

Introduction

This is the first pack in the *Parents as Partners* series and it is aimed directly at the headteacher to provide crucial guidance and support.

Working with parents is an important part of a headteacher's job and, when carried out effectively, can be of enormous benefit, contributing to the school's success. Work with parents can be on an individual basis, with a small group of parents, or more formally through the PTA. This pack is designed to help headteachers consider their work with parents and put the relationship on a sound footing.

There are suggestions for a parental audit to see what is happening already in the school community; ideas for consultation with parents and ways to engage with them; how to make the most of parental goodwill and examples of good practice that can be applied in your own setting.

Packs 2 and 3 accompany this pack. *Pack 2* is aimed at teachers and looks at ways to involve parents in their children's education and raise achievement for all concerned. *Pack 3* offers a perspective for parents and provides advice on how they can set up and manage a successful parent organisation within a school.

Note that in this series we have adopted the following terminology:

- 'Parents' refers to all responsible adults, be they mothers, fathers, grandparents, child carers, etc.
- 'PTA' – Parent Teacher Association – refers to any organisation involving parents in the school community, eg home-school associations, friends of..., etc.

The other titles in the series are:

- *Parents as Partners Pack 2: Teachers and PTAs*
- *Parents as Partners Pack 3: Parents and PTAs*

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You may choose to form a working group from the governing body, ensuring all sectors of the school community are represented. Given terms of reference and a timescale to work to by the governing body, this group will then, through wider consultation, produce a draft document. This can be used for a further round of consultation before final adoption.

Another method is to call a general meeting of the whole school community to discuss the requirements of a home-school agreement. If a large attendance is anticipated, break into smaller groups after an initial outline presentation to ensure everyone has a chance to contribute to the discussion. At the end of the session, a few people should be appointed to produce a draft document. This can then be used for a further round of consultation before final adoption.

You may wish to bear the following in mind when drafting your home-school agreement.

A school with effective home-school links:

- has clear, thought-through aims and policies for its work with parents
- has discussed these aims and policies with parents
- has translated them into a body of effective practice
- shows sensitivity towards the different needs and circumstances of its pupils, their families and communities
- regularly consults parents and listens to their views and responds to them
- provides a range of information and contacts for parents and encourages their involvement in the life and work of the school – both as individuals and collectively
- acknowledges the needs of parents' own education and development in the education process
- plans and reviews its work on home-school links regularly and addresses any shortcomings
- shares responsibility and works jointly with parents in educating their child.

Form 3 (pages 17 and 18) offers a series of questions that schools may wish to ask of themselves when drafting a home-school agreement.

How to sign up to the agreement

For the home-school agreement to have any effect, it needs to be accepted by the parents, children and school and made to work. Sending a piece of paper home to be signed is like any other school administrative task and is unlikely to have the intended or desirable impact. In a primary school setting, the parents and child could be invited to sign the agreement after explanation and discussion with the class teacher at one of the regular parent teacher consultations or on a specifically arranged day. In a secondary school setting, the signing could also take place at the parent teacher consultation with the form tutor, head of year and senior staff. It will be more time-consuming, but in the spirit of the agreement.

This information warrants separate meetings in school, especially in the areas of numeracy and literacy, to help and encourage parents to work with the school when supporting children at home. For example, explain reading schemes and how to choose appropriate books to share together at home; suggest games to play at home to help develop literacy and numeracy skills; tell parents about teaching methods for reading and Maths so they are able to help their children by using the same approach as that of the teachers at school. Sharing this information with parents is relevant at all stages of their children's learning, from nursery through to secondary education.

Other areas of the curriculum benefit from parental help. Homeworks might include the option of a worksheet for a trip to the local park, museum, town centre, or a bus ride for the children accompanied by their parents. If parents know the area of the curriculum that is being taught that term, or during the week, they are able to contribute to the resources available for the child's learning.

If the school has a Web site, such information can be conveyed imaginatively, interactively and easily updated. A frequently asked questions page for homeworks could be of enormous benefit.

PTA Web sites

Using information and communication technology with parents is an ongoing challenge and it is important to keep up with every method available. Many schools already have useful Web sites but do you have a PTA page or even a PTA Web site linked to the school's own site? It is not difficult to create your own site these days. Take a look at some that already exist for some immediate inspiration (see below). Appoint a 'Web master' to organise and maintain the Web site with input from the PTA committee or even a sub-group of interested parents. This is where an audit of parents' expertise will come in useful to identify the skills available to you for this project. There is already plenty of help and advice on setting up a site available on the Web, in books, etc (see *Building a School Web Site*, Pearson Publishing, 2001).

You might want to include some of the following details on the PTA Web site:

- Names of the committee members.
- Forthcoming PTA events.
- Reports on past events.
- Fundraising activities.
- Invitation for help, ideas and comments.

Some examples of PTA Web sites are as follows:

- Templars' Primary School – <http://www.geocities.com/templars-pta/>
- Christ Church Primary School – <http://christchurchschool.birkenhead.net/ptaparents.html>
- Yateley School – <http://www.yateley.hants.sch.uk/pta.htm>
- Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School – <http://www.brgs.lancs.sch.uk/esquirrel/ptaindex.htm>

Fundraising event planning checklist

The event:

Date

Consider the following before making a decision on the date:

- Other events in the area that might clash with your proposed date.
- Major sporting events that may affect attendance.
- The likely weather conditions, given the time of year and the event's seasonal suitability.
- Holidays and half-terms.
- Which day of the week is most suitable, ie when helpers are available or when it is possible to maximise attendance.
- Whether the venue is available.

Time

Consider the following before making a decision on the time:

- When people are available to help and attend.
- Available transport.
- Daylight hours, if applicable.
- Whether the venue is available.

Finances

Consider the following:

- How much will running the event cost?
- Are you charging people to attend? If so, how much?
- How much do you expect to raise?
- Do you have enough in the bank to cover the event?
- Who is in charge of the finances?
- Remember petty cash, if applicable.

Licences

Consider the following:

- Do you need a licence for the event?
- If you sell lottery tickets, you need a **lottery licence** obtainable from your local authority.
- If you are performing for the public, you will probably need a **public entertainment licence** from your local council. You may find that the school already holds one for the school premises, so check first.
- A **liquor licence** is needed if you sell alcohol at an event. This is obtained from the local magistrates court where you apply for an occasional licence. Or you can ask a local publican to run the bar for you.
- Less familiar is the **Performing Rights Society licence** which may be needed if performing music for the public. Premises are covered by this licence so ask first as the venue may well have one. PRS licences cover the copyright and can be obtained from the PRS, telephone 0207 580 5544.

9 Wider parent representation

Parents are increasingly keen to be involved in decision-making, participation and leadership within education. Many educationalists are wary of such involvement but we must consider carefully what we mean by 'decision-making'. The author suggests that it means a process of partnership to share views and take action towards shared goals, not a power struggle!

Parent representation/participation can happen at a number of levels.

PTAs and parent governors

Within the context of the school, parents will be involved through the PTA and as parent governors. Many European countries also have parent representatives from each class who come together to form a school parent council along the lines of the increasingly popular UK school councils. Their views are then sought and fed into the school decision-making processes in a formal and well-structured way.

Using the PTA as the vehicle for participation in the decision-making process is a good model to follow and you might consider setting up membership of the PTA committee along the lines of class representation. Remember that all parents are members of the PTA and the membership can be broadened to include the wider school community – grandparents, past pupils and genuine 'friends' of the school. When electing a committee, it is an important challenge to make sure you include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic and other groups within the school.

You should offer training for parent leaders to develop their leadership skills. The whole PTA committee can benefit from training sessions in a variety of areas to develop the necessary skills to run a successful organisation. This is an important element in the recruitment and retention of committed parent participation.

Once more, it is good practice to include pupil representatives along with parents in the decision-making process.

The following benefits arise from greater parental involvement with the school:

- Pupils benefit from the awareness that parents are involved in school decisions and may specifically benefit from policies enacted by parent organisations.
- Parents have a greater awareness of and input into policies that affect their children's education and have access to shared experiences and connections with other parents.
- Teachers and the school gain awareness of parents' perspectives in policies and school decisions and soon accept the equality of parent representation on school committees.