

ENCOURAGING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT VIA TECHNOLOGY

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Carer or parental engagement in education is so valuable, particularly for primary school children. Not only does it boost their confidence and encourage them to do well, but feeling supported provides the conditions necessary for them to develop their skills while exploring all the different aspects of their education. It pays dividends for parents too, reassuring them that their child is happy and secure in their school's environment and is being given the support they need to learn important skills.

Contrary to the beliefs of some parents, being engaged with their child's education isn't all about doing their homework for them. This is one of the main points of anxiety for today's parents, many of whom feel that their skills simply don't extend that far, they just don't understand what's needed, or it was all done differently when they were at school.

Involvement really counts

Schools are eager for parents to be involved in the school and know what their child is learning about. They want them to be interested and part of the school community, which then brings the benefits of security, support and encouragement to their children.

Not all parents understand this, however, and finding ways to involve them is a dilemma faced by schools right across the country. With so many barriers to overcome (e.g. time pressures, disengagement, low parental self-esteem, inflexible work schedules, language barriers, poverty and so on), schools can't possibly find a single solution that fits everyone, so instead they employ a variety of approaches that

offer options for parents to connect with school life on different levels.

Try, try and try again

Many schools go to great lengths to extend the hand of inclusion to parents and, through a mix of dialogue, social events, parent and child learning sessions, family assemblies and so on, are very successful in garnering the involvement of the majority of their pupils' parents/guardians. Many parents really value the time that teachers take to talk to them about their child in person. These face-to-face conversations enable each to understand the other better, as well as provide the teacher with an insight into their pupils' home circumstances and how that contributes to their learning.

The biggest challenge for most schools is connecting with those hard-to-reach parents who don't come to events, don't respond to letters or emails, don't come to parents' evenings and just don't appear to be interested.



Of course, there are many, many reasons for apparent non-engagement.

Encouraging parental engagement via technology

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Most schools understand this and constantly seek alternative ways to connect with these parents. One such way is via technology. With so many parents having smartphones these days, schools have a direct path to keeping them in the loop of what's happening in their child's school life – without the parent having to do anything!

ReallySchool: a multi-tasking solution

In all primary schools, it's a requirement for each teacher to observe and gather evidence of pupils' skills acquisition in their EYFS, KS1 and KS2 classrooms every day. As you know, this takes a lot of time, especially as pupils need to be assessed on each activity multiple times to show the level and rate of their progression. The ReallySchool app makes this task easier and more streamlined for teachers, allowing them to capture an image of the observation and apply an assessment score for each child in just a few clicks and compiling a record of their progress as they go through the year, as well as enabling them to generate termly reports or student journals to show to parents at parents' evenings – and more.

However, in terms of parental engagement, ReallySchool delivers a really useful extra benefit and that is to help schools to involve parents in their child's learning journey via their own dedicated free version of the app. The school simply sends an email invitation for the parent to download the app and, once accepted, the parent is automatically linked to their child's profile. This removes any potential barriers to parental uptake of the app by making it as easy as possible to get started.



Designed in the style of many social media apps, it's totally intuitive and easy to use; neither teachers nor parents need special training to be able to use it fully – and this includes those who may feel that their IT skills are lacking!

It works like this: teachers capture children's learning in the classroom with photos, videos or audio recordings – and these can all be shared directly to parents' smartphones or tablets to provide a snapshot of what their child is doing and how they are getting on. Parents and guardians then have the option to reply to the teacher's messages and even have a quick dialogue, if they wish. It's an easy way to keep them informed, without the pressure of having to attend the school – or even reply.

For those parents who may speak English as a second language and find visual or audio communication more useful than the written word, ReallySchool also enables teachers to share video or audio clips of their child's learning, ensuring these parents can still be aware of what happens when their child is at school.

A feature of ReallySchool that the pupils love is that their teacher can award them badges for achievement when they have done well. The teacher can immediately share this news with their parents/guardians – and this acts as a great motivator for children as their parents share in their success.

And let's not forget that people are social beings. We love sharing on social media and ReallySchool mirrors this, making it easy for parents to download learning journals that show their child's progress in a matter of clicks, which they can then share with relatives or friends.

Having access to the ReallySchool app is especially useful for busy parents who are keen to be as involved in their child's education as they can be but are constrained by working hours or other commitments. The app allows them to view observations from the teacher just as easily as checking their emails – and if they can't do this immediately, they're all there waiting to be seen at the end of their day.

Taking the direct route

Using the technology that many parents have in their hands daily is the obvious way for schools to share good news and keep them informed about their child's life at school. Even if they still don't respond or attend, they are not excluded, thanks to the intervention of the ReallySchool app.

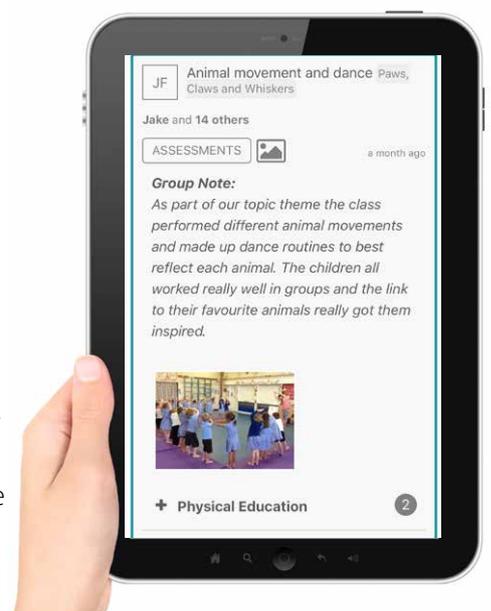
Mrs Waters, the head teacher of one of our customer schools, Dogsthorpe Infants, puts it this way: "Involving parents is never easy, but the more options a school has, the better chance there is of reaching a greater number of them. Many parents use smartphones, so there's a clear opportunity there for us to keep

them informed about wider school activities via social media, while the ReallySchool app can provide the details about what their child is learning in the classroom. It's about having different ways of including different people, even if it's on a non-committal level to start with – and greater engagement can grow from there."

Helping parents see things differently

Not only is ReallySchool a fantastic time-saving tool for teachers, the fact that it provides schools with an additional way to reach parents and guardians is such a benefit. It demonstrates, via its dialogue and video/audio sharing tools, that parental engagement isn't all about dedicating hours on end to help with homework; it's more about being supportive and interested – and encouraging their child to succeed.

ReallySchool's bitesize communication is an ideal way to keep parents in the loop without overwhelming them and, as it comes in an app format that has mass appeal, it's a great extra tool that schools can include in their parental engagement toolkit!



ReallySchool is developed by NetSupport, a trusted provider of education IT solutions since 1989.