

parents

Parents can play an active, constructive part in their child's education. For example, Parentkind's blueprint¹ for parent-friendly schools articulates some key elements for parental participation:

- **effective two-way communication**
- **parents supporting learning**
- **parental involvement in school life**
- **engaging with the wider community**

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) recognise a continuum between parental involvement and parental engagement and describe a 'shift... from the relationship between parents and schools, to a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning'.²

purpose

Purposes of parental engagement

There is an increasing number of ways in which digital applications may be used to support the engagement of parents and carers. Leaders should **decide on purpose** in light of the priorities in the school's development plan (SDP), and the context of needs in their school at any one time.

Purposes may include³ :

- **direct communication** – enabling parents to know what is happening at school
- **video creation** – allowing parents to see activities in the classroom that day
- **audio recording** – providing, for parents, a child's presentation of their learning
- **online resource interactions** – supporting and involving parents in specific learning activities at home
- **online homework** – guiding parents on homework and how they can be involved
- **online discussions** – discussing points that parents wish to raise, within an agreed **framework of practice**

planning

Planning and managing parental engagement through digital technologies

When taking forward the agreed purposes, the introduction of any digital application needs to be **planned and managed** to avoid drawbacks, including any necessary user guidance/training, in the context of the SDP priorities and the school's plan for the development of parental participation.

controlling expectations

Expectations need to be promoted carefully and managed for teachers, parents, carers and learners to avoid unintended consequences:

- Social media can enable effective consultation with parents (parent voice) on school policies and practices, provided that a mutually-agreed framework of practice sets out acceptable uses and rules out unacceptable behaviours and abuses.
- Email can ease parent/teacher communication, provided that expectations of immediate responses and replies outside working hours and days are restricted explicitly.
- Use of images requires agreed approval code of practice to protect identity and privacy.
- Pastoral care, behaviour records, and child protection reporting software needs to be introduced in the context of a full parental/carer understanding of the school's positive behaviour, and wider care and welfare policies and practices.

evaluating

Evaluating parental engagement arising from the uses of digital technologies

Any digital application costs time, resource and effort and should be evaluated for its effectiveness against agreed measures of success for parents and carers, for teachers and learners, in terms of:

- **better communication and interaction**
- **greater appreciation of teaching**
- **greater involvement and engagement in learning activities**
- **better support for school policies and practices**
- **enhanced mutual understanding**
- **more positive motivation and better learning outcomes**

¹ Parentkind (2020). Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools. Tonbridge: Parentkind <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Projects/Blueprint-for-Parent-Friendly-Schools>

² Goodall, J. and Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental Involvement to Parental Engagement: A Continuum. Educational Review, 66(4)

³ Passey, D. (2011). Technologies involving parents and guardians with their children's learning. In A. Méndez-Vilas (Ed.). Education in a technological world: communicating current and emerging research and technological efforts. Badajoz, Spain: Formatex Research Center

The Northern Ireland Innovation Forum comprises stakeholders including primary and post-primary schools, teachers' professional associations, the Department of Education, the Education Authority (including C2k), CCEA, the ETI, the UCET (NI), Capita (the C2k service provider) and the Creative Learning Centres. Through research and evaluation initiatives, the forum seeks to identify, create, support and promote innovative education practices that apply ICT effectively to improve teaching, learning and school effectiveness. The research and case studies in this leaflet was conducted by Professor Don Passey, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University and Research Advisor to the Forum.

INNOVATION
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Advancing and enhancing parental engagement with schools through digital applications



LEADERSHIP GUIDANCE

Purpose, planning and managing, controlling expectations and evaluating

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Examples of digital applications for parental engagement

Regularly communicating cognitive and behavioural data to parents, in response to social or psychological concerns

- **SIMS** Parent App
- **CPOMS**

Raising parental awareness and emotional engagement with learning and 'presence' as an audience for their child's creations

- **Audio** recording and/or **video** creation, and publication/presentation
- **Seesaw** used by teachers in a school to engage with parents and show what their children have been doing in class
- **Newsdesk** used to create video news stories that can involve and be seen by parents
- **Audio** created in school by children, but in the parents' native language, and accessed at home using **QR access codes**

Online discussions

- **Email** to raise and discuss certain issues and to make specific appointments

Direct communications to parents about - learning engagement, positive behaviour, and care and welfare issues

- **Mailchimp** used to send documents to parents
- **Google Translate** used for parents with EAL to translate communications into their native language
- **SIMS** Parent App used to send cognitive (and sometimes) behavioural reports and notes to parents
- **CPOMS** (Child Protection Online Monitoring Software) to draw together evidence so that teachers can contact parents early if they identify a potential social or psychological issue

Communicating with parents about school events/administration

- **Twitter** and **Facebook** used to communication events
- Websites used to provide access to upcoming events and to present details of past events

Increasing parental engagement in homework activities

- **Online resource** interactions and **online homework**
- **Accelerated Reading** and **Purple Mash** used at home by learners, so that parents can interact with them when these activities are undertaken
- **Learning by Questions** used as homework, so that parents can engage or monitor how their children are progressing
- **myHomework** app allows learners and parents to access homework details



Engaging parents and supporting cognitive, social and emotional needs

Teachers report that parents respond very positively to their different uses of digital technologies to support engagement – that they are keen and proud to see how their children are involved and achieving. Even parents who have not engaged with school previously, do not ignore pictures of their own children, and are proud when they hear the teacher or principal saying something positive about their children.

Developing positive patterns, encouraging parental monitoring and discussion of learner attainment and achievement

Use of the SIMS Parent App system has been found to save teacher time; telephone calls took longer previously. As parents monitor attainment and achievement in a more ongoing way, there has been a change in the nature of discussion in parents' nights. Broader conversations are found to be happening now, with less challenging discussions arising, as there are fewer last-minute surprises.

A range of digital technology applications support parental engagement and involvement

Parents are keen that their children attend school, and messages about this through the SIMS Parent App have generated positive discussions between parents/carers and their children. Parents have increasingly engaged with the school, and report that they feel informed about what is happening in the school and with their children. Parents appreciate access to Facebook messages, which highlight what their children are doing, and how they are achieving.

Moving online to support and enhance communication

From the range of digital technologies used, the school finds there are now more frequent communication to and from parents, which is often regular and ongoing. Having increased the use of digital technologies, the school finds that parents now tend to use email more to communicate, and this route maintains their engagement.

Enhancing homework practice

In this class, Learning by Questions (LbQ) is being used about three times a week. It is also used once a week for homework; and for homework, the system marks the questions. In one class, all the children said that they liked using LbQ in class, but two said they did not like using it at home (in one case, because a father monitored use very closely).

Directly involving parents in children's learning

The teacher supported all learners in the class to write a story that was submitted to News Desk, so that one or more stories might be selected and shown to a much wider audience of learners, teachers and parents across schools in Northern Ireland. The story chosen for the front page of the website was the story written by a boy with extremely low self-confidence, who gathered evidence about his father's work in order to create the headline and content.