

Vignette 3

A range of digital technology applications support parental engagement and involvement

Abstract: Parents are keen that their children attend school, and messages about this through the SIMS Parent App¹ 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.

Full vignette

The level of students with free school meals is about 50% in this post-primary school, about a third of the learners have English as an additional language, and there are a high number with specific needs. The school provides a wide range of subject courses including horticulture, and supports students through a 'Breakfast Club' and initiatives such as 'Aiming Higher'. Teachers use Google Drive and Google Classroom, and the latter has been used to support students who are out of school for extended periods. Teachers have also used Google Drive to upload videos of lessons that they have run, so that these are accessible to the young people at home.

The school uses data systems to identify those learners who might be 'under-achieving', and those that appear to be on the borderline of more successful achievement. The school uses SIMS Parent App, particularly with year 10 groups, where some students are fast-tracked to take GCSEs.

Parents are involved in school events whenever possible. Learners new to the school are invited to Saturday events, and there are regular opportunities set up for them to be specifically supported in terms of cultural and linguistic engagement. Parents are supported by the school in terms of developing English for speakers of other languages; Google Translate is used in this context wherever appropriate. Parents are also provided with support on how to use the SIMS Parent App, and how they can receive messages through that system that can be translated. For those with any ongoing difficulties with using SIMS Parent App, the school runs 'surgeries'.

The school uses SIMS Parent App to send out more official attendance and achievement reports, but uses other systems to send out notes about after-school clubs, events, meetings, community events, web-site links, reminders to parents, and emergency communications. Some general details are put onto the school website. Subject departments send out Twitter messages every day which are subject-specific, and can indicate work that the learners need to do. Facebook is used to send out messages about events, while the Show My Homework App allows parents to see what the learners have done for homework, but it also allows them to easily access their own homework. Teachers and parents can monitor homework using this app. This digital technology has been found to help to address issues that the school faced with homework completion, but it has also been found to save time for the learner and the teacher.

At this time, the school does not send out messages about behavioural issues; only achievement messages are sent out. Parents are keen that their young people attend school, and messages about this through the SIMS Parent App have generated discussions between them. Parents have been found to engage with the school increasingly; they know that they can either telephone or come into the school. Parents have reported to the school that they do feel informed about what is happening in the school and with the young people. Parents have reported their appreciation of access to Facebook messages, which can highlight what they are doing at school, and how they are achieving.

Outcomes and benefits:

- Communicating with parents about school events leads to higher engagement

¹ <https://www.capita-sims.co.uk/products-and-services/sims-parent-app>

- Direct communications to parents about attendance, learning engagement, and attainments leads to more informed discussions
- Showing learning activities in which the learners are involved, raises parental awareness and interest.