This space can include a room in the school or a neutral place such as a café. Alternatively, home visits can be arranged (with appropriate home-visit, lone-working and safety policies in place).

- In some cases, motivation groups with students and children who have particular difficulties have been established within the school. These groups provide space to share feelings, and provide peer support for managing and dealing with issues.

- Individual work with students can address some of their difficulties, including drawing and talking work, ‘learn to smile’ or just having an adult person in their life whom they can trust and speak to.

- If there is a particularly large ethnic group at the school, encouraging teachers to learn some basic words of the language, potentially getting parents involved in developing and delivering basic materials.

Top tips

Some top tips, directly from an SHS practitioner, about parental engagement strategies:

- There is no quick fix, persistence and commitment are needed at all levels if there is to be effective and successful parental engagement work.

- There is no right or wrong way of engaging with parents. Different approaches will work with different parents. Most parents want the human touch and creating personal relationships is vital.

- For each parental engagement activity (group work, or individual support), begin with the end in mind.

- Seek out other opportunities with community groups and local services.

- Most importantly, seek first to understand, then to be understood.
Practical strategies for engaging parents (whole-school approach)

Creating an atmosphere for purposeful parent engagement and partnership begins with governance and school leaders, pastoral staff and teachers. These leaders are key for setting the tone for parent engagement and ultimately the success of a school for student achievement and families.

Elements of whole-school approach

Where success in student achievement is supported by creating a culturally responsive, positive environment for parent engagement.

Set high expectations for engagement.
The acknowledgement of high expectations for successful parent engagement sets a tone that will benefit students, teachers and community. The same high expectations that are set for students should also be set for teachers, staff and parents.

Create space and time to plan together.
At the beginning of each school year, create a plan with staff about how to involve parents. Explore the benefits of such involvement and what you will be doing to bring everyone (staff and parents) together. Key topics that parents like to discuss are ‘rigour’, ‘discipline’ and ‘communication’.

Begin with the premise that parents do care and know what they need for themselves and their children.
Key questions to ask:
- ‘Does the school know what parents’ needs are?’
- ‘What opportunities have been provided or will be provided for parents to give feedback?’
- ‘How will the school use this information in a meaningful way to respond to their needs?’
- ‘What needs do they have that could be provided through community services?’

Issues that may arise at home where there is no support do affect the learning process. It is important to listen actively to parents.

Publicly acknowledge and celebrate parent engagement.
When parents are recognised, they feel appreciated and valued and always respond enthusiastically, for example, acknowledging the contributions of parents through awards and recognition ceremonies that value and honour their contributions. Parents could be encouraged to participate in site-based management and decisions, the school-community advisory board, school field trips, parent-teacher organisation fundraisers and student interventions.

Become a parent engagement advocate.
Rather than perpetuating the erroneous myth that parents do not care or are not involved, pro-actively affirm that parents do have high expectations for their children and that they care deeply about their academic success. To counteract any blaming and negativity, be an advocate and cite examples of successful parent engagement. Be responsible for generating a different mindset with ideas about how to engage parents successfully.

Ensure ongoing communication and monitoring of engagement.
Continually seek ways to maintain the momentum of engagement, sharing successes, checking and adjusting strategies and moving forward together. Parents really do want to know what is happening in school. They also want to participate, but may feel unwelcomed or intimidated because of language barriers between parents and teachers. Therefore, plan for meetings to be held in the language of the community, with sufficient child care support and during times that are convenient for parents. Offer feedback and ask for feedback on a regular basis and make a point of de-mystifying school procedures and school jargon for parents. When parents develop that needed level of trust and confidence in the school, they begin asking more and more questions related to implications of grades, attendance, testing and higher education.

Keep the focus on children’s academic success at the centre of all engagement activities.
This means aligning talk to action and focusing on keeping parents informed and involved, making them an integral part of the teaching and learning process for student academic success. Parents are eager, willing and ready for engagement. As their children’s first teachers, they have much to offer. Parents are the integral component of keeping the public in public schools and of helping to create a climate where high school graduation is ensured for all students.
Introduction

TEACHING ACTIVITY:
- Display PowerPoint Slide 1.
- Introduce the aims and objectives of the session.
- Carry out standard housekeeping.
- Agree learning agreement and ground rules.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
- Learners listen, contribute to learning agreement and ask questions.

General resources required for this section:
- Flip chart and paper
- Pens
- Post-it Notes - various colours
- Handouts, PowerPoint slides and other specific resources as indicated under each activity.

Notes
**Principles and values underlying effective parental engagement**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Ask learners to suggest some principles and values of effective parental engagement practice.
- Record ideas on the flip chart.
- Distribute Handout 1 (Principles and values) and facilitate additional comments.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 2.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners contribute ideas regarding the principles and values of parental engagement.
- Learners read Handout 1 and contribute any additional comments regarding these principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles and values</th>
<th>Handout 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Develop trust</td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show empathy</td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be non-judgmental</td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show respect</td>
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**Confucius**

“Families are unique and aren’t defined by the issues they may face. Recognising parents’ expertise in their own lives, and emphasising partnership by doing things with families rather than to them, is crucial.” (Moran et al, **4**)

**Alternative activity**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Display PowerPoint Slide 2.
- Place four flip chart papers in four corners of the room, labelled with four values and principles:
  1. Develop trust.
  2. Show empathy.
  3. Be non-judgemental.
  4. Show respect.
- Divide learners into four groups, numbering them one to four.
- Each group to spend two minutes at each flip chart, writing up ways that they can demonstrate this value in their practice.
- Collate results from the four flip charts so that all learners can see the results of the work.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners spend two minutes at each flip chart, writing up ways to demonstrate that value in their practice.
Identify barriers that may prevent parents and families from engaging

**Activity 2**

**20 MINS**  
**SMALL GROUPS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Divide learners into four groups, numbering them one to four.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 3.
- Each group to use flip chart paper to list:
  1. What do parents look for from practitioners?
  2. What do parents want from schools?
  3. What barriers do parents face to engagement in learning?
  4. What barriers do parents face to involvement in school?
- Facilitate feedback from each group and note any key learning points.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY**
- Learners use flip chart to discuss topics and make lists.
- Learners feedback lists and contribute key thoughts and learning points.

**Alternative activity**

**20 MINS**  
**SMALL GROUPS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Divide learners into four groups.

**Group 1:** imagine they are parents of a primary or secondary school child and imagine a school that they find really welcoming. Learners to write on green Post-it notes different things that they would find welcoming in a school.

**Group 2:** imagine a primary or secondary school that is really unwelcoming. Learners write on pink Post-it notes different things that they would find unwelcoming in a school.

**Group 3:** think of institutions other than schools that they find really welcoming. Learners to write on green Post-it notes different things about these institutions that they find welcoming.

**Group 4:** think of institutions other than schools that they find challenging or unwelcoming. Learners write on pink Post-it notes different things about these institutions that they find unwelcoming.

- Group one and three bring their Post-it notes together onto one flip chart.
- Groups two and four bring their Post-it notes together onto one flip chart.
- Facilitate group discussion on:
  1. Barriers that prevent parents from...
  2. What makes an institution welcoming?

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners use Post-it notes to write up ideas.
- Each group brings together their Post-it-notes as instructed.
- Learners contribute key thoughts and learning points about barriers that prevent parents from engaging with school life.
Explore effective engagement strategies with parents from a practitioner perspective

**Activity 3**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Divide learners into trios.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 4.
- Distribute Handout 2 (Case studies), one case study per group, and instruct learners to work through the questions.
- Remind the participants that the focus of the strategies should be to improve pupil attainment and other positive outcomes for children and young people.
- Facilitate feedback from each group.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Learners read the case studies in Handout 2 and answer the questions.
- Learners feedback answers and learning points to the rest of the group.

**Alternative activity**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**
- Divide learners into trios.
- Distribute case study 1 from Handout 2 (Case studies).
- Ask trios to read through the case study and carry out a role play.
- One participant is a parent.
- A second participant is a practitioner.
- A third participant observes.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**
- Two participants conduct the role play as parent and practitioner for 5-8 minutes.
- Observer feeds back for 2-3 minutes on the listening skills that were used during the role play.
- If time allows, change roles so that everyone has a turn in each role.

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**Case Studies**

**Case 1: Shaeda**

Teacher's perspective

Shaeda is a Year three student who regularly misses one or two days per week from school. During the last two terms, you have noticed that this is having a serious impact on her learning. She has shown little progress in Maths or writing over the year and she shows general disinterest in school work. Shaeda cries often in class and is very reluctant to discuss how she feels with you or with her peers. She has stopped interacting with other students altogether. You worry that emotional and other needs are not being met and that this has affected her learning.

She has a lot of potential as a student and you are not sure what to do next.

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**Handout 2**

**Case Studies**

**PowerPoint Slide 4**

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**Section**

Strategies for engagement

Delivered by SHS - www.shs.org.uk
Develop a plan for sustaining parental engagement work within the school

**Activity 4**

**30 MINS**  
**PAIRS OR TRIOS**

**TEACHING ACTIVITY:**

- Ask learners to consider current parental engagement work that they are involved with or aware of in school.
- Facilitate a thought-storm to generate ideas about what makes parental engagement successful at whole-school level.
- Divide learners into pairs or trios depending on the number of strategies that have been identified.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 5.
- Introduce Handout 3 (Parental engagement tool). Instruct learners to develop an action plan to deliver the identified parental engagement strategy.
- Ask for feedback regarding the action plans that have been devised.
- Distribute Handout 4 (Strategies for engagement), for supplementary reading after the session.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:**

- Contribute ideas regarding successful parental engagement work at whole-school level.
- Learners use Handout 3 to devise action plans.
- Learners feedback on action plans and contribute any key learning points.
- Learners receive Handout 4 for supplementary reading.

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**Handout 3**  
Parental engagement tool

**PowerPoint Slide 5**

**Handout 4**  
Strategies for engagement
In considering the quality of how we are engaging with parents, it is useful to take time to reflect on the following questions, and to engage in thoughtful analysis of our personal practice in parent engagement as members of the school community.

Jot down some answers to the following questions:

Q. As a member of the school staff team, do I consistently value and acknowledge the strengths and gifts that parents from diverse backgrounds and languages can bring to the teaching and learning process? How do I do so?

Q. Am I willing to implement varied approaches to engage parents from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds meaningfully as partners in a community of learners?

Q. Do I facilitate engagement that is relevant to parents’ context and needs, and do I set the tone of respectful readiness to begin to partner effectively with a diverse group of parents?

**Reflection**

What is the one thing you will change in your practice to improve parental engagement?
Plenary

Plenary activity

10 MINS  WHOLE GROUP

TEACHING ACTIVITY:

• Summarise learning from today.
• Identify good practice for ‘Strategies for engagement’ and areas for development.
• Hand out Plenary (Action planning template).

LEARNING ACTIVITY:

• Identify the next steps post training, alongside any individual learning needs.
• Use Plenary to stimulate discussion.

Notes

Reference/further reading: Section 6

Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A. (2003), The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a review of the literature, DfES, RR433

Hallam, S., Rogers, L., Shaw, J. (2004), Improving children’s behaviour and attendance through the use of parenting programmes: an examination of good practice, DfES

Harris, A., Andrew-Power, K., Goodall, J. (2009), Do Parents Know They Matter?: Raising Achievement Through Parental Engagement, Network Continuum

Leat, D. (2001), Thinking through geography, Chris Kington Publishing

Aim

To examine the current level of parental engagement activity within the school community against OFSTED’s criteria and enable the facilitator to monitor progress and record actions/strategies for further development.

Objectives

1. Raise awareness of the Ofsted requirement on parental engagement.
2. Collect valuable data to identify the current skills, knowledge and experience within the school community on parental engagement.
3. Devise a school action plan to improve parental engagement within the school community.
Getting prepared for Ofsted

How can the knowledge gained throughout the training sessions support the SEF/SIP process?

Throughout this training toolkit staff will be given the opportunity to examine their current levels of skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to ‘raising achievement through parental engagement’.

Firstly, by completing the parental engagement audits.

Secondly, at the end of each training session the teacher will collect the ideas generated throughout the session by completing the action planning template.

The data collected by both these tools will help the SMT to complete a whole-school audit on parental engagement. The information collected in this document may support the SEF/SIP process on parental engagement.

What will be evaluated

According to ‘The Evaluation Schedule for Schools’ July 2009, inspectors should evaluate:

- The extent to which the school takes account of parents’ and carers’ views and how well they are involved in contributing to decision-making about whole-school matters.
- The extent to which the school enables parents and carers to support, and make decisions about, their own children’s learning, well-being and development.
- The quality of the school’s communication with parents and carers (Ofsted).

What will be taken into account

The guidance inspectors are asked to take account of includes:

- The effectiveness with which the school communicates with all parents and carers with parental responsibility, including those who may be reluctant or unsure about approaching the school, such as mothers and fathers not living with their children, those accessing additional services and those whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The views expressed by parents and carers through the Ofsted survey carried out at the point of inspection and any survey information provided by the school.
- The frequency and quality of the school’s communications with parents and carers regarding the achievement, well-being and development of their children, including, for example: reporting arrangements; parent/teacher consultation arrangements; clarity of lines of communication; response rates and complaints procedures.
- The frequency and quality of the school’s communications with parents and carers regarding important school developments, including the ways the school has used the views of stakeholders to influence the school’s priorities.
- The mechanisms for helping parents to support their children’s learning, for example through: information provided, activities for parents and carers and support for specific groups and individuals.

(Tackling the new SEF Ofsted school inspection project, July 2009.)

Key quote

The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers is one of the eight judgments under ‘Leadership and management.

(Ofsted)
The overall aim of the audit tool is to work towards the five strands of parental engagement, those being:

- Having positive and strong relationships with parents and carers.
- Regularly receiving feedback from parents and carers.
- Keeping parents and carers informed of pupil progress.
- Informing parents how to help their pupils.
- Ensuring lines of communication with parents and carers are open and are varied.

The parental engagement audit has been designed to help you recognise and celebrate the areas that are currently working within your school community, and to identify those which need further development. It will then be used to inform the planning and strategy for the School Action Plan on parental engagement.

Parental engagement audit (PEA)

Within this toolkit there are five types of parental engagement audits corresponding with the different roles that exist within a school community:

- PSA.
- SMT.
- Middle Managers.
- Classroom Teachers.
- Support Staff.

A parent questionnaire has also been included.

**When should you complete it?**

The audit tool not only helps staff assess their current levels of activity against Ofsted requirements, but also encourages them to become more aware of the role they play in improving parental engagement.

We would advise that staff complete the audit before they attend the training sessions. This information will support the plenary section of the training sessions.

**Steps to completing the parental engagement audit tool:**

- Read the statements.
- Give yourself a grade.
- Provide evidence to support your decision.
- List further areas for improvement.

**Parental engagement - whole-school audit**

*(to be completed by SMT only)*

Using the information you have compiled from the training sessions:

1. Give the grade you think you should get from the Ofsted grade descriptions detailed on the following pages.
2. Give the evidence(s) to support this.

**Reflect on the following:**

A  Is your approach consistent?
B  How many different methods do you use?
C  Are the same parents engaging with you, or different ones depending on the method?
D  What do you do when something doesn't work?
E  What do you do when something does work?
F  What other information/professional development do you need?
Strands to parental engagement

1 Relationship with parents
Outstanding (1)
The school has a highly positive relationship with all groups of parents and carers, particularly those groups of parents and carers who might traditionally find working with the school difficult.

Good (2)
The school has a highly positive relationship with most groups of parents and carers.

Satisfactory (3)
The school has a generally positive relationship with parents and carers.

Inadequate (4)
Communication between the school and parents and carers, or particular groups of parents and carers, is poor.

2 Seeking the views of parents
Outstanding (1)
Parents and carers are heavily involved in decision-making on key matters through well-established procedures.

Good (2)
The school regularly asks parents and carers for their views and ensures that these are used to inform important decisions about whole school matters.

Satisfactory (3)
The school regularly seeks and takes account of the views of different groups of parents about important issues.

Inadequate (4)
The school does not take sufficient account of parents’ and carers’ views, or the views of particular groups of parents and carers, so that they have too little say in decisions about whole-school matters.

3 Keeping parents informed of pupil progress
Outstanding (1)
Parents and carers are exceptionally well informed about all aspects of their own children’s achievement, well-being and development.

Good (2)
Parents and carers are kept well informed about their children’s achievement, well-being and development.

Satisfactory (3)
There is a regular exchange of information with parents and carers, providing them with adequate information on how well their children are achieving, their well-being and development.

Inadequate (4)
Parents and carers, or particular groups of parents and carers, are not sufficiently involved in supporting and making decisions about their children’s well-being.
Strands to parental engagement (cont.)

4 Informing parents how to help their pupils

Outstanding (1)
The school provides tailored guidance and information about precise ways parents and carers can support their children’s learning across a wide range of subjects.

Good (2)
The school helps parents and carers to support their children’s learning in different ways.

Satisfactory (3)
There are some general strategies to help parents and carers support their child’s learning.

Inadequate (4)
Parents and carers, or particular groups of parents and carers, are not sufficiently involved in supporting and making decisions about their children’s well-being.

5 Lines of communication

Outstanding (1)
All groups of parents and carers are able to communicate with the school through a wide range of media. The school’s systems for keeping parents informed about aspects of its work ensure that parents and carers have coordinated, up-to-date, accurate and timely information.

Good (2)
There are clear and accessible channels for parents and carers to communicate with the school which the school actively encourages parents to pursue. The school’s systems for keeping parents informed about aspects of its work run smoothly.

Satisfactory (3)
There are clear and accessible channels for parents and carers to communicate with the school. The school generally keeps parents up-to-date about the main events in its calendar.

Inadequate (4)
Communication between the school and parents and carers, or particular groups of parents and carers, is poor.

6 Effective information systems

Outstanding (1)
The school’s information systems ensure parents and carers have coordinated, up-to-date, accurate and timely information.

Good (2)
The school has smooth-running systems for keeping parents informed about its work.

Satisfactory (3)
The school generally keeps parents up-to-date about the main events in the calendar.

7 Impact of parental engagement

Outstanding (1)
Consistent and productive partnerships ensure parents and carers are strongly engaged with their children’s learning and the school’s work.

Good (2)
The effective liaison with parents contributes to improvement in pupils’ achievement, well-being and development.
Ofsted grade descriptors for parental engagement

Outstanding (1)
The school has a highly positive relationship with all groups of parents and carers, particularly those groups of parents and carers who might traditionally find working with the school difficult.

Parents and carers are heavily involved in decision-making on key matters through well-established procedures. Parents and carers are exceptionally well informed about all aspects of their own children’s achievement, well-being and development. The school provides tailored guidance and information about precise ways parents and carers can support their children’s learning across a wide range of subjects. All groups of parents and carers are able to communicate with the school through a wide range of media.

Consistent and productive partnerships ensure that parents and carers are strongly engaged with their children’s learning and the school’s work. The school’s systems for keeping parents informed about aspects of its work run smoothly.

Good (2)
The school has a highly positive relationship with most groups of parents and carers. The school regularly asks parents and carers for their views and ensures that these are used to inform important decisions about whole-school matters. Parents and carers are kept well informed about their children’s achievement, well-being and development.

The school helps parents and carers to support their children’s learning in different ways. The effective liaison with parents and carers contributes to improvements in pupils’ achievement, well-being and development. There are clear and accessible channels for parents and carers to communicate with the school which the school actively encourages parents to pursue. The school’s systems for keeping parents informed about aspects of its work run smoothly.

Satisfactory (3)
The school has a generally positive relationship with parents and carers. The school regularly seeks and takes account of the views of different groups of parents about important issues.

There is a regular exchange of information with parents and carers, providing them with adequate information on how well their children are achieving, their well-being and development.

There are some general strategies to help parents and carers support their child’s learning.

There are clear and accessible channels for parents and carers to communicate with the school. The school generally keeps parents up-to-date about the main events in its calendar.

Inadequate (4)
Parents and carers, or particular groups of parents and carers, are not sufficiently involved in supporting and making decisions about their children’s well-being.

The school does not take sufficient account of parents’ and carers’ views, or the views of particular groups of parents and carers, so that they have too little say in decisions about whole-school matters.

Communication between the school and parents and carers, or particular groups of parents and carers, is poor.
If you have any queries regarding this toolkit please email: training@shs.org.uk

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