

Vignette 2

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

Abstract: 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.

Full vignette

This post-primary school traditionally holds parents' nights for each year group, where student achievement is discussed. However, the school felt that parental engagement could be higher, and they wanted to find a way to address this. Use of the SIMS Parent App¹ was considered as a possible way forward, so that parents would have access to progress reports much more often than they would through attending parents' nights. Having undertaken a thorough cost-benefit analysis, the school decided to move to use of this system.

Now, no printed reports go out to parents. Of all the parents and carers, initially only 2-3% had not signed up for use of the system, which reduced to less than 1% within six months; indeed, most parents indicate that they are content to use the system, and their familiarity with social media reassures them that they can access it.

The school reports regularly using this system to parents, both about the learners' academic progress, and their behaviour. Parents now have an 'on-time' picture of what is happening, and have details of minor behavioural incidents that they would not have had previously. This enables them to have more regular involvement through an ongoing record, which is quite different from the infrequent record that they would have had through an occasional parents' night.

It has been found, however, that parental responses to and uses of the system do need to be managed; understanding and expectations need to be appropriately set. For example, to avoid rapid telephone responses from parents, all messages are sent out at 6.00pm. The reception staff are made aware when this happens, so that they can accommodate a possibly greater incoming telephone response the following morning. Similarly, briefing parents on the meaning of behaviour reports has been particularly important, so that they understand that the issues may be minor, and not major, ones; this has been vital, as such reports were not sent out previously for parents' nights. The wording of messages is also found to be important, as system-generated terms can create major concerns for some parents; the terms 'under-achievement' and 'behavioural issue', for example, are now avoided, as these tended to generate negative responses or concerns from parents.

Overall, the SIMS Parent App system has been found to save teacher time; previously, telephone calls took longer, whereas this system handles records more efficiently. It has also been found to change the nature of discussion in parents' nights. Broader conversations are found to be happening now, with less challenging discussions arising, because there are fewer surprises when details are regularly reviewed by parents.

Outcomes and benefits:

- Direct communications to parents about learning attainment and achievement is having positive effects on teachers and parents
- Cognitive data are regularly communicated to parents

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