

Parental engagement at Newport High School - A whole school strategy

At Newport High, we recognise parents as essential partners in their child's learning. We view parental involvement as an integral part of our work to improve students' achievement, attendance and behaviour. Over the last three years we have worked to develop a range of approaches to improve parental engagement, particularly in relation to those parents who rarely become involved in their child's education. This paper details five of the whole school strategies implemented to address this priority.

Context

Feedback from a parental survey highlighted that other than termly progress reports or whole school letters, many parents rarely received any communication from the school. Consequently, we recognised that if the school wanted to increase the level of parental engagement, it was essential that we introduce a range of strategies to improve our communication and links with all parents.

School strategy 1: Transition into Year 7

Our Year 7 curriculum has been designed with the aim of ensuring students feel safe, happy and successful from the start of their secondary education. Students work with their Tutor for over half of their timetable covering the English, History, Geography, Religious Studies, ICT and PSE elements of the National Curriculum. To complement this, students access specialist teaching in Maths, Science, PE, Design & Technology, Welsh, French and Music. This means that Year 7 students will be taught by around eight teachers, more than in primary school but less than in many secondary schools. This approach ensure that the child's Tutor is the person who teaches them the most, knows them the best and as the named first point of contact, gets to know their family well.

Year 7 tutor groups are made up of students from usually two but no more than three feeder primary schools. To build good relationships with students before they start Year 7, Tutors visit primary feeders one lesson per fortnight during the summer term; teaching, team-teaching and meeting parents.

This approach - a small number of key teachers who get to know students and their families from Year 6 onwards, helps to ensure students feel well-known and also helps to build relationships with families prior to transition to Newport High.

Parental surveys on the transition process and first month of Year 7 provide a clear indication of the success of this approach.

Y6 into Y7 Transition Survey (completed after 1 month at Newport High School)

	2012	2013
My child has settled well into Newport High School	68% strongly agree 30% agree	66% strongly agree 34% agree
The Tutor's visits in Year 6 were helpful	62% strongly agree 37% agree	61% strongly agree 37% agree
I have had contact with my child's tutor since the start of term (in the last 4 weeks)	32% strongly agree 29% agree	25% strongly agree 25% agree
I know who to contact if I have any concerns	51% strongly agree 41% agree	50% strongly agree 42% agree

School strategy 2: Home Contact

Each teaching member of staff has a one hour Home Contact session on their timetable. During this session, three positive telephone calls are made to parents of students in the member of staff's tutor group. One other call is made sharing any concerns they may have. This gives a 3:1 ratio of positive and negative phone-calls made to parents. The positive phone-call is intended to highlight one encouraging aspect of the students' academic achievement, approach to school life, behaviour, etc. All home contacts are logged on the school Management Information System (MIS) to allow effective tracking of this practice. If a Teacher is unable to reach the parent by phone then a card, letter or email is also sent.

Number of Home Contact Phone Calls/Messages made 2010-2014

Academic Year	Positive	Negative	Total
2010-2011	10923	1591	12514
2011-2012	13316	1998	15314
2012-2013	15887	1452	17339
2013-2014 (to 31.01.14)	7568	724	8292

Analysis of data shows that positive phone calls home are now an embedded feature of our school practice.

School strategy 3: Family Engagement Officer

In order to increase the level of engagement of parents of those students eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and those facing deprivation, the role of Family Engagement Officer (FEO) was introduced. This role is currently a Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) funded position. The FEO is tasked with:

- increasing the involvement in school life of the parents and families of eFSM students;
- working closely with pastoral staff if there is a need to improve the attainment, behaviour and attendance of these students; and
- providing a link between home and school.

Where eFSM students are targeted to achieved Level 2 threshold including English and Maths their families are prioritised for support.

A key element of the work of the FEO has focused on providing opportunities for parents to learn how to meet the educational needs of their children through the provision of community and school based workshops. These include revision and study skills workshops and parenting workshops.

School strategy 4: Parents' meetings to review academic progress

Annual meetings with parents to discuss their child's academic progress are an integral part of the school calendar. The school views these meetings as an opportunity to share with parents details of progress made, targets for improvement and how we can work together to support their child's learning.

Parental attendance at traditional style academic review meetings previously averaged 30%. We discussed with parents their reasons for non-attendance at these events and learned that many parents were reluctant to attend meetings where they may be expected to talk to specialist teachers about a subject they lacked confidence in.

We worked with parents to develop academic review days and now host two of these each year, one in the autumn term and another in the spring term. Each parent is asked to arrange an appointment at a time between 8.30am and 8.00pm. They then meet with their child's Tutor and discuss academic progress in all subjects in a meeting that lasts between 10-15 minutes. If parents wish to access subject specific advice they are able to attend a subject surgery held on the same day. Consecutive appointments are also made on the same day to complete Individual Education Plan (IEP) reviews or Additional Needs reviews with relevant students and parents. Parental attendance to Academic Review Days now averages 77%.

School Strategy 5: Parents' meetings to provide information and support with learning

In addition to Academic Review Days we aim to provide regular parent workshops and learning events. At a meeting held for Year 10 parents during the previous academic year, families were invited to meet with key staff to learn about the GCSE Maths and English exam, its structure and assessment and to access revision and support materials for their son/daughter. 20% of the parents who were invited to this workshop attended on the evening. Similarly, we held an English and Maths progress evening for a target group of Year 11 parents with 32% of those invited attending on the evening.

We discussed with parents their reasons for non-attendance at both events and learned that many parents were reluctant to attend parents' meetings when they were invited by senior staff, this gave the impression of a formal event and again, one where they may be expected to talk to specialist teachers.

We made use of these findings at the English and Maths workshop held for Year 11 parents earlier this year. On

this occasion, the FEO contacted all parents by phone as a follow up to the letter sent out. The FEO also arranged to meet with those parents who were reluctant to attend and sit with them at the meeting and offered a follow up workshop. 46% of the parents who were invited to this workshop attended on the evening including a number of parents of eFSM learners we had been unsuccessful in engaging prior to this.

Conclusion

If the school wishes to engage as many of its parents as possible it is essential that current practice is consistently refined and views from parents both sought and acted upon. Feedback from parents has helped us to identify that when meetings have a generic focus on providing information about school or progress, there is good support from parents. When meetings allow parents and staff to meet and discuss subject-based information, attainment or progress, there are lower levels of parental support. It is therefore essential for us to make use of both styles of activity if we are to engage all parents and ensure they can support their child's learning.

As part of our November 2013 Estyn Inspection, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire. Their feedback highlights the impact of our approach.

	Number of respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I am kept well informed about my child's progress	51	35%	49%	10%	0%	6%
I feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem	51	53%	43%	0%	0%	4%

We have yet to engage all parents, but nevertheless acknowledge this is a strategic responsibility and consequently are working towards completion of the Investors on Families Award in recognition of this.