



Leadership and Management: Parental Engagement

Audit which identifies the aspects of classroom practice which leaders should focus upon

When I took over the Headship in 2013 we had already started to complete the 'Leading in Parental Partnership Award' (LPPA) and were using it as an audit to look at how we were engaging parents and supporting them. There were many areas in which we were strong, particularly linked to how our Care Team supports parents and families, but there were also areas that could be developed further. As a teacher at the school and now as Head, the main area I wanted to focus on was engaging parents in their child's learning. This had come also from staff evaluations of the academic year and had been an area we knew needed strengthening, but one that had not fully been addressed. Historically at the school parents have been very good at coming into school for the 'Summer Fair' or the 'Christmas Performance' however not so good when it involved their child's actual learning. We also identified that there weren't really any opportunities currently at the school that enabled them to do this either. It was also important to remember that research shows that for those children, whose parents are engaged in their learning, make the most progress and therefore this development area was something that could potentially impact on the overall progress and achievement within school. As a result this became a main area for development within the 2013 – 14 SIP. This fitted in well with the conversion to Academy in April 2014 and re-branding Easterside Primary School as 'Easterside Academy.'

Leadership activity which focus upon making a difference in classrooms

As a new Head and as a leadership team we looked firstly for ways in which we could engage parents further by adapting things that we were already doing, but maybe weren't getting the response from parents that we wanted. This included:

Activity	Before	Development/New Practice
❖ Stay and Play	This was an open invitation for nursery parents to stay for a little bit on Thursday's to play with their child. Usually around 3 parents attended.	A timetable of planned activities was devised for each half term and advertised to the parents for them to sign up for.
❖ Parents Evening	This took place after school with the parent/s with a high % not turning up.	'Consultation Time' was introduced through the day and after school. Pupils were included and parents were invited to a 'learning conversation' with parent/s, child and class teacher.
❖ Head Teacher's Letter	This was sent out termly and was quite lengthy. It was not thought that many parents read it.	A fortnightly newsletter was introduced and a different format used in which to inform parents in 'snap shots'. It also displayed a class by class attendance chart so parents knew how their child's class was doing in relation to attendance and the NA.
❖ Website	Words to describe it might have been: Out-of-date; not interesting; not sharing all the information needed for parents;	The HT worked with a new company 'Itchy Robot' to create and write a new website.

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	visually not good.	
❖ Parent Policies	Policies were available to parents but no parents asked or read them.	Parent leaflets were created to identified areas. These have also been added to over the past two years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Behaviour - Attendance - Playtimes - Outdoor Learning
❖ Transition Meetings	The former HT had small group meetings with parents in her office over a few weeks. This was felt to take up a lot of the HTs time.	Opportunity for parents to come to one of two meetings in which they would not only meet the Head but other professionals and services from within the school and outside the school, that they would come into contact with.

We then looked at trying out some new ideas in which to engage parents, drawing on our knowledge and 'observation' of what was currently going on in some 'Outstanding' schools locally. As a result in the first year we introduced:

Activity	Further Detail
❖ Open Mornings	These were introduced for each team including: KS1 / Y3/4 and Y5/6. Parents were invited to follow their child around six activities during the morning. Teas and Coffees were served afterwards with parent evaluations.
❖ Parent Coffee Mornings	These were introduced and used by our 'Care Team' and one of HLTA's in order to find out what our parents wanted for themselves. This informed parental courses and opportunities.
❖ Easterside APP	This was introduced to enable use to communicate better and directly with our parents and families. It also enabled push notifications.

Over the second year (2014 – 15) we continued to build on what we had achieved and introduced:

❖ Early Years Stay and Play	Reception were also included within 'Stay and Play'.
❖ Project Homework	A menu of homework is sent home for the half term linked to the topic. Parents are invited to join in with their child/ren in order to complete them and homework is designed in which to engage the whole family.
❖ KS1 Parent / Child Activity Sessions	Introduced as a progression from Early Years 'Stay and Play'. Linked to the new curriculum parents are invited in each half term to join in with their child in a creative activity linked to the



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❖ Marvellous Me	topic. Introduced in order to continue to give parents positive feedback about their child and inform them as to what they've been learning about. It also provides instant positive feedback to pupils.
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Interventions designed for adults to learn how to do things differently

At the start of first year we used a variety of different strategies in which to gather information and inform us as to the best way to go about some of the new initiatives including trailing ideas in specific year groups first e.g. Project Homework. Throughout we sought parental feedback in order to help us evaluate what we were doing and to help us measure the impact it was having, and what ways.

Prior to introducing the 'Open Mornings' two members of staff went to observe a similar initiative in an 'Outstanding' school not far from us but within a different local authority. This enabled them to see a format that was established and worked well, and in a school with a very similar catchment area to our own. The members of staff that visited were then able to feedback to the SLT and were the first to plan and deliver an 'Open Morning' in our school. From this we then planned and delivered further ones using the format that we had agreed as a school. This has continued to work well and as a result we have increased our 'Open Mornings' to two per year, per team. Six in total.

A 'Parent Engage Team' were put together made up of the school's 'Care Team' who already worked closely with parents on a more personal level, along with the HLTA's within the school and from each Key Stage. This team looked for ways in which to engage with parents and to find out what it is they wanted from their school. This was done through informal 'Parent Coffee Mornings' where parents could relax and catch up with each other; meet staff and engage in a small input planned by staff. From these valuable sessions that were well attended, we were able to identify:

1. What parent courses / training / support they wanted, **and**;
2. That parents enjoyed getting involved with their child and would like to do that more.

One of the focused sessions within the 'Coffee Mornings' was on 'Homework'. We used this opportunity to seek parental views as to what they think worked well, what didn't and any ideas for how they felt it could be improved. This information was also sought from all parents through a questionnaire in which we had 60 returns. This in itself also highlighted the improved steps we were making to engage with parents, as questionnaire responses when sent home with the child were historically very poor. The feedback from our parents highlighted in particular that the 'Project Homework' that was being trialled in a couple of classes, was something that parents enjoyed doing as they could join in and especially with the 'creative' types of homework. This also mirrored what was coming out from the 'Open Morning' evaluations in that parents had really enjoyed the physical and creative activities during the morning and this could also be evidently seen.

All this information and feedback helped us as a school to evaluate and re-design our homework policy. A working party within school made up from a variety of different people across the school and shared with staff, parents and pupils. This is currently under regular review.

In order to ensure the new approach to 'Consultation Time' worked consistently across the school as a SLT we first looked at why we were changing it and what we wanted to achieve in the time we had the child and parent/s together. One of the first things we agreed was that we wanted to give ourselves and parents more time to talk about their child's learning. As a result we decided that 15



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minutes would be the agreed time, although for specific parents we would plan in longer. In order to facilitate this we decided to hold the 'Consultation Time' throughout the day as well as after school, and each teacher was given a day out of the classroom in which to do this. Due to the community we serve most of our parents do not work and for those that do we would be able to give them an evening appointment time. As always we would work flexibly in order to get as many parents as possible. As an SLT we then agreed on some key practices that we wanted to go on through each of the 'learning conversations' across school. These were written down and shared with all teachers through a staff meeting. Each child had a 'file' that would be used to support the 'learning conversation' around each child's learning and development. After the first 'Consultation Time' again we took feedback through questionnaires from both staff and parents. From parents we had 78 returns that were all very positive towards the new approach and included feedback such as:

Involving (child's name) was an excellent idea as he was there to hear what was said and I believe that because he thrives on praise and encouragement from his teacher this would make him listen to what his pro's and con's were and he would work twice as hard to try and better himself at what he was not quite achieving. An excellent idea! Also you get to form a rapport with the teacher as it's a longer appointment."

"Was lovely to see how happy (child's name) was being with her teacher and enjoying listening about her own progress as well, and she took it all in and we talked about all of it at home and now I've found she comes home and tells me even more about what is going on in and around school."

"Helped us to understand how we could support (child's name) at home and how well she was doing. Very happy!"

New practice and provision in classrooms

Observations, monitoring and feedback of parental engagement activities across the school identified a number of key things:

- ❖ **'Early Years Stay and Play'** sessions have increased from the few parents we used to get, to on average 18 parents a session. This also increases for certain activities and times of the year e.g. Christmas / Halloween / Easter.
- ❖ **'Open Mornings'** have proved to be successful now over a period of two years, with usually between 40 and 50 parents attending. Feedback from these sessions has been very positive and has allowed parents to find out about their child's curriculum and the fun ways in which we teach and learn. E.g. Through Outdoor Learning.
- ❖ **'Parent/Child Activity Sessions'** at KS1 have continued that regular involvement within school for a lot of our parents throughout the term. These happen once every half term and we usually get between 20 and 30 parents also participating in these.
- ❖ **'Project Homework'** is currently enabling parents and pupils to work together at home and engage in learning activities. The quality of the work being produced is of a much higher quality than previous, and evidence has been seen within formal lesson observations, as to how homework has directly impacted on teaching and learning within the classroom. Project homework is proudly displayed across the school.
- ❖ **'Marvellous Me'** has been a more recent addition to our parent engagement journey and has already received some positive feedback both from staff, pupils and parents. Lesson observations again also have shown how it is used with parents and directly teaching and learning within the lesson.
- ❖ **'Transition Meetings'** have ensured that nearly all parents attend; enabled parents to meet staff; and provided all the parents with the information they need for whatever transition stage their child is at.
- ❖ **'Easterside APP'** has just under 500 users. Communication is much more direct and enables

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us to send out reminders and message very quickly.

Improved outcomes for children

We were awarded the 'Leading in Parental Partnership' award in April 2014.

As a result of the new initiatives over the last two years, we have undoubtedly improved parental engagement in pupil's learning. (*See numbers of engagement in section above).

Through the increased parental engagement it can be noted that for some pupils having their parents in school is very important to them and has helped to develop both relationships between staff and families as well as increasing individual pupil's own **engagement** and **self-esteem / confidence**.

Attendance has also improved at Easterside Academy over the last two years. This could be down to a number of new initiatives within this area as well, but also could be linked to increased parental engagement. Parents now having a better understanding in relation to the importance of school and recognising also the enjoyment it can provide. Many of our parents have had bad schooling experiences themselves and this can influence how they see their child's school and education. This has been another reason for engaging our parents further at Easterside Academy.

The end of Year Parent Questionnaire outcomes for 2014 – 15 showed that: (123 returns)

	Strongly Agree / Agree
The school communicates with me well.	99%
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns.	100%
The school sets appropriate homework for my child.	100%
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school.	100%

Action research linked to those parents that are more engaged – better progress?

Enquiry into and reflection upon what difference it makes and where to focus next

As a new Head Teacher and the conversion to Academy status, the engagement of parents was essential to both these transitions during this period. Parents and families were involved in the design of the new logo for the Academy; devising a pupil friendly school 'motto' and had input into our new curriculum and the identification of '101 Things to do Before You Leave Easterside Academy'. These have now been written into our curriculum. As a new Head Teacher and leadership team parents remained confident that the school was being led well and effectively with 100% of parents strongly agreeing / agreeing. (123 returns).

The school feels much more central to the community and parents are a regular feature within it.

Stepping back and looking at what we have achieved we are also able to identify what we need to do in 2015-16 to sustain this progress and outcomes. These include:

- ❖ Continuing to develop our 'Stay and Play' sessions and 'Open Mornings' by thinking more carefully about the activities we're providing and linking them to key messages and training we want to get across to parents e.g. Higher expectations of spelling within the curriculum.



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- ❖ Continuing our journey with parents and as a school by engaging in our own action research. We have developed 'parental descriptors' that help us identify the level of engagement each parent has in their child's learning. Class teachers and the 'Parent Engage Team' are focusing on how we can engage groups and individual parents further, and as a SLT we are looking at how parental engagement links to progress.
- ❖ Introduction of 'Marvellous Me'.