Vignette 1

Engaging parents and supporting cognitive, social and emotional needs

Abstract: 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.

Full vignette
The level of free school meals is about 60% in this primary school; the learners speak some 24 different first languages. There is access to Wi-Fi across all areas of the school. Digital technologies are used to support a wide range of needs for different groups involved in different aspects of the school – learners, teachers, governors, parents and carers. Governors, for example, have access to a secure Google Classroom area, where documents are uploaded for their view. Similarly, teachers have access to another secure Google Classroom area, which contains resources and documents for sharing and view.

Parents have access to See-Saw[1], where teachers upload examples of the work of the learners, highlighting their achievements, and illustrating their activities. The school started use of See-Sew with nursery children, and then developed its use across the school, over a period of some three years. Alerts are sent to parents via their mobile telephones, to let them know that new material has been posted. Teachers report that parents respond very positively – that they are keen and proud to see how their children are involved and achieving. Even parents who have not engaged with school previously, have been found to access See-Saw – they do not ignore pictures of their own children, and are proud when they hear the teacher or principal saying something positive their children on See-Saw.

To support social and psychological issues that the learners may face, the school has developed use of CPOMS. This online system gathers details that are submitted, from a range of different teachers or support staff. Teachers are encouraged to use the system when they note anything that might indicate a social or psychological issue that a child is experiencing. The system enables details from different teachers and support staff to be collated into a collected record, so that the principal has an overview, and can see when different staff are identifying indicators of possible issues. If a potential issue is identified, it allows very early intervention – the principal can call a parent/carer, to open up a discussion. If appropriate, advice can be offered, about social support, for example.

Overall, teachers in the school welcome the CPOMS[2] system. Teachers feel more confident that their concerns are being checked, alongside those of others. Being able to keep an instantaneous record means that the points they notice are not then forgotten. The early interventions that can be enabled, means that discussions can be at a level that the school would call 'honest'. These discussions, at that early stage, are found to more open, as emotional levels in the discussion are not as high as they would be at a later stage. As teachers and parents can discuss more easily, with lower levels of emotional concern involved, wellbeing is supported - teachers feel less stressed about these interactions, and feel more able to handle the situations as they arise.

In general, the school is concerned to engage through positive connections with the community. The school has found that these connections lead to educational improvements and outcomes. Digital technologies are used to support these connections, allowing joint understanding of what the school is aiming to achieve, and how it does this, to be developed. Consequently, the school develops a deep understanding of individual and community contexts, and can use this in-depth understanding to support the wellbeing and educational achievements of the children.

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[1] https://web.seesaw.me/
[2] https://www.cpoms.co.uk/

Different digital technologies are used for different purposes, with a range used to support parental interaction and engagement. For example, Twitter and Facebook are updated daily to communicate school events to parents. Documents are sent to parents online, via MailChimp[3]; in this form, parents who are not familiar with English as a first language can use software to translate the documents into their native language.

The school has generated a clear policy and framework of practice in order to address issues that might arise. Decisions about ways to use the software, which software to use for what purposes, and how to gain support from parents on when and how to use the software, have all been points that are vitally important and have been addressed. Policy decisions about acceptable use have in particular applied to the use of email, where issues can arise, and where an understanding of the potential issues beforehand allow practices to be put in place to pre-empt problems.

Outcomes and benefits:
- There is ongoing communication with parents/carers about school events and activities
- Parents can see clear examples of their children's positive behaviour, and how their children are engaged in learning
- Parents are made aware of any care or welfare issues, and are involved in early discussions
- Parental contact to discuss social or psychological concerns can arise from indicators that staff can quickly report

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[3] https://mailchimp.com/