

1

Critically review how you work with parents



Schools should be optimistic about the potential of working with parents

- There is an established link between the home learning environment at all ages and children's performance at school.
- Schools and parents have a shared priority to deliver the best outcomes for their children.

However, evidence on effective strategies that schools can use to engage parents in their children's learning is mixed

- If the aim is solely to improve academic outcomes, classroom interventions working directly with children currently have more evidence of effectiveness at improving learning than parenting interventions with the same aim.
- Working effectively with parents can be challenging, and is likely to require sustained effort and support.
- Most schools say that they do not have an explicit plan for how they work with parents, and fewer than 10% of teachers have undertaken CPD on parental engagement.

Schools should start by critically reviewing their aims and current approaches

- Focus on areas that have better evidence (such as those summarised opposite)—different approaches are needed for different ages.
- Talk to parents who are less involved about what support they would find helpful.
- Plan and monitor to progress towards defined aims.

2

Provide practical strategies to support learning at home



- 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.
- Book-gifting alone is unlikely to be effective, but carefully selected books plus advice and support can be beneficial for supporting reading.
- Support parents to create a regular routine and encourage good homework habits, but be cautious about promoting direct parental assistance with homework (particularly for older children).
- Parents can support their children by encouraging them to set goals, plan, and manage their time, effort, and emotions. This type of support can help children to regulate their own learning and will often be more valuable than direct help with homework tasks.
- Consider initiatives to encourage summer reading; these have some promise but are not widely used at present.

3

Tailor school communications to encourage positive dialogue about learning



- Well-designed school communications can be effective for improving attainment and a range of other outcomes, such as attendance.
- Examples include weekly texts sent from school to parents, and short, termly letters.
- Impacts from such approaches may appear small but they are generally low cost, and straightforward to introduce.
- Messages are likely to be more effective if they are personalised, linked to learning, and promote positive interactions by, for example, celebrating success.
- Communication should be two-way: consulting with parents about how they can be involved is likely to be valuable and increase the effectiveness of home-school relationships. Currently around half of parents say that they have not been consulted.
- School communications may be particularly important for engaging some parents who could play an important role but may have less contact with school.

4

Offer more sustained and intensive support where needed



- Start by assessing needs and talking to parents about what would help them support learning: targeting is likely to be needed to use resources effectively and avoid widening gaps.
- Communicate carefully to avoid stigmatising, blaming, or discouraging parents. Focus on building parents' efficacy—that they are equal partners and can make a difference.
- Encourage a consistent approach to behaviour between parents and the school, for example, by sharing expectations with parents.
- Offering more structured, evidence-based programmes can help to develop positive behaviour and consistency where needs are greater.
- Plan carefully for group-based parenting initiatives (such as regular workshops). A convenient time and location, face-to-face recruitment, trusting relationships, and an informal, welcoming environment are the most important factors for parents to attend group sessions.
- Consider offering regular home visits for younger children with greater needs. This can be an effective approach for parents that struggle to attend meetings, and for building relationships.