



Enhance parental engagement support case studies

Exceed Institute
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Introduction

Following a competitive process in September 2020, Bradford Opportunity Area commissioned Exceed Institute, part of Exceed Academies Trust, to provide universal and enhanced support to Bradford schools in response to the outcomes of the June 2019 parental engagement survey of completed by 128 Bradford nursery and primary schools.

In the survey, school identified three priorities:

- Funding to support schools to enhance their parental engagement strategy
- Training for support staff, such as Parental Support Workers
- A focused improvement strategy for their school

The Opportunity Area invested £175,000 to support schools. Universal support was provided, including a parental engagement conference; access to the EEF guidance report '*Working with parents to improve childrens' learning*'; a range of case studies were collated from Bradford schools with effective parental engagement practice and published; and network meetings for Parental Involvement Workers (PIWs). Exceed Institute later extended this to a six-event training programme for PIWs.

The schools featured in this booklet were also supported with £7,000 grants to develop a research-informed strategy to improve parental engagement in their school. These schools were selected based on the outcomes of the survey. They developed action/implementation plans with the support of a system leader.

- The parental engagement survey report and resources and case studies can be accessed here: <https://www.exceedacademiestrust.co.uk/pes/>
- The EEF guidance report is available here: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/school-themes/parental-engagement/>

The case studies included in this booklet reflect the work undertaken by the schools in receipt of the grant funding. The document the resources, strategy and impact that each school accessed, implemented and measured. They hope other schools find these beneficial in considering developing their own provision and practice.

It should be noted that the enhanced support commenced in the weeks prior to the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring term of 2020. This affected schools' ability to implement their projects and to assess the full impact of their investment. The projects were extended to Christmas 2020, some into January 2021, to provide schools with more time and opportunity to maximise the impact of their project. However, even with this extension, schools were reporting back to Exceed Institute whilst many restrictions and social distancing were still in place and many pupils and teachers were accessing learning or working from home due to the need to isolate. These were far from ideal circumstances. But, in this context, we're pleased and proud to share the work they were able to undertake in these difficult circumstances.

The schools wish to thank Bradford Opportunity Area for their investment in parental engagement at their school.

St Clare's Catholic Primary School, Bradford

Headteacher: Mrs Carmel Utting

Other staff involved: Mr Tom Kowalski, Mrs Lynne Davey, Mrs Cath Furniss, Mrs Nicola Simmons

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

office@stclares.bradford.sch.uk

Case study focus:

- Preparing for effective parental engagement
- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork

Focus on your case study

Our aim was to increase parental engagement through replacing traditional paper-based communication with an app-based system.

We also sought to increase parental engagement through working more closely with parents and giving them roles in school.

About your school

In the 2020 Spring School Census, St Clare's Catholic Primary School had 213 pupils on roll (the primary phase national average is 282 pupils). There are more boys (51.6%) than girls (48.4%). 33.3% of the school cohort is eligible for Free School Meals compared to 66.7% of the cohort who are not. 39% of the school cohort is eligible for Pupil Premium compared to 61% of the cohort that are not.

38% of the school cohort speaks English as an additional language compared to 62% of the cohort that do not.

20.7% of the school cohort has SEN Support, 2.3% have an EHC Plan or statement and 18.3% receive SEN Support. Nationally 12.6% of the primary phase cohort has SEN Support and 1.6% have an EHC Plan.

St Clare's Catholic Primary School is situated in the Bradford East area of the city within the Eccleshill ward. 87.4% of the school cohort live in the 30% most deprived areas of England. Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the school is ranked 34th out of 160 primary schools (where 1 equals the most deprived).

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Although staff have worked hard over many years to establish and maintain good relationships with parents, parental engagement in children's learning, as well as participation in wider school

activities such as school fayres, can be low. This is due to a number of factors: parental illiteracy, language barriers, lack of valuing education.

We wanted to try and tackle these issues by making communication easier and thus engaging more parents.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

- We conducted an initial parental engagement survey which showed that many parents in our setting were disengaged in their children's learning.
- Recommendation 3 from the EEF Guidance Report into 'Working With Parents To Support Children's Learning' Summary of Recommendations suggested: 'Well-designed school communications can be effective for improving attainment and a range of other outcomes, such as attendance'.
- In light of this, we sought opinions from staff and parents, and decided to use an EdTech parental communication product (ParentApp) to streamline our communications with parents and make them easier to engage.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

We purchased the ParentApp system.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

Members of the school's Senior Leadership Team attended a Parental Engagement Conference and shared potential ideas with other SLT colleagues in school. It was decided that school would benefit from the use of ParentApp as a new communication tool.

Due to the school closure relating to COVID-19, our ability to launch our new ParentApp communication system was delayed and thus the app went live at the end of October 2020.

The school also wanted to increase parental engagement and link this to engagement in reading which was another school priority. Recommendation 2 from the EEF Summary of Recommendations for 'Working With Parents To Support Children's Learning' suggested: 'For young children, promoting shared book reading should be a central component of any parental engagement approach. Home learning activities, such as playing with letters and numbers, are also linked to improved outcomes. Tips, support, and resources can make home activities more effective- for example, where they prompt longer and more frequent conversations during book reading... carefully selected books plus advice and support can be beneficial for supporting reading.'

With this in mind, we also sought to introduce an initiative from the National Literacy Trust called 'Inspiring Parents'. This 6-week intervention recruits 'Parent Champions' to engage parents not only in improving their child's literacy but giving them the skills that will allow them to train other parents and build better relationships between school and the wider community.

Due to the initial school closure and the lasting restrictions in school caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'Parent Champions' initiative cannot go ahead at present. The school's SLT still intend to initiate this when restrictions allow.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

Since the launch of ParentApp in late October, engagement has been positive and staff and parents are becoming more familiar with how to use the system. The impact of the app is yet to be realised due to the short time since the launch, but initial signs are encouraging with 66% of parents already actively using the app. As we phase out our old communication system (Teachers 2 Parents) in January 2021, we are confident that the remaining parents will become active app users.

This system is revolutionising our parental engagement in a number of ways. Firstly, the fact newsletters and other parental notices are delivered directly onto the parents' mobile phones means that teachers and parents are not reliant on children bringing letters home in bags which can easily become lost or left behind in school. It has also meant that school has a much clearer oversight as to what has and has not been read by parents, as the app's administrative dashboard clearly displays when messages have been read.

Secondly, it is having a positive impact on permission slips and other necessary items like consent forms. The app provides parents with the ability to access and sign consent forms with the swipe of a finger on their mobile device, meaning there is a much better chance of forms being completed and returned instantaneously. Furthermore, because the app links directly to the school website and Twitter feed, parents have all the information they need in one easy to access app and as such, it is now much easier for parents to find any information they are looking for.

Moreover, it is already having a positive impact on engagement in the uptake on school trips. For example, the permission form for the school's Year 6 residential has been sent to parents digitally through the app, with no paper-based letters being sent. This ease of access has meant that more parents have signed their children up than in previous years and it is hoped that this will be mirrored in other year groups when trips are organised.

As the use of the app becomes more embedded among parents, the school is confident that paper-based communication will become redundant, with the impact being that parental engagement in school life will increase, as the promising early signs have shown.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

If planning to introduce a new EdTech solution for parental communication, survey the parents to ensure they have access to a smartphone with the facility to download the app.

Train a pool of staff members in using the app proficiently so they can assist parents who are having problems setting up the technology.

Ensure teachers and staff use the app to communicate regularly and consistently across the school so that parents see the value in using the app.

Be persistent in chasing up parents yet to engage - aim for a 90% uptake.

St John the Evangelist Catholic Primary School

Headteacher: Sarah Kenyon (Head of School, Ben Lavin (Executive Headteacher)

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

sarah.kenyon@sje.bcwcac.co.uk

Case study focus:

- Preparing for effective parental engagement
- Supporting parents to have high academic expectations for their child
- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork

Focus on your case study

Provide practical strategies to support learning at home

About your school

St John the Evangelist Catholic Primary School had 206 pupils on roll. The school population has been largely static between Early Years and Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. 10.6% of the school cohort is eligible for Free School Meals and 15.4% of the school cohort is eligible for Pupil Premium.

The three main ethnicity groups that attend the school are British (75%), Any other White background (7.7%) and White/Black Caribbean (4.3%). St John the Evangelist Catholic Primary School is situated in the Bradford South area of the city within the Royds ward.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

At St John the Evangelist, our parents were happy to attend assemblies which included their children and to engage with school for parent consultation evenings but take up was quite low when invited to events linked to the children's learning such as reading or maths workshops. The parents did not engage nearly as much when it involved the children's learning and how they could help at home and at school. School wanted to find more creative ways to get the parents involved in classroom life / their child's learning and to engage with their children in more family activities that would develop skills out of school too.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

We started by sending out a questionnaire to the parents asking for their opinions and interests in what they would like school to offer / how confident they were in helping their children with a range of school life. We also asked when the best times of day were to involve parents. With the staff in school we sat and looked at where the greatest need was for parental involvement and how we could encourage more parents to engage with the activities and workshops being offered.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

We started by purchasing Marvellous Me (messaging service) to offer messages / personalised texts / badges / awards and to be able to set activities and tasks for the children. We bought in resources to use at workshops for parents and give small work packs for home use as an incentive to those who attended. We have bought display boards for the outside of the building to show curriculum newsletters and 'Knowledge organiser' for the children's learning and we have used money for copying and printing to make sure that parents who are unable to attend workshops still get copies of booklets and information shared.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

Staff prepared a **parental engagement calendar** which was added to the website / sent out on parent messages and as paper copies with a variety of activities / meetings and tried to add events at different times. We tried to arrange activities that could be held at a range of different times with plenty of notice (one of the things our parents said we didn't do). The calendar was advertised widely and parents were encouraged to join in where possible.

School introduced '**Knowledge organisers**' to go alongside the curriculum newsletters that already went out to parents. These helped the parents to break down what the children were covering in school and in each topic into smaller chunks for discussing and researching at home. They contained vocabulary that the children should be able to explain to their parents and that the parents could talk about with their children so that the parents were taking a more active part in their child's classroom learning. (One of the things parents had said – especially with KS2 – was that they were generally unaware of what their child was studying in school, as they never 'shared' when they got home). These knowledge organisers are shared via Marvellous Me, put on the website, sent out as paper copies and are advertised on the noticeboards on the outside of the building.

We adapted an '**Activity Passport**' to match our topics in school. This was originally from the DfE but we changed some of the activities to match our children and the work covered in school. These were used to encourage the parents to work in partnership with the school, with the challenge to complete half at home and school would complete half with the children. This was a new initiative which we started just before lockdown but gave us a set of activities to keep the link with parents who were struggling with home learning because a lot of the activities weren't 'academic' and they felt more confident trying them with their children.

The introduction of **Marvellous Me** not only let the parents know what was coming up but also initiated conversations with parents and children about what the children have been learning / how their children have been achieving. School not only send out reminders and general messages from the office but each class teacher regularly sends personalised badges and awards for work that has been completed in class, keeping parents informed about successes and informs about the work being covered. Reminders are also sent to look at our Twitter feed on our web page to see regular updates of the work that is being covered in classes.

School have introduced a '**Green reading**' system – starting with KS1 and now including KS2 to highlight the importance of regular reading at home and its benefits. Children are encouraged to read (5 times per week) with or to an adult. A reading record should then be signed by the parents

to show this. Stickers are given out at the end of each week for 'Green readers' and if the child has been a 'Green reader' for the half term then there is a party for those children.

Prior to lockdown, school had begun a series of **'join the class'** activities in school where parents could join a Maths / English / Reading session in their child's classroom. Craft activity workshops had previously been well attended but again not the 'academic' ones. These had begun to build numbers of parents engaging with their children's learning but they are obviously currently on hold with COVID restrictions but staff are trying to be more creative with how we can still get this information to parents during this time and to keep them engaged.

Prior to lockdown, to highlight the importance of parents reading with their children, parents were invited into school to read to their child's class as **'Surprise storytellers'** – limited success with KS2 but better with KS1. Since COVID restrictions though, we have invited 'Surprise storytellers' to send in videos of themselves reading a story for a class which has had a more positive response (as they do not need to brave enough to sit in front of a KS2 class in person). The Christmas storyteller has also been very successful and this is definitely something we will be looking to continue and develop.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

Marvellous Me has improved communications with the parents in school. When a questionnaire was sent out about how they felt about Marvellous Me and its uses, not only did we get more responses than usual to the questionnaire but also it was extremely positive with the feedback. 98% said that it was very easy to use and understand; 75% of answers said that it helped them to know more about the work their children had been doing in class; 70% said that the badges and message had helped to start discussions about what the children had been learning in class; 68% said it helped them to understand how well their child was achieving (through awards and badges) and 90% said their child was really proud when a badge / award came through via Marvellous Me. This is a very positive result for us if it makes the parents talk with the children about their learning and successes because it shows a greater engagement with school life, which wasn't previously as strong. We have 100% take up by parents in school to setting up the App on their devices.

Our **parental engagement calendar** is giving parents notice of dates but encouraging more parents to take part where previously they may not have wanted to be involved. The activities to see learning in the **'join the classroom'** activities were initially approached with caution with quite low numbers. Feedback taken from the attendees was very positive and not only did they come back for another session but they started recommending it to other parents. We had book and breakfast events with parents coming in and reading whilst being offered breakfast, maths and phonics lessons being shared with parents in KS1 and maths lessons being shared in KS2 – a lot of parents commented on how much they're needed to learn themselves before they could help their own children with the Year 6 maths.

Unfortunately, these are on hold until restrictions are lifted but we aim to offer them again as soon as possible.

'Activity Passports' have been very well received – during Lockdown, we had 65 families engaged with their children's passports from different classes (a good number for us). Since September, we

have all children with some passport activities completed because the children are being given the opportunities in class but also have 75 families who have completed activities at home with their children. This is continuing to rise with messages of encouragement via Marvellous Me.

Green reading scheme is showing improvements in children's engagement with reading in class. It is difficult to judge by attainment because of the loss of learning during lockdown but engagement with the scheme has risen from 30% of KS1 taking part to over 50% of the whole school now engaging with the green reading scheme. The message is getting through via 'pester power' when the children are not invited to the party at the end of the half term and the children are definitely keener each half term.

Knowledge organisers have received positive feedback on our Parental engagement questionnaires. Feedback from parents like that they know the topics being learnt about in class and others have commented how they like having it stuck on the fridge to 'check' their child's understanding of the key vocabulary in the work they are covering.

'Surprise Storytellers' has definitely increased in numbers since we have moved to video presentations but the children in class are extremely excited to see whose parent will be on the video and are then enthused to go home and ask their parents to join in too. This will continue as an activity on our 'Engagement calendar'.

With the work we have undertaken, we were hoping to see not only an increased level of engagement with the parent's involvement in their child's learning but also a more positive attitude in class, leading to increased attainment. Obviously, COVID has affected not only the number of events and engagement plans that we had but it has definitely made us, as a school think about how we can work with parents to help their children with their SEMH needs as well as their academic learning. This will continue to be an area for development at St John's but we are pleased with the results we are now seeing. This time of restrictions has also meant that the staff think more creatively about how we engage our parents in the children's learning – always a positive!

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

Looking at different ways to engage parents in their children's learning and in the life of the school can be developed at a range of different levels – some simple, quick wins and other needing more of an investment in time and resources. The more we can engage our parents in the children's learning and development as a whole person, the more engaged and positive our children will be about school life. Try small steps and build to something bigger. We have future plans now that we wouldn't have thought about doing without working as a team with all stakeholders. Communication is the key.

St Luke's Church of England Primary, Bradford

Head teacher: Gemma Zulu

Other staff involved: Claire Dignam and Claire Thornton (PIW's), Lynsey Hodgson (INCO)

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice: 01274 639374

Case study focus:

- Preparing for effective parental engagement
- Offering more sustained and intensive support where needed

Focus on your case study

To improve parental engagement in school activities. As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold this turned into much more of a focus on supporting parents/families requiring intensive support during periods of lockdown and return to school.

About your school

St Luke's is a small 1 form entry primary school. Our catchment area is wide and we take families mainly from Eccleshill, Ravenscliffe and Fagley with some families from other local areas. St Luke's is a church school with strong links with the church next door. 18% of our pupils are entitled to FSM.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Although there has always been many parental activities for parents to attend at school the uptake was generally low with some events having little or no attendance. The school has a supportive SOS (Supporters of St Luke's) PTA group in place who support the school with fundraising opportunities. What appeared to be missing was a PIW worker who could develop and build positive relationships with our more difficult to reach parents in order to encourage them to come into the school environment.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

The first thing we then did was send out a letter/email introducing ourselves, what our roles were and the support we could provide. We launched our Parent and toddler group and this gave us an opportunity to really see what parents wanted to be involved with in school this proved to be very useful information.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

Two members of staff already in post in school were given 'PIW' focussed hours as part of their existing roles.

Resources were purchased for the setting up of a Parent and Toddler, maths and English workshops including the cost of hiring out the school basement from the church.
The school signed up to the 'FareShare' scheme.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

The first step in the project was to introduce informal, 'non-threatening' activities which parents were able to engage with to begin breaking down barriers between school and home. Many of our parents felt nervous attending more formal events such as maths/English meetings for a variety of reasons, language barriers, own prior bad experiences of school, lack of own academic ability etc.

The setting up of a parents 'Cuppa and a Chat and 'Book and a Bagel' sessions in the autumn term allowed parents to come into school in a relaxed, non-formal environment and begin to build up a rapport/relationship with our new PIW's.

The introduction of a weekly 'Parent and Toddler Group' further enabled parents to attend school within an informal environment where they were able to express concerns/discuss problems with our PIW's whilst their younger children were entertained!

Once these sessions were embedded and trust was building up between the school and parents weekly 'maths and English' workshops were introduced. Parents were invited to attend the sessions alongside their child where they were able to engage with a range of fun learning activities assisted by input from the PIW's and where possible the child's class teacher to share expertise and ideas for engaging with their child's learning at home.

Unfortunately as things were really getting off the ground the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The work already done to date proved invaluable during the lockdown period in supporting our most vulnerable families. Our hardest to reach parents, who are often our most vulnerable, had built positive relationships with our PIW's and were not afraid or embarrassed to reach out for help where needed. Our PIW's continued to support families delivering food parcels, home learning packs and conducted doorstep visits where required.

Our PIW's and Inclusion Mentor continue to support families as the pandemic continues in the following ways:

- Weekly hamper deliveries using food donations from the FareShare project
- Signposting families to appropriate mental health support
- Conducting home visits and working closely with families where attendance is a concern
- Applying for Christmas hampers for families through the Bradford North Foodbank

What impact has this had? How do you know?

The feedback we have had from parents has been very positive, from speaking to parents in the playground on a daily basis both at home time and in a morning, to receiving phone calls and emails and supportive comments on social media it is apparent we have reached many families. Lots of our hard-to-reach families are now engaging with us are becoming more responsive to our offers of support. Through our non-judgemental and friendly approach we are now engaged with a number of families on a weekly basis, from a weekly supportive phone call home to a daily check in with a child, providing uniform requests and just been generally available throughout every school day the impact has been significant. Parents and carers wellbeing alongside their children has been our main priority throughout the pandemic and by meeting their SEMH needs we've found that the family as a whole has felt supported and parents felt confident in our ability as a school to let us provide help when and where it is needed.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

Reaching out to parents can be difficult particularly hard to reach parents, what worked especially well for us was playground engagement actually being a face in the playground, greeting them with a smile and a good morning. Lots of conversations not necessarily about their child's education. Many of those conversations then led to parents talking about problems they might be facing which then eventually as relationships grew led to support and help from school.

Hoyle Court Primary School, Bradford

Head teacher: Tim Phillips

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

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Case study focus:

- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork

Focus on your case study

Developing greater communication between Teachers / Leaders and parents with a focus on promoting positive learning behaviours

About your school

- There are 301 children on roll.
- 65% of children are White British. The remaining 35% are made up of 13 other ethnic backgrounds and around 17% of children have English as an Additional Language; this is broadly in line with national averages.
- In terms of children with Special Educational Needs (13%), disadvantaged children (21%), FSM (18%), looked after children (2.3%) and those who are Previously Looked After (1%), the school is broadly in line with national averages. For pupils with an EHCP (3%), the school is above national average.
- The school's deprivation indicator places it in the average quintile nationally. The school has expanded three-fold in ten years and takes higher proportions of children from deprived backgrounds in wider parts of the city.
- The Head teacher is supported by a Deputy Head teacher, SENDCO and Key Stage Leaders.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Although our school has a range of embedded methods for communicating with parents, these tended to be very conventional and one-way. These also were almost exclusively communication *from* Leaders *to* parents. We needed Teachers communicating more fluidly and frequently with parents. We have supportive parents but in parental feedback they stated that they did not always feel they received enough information about their children's learning. It was also the case that Teachers 1:1 communication with parents has been limited, resulting in not only a lack of academic information being provided, but also that relating to pastoral, behaviour and celebrations of positive news. We also needed a more secure way to obtain confidential information, e.g. that relating to consent and personal details. In addition, our website was not user-friendly (mobile friendly) and was not being accessed on a regular basis.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

I composed a detailed timeline for the establishment of a new parental communications APP and integrated website. This included consultations with leaders, staff and a comprehensive consultation with parent representatives. Once all views were gathered we provided training for all staff. We then ensured very clear communication to parents as to how the new APP would work. We then worked with Teachers on the content and nature of their communications to parents.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

Following research, we invested our funding with 'ParentApp', a provider based in Liverpool, who had presented at the Parental Engagement Conference, organised by Exceed Institute. The app is fully integrated into a brand-new website. It also provides 2-way parental / Teacher communication and a range of other tools to support parental engagement. For a 3-year package, this cost approximately £6,500.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

We purchased a new messaging and communications app. This is because we were running 2 communication systems to communicate with parents. We also redeveloped our website. Our website was not mobile friendly and was not integrated into our messaging system.

We wanted an effective parental engagement tool that would be easy for parents so that they could participate in and be informed about their child's progress, and give them an easy, secure route to update important information. This included home details, contact information and the ability for school to contact all key adults in a child's family (e.g. Grandparents).

A representative from ParentApp visited school to listen to what we needed and gave a full demonstration on what they could offer. Following parental consultation (see above), and once the decision had been taken to go with 'ParentApp', on-site training was provided for school leaders.

We rolled out the new APP on 1st October 2020, although this was originally planned for summer 2020. Due to Covid restrictions, this needed to be delayed.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

All teachers, leaders and administrative staff now communicate more fluidly with parents. This includes Teachers now providing 'real time' updates on children's learning and positive learning behaviours. For example, a child (ren) may have demonstrated excellent listening skills in a maths lesson; the Teacher will then type a supportive, complimentary message to parents(s) whilst the children are present with the Teacher- and press send. The power this has to support positive reinforcement is highly significant.

Additional messaging is now also provided on an ongoing basis on, e.g. attendance, homework and 'reminders' for enrichment days etc. These are all now personalised, and Teachers have ownership of what information is shared and when. Electronic copies of school reports and other historically paper-based communication is saving significant resources- both financially and in

administration time. Additional time is also being saved as we are now able to collect up-to-date information about, e.g. medical requirements, dietary preferences, menu choices for lunch, consent for use of images etc. All these are now non-paper based, meaning GDPR requirements can also be safely adhered to. Parental questionnaires can also now be completed via the app, meaning up to date parental feedback can be gathered through the year – not just annual on paper questionnaires.

We also now have the ability to notify parents straight away about school closure. This has proved very useful when closing bubbles due Covid cases. We can also send instant notifications when a child is absent. This saves on time, postage and telephone costs; being able to click a button to Individual parents, classes, year groups or whole school time and resource efficient

We now intend to develop the app further by using the integrated 'parent's evenings booking tool'. We also plan to use the parent payment facility and for gaining parental consent e.g. for trips and vaccinations. In summary, we aim to use the new technology to provide a fully integrated communications, bookings and payment system for parents; a one-stop-shop for everything – all available via parent's mobile phones.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

- Research different providers carefully. Some may appear very similar but packages of what your funding can buy vary enormously – read the small print.
- Look into the finer details of what your funding secures, e.g. does an app provider offer text messaging as part of the package, or is this a 'bolt-on' which will cost money, will your website allow you to present key documents and information in the same way as your existing website – or will these be available only through 'bolt-ons'?
- Make sure that you are providing what your parents want. Be clear on what it is the new app / website will do better than existing approaches. Your outcomes should be shared clearly with staff so that intended goals can be achieved – be specific in what you want to see and when.
- Provide training which ensure everyone feels confident and supported.
- Track the progress carefully – to ensure early progress is maintained.

St John's Church of England Primary School, Bradford

Headteacher: Andrew Knight

Other staff involved: Karen Illingsworth

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

Case study focus:

- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork

Case study focus

The school's aim was to improve and maintain effective communication with parents with a system whereby we could get information out speedily and not rely on printed letters home, which in many cases do not reach home.

About your school

St John's is a two-form entry primary school, with a nursery attached. In total we have 449 pupils on role. The school is in a deprived area of Bradford serving mainly the families of the Holmewood and Bierley estates.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

We wanted to address the issue of getting information speedily and effectively to all parents and carers of the school. Previously we used a variety of mediums to send information including hard copy letters, texts and e-mails where necessary. Letters were easily lost; sometimes not taken home; parents failed to check book bags. We wanted a way to ensure that all parents/carers received information relevant to them at the same time. We felt keeping all the information in one place was the way forward and after doing our research decided to embrace the Parent App option having listened to parents' use of smart phones.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

We did our research and invited two app providers into school to discuss their product.

We spoke to many of the parents who may have been slower on the uptake, we explained the app, we helped them on a one-one basis upload the app onto their phone and explained how it would be used.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

We chose to go with ParentApp Connect.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

We added all staff to the app as an admin user and also set a class of 'staff' up to enable us to send messages to staff too. We made all staff aware that we were moving our communication over to the app (eventually the current system for sending SMS messages and e-mails would cease at the end of the contract). We had some initial in-house training provided by the app company for key staff members. We then initially started with Y2 parents/carers, believing we would perhaps need to roll out in stages. The take up was immediate and immense, so we rolled it out to the rest of the school. Within a few short weeks we had 100% of parents/carers active on the app. We explained to parents/carers that all information from school, going forward, would be provided via the app.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

The app has already proved a great asset to the school and has been incredibly useful given the year 2020 has turned out. We have been able to get information out to parents/carers and we are extremely impressed by the speed the app gets information out. We have been able to keep our school families updated with Covid information and changes to school procedures and safety measures immediately. Reams of paper have been saved, much time has been saved where previously staff would print out the letters and then name them for the children in their class. It has been an invaluable tool throughout these difficult months where parents do not have the same face to face contact with school staff as they previously enjoyed.

We have been able to maintain communication and support to all our families with comprehensive information. Added to this parents/carers have access to all other school information in one place, e.g. school policies, term dates etc. and links to information on the web site. We are able to send information to the whole school, to classes or groups or target individual parents. Parents/carers are also able to change their personal information via the app and send it into school, saving them phoning school or visiting the office. They can also send in medical appointments (signed) which can be immediately put onto CPOMS. Messages can be sent immediately as a push notification.

Considerably more children are accessing remote learning than ever before. Obviously, this has been required by the necessity for remote learning during Lockdown 1 and Isolating children in the Autumn 2020 term. In March, no children in KS2 access SEESAW. Having distributed individual logins for Seesaw via the app to 120 KS2 children (due to bubble closures) 108 of these children have access Seesaw from home. The distribution of the logins via the app was seamless and instant when the bubble closed.

As a result of the app, the children are also making more than expected progress during bubble closures because pupils and parents are able to efficiently communicate to each other about their learning. Some children have even downloaded the app onto their personal tablet/phone!

In October 2020 we completed our annual Autumn Parent Consultations (via phone). We would usually conduct a paper parent survey in school. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this was not possible. As a result, we used the app to share a parent survey and received 156 responses.

In September 2020 we opened a 'Praise a member of staff' survey on the app. Within 30 minutes of opening the survey, we received 59 responses! To date, we have received over 180 responses! Previously, our paper versions received less than half of these responses.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions, our attendance has remained high. The ability to send communications and information to parents quickly, and that they can refer back to previous letters, has certainly helped maintain this attendance level:

Pupil Premium 20/21	Non-Pupil Premium 2020/21	2020/21 difference
96.20%	97.80%	-1.60%

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

We would highly recommend this app to any school, it is easy to use, the support provided by the company is easily accessed and they are most helpful, no matter what the query.

Grove House Primary School, Bradford

Headteacher: Alex Summerscales

Other staff involved: Huma Raza

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice: 01274 636921

Case study focus:

- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork

Focus on your case study

Communication with parents across the school on operational, educational and well-being matters especially during the current period of uncertainty.

About your school

Grove House Primary School is a 2-form entry school in a disadvantaged area of Bradford. At the last OFSTED inspection, the school was graded as requires improvement. The school has 421 pupils registered on roll and a high percentage of pupil premium. The school has on site a Visual Impairment unit; some children travel a great distance to attend the school. The school has recently joined the Pennine Academies Yorkshire multi academy trust. Since returning to school in September many of the school plans had to be amended to take into consideration the covid restrictions and government guidelines. Due to this, the school have been unable to make as much progress as had been originally anticipated concerning parental engagement. School leaders has identified the importance of placing pupils' well-being at the forefront of the autumn term whilst actively supporting parents through this uncertain period of time.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Increasing parental engagement was a priority for the school, as parents would regularly contact the school, asking for information already shared as a letter. This was because the physical letter had either been lost or left in school. Resulting in parents not always being aware of school initiatives or changes to the regular school routines. The school office has to communicate with several parents relaying information that previously shared with the parents, which also meant inefficiency in the school office.

During the lockdown, some parents engaged well with the school whilst others struggled to maintain contact. We felt that senior leaders and teachers had made progress in developing relationships with all parents during this time, including the hard-to-reach parents.

Other reasons for developing parental engagement was to show the parents the importance of their support in their children's education. Historic opportunities to invite the parents into school, to engage with their children whether it be through reading or arts and craft were well received by parents and so the school have identified further opportunities for parents to engage and support learning. As the current climate did not allow for parents to visit the classrooms the school leaders decided to upload some of the children's learning on to Google

Classroom so that the children could share their best work with their parents in a covid secure way.

Relationships with parents were not as secure as the senior leaders in the school desired, this meant that parents would only contact the school when they had taken issue with something, now the parents will contact school when they want to talk about something important to them, share positive news and seek guidance for things that worry them.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

Before lockdown, the school had developed their website; all letters were available on the website. Still, some parents needed constant reminders to visit the website to view the misplaced letters, some parents engaged in this, and some did not. During the lockdown, the school website became the only place to find home learning activities for children across the school. It was resulting in more and more parents beginning to access the website and familiarising themselves with navigating it. Also, at this time, the school's Facebook page provided daily activities for parents to engage their children whilst school was closed. The Facebook posts also contained links to the school website to find out further information. Over this period, Facebook engagement data continued to increase, this meant more and more people were 'liking' the posts and commenting. Parents enjoys submitting their children's work through using the messaging function and the dedicated school email address. Through speaking to parents, the school realised that the parents engaged with the school when they could use their phones to do so. This led the school to research additional methods of communicating with parents whereby they had information arrive on to their phones.

The senior leaders in the school made themselves available to parents both before and after school so that they could speak to a wide range of parents, feedback was gathered and acted upon which indicated to parents that the school valued and respected their opinions. Parents spoke positively about Google Classroom for when remote learning needed to take place, they enjoyed looking at pieces of work their children had produced and the spoke about their worries in the current climate.

Regular school newsletters have been created for the parents to share new initiatives and parents have always has the opportunity to share their feedback on these with the school. Parents expressed safety concerns with social distancing in the playground; a new plan was put in place where parents felt safer.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

The school management information system changed from SIMS to Arbor earlier in the academic year, which was an easy to navigate user interface. Through conversations with the provider, the school realised that Arbor offered a smartphone app for parents to download free of charge. The school needed to ensure the data on the system was up to date: Correctly linking parents to their children. During the lockdown, the school administration team worked to build up to date contact details, including email addresses. The administration team undertook training sessions, had dedicated time to determine what the system could, and could not do and how parents

would be able to set up and register the app. School feel that as parents that in the coming term the school will focus on launching the Marvellous Me app, which will engage parents with their child's classroom learning and teacher, have welcomed this system.

School have plans in place to further support parental engagement opportunities by employing a lead practitioner who would also be the main point of contact for parents. This has not taken place yet as due to covid restrictions, there have been no opportunities to invite parents into school.

Resources to create a functional community room has been identified but due to the current climate, the school have not been able to adapt this space appropriately. Plans are for the adaption to be made over the summer of 2021 ready for a September launch.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

Relationships with parents developed through regular welfare calls made by the school to all families, directing parents to the Facebook page, school website and other online subscriptions so that the children had purposeful learning to complete when school was closed. Through launching the free school meal vouchers to vulnerable families, the school were able to develop relationships with families further and support them effectively.

Messages on Facebook and updated website entries allowed parents to remain well informed of the school and its activities; learning materials were frequently updated along with posting up to date homework calendars. The school systematically supported parents to download and register the app with their details so that children were linked to the right parents. Additional support over the telephone and face to face was offered for parents who were struggling to register the app. Soon after the app was launched, parents were encouraged to book consultation appointments through the app. This meant all parents had to download and install the app to access the available appointments.

A soon to be appointment parental engagement lead will work to establish online sessions with parents, school have developed a relationship with Bradford East Partnership and secured access to a number of parenting courses ranging from baby classes to talking teens. This will mean that parents requiring additional support will be able to access this through the school, further strengthening the relationship between the school and its parents.

Plans to establish a dedicated community room has been temporarily halted as the school prioritised the welfare of pupils returning to school specifically in year 6. The school identified the vulnerability of this cohort and decided to split the cohort into three classes of twenty children allowing for targeted teaching to take place. Moving into the next academic year this space will again become available for parents. Items to develop this into an inviting room have been made but these items have not yet been purchased, as storage within school is currently limited.

Text messages to individual parents, classes, year groups or to the whole school have been established so that parents again receive information in a timely fashion straight to their mobile phones. Previously the school used the text message system to share news such as children

passing their maths passport challenges and progressing to the text continent. School found that the children were very excited to know that their parents would be informed before they came to collect them at the end of the day and greet them with big smiles on their faces. This has led to the school purchasing the Marvellous Me app, so that class teachers and senior leaders can share positive praise directly with the parents such as celebrating academic achievement, giving reminders and sharing positive behavioural choices, instead of asking the school office to send out the text messages.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

The impact of the parents having an app that is on their smartphones has been that parents have received information promptly, messages with links to the school website to share letters. Parents have been able to message the school with information such as medical appointments or absences, meaning that they do not need to call the school but instead message at a time that is suitable to them. Parents can edit their contact information, which meant that contact details can be updated, resulting in up-to-date information being held by the school. Parents can add additional contact details for family members so that in the case of an emergency, the school have more than one contact number to call if needed. Parents have access to their children's attendance data, which means they can see if the data is rising or falling, which has helped reduce some attendance concerns.

Parents can book their children into breakfast club, after school clubs and pay for school trips and visits through the app. This facility allows parents to choose which days they need childcare and provides the school with up-to-date registers for these clubs. This means that there is a reduction in paperwork and the reports downloaded directly from the Arbor system. The system allows teachers to communicate with children through the app, but at present, we have not felt that it was required. If the teachers required to contact parents, then the system allows emails to be sent from the teacher without revealing their email address. For direct contact with the children, teachers have access to Google Classroom, and in the event of class closures, the teachers can communicate with their class via this platform. From the last check on the engagement level, 84% of parents across the school had been engaging with the app. The school is considering launching the Marvellous Me app, which would provide further opportunities for the parents to engage with their children's education. This is something the school will look into launching within the next term.

Parents have the confidence to approach senior leaders in the playground before and after school to discuss their concerns, parents have established strong relationships with staff so that if they ask for a phone call to discuss a concern they have the confidence that they will receive a call and that their concerns will be listened to with respect.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

Spend time carefully laying the foundations for building strong relationships with the parents, have senior leaders available and visible for parents to see and approach. Communicate any changes made due to parent feedback: This will indicate to parents that their views have been acted on.

Carefully planning the steps needed to download and register for anything online is essential. Sending parents the information that they need directly to their phone means that they are more likely to engage as they can access it immediately instead of waiting to go home and sit at the computer or laptop. Some parents will not have devices other than their phones available to them.

Provide support with anything technical that you are launching to the parents, some parents struggle with accessing technology, for some it causes anxiety. Therefore, ensure the school have identified super users who can provide support to resolve issues as parents who do not receive the support will be unlikely to try again with the technology. Having a reason for parents to download the app promptly will ensure that they engage with the technology. For us this was booking a parents evening appointment and being able to see work their child had completed and was proud to show them.

Southmere Primary Academy, Bradford

Headteacher: Rachael Binns

Other staff involved: Steph Tempest-Mitchell (Assistant Principal) Jane Hague (Learning Mentor) Leanne Crowther (Thrive Practitioner) Admin Team and all school staff

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

info@smpa.org.uk

Case study focus:

- Preparing for effective parental engagement
- Supporting parents to have high academic expectations for their child
- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork
- Offering more sustained and intensive support where needed

Focus on your case study

To provide a communication platform that was effective in communicating school activities, homework and remote learning to children and families as well as gauge parental views and feedback.

About your school

Southmere serves a multi-cultural area of Bradford in an area of high deprivation and has high EAL and NTE. Southmere has been a school judged inadequate by Ofsted and converted to a Delta Academy in January 2019. There has been a history of poor outcomes for children and lack of engagement from families due to poor communication systems. Attendance has historically been poor. There has been inconsistency in approach from class teachers which has led to families with multiple children in school to be confused and disillusioned with schools' motives.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Developing parental engagement has been a priority to address a range of factors. The most important being communicating the school's ethos and values to improve the community's view of the school. As part of this, it was required that the school's curriculum expectations were to be regularly communicated to families. This was to ensure they had a good understanding of how they could support their children at home. Communications were to include information on curriculum content, sharing work and activities that the children were completing in school as well as setting clear homework expectations. The intended outcome would be for Southmere families to actively engage in daily school life which involved parents working as partners. Improvements were anticipated to be evidenced through school attendance data as well as pupil outcomes.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

Staff were already using the reward aspect of Class Dojo and at the start of the national lockdown in March 2020 they were preparing weekly home learning plans for children on the school website and paper packs in school for families to collect. The communication aspect of Class Dojo was demonstrated to them in a staff meeting CPD session and pages were set up with ease.

Unfortunately, email addresses had historically not been collected from families in annual data collection returns. In March 2020 it became apparent that these would be needed for the Edenred Free Schools Meals vouchers. Text messages and phone calls were made to the 157 families receiving this entitlement to collect email addresses for their vouchers to be delivered to. Families were then sent invites to Class Dojo through the school's regular text messaging service. Parents quickly joined up and from a standing start of zero we had 157 children and their families were connected within a week. This endeavour to sign up every child and their family has continued and to date we have 253 families connected with over 300 children accessing learning online. Once children returned to school in September the platform continued to be used to provide homework and introduce other learning platforms with video demonstrations, such as Times Table Rock Stars, Bug Club and Reading Plus. Families who have struggled with technology have been guided through the process of signing up to Class Dojo by attending school and a member of SLT or school admin staff have guided them through the process.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

We used Class Dojo which was a platform we had started using in school in September 2019 for a school rewards system. Children receive Dojo points which they can then exchange in a school 'Swap Shop' for toys, games and stationery items. This platform had an additionality that allows the school to create a page for school communication as well as teachers creating their own individual pages for their classes. This aspect had not been explored until March 2020, when the country was put into lockdown and schools were closed to most pupils.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

Once families were signed up, posts were made to the Whole School Page to communicate the purpose of Class Dojo and what to expect on their children's Class Pages. Staff began posting examples of lockdown activities that they were doing with their families and soon families started sharing their own content. Once this was in place the home learning plans that were posted to the website were included with examples throughout the day of maths and English activities that were on the learning plans for children to complete. Parents then started posting examples of their children's home learning and staff would provide praise and feedback. The school newsletter was then added to the Whole School Page each week. A dialogue between school staff and families has developed which has created high engagement in home learning and school activity. Parents complete surveys through the platform that helps school to develop other aspects based on parental feedback.

A staggered approach to involving parents was taken so that families did not feel overwhelmed by the amount of content or information they were receiving. It was important also to ensure that any feedback resulted in a development and that this was tangible for families to see, this in turn developed their confidence to interact with the site.

The facility for families to directly message school staff on the platform has been particularly beneficial and resulted in a much more efficient way of dealing with enquiries and less complaints.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

There has been a consistency in approach to teaching and learning alongside the development of Class Dojo and this is now communicated to families through teachers Class Dojo pages. This has been apparent in the improved approach to homework, classes now provide homework for specific subjects on the same days across the week, so that parents know that Spellings are always given on a Monday and the test is on a Friday for example. This has led to more children completing the spelling homework. It is communicated that Reading is expected every night for all children, and alongside the introduction of Reading Record Books has resulted in more children reading more books and signatures in Reading Records.

The quantity and quality of work that has been returned both as homework and now in further partial closures in January 2021 is of a high quality and monitored by SLT daily with immediate feedback to staff. As we now enter the 5th week of 2021 lockdown we have 84% of the school community accessing online learning on a daily basis. With others accessing through paperwork packs. This has been tracked by teachers and support staff and daily communication and support for families who may need it. This has allowed us to also identify where more pastoral or family support may be needed and families are confident to ask for the help they need. Be this extra support with their child's learning, food parcels, devices or access to WIFI.

Microsoft forms is used to regularly monitor parental views, again by posting links to complete on Class Dojo. We then add a 'You said, we did' aspect to our weekly Newsletter on a regular basis which shows families that their views are important and have a direct impact on the work of the school.

Another positive impact this has had, was during the Autumn Term 2020 when Class Bubbles were closed. Full time learning could continue as normal meaning there was limited impact on children's learning. It possible to add links for Zoom on to the platform so that children could access live lessons 3 times a day. These routines made the transition to remote teaching across the whole of school easier in January 2021.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

The choice of platform that is used is very important, considering the context of your school. Class Dojo was chosen as it was perceived as relatively simple for all stakeholders to use and was an extension of a system already in place rather than introducing a further platform. Staff confidence with the platform is the first hurdle as there is always a range of abilities and knowledge around technology. Allowing staff, the freedom to create their own content is very important. Imposing a range of non-negotiables would have been detrimental to this process

and be seen as a chore for staff. Staff have been creative and developed high quality learning experiences for their children based on their strengths. These strengths can then be shared in CPD sessions and very quickly a consistency develops across pages.

SLT presence on the platform should be apparent, modelling of posts on the Whole School Story and praise and feedback to children on class pages and in their portfolios should be a regular feature.

Finally gauging parental feedback regularly and adapting the approach, not standing still and thinking it is done. There's always something that can be improved.

Eastburn Junior and Infant School, Bradford

Headteacher: Jo Waterhouse

Other staff involved: Hilary Gornall, Jenny Hughes and Jo Taylor

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

office@eastburn.bradford.sch.uk

Case study focus:

- Preparing for effective parental engagement
- Supporting parents to have high academic expectations for their child
- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork
- Offering more sustained and intensive support where needed

Focus on your case study

EEF Guidance Report: Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning

Section 1: Critically review how we work with parents;

Section 2: Provide practical strategies to support learning at home;

Section 3 Tailor school communications to encourage positive dialogue about learning; and

Section 4: Offer more sustained and intensive support where needed.

About your school

Eastburn Junior and Infant School is a single-form entry school situated on the edge of the Bradford Authority between Keighley and Skipton. Most of our pupils are from white, English speaking households from a wide range of housing types and socio-economic backgrounds. Approximately 10% of our children are from non-English speaking households from a variety of countries and cultures, including Pakistan, Kerala and Poland. In a majority of households both parents/carers are in paid employment. A significant number of parents are employed in unskilled/semi-skilled work or are self-employed tradespeople. As a result, many of our families earn just above the threshold for free school meals, which keeps our percentage for this and therefore Pupil Premium, low. A significant number of our parents work long hours, and the school provides before and after school provision to support these families.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Although the school has worked hard to improve communication with parents for a number of years, we realised that we needed a more strategic approach to enable parents to become more actively engaged in the life of the school.

Our main aim was to enable our parents to support their child's learning and development at home. This was proving particularly difficult with those parents who work long hours and did not feel they had the time to support their children's learning at home. Some parents said that they have not had a very positive experience of education themselves and as a result, did not place a

lot of value in learning at school. Some of our parents were struggling with parenting strategies such as daily routines, communication and behaviour expectations. This was particularly difficult in some blended families where routines and expectations were different between each household.

We also recognised that we needed to provide more targeted support to enable the most vulnerable children and families to engage with school and develop positive parenting skills.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

Parents and carers were consulted through a whole school parental questionnaire and informal conversations with our Pastoral Manager. This enabled us to review our current approach, to identify strengths and areas for development.

We spoke with staff to understand the challenges associated parental engagement throughout school and how these might be addressed.

We developed a clear Action Plan which became part of our School Improvement Plan. Consultation with different stakeholders, including parental engagement is now also part of the Action Plan for Governance.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

We refurbished a dilapidated part of the school building to create a welcoming space within school for the Pastoral Manager to work with parents. We installed a small kitchen to enable us to deliver workshops and provide a nurturing space for families. We also created a workstation for our Pastoral Manager with the IT and communication links she needs to be able to keep in touch with families.

We installed a new telephone system to improve parents' ability to contact school, including an absence reporting line and dedicated phone lines for the Pastoral Manager and Inclusion Leader.

We provided Family Links and Dice training for three members of the pastoral team to enable us to deliver this training to parents.

We upgraded the school website to create forums for parents and invested in software to support remote learning.

What did you do to develop parental engagement? (Detailed main section of the case study)

Our first priority was to develop a clear vision and strategy for parental engagement as an integral part of the School Improvement Plan. This involved a consultation period with various stakeholders, including parents and staff. We also gathered feedback on a 1:1 basis, targeting parents who were less involved in school in order to understand what support they would find helpful.

The first phase of the Parental Engagement Plan was to create a welcoming space within school for the pastoral team to work with parents. We designed the space to enable staff to work with both children and parents in a nurturing environment. The space has a sofa and tables and chairs to reflect positive learning environments which can be replicated at home. The team will use these areas to model reading with a child, creating a positive workspace to support children's learning at home. We also installed a small kitchen area to enable us to deliver Family Links and Dice workshops as well as soft workshops such as 'cooking on a budget'. The refurbishment was completed in the Spring Term, despite the national lockdown.

The second phase of the plan was to review the communication strategy within school. We used the feedback from the parental questionnaire and researched a number of different models. Parents said that they were often frustrated because it was difficult to get through to the school office as the single phone line was always engaged. Office staff felt their work was interrupted by unnecessary telephone calls. Staff, particularly the Pastoral Manager and Inclusion Leader were often struggling to contact parents because the phone line was in use. In response, we installed a new phone system which allows parents to report absences, to leave a message or to be directed the appropriate member of staff. We have set up dedicated phone lines for key members of staff including the Pastoral Manager and the Inclusion leader so parents can get in touch with them quickly and efficiently. We created a 'virtual office' on the school website to help answer general enquiries without needing to contact the school office. We have continued to develop the Family Support, SEND Support and Curriculum sections of the school website to provide parents with general guidance and support.

We had not anticipated the impact which Covid-19 would have on the school's approach to parental engagement and communication. As a result of the school closure, we had to revise our communication strategy in order to maintain parental engagement. Teachers made telephone contact with pupils and parents on a weekly basis to assess wellbeing, identify any new safeguarding concerns and support remote learning. The Pastoral Manager maintained regular contact with vulnerable children and their families throughout the school closure, enabling us to adjust provision and support for these children in response to their needs. Since September, we have continued to build direct lines of communication between teachers and pupils through our remote learning software Seesaw, which allows parents to comment and pupils to receive feedback from the teacher. We have also used Seesaw as a context to build parents' understanding of the teaching and learning strategies used in school.

Another of the original aims of the parental engagement plan which had to be adjusted in light of the pandemic was the aim to improve systems for transition. We wanted to ensure that we identified children and families who would benefit from more sustained and intensive support before they started school in Reception. Although transition arrangements were significantly hampered by the school closure, we were able to undertake virtual home-visits for every child entering school in Reception. We developed some standard questions to enable staff to identify vulnerable children/families at the earliest opportunity. During the school closure, we held some 'stay and play' sessions in very small socially distanced groups. This approach meant that the Reception staff felt that they were able to get to know children and parents quickly. As a result, the Pastoral Manager Inclusion Leader have been able to work closely with parents in order to target support more effectively.

Three members of staff within the pastoral team have undertaken Family Links and/or Dice training. This will enable them to deliver these courses to small groups of parents as soon as government restrictions allow. We also intend to engage some hard-to-reach families through a series of 'soft-workshops' on topics such as cooking on a budget, surviving the summer holidays and making playdough. We hope that by providing these more informal sessions, parents will start to view school as a source of general support for the wellbeing of children and parents. We intend to provide some socially distanced Family Links 'taster' sessions during the spring term to engage with some of our hard-to-reach families who are not always able to commit to the full ten-week program.

We have also undertaken training with all staff on managing 'difficult conversations' with parents. The strategies included in this training have been very effective in focusing parents on the positive outcomes which can be achieved when home and schoolwork together.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

The school now has a clear vision and strategy for parental engagement which is an integral part of School Improvement Plan.

Parents and staff report a significant improvement in the communication between home and school. Parents can get through to the appropriate member of quickly and efficiently.

The Pastoral Manager has a space which is fit for purpose, serving as both an office, a confidential meeting space, a safe place for children/parents and a space to provide workshops for children and parents.

The quality of communication between staff and parents has led to improvements in attendance (Persistent Absence has dropped from 5.4% to 1.9%) and behaviour. CPOMS records show that the number of behaviour incidents has reduced as a result of parents being involved earlier.

The period of school closure and ongoing government restrictions have impaired our ability to implement all aspects of our action plan, in particular to deliver Family Links and Dice sessions with parents. We have also been unable to hold open afternoons to support parents' understanding of their children's learning within school and have been unable to loan out resources to parents. We intend to implement these actions in the spring/summer term as soon as government restrictions are lifted.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

- Clarify roles and responsibilities for parental engagement.
- Listen to understand. Take time to gather a deep understanding of the challenges to parental engagement.
- Use the 'you said . . . so we did . . .' approach.

- Consider the quantity, frequency and complexity of the communications parents are receiving from school.
- Use ed-tech discerningly. Consider whether/how it enhances what you're already doing.
- Parental engagement is about personal relationships.
- Develop communication strategies which encourage parents to build relationships and talk with school staff, rather than just be passive recipients of information.
- Use your communication strategy as a vehicle for modelling good communication with parents: talk in person, rather than via texts/apps.
- Personal phone calls/face to face conversations have had a huge impact on our hard-to-reach families in relation to both attendance and behaviour

Farnham Primary School, Bradford

Headteacher: Mrs Bains and Mr Quick (Co-headteachers)

Staff involved: Mrs Savage (Early Years Leader/Reception teacher) and Mrs Fozia Bibi (Pastoral Support Officer)

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice: Tel: 01274 573297 or email office@fps.paymat.org

Case study focus:

- Preparing for effective parental engagement
- Supporting parents to have high academic expectations for their child
- Developing and maintaining effective communication about school activities and schoolwork

Focus on your case study

The main focus of our case study is to develop parental engagement which is effective in increasing pupil attendance with a particular focus on KS1. In addition to this, we want to educate our parents so they can support their children with home-school learning and have high aspirations for their children's future.

About your school

Farnham Primary School is located in an inner-city area of Bradford. Pupils are predominantly from Pakistani heritage with 97% of children of this background and 3% being of an Eastern European background. Most children are EAL and therefore there is a language barrier which can sometimes hinder parental engagement and support. There are currently 490 pupils registered at Farnham. This number includes our 2-year-old provision all the way up to year 6.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

When the implementation plan was written, it was noted that KS1 attendance was lower on a weekly basis compared to KS2. The percentage was 93% compared to 96%. We realised that we needed to emphasise the importance of education for our parents and to manifest that attending Farnham was paramount with supporting their child's education. We believed that if we improved parental engagement and raised aspirations, parents would bring their children to school.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

Parental engagement has always been of high priority at Farnham. In order to encourage parents to be onboard with the new approach, a letter in the form of an email and several text messages were sent to parents informing them of a virtual coffee morning. We had intended to run a coffee morning in school but had to adapt this to adhere to Covid-19 government guidelines. Our

parental engagement support worker also informed parents about this approach when she was in the playground before and after school. We spoke to BCL and informed them of our priority. They agreed to work with Farnham with a particular target of increasing the attendance of vulnerable pupils. BCL proposed to work with parents to ensure that the children are attending school unless they are unwell.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

Following the virtual coffee mornings, the feedback from these conversations was that parents were struggling to support their children's learning at home as they didn't have the resources/equipment required. Therefore, resource bags containing pens, pencils, laminated paper (similar to a whiteboards), whiteboard pens and cubes are going to be purchased and prepared and given to parents who attend the meetings.

We also used the support of an outside agency BCL who conducted home visits for pupils who were missing from school and those who had poor attendance. BCL also provided translators if required so we could have conversations with parents/guardians to explain the importance of education in addition to listening to any concerns the parents may have had, for example concerns about COVID-19.

We have also purchased 'Marvellous Me', an app which informs parents about their child's education and successes. It aims to develop parental engagement as it initiates conversations at home and celebrates achievements.

Parental courses have also been booked through Bradford College. These will support parents with English and Maths functional skills.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

As mentioned above, weekly coffee mornings were held but due to the current pandemic, these had to be held online. Parents did initially struggle to join these meetings due to technical issues or not having the correct technology e.g. phones/tablets. In order to combat this issue, the parental support officer engaged with the parents through phone calls to explain how to access the virtual coffee mornings or had a similar conversation on the phone instead. This ensured that those parents seeking to engage were supported by using either method.

Through the conversations, parents identified that the biggest barrier they face is not knowing how to support their children as they don't have the knowledge themselves. Usually parental workshops are held and parents are encouraged to attend when they drop their children off in the mornings. Unfortunately, the information has had to be provided online on the school website instead. It is proposed that staff record a video to support a particular area of learning. An example is the Reception teacher will record the sounds taught in Phonics. This will then be uploaded onto the website so parents can view when required. This provides a visual and auditory method which supports all parents but particularly those who have English as an additional language or find reading difficult.

In order to support our parents, virtual parental courses have been booked; one course being English and the other being functional skills in Maths. The English aims to develop confidence with speaking and listening. This will be particularly useful for parents who speak English as an additional language. The maths is GCSE equivalent when the course has been completed and will provide parents with confidence to know that their involvement in their child's education will be of value.

Another strategy that we have purchased and are implementing is the 'Marvellous Me' app. The aim of this app is to promote positive relationships between parents and school. Staff will be trained on how to use the app and a demonstration will be given for parents. A step by step guide will also be emailed to parents to support them with the use of the app. Staff will be able to safely send messages to parents using the app to inform them of their child's achievements. This app will not be used for concerns but rather celebrating small steps and achievements. The hope then is that if parents are informed of their child's achievements, they will try to support them alongside school by working with them at home. Our hope is that parents will realise the importance and impact of school and will send their child every day in order to access the outstanding education that we provide at Farnham even during such different and testing times.

Our parent governors have been outstanding during these difficult times. They have provided support for parents by listening to their concerns particularly with regards to COVID and have liaised with SLT to voice and share the parents' thoughts. One major concern was the safety of the school environment for their children. Parents were reluctant to send their children which affected the attendance. Our parental governors reassured other parents that the measures put in place were effective in keeping the children safe. Packs were also provided for parents which included PPE such as face masks, hand sanitiser and leaflets of support.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

It is evident that parents are enjoying sharing their thoughts and ideas through the virtual coffee mornings as they have encouraged other parents to join. They feel they are valued and their voices are being heard. We aspire to continue these meetings throughout the pandemic, we will introduce virtual parental workshops delivered by external agencies, and hope to return to hosting parental workshops in school when we are allowed. It also provides a chance for parents to voice their concerns and going forward, we can work together to implement solutions to support parents even further.

As parents are understanding more about home learning, the percentage of 'hits' and 'visits' to the school website has increased significantly. The statistics in September were 6,000, a slight decrease in October but since the virtual coffee mornings/phone calls have been conducted, the 'hits' and 'visits' have increased to 8,000 in November. We cannot statistically see the completed number for December but would hope that the number would continue to increase or at least be sustained.

Unfortunately, we cannot yet comment on the impact of the 'Marvellous Me' app due to it being a recent purchase, but we will begin to see the impact of this in the New Year. It is hoped that this will develop positive relationships between parents and school. It will be interesting to see

how this also supports the learning between school and home.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

We would highly recommend these strategies as an avenue for other schools to explore if parental engagement is one of their priorities. We have seen an increase with attendance in addition to the website being used frequently to support home-school learning. Parents now feel confident to ask questions with regards to their child's education and have developed further knowledge and understanding of how to support them at home.

Due to the current situation, our biggest barrier has been the use of technology to communicate with parents - the use of a device to host the virtual coffee mornings. Similarly, some parents have struggled to access online learning due to this issue or not understanding how to do so. Since we have considered and begun to implement new strategies to engage positively with parents, we have considered a range of other ways such as communicating with them before and after school, parental phone calls have also been useful, in addition to working closely with our parental governors.

Our advice therefore would be to clearly identify your targets, implement a range of strategies that will appeal/support parents of different backgrounds and to constantly aim to improve aspects in order to achieve the long-term goals.

Clayton St John C of E Primary School, Bradford

Headteacher: Gemma Emsley

Other staff involved: Elizabeth Lawley

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

office@claytonce.bradford.sch.uk

Case study focus:

- Preparing for effective parental engagement
- Supporting parents to have high academic expectations for their child

Focus on your case study:

Supporting parents to have high academic expectations for their child.

During the lockdown due to a national pandemic in March 2020, we needed to re-think how we educate our children from home, ensuring that parents were given as much support and advice as possible to support this. In some cases, we also recognised that some of our 'harder to reach' parents and carers would need to build a more positive and trusting relationship with us, which could prove to be challenging, given the circumstances. This situation was new territory for us all and one of which was crucial that we succeeded in, engaging with parents had never been more important to the educational and emotional development of our pupils.

About your school

Clayton St John is a sponsored academy with 468 pupils on roll. There is a high level of religious and cultural diversity, but less than the national figure of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is above national averages and above for Free School Meals (30.8%). The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages (12.1%). The school converted to an academy in October 2017 with BDAT, after it was judged to be inadequate by Ofsted. It has had three Executive Head Teachers over three years, the most recent joined the school in September 2020 working three days a week in school. The school has a Head of School, a class-based AHT 0.8, 3 TLRs (2 full-time and 1 0.6) who serve on the SLT along with the Executive School Business Manager (0.6).

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Initially, prior to COVID 19 the school was aware that relationships with our parents and carers had been significantly impacted by the reputation of the school and the significant changes in leadership. Our school was placed in Special Measures in 2017, and later that year we converted to academy status. We are one of three schools in Clayton and we had historically been 'the school of choice' for many of our families in the community. As a new SLT, we identified that parental engagement was a key priority for improvement.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

Due to COVID19, our initial plans changed in terms of 'how' we would improve engagement to enable parents and carers to have high academic expectations for their child.

Initially we met as an SLT to devise a plan of how we were going to maintain, develop and support our parents and carers in their role as 'home educators'.

We also worked as a pastoral team to identify vulnerable and hard to reach parents and formed a plan of how, who and when we could build relationships and engagement with these families.

Governors and directors of the trust were also involved in this planning and once we were confident we had a plan of support and engagement in place, this information was shared with our parents and carers.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

To enable us to effectively carry out our plans effectively, we purchased licenses for a number of high quality, online resources that children could access at home (if they had facility to do so). This included resources such as Times Table Rock Stars and Spelling Shed.

For families who were unable to access the internet at home, we printed out work packs and delivered them to their homes and where possible, we loaned devices to children to enable them to access online learning from home. Further to this, we bought new resources to make up SEND work pack so that our SEN children would have the visual and concrete resources needed for them to access the learning provided for them.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

We ensured teachers, support staff and SLT made some form of contact with our families via email, telephone or in person at least once a week. This was done to offer support with children's home learning; to ensure parents and carers were confident they had enough information to guide their child/ren through the work that was set each day, online.

EYFS and KS1 teachers produced videos of phonics lessons and reading to support parents/carers and children with their remote learning. KS 1 and 2 have also used 'note book' to model the teaching of maths and English again to support with remote learning.

Our pastoral staff made contacted our vulnerable and hard to reach families twice a week and as a result of this we made a number of Early Help referrals and supported families who were finding it difficult to source food by sending out food parcels etc. This in turn gave us more opportunity to develop trust and build positive relationships with families we have historically struggled to do so.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

In terms of building relationships with hard to reach and vulnerable families, the impact can be recognised through the feedback we have received from parents and our logs on CPOM's which you can see an increase in referrals to relevant agencies and a log of positive communication between staff and parents. Our current attendance stands at **95.3%** which is an improvement from this time last year (at this time) which was 94.2%.

When our children returned to school in September, we used gap analysis to ascertain where our children were in terms of assessment.

Our EYFS figures demonstrate that although we are not in line with national averages, the children did make progress over the year, including over the lockdown period.

EYFS 2019		Reading	Writing	Maths	GLD
Baseline		44%	43%	56%	37%
National		77%	74%	80%	72%
EOY		71%	63%	76%	63%

2020 Phonics Screening and Assessment (KS1):

Y2 pupils sat 2019 (Y1) phonic screening test – 35 pupils out of 49 passed – 71%

Y1 pupils sat 2017 phonic screening test – 8 pupils out of 56 passed in autumn 2 – 14% (25 have a score of 20 or above – 45%).

We also received positive feedback from individual families who expressed their gratitude and relief that school had been there to support them through difficult times. We also received positive feedback from agencies we worked with to support families such as Early Help and Children's Social care, who commented on the quality and detail of our referrals.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

When building relationships with families, particularly vulnerable families, don't be afraid to have those 'challenging' conversations. It is important that families learn to trust you and that as a school, you can identify what it is that makes some families 'hard to reach'. In doing this, schools are in a stronger position to signpost families to the right agency/support.

Being visible and consistent is also important in building those positive relationships; parents and carers need to know that you are there and that the support offered is not restricted by timescale.

Ensure all online/remote learning is again set up with consistency so that families at home become familiar with the procedures and systems in place. This does require lots of communication from school to families, to ensure they are able to access and school can support any difficulties in accessing the work. Set high expectations for children and follow this through with feedback so that children accessing their learning at home are not 'missing out' on their full entitlement to be educated.

Be persistent! It takes time to build positive relationships and be realistic; some families will not fully engage but as long as you can demonstrate that you have exhausted all avenues and you keep detailed records of the support you have offered; you can share this with other agencies if needed.

Swain House Primary School, Bradford

Headteacher: Dianne Richardson

Other staff involved: Clare Pugh and Catherine Cook

Contact details for schools interested in finding out more about your practice:

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Focus on your case study

- Section 1 of the EEF guidance report: Critically review how we work with parents
- Section 2 of the EEF guidance report: Provide practical strategies to support learning at home
- Section 3 of the EEF guidance report: Tailor communications to encourage positive dialogue about learning

About your school

Swain House Primary School is a larger than average school with 505 pupils on roll including a nursery for 2 year olds and a nursery for 3 and 4 year olds. The school is situated in north east Bradford and also includes an Additionally Resourced Centre (ARC) for Deaf and Hearing Impaired pupils.

The majority of pupils live close to the school in local authority housing. However, pupils in the ARC travel to school in authority transport from across the Bradford district within a fifteen-mile radius of the school. An increasing number are attending from neighbouring local authorities.

A large majority of children enter the Nursery with skills which are below age-related expectations in the prime areas of communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. Addressing the needs of pupils at an early stage is a key focus for the school, particularly for pupils from homes with high levels of social and economic deprivation.

Why has developing parental engagement been a priority for your school? What was the problem you were seeking to address?

Parental engagement has always been a priority for the school due to our awareness that parents' interest and involvement in their children's learning is associated with improved outcomes. However, despite the school's efforts to engage parents with their children's learning, we found that meetings and workshops were not well attended, often with the same families engaging in the sessions we provided. Following the Education Endowment Foundation review, we felt that we needed to evaluate and improve the way we communicated and worked with parents to effectively engage them. Our aim was to listen to our families, particularly our 'less-involved' parents, to find out what they would find useful to support their children with learning and to improve our communications.

How did you consult with and/or prepare staff, parents and/or other agencies for your new approach/strategy?

After agreeing that we would purchase the parent support app 'MarvellousMe' as a new strategy to engage parents with their child's learning and successes, staff were consulted through regular staff development meetings and weekly Key Stage meetings to ensure that the implementation of this was successful. Staff attended training led by Adrian Burt, the founder of MarvellousMe, and had the opportunity to discuss and agree non-negotiables for staff usage following this training.

Before introducing MarvellousMe, we communicated with parents via letters on the website and texts to give them information about the new app and the purpose of it. When we were ready to implement MarvellousMe, we sent individual letters to parents via email with additional information and joining instructions and codes. We followed up with texts and individual phone calls to support parents and to find out if they needed any support.

What resource(s) did you need/purchase?

After discussions with the Leadership Team and consulting with staff, we purchased MarvellousMe to encourage positive conversations between parents and children about their learning.

Following an evaluation of our current practice for communicating with parents and responding to their feedback, we decided to investigate the use of a school app so that all communication to parents was in one place. Following demos from a number of companies, we have decided to purchase 'ParentApps connect'. This transition will take place in April when our contract with our current provider ends.

What did you do to develop parental engagement?

Following attendance at the Parental Engagement Conference in January 2020 and discussions with the Head and Parental Involvement officer from our supporting school, we identified the current issues in regard to parental engagement at our school and created an action plan with the specific areas that we wanted to focus on. We used the EEF guidance report to support with our next steps.

Unfortunately, due to the global pandemic, some of our parental engagement actions were delayed and we had to refocus on engaging parents with home learning. Throughout this time, staff had to communicate with parents on a regular basis but due to Covid restrictions, our usual form of sending letters home could not be used. We decided that staff would use our current text messaging service and individual phone calls to support parents. Staff had to persist with some families, but over time we found that these forms of communication were becoming increasingly effective.

When schools reopened to all children in September 2020, our focus returned to the parental engagement action plan. The first area we focused on was to gather information from parents. We felt that the shift to communicating with parents via text and phone calls had been

effective but we wanted to gather their views. We sent out a questionnaire to find out their preferred method of communication and we also asked what they would like in terms of support from school. Previously, school had made the decisions about what we offered parents to support them with their children's learning but by using feedback from parents we felt we would have a clear starting point to move forward from and this would impact on attendance at sessions we provided. For our 'less-involved' parents who historically haven't engaged with school, we made individual phone calls or if possible spoke to these parents when they dropped their children off at school at a social distance!

We evaluated the feedback and found that the text, email and school app were the most popular choices for communication with phone calls being the least popular choice. The feedback regarding what parents would find useful to support with their children's learning gave us a very clear view on what our future workshops and meetings would focus on. The Parental Involvement Officer and Learning Mentor are now using this information to plan Zoom sessions for parents.

To improve communications with parents, making them more personalised and linked to learning, we also purchased the MarvellousMe app. The aim of the app is to engage parents and encourage family conversations by telling them about their children's learning and success, delivering a positive teacher-parent partnership. Although we have only been using this app since January, it has been an agenda item on our weekly Leadership and Key Stage meetings. The feedback from staff has been very positive and we have received feedback from parents through email or at the end of live lessons which has also been positive. We will be gathering more detailed feedback from parents about the app but as this is still in the early stages of implementation, we will plan this for later in the year.

To further improve our communications with parents and taking into consideration the feedback we have had about methods of communication, we are planning to move all of our school communications to a parent app. Following demos from different companies, we have made the decision to purchase ParentApps connect which will be implemented in April. The use of an app gives parents instant access to the school and they can get the information they need quickly and efficiently. We will be consulting with parents before moving to the app so they have all of the information they need to download and join. We will be identifying a team of staff to support parents with the transition.

What impact has this had? How do you know?

Although we are still in the early stages of implementing our parental engagement action plan, we have started by listening to our parents and responding to their views. From the questionnaire sent out and the responses we have received, our Learning Mentor and Parental Involvement Officer are planning sessions that we will be offering to parents.

Although we only started using MarvellousMe in January, we have seen a weekly increase in the number of parents downloading and engaging with the app. After the first week, 23% of parents were using the app, the second week 49% and the third week 68%. We will continue to send reminder texts and make individual phone calls to our 'less-involved' parents.

Since using the app, the feedback from staff has been extremely positive and although parents cannot reply with comments they do have the option to send a high-five to the teacher which many have been doing. As the app is in the early stages of implementation, we have only had informal feedback from parents. Some parents have shared their children's success on social media and some parents have sent emails. One parent contacted us to inform us that their child wasn't consistently engaging in live lessons but since receiving a positive message on MarvellousMe they have been joining in with their live lessons. However, we will be sending out a questionnaire later in the year to gather the views of the parents.

Do you have any advice for other schools looking to develop this aspect of their practice?

Use the EEF 'Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning' guidance report to help identify which areas you need to improve in terms of parental engagement. Use the guidance to write an action plan.

Appoint a team to lead with parental engagement and ensure they have time to share their actions with the Leadership team then staff so that there is a whole-school approach to any new strategies.

If you are implementing something new, ensure that staff are clear about the purpose of the strategy and how it will improve parental engagement.

Take the time to communicate with parents to find out what school can offer to help rather than just planning what we think they need!