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**PiXL
INSIGHTS**

**Partner with
parents for impact**

PARENTKIND & PiXL INSIGHTS

PARTNER WITH PARENTS FOR IMPACT

SPECIAL EDITION

JUNE 2025

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Parentikind

PiXL
INSIGHTS

“When schools and families work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”

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A PiXL AND PARENTKIND PARTNERSHIP

A WELCOME FROM OUR CEOS

RACHEL JOHNSON, CEO, PiXL

When we speak to many of our member schools, there is a growing sense of unease about the nature of the relationship between school and home. It can feel like parent and school are pulling in different directions, that the expectations each have of this crucial relationship are more unclear than they ever have been.

And this is having an impact in the classroom on the quality of education children are receiving: in 2024, TeacherTapp reported that 27% of the teachers they surveyed had ignored a pupil's behaviour **because of** concerns about parent complaints.

Our reason for existing at PiXL is to support school leaders in improving outcomes and life chances for all young people. Increasingly it feels as though that cannot be done without putting serious thought and intention into how we work with parents. We need not be on different sides, ultimately, we need to work together in the best interest of the young people we have in common. That may look different now post-pandemic but educators are experts at adjusting approaches to address the issue.

We're solutions-focused at PiXL. We know that, if we are going to be able to truly get under the skin of the issue and find positive ways forward, we cannot do that without engaging positively and collaboratively with the parent perspective. That's why we're so thrilled to partner with Parentkind on this publication: we need their insight and perspective just as individual school leaders cannot 'fix' the school-home relationship without the parents themselves.

Wherever your school is on their journey with this, we hope this publication serves as a practical companion as you travel towards an even more positive and productive home-school relationship. If we get this right, everyone benefits.



JASON ELSOM, CEO, PARENTKIND

The social contract between home and school has long been fraying. We can no longer assume that all parents will support the schools that their children attend, and it is increasingly the case that parents feel that school is not meeting the needs of their children, nor their role in their education. One of the parents in our 14,200 parent groups shared their view that 'parents have become the pantomime villains for schools'. For many parents, their experience of homeschooling their children through the pandemic, teacher strikes and the television portrayal of a secondary school in Yorkshire as 'a holding pen' has shaken their faith in the education system. Teachers are struggling in an under-resourced system, and parents are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing. Parents and teachers are locking horns for many reasons rather than supporting each other in overcoming the challenges they should face together.

As the leading charity for parents in the UK, Parentkind publishes the National Parent Survey to advocate for parents and identify the issues they face personally while supporting their children. But with many colleagues hailing from the education sector themselves (myself being a former educational leader, teacher and parent), we believe that we can work with you to unlock the gates to the bridge between home and school to strengthen and often re-establish a trusting relationship between two of the most important champions for the wellbeing and outcomes of the nation's children.

Our Parent-Friendly Schools accreditation programme enables schools to celebrate how they involve parents in their school community while offering support where they struggle. It's time we all work together to overcome the current challenges many schools face in collaborating with parents to deliver the best outcomes for children. Parent participation plays a crucial role, and this book offers practical guidance on how to make that happen.



WHO IS PiXL?



We are the UK's largest education leadership network, working with over 2,000 schools, colleges and alternative provisions across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, from Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) up to Key Stage 5. PiXL exists to support and strengthen the work of school and college leaders as they strive to improve the outcomes and life chances for all young people.

The support we offer schools is diverse, highly adaptable and responsive to the ever-changing educational landscape. We know that, while many schools face similar challenges, all are unique. That's why **supporting strong and thoughtful leadership** and **facilitating positive and productive networking and collaboration** is at the heart of what we do. Whatever aspect of our offer our members engage with, we strive to:

- Listen to ideas from diverse perspectives
- Learn from what works in different contexts
- Share that learning to help us all make an impact on our teams and our students

NETWORKING

- Online networking events where schools come together to share ideas and strategies across a whole range of issues and topics – from oracy to attendance
- Access to online surgeries with specialists on a variety of areas, from reading to financial education, assessment to curriculum support
- Open days hosted by member schools, providing opportunities to see strategies in action and, crucially, time to get out of school and get a fresh perspective
- A designated PiXL Specialist who supports each individual school's improving outcomes journey, signposting them to the most relevant support for them

LEADERSHIP GROWTH

Support for school leaders is absolutely central to our work and is implicit in all we do.

- All leaders have access to 'Time to Think' sessions with qualified coaches as part of our surgery offer
- We partner with leadership authors and thinkers to bring our members the latest thinking and insight
- Our two popular podcast series, PiXL Pearls and the PiXL Leadership Book Club, have leadership reflection and growth at their heart and are freely available to non-members
- Our School of PiXL Leadership provides quality leadership Continuing Professional Development (CPD) across all levels of leadership and from 2025-26 is available as part of the PiXL membership offer

EVENTS

- Our National Conferences happen three times a year for each sector: Primary, Secondary and Post-16. These are held in London and attended by hundreds of leaders. We strive to strike a balance between supporting with the here-and-now – those things that our members are currently grappling with, whether that be attendance, staff wellbeing or new curriculum changes – as well as encouraging more upstream thinking – such as the recruitment and retention of Gen Z teachers
- We have additional conferences for leaders of Multi Academy Trusts
- Every academic year we also offer a range of in-person and online events on a range of topics and curriculum areas, which are responsive to our membership

STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

We have a wide range of resources and strategies to support schools and colleges in improving outcomes – from resources to support in the classroom to teacher CPD.

As with everything we do, we try to respond to what our members want support with. In recent years this has included:

- Support for developing spoken language and communication
- A financial education package developed in conjunction with Young Enterprise

Our assessment offer also provides us with data on what students' barriers are and strategies and resources are produced in response to these.

At PiXL, we are committed to facing the brutal facts with unwavering hope. We do not shy away from the very real challenges that we face as a sector, but we are committed to doing so with an open outlook, a solution-focused mindset, and a person-centred approach.

WHO IS PARENTKIND?

Parentkind exists to empower parents and those with educational responsibility to improve the life chances of children, young people and their communities.

We are a national federated charity and membership association to over 21,000 schools. Our network mobilises over 200,000 volunteer fundraisers to raise more than £140 million annually, which funds vital equipment and services for our schools. This outstanding effort raises an amount comparable to leading UK charities.

As well as being the leading membership organisation for Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) for over 60 years across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are advocates for the parent voice. Our role is to ensure that all parents can participate in education and have their voices heard so that education across the nations can benefit all children in all schools and society as a whole. This means we have a wealth of experience with schools of all sizes and types and the communities they serve.

DRIVING NATIONAL PARENT POLICY

Parentkind provide the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Parents and drive policy change to support parents. Our most recent campaign elicited support from the Secretary of State to ban smart phone use in schools. We recently represented parents' views at the Education Select Subcommittee.



SUPPORTING PTAS

Our 13,000 PTA members account for more than 5.5% of all UK charities and raise up to £140 million each year, providing vital funds to our schools, paying towards learning equipment, facilities, school trips and other activities that enrich our children's educational experience.



SUPPORTING PARENTS

Parentkind gives those with a parenting role a voice in education. We invest substantial resources in representing parent views on their child's learning to local, regional, and national governments and agencies. Evidence tells us that parent participation in education benefits all children in all schools, and society as a whole.



SUPPORTING SCHOOLS

We are dedicated to delivering positive change for UK schools, parents and their children. With 60 years of experience working alongside schools and parents, and five years of evidence-based research backing our thought leaderships, we hope to support schools in delivering improvement in trust and relationships with parents.



WE ARE THE BRIDGE BETWEEN HOMES AND SCHOOLS

- We marry research with first-rate practice that has been proven to work
- We make sure that the voices of parents are heard in education
- We represent parents' views and interests in discussions with education authorities, agencies, central government and all other interested parties and bodies
- We work on parent participation with partners and stakeholders, researchers, teachers, parents, administrators, community partners, and others
- We identify and promote examples of high-quality parent-school partnerships and provide resources to support parent participation in school and home-based learning

INTRODUCING PARENT-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY PARENTKIND

Over the last five years, Parentkind has engaged with the 9,500 schools within our network to research best practices in parent participation.

Our research has resulted in a Blueprint Framework for Parent Participation. With five drivers and 25 initiatives, this framework can support schools in evaluating success and managing onward improvements. We've built this framework so busy school leaders can prioritise actions and deliver fast impact.



This framework is gifted to UK schools because we want to work together to create stronger parent participation for the benefit of all.

PARENT-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS - THE ACCREDITATION

Parent-Friendly Schools is a first-of-its-kind initiative for helping schools accredit the powerful work they do to encourage parent participation. Using the Blueprint Framework for Parent Participation, a school can complete our survey and be evaluated against the five drivers and 25 initiatives using our 325 measures.

The reward for completing the survey is a detailed report identifying a school's starting point for parent participation. You will receive a report with an action plan and guidance on improving parent participation.

If you gain more than 40% in our survey, you will have successfully achieved the Standard Award and are officially a parent-friendly school. You will learn what level of accreditation you could achieve if you continued working with Parent-Friendly Schools.

If you score above 60%, you are working for a Silver Award; if you reach over 80%, you are working for a Gold Award. To successfully secure these higher levels awards, you will be assessed further by our Parent-Friendly Schools consultants.



You can read more about the Parent-Friendly School accreditation on [page 88](#).

PARENT-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS - YOUR COMMUNITY OF BEST PRACTICE

Your accreditation is the start of your journey with Parent-Friendly Schools. We are a charity and want to make a difference by improving education for parents and children. Therefore, our mission is to be a partner in school improvement. We provide a suite of support to our members as they work hard to strengthen the bridge between home and school.

Our community includes:

Membership in the Parent-Friendly Schools community and the chance to explore parent participation with other practitioners

Access to extensive training with a partner discount. We have training that covers every initiative

Access to a Parent Participation Strategy Generator and Parent Participation Lead Job description

Access to a resource bank of information sheets, toolkits and templates to action parent participation

Discounts on our advisory services, as we support you to deliver on your strategy

Take our mediation and parent services as we support you in rebuilding trust and relationships with individual parents

ALL CONNECTED TO ONE POWERFUL BLUEPRINT

All our training, resources, and advisory services are grounded in the Blueprint Framework for Parent Participation. Once you gain your accreditation and action plan, there will be resources to support you with the Driver and Initiative identified in your action plan.

Our accreditation survey is a powerful diagnostic tool for your school to help you focus limited resources to power change for good.

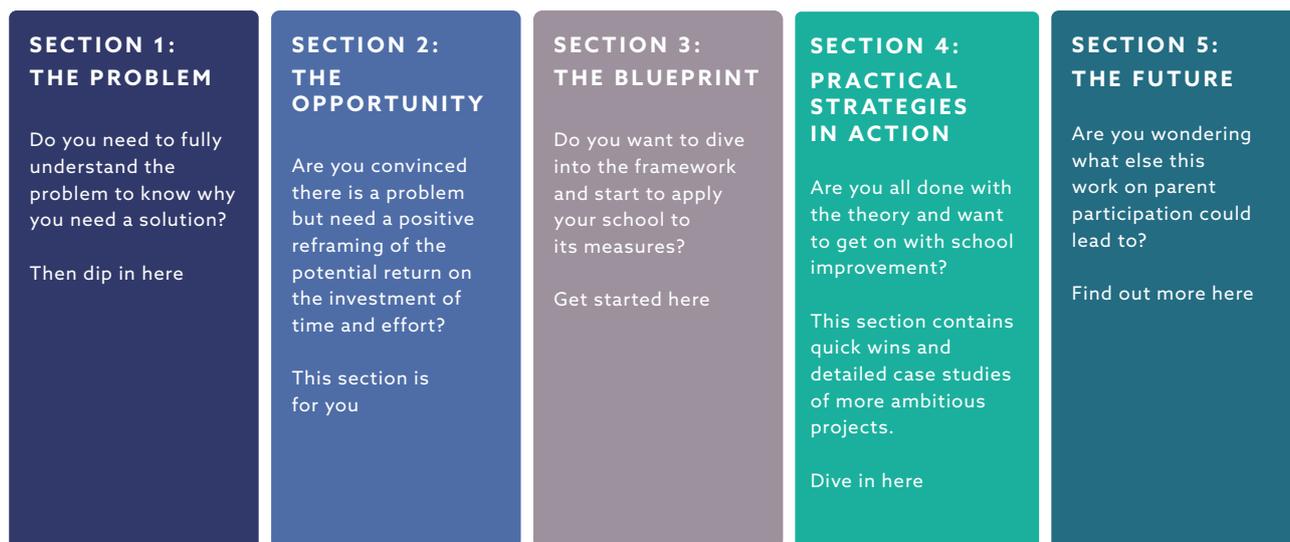
Our services are available to help you act on this diagnostic as we partner with you to deliver improvement as you seek to advance parent participation.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

There is no requirement to read this book from start to finish, that would be a colossal effort and could result in overwhelm. Nothing is more daunting and numbing than taking on hundreds of new ideas and initiatives. It might be that you share it with other stakeholders and maybe even pass it on to your PTA.

So, here's how to be more targeted:

1. Skip to the section that best fits with where you are now in your thinking.



2. As you read, ask yourself, 'will this help us now?' If the answer is yes, stick a Post-it note on the edge of the page. If not, walk on by and come back to it later.
3. When questions pop into your head, write them in the margin. Yes, it's ok to write in this book. Please do; we dare you to make those notes in the margin!
4. Be reflective and evaluative. When people write case studies, they present a snapshot of an approach that will have its ups and downs. When someone offers strategies, it is without knowledge of your context, and without any sense that schools are messy, imperfect environments. Feel free to adapt, evolve or disregard strategies.
5. Choose just one thing to do after browsing this book. There's no need to commit to anything more. If everyone who reads this book makes one change that enhances parent participation, we will have collectively taken a significant step forward.

If you'd like to share your opinion, please do!

Email us at parentfrendlyschools@parentkind.org; we would love to learn from practitioners on the front lines of learning.

MEET THE TEAM



HANNAH COSTANZO HEAD OF CROSS-PHASE PROJECTS, PiXL

I've had the privilege of taking on several different roles and responsibilities in the decade-plus that I've worked at PiXL. In my current role as Head of Cross-phase Projects, I get to work on the development and delivery of strategies and resources that support across our entire PiXL membership network from EYFS to Post-16. All my work is fuelled by a desire to think my way through complex issues, solve problems, and ultimately support and amplify the brilliant work that teachers and school leaders do every day. As the strategy lead for PiXL Insights, I get to do this every year as we support projects in schools and publish professional insights through our four main publications (raising boys' achievement, stretching more able learners, improving inclusion for learners with SEND (Special educational needs and disabilities), and empowering learners from disadvantaged backgrounds). I also lead on strategic partnerships at PiXL, finding new ways to work collaboratively with like-minded, values-driven organisations for the benefit of our members. So, this special edition of Insights, developed in collaboration with the brilliant team at Parentkind, is something I'm especially proud to have been involved with.



CAILEAN CARVALHO HEAD OF ACCREDITATION, PARENTKIND

I'm the Head of Accreditation at Parentkind, overseeing 9,500 schools in network. I lead training and services aimed at improving the relationship between schools and parents, utilising the evidence-based Blueprint framework to ensure high standards and better outcomes for children. Currently partnering with Oxford University's (Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education) REEs Centre, I am conducting research on the impact of parent participation on attendance and achievement, particularly for children with SEND and those who are care-experienced.

With 15 years in education, my experience includes roles as the Global Education Lead for IBM and Vice Chair of the Leadership Board at Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), where I influenced admissions policy. As Director of Innovation at the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE), I implemented quality assurance measures and improved assessment processes. Passionate about data and storytelling, I work to drive meaningful change in schools through enhanced parent participation.



RACHEAL SMITH PARENTKIND CONSULTANT AND COACH FOR PARENT-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS ACCREDITATION

I feel lucky to work with Parentkind to deliver genuine impact to schools and parents. I was a teacher in a secondary school for 19 years, a Chief Examiner with Pearson and an author of textbooks. On leaving teaching, I worked with children in care to help them access learning, as well as supporting young people with complex needs to gain English and Maths qualifications. Since 2018, I have worked in startups, learning the commercial skills needed to deliver fast impact and a powerful return on investment. As a Head of English, I used to work with PiXL as a practitioner, and now I am proud to partner with them in the delivery of this book.

“The top barrier to parents getting more involved in school life remains time (36%), followed by simply not being asked (28%) and being unsure what they have to offer (25%)”

THE NATIONAL PARENT SURVEY 2024

THE PROBLEM





When did some parents stop trusting schools?

In this article, we will explore the research on the social contract between home and school. Gone are the days when trust in a school was taken for granted. There seem to be more and more stories of broken relations these days. Let's explore how we got here and see if there are clues about how we might move forward.

In November 2023, the former Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, reported a breakdown in the unwritten agreement between parents and schools. The unwritten agreement, also known as a social contract, was that parents and teachers would work together to get the best outcomes for the children. In her final annual report, she noted that many parents were 'a little bit less willing to support schools and a bit more willing to find fault.'

Is it really so bad?

Before we understand when the relationship between home and school became frayed, we should justify the assertion that it has. It won't be a universal experience for all schools or parents. There will be some communities where the school is still a central hub, and the teaching staff and school leaders are widely respected by parents and children alike.

And some experience extreme distrust and a fractured relationship to the detriment of the child's education. There are episodes of violence against teachers and reports of parents being excluded from the life of the school.

A survey conducted by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), in March 2025 reported some devastating statistics: 82% of school leaders say parents have abused them in the last year. And much of this abuse was verbal. However, 68% reported threatening behaviour, 46% experienced online abuse, 22% experienced discriminatory language and 10% suffered physical violence.

In turn, some parents might challenge whether they are the reason for the breakdown in this relationship. Some parents have reported frustrations with their campaigns to have a say in their children's education. A report by The British Educational Research Association (BERA) gave the example of the Eastborough Anti-Academisation Coalition and the Crowley Parents Campaign, who were routinely frustrated with being heard. The consultation process was represented as 'bogus' and they felt belittled as troublemakers. While this is labelled as 'parent activism' and characterised as being somewhat disruptive in the media, it could be that parents are deeply committed to pursuing a high-quality and varied education for their children.

In interviews after Spielman's final report, she described inspectors' experiences in which parents used the inspection to further a campaign against the school. The tone of these campaigns was 'vexatious.' She noted that inspectors easily spotted parents furthering what she considered a vendetta against the school. The disregard of these parents' comments in this way may be a cause of much frustration.

So, when did the social contract break?

Amanda Spielman's diagnosis of when some parents stopped trusting schools was 2020, and the lockdowns that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic. As Spielman explains:

'This breakdown is feeding into a troubling shift in attendance, in attitudes, in behaviour since the pandemic. Absenteeism has become a stubborn problem. Some of that is down to illness, including mental health problems, but nevertheless disruptive behaviour has become more common.'

The NAHT survey supports the suggestion that the contract breakdown happened because of the pandemic. It stated that 86% of 1,600 school leaders felt it had worsened in the last three years, and 37% thought it had 'greatly' increased.

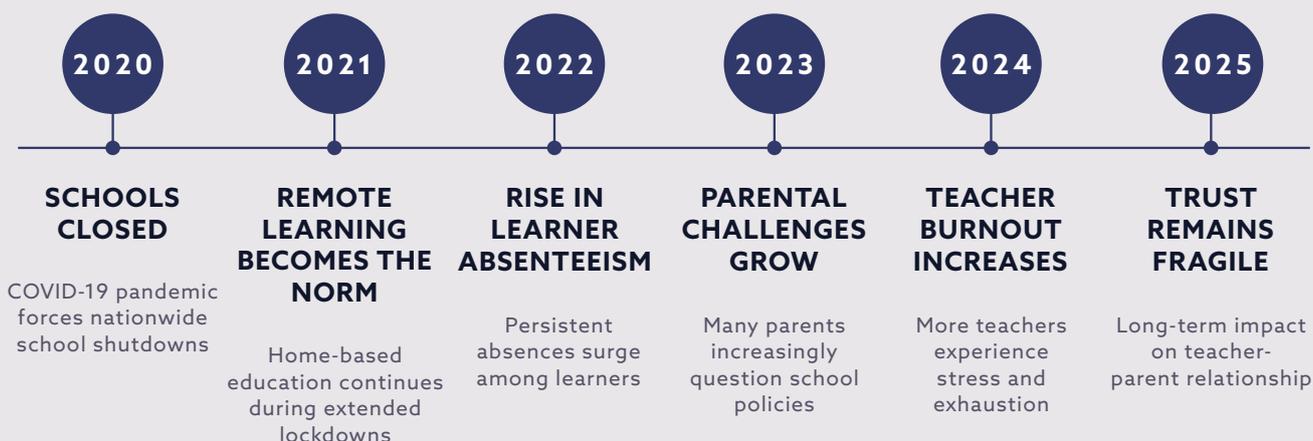
Was COVID-19 the start of the fracture between home and school?

The rise of social media and smart technology must also be a contributing factor, which was dominant well before the pandemic. Not only has this allowed for public vitriol about schools to spread more widely and more rapidly, but it has also allowed children instant access to a parent when there has been a conflict at school.

The best example of social media's role in the breakdown was 2023 when learner protests against uniform and toilet usage policy occurred. Platforms like TikTok and Snapchat empowered learners to organise these protests, and some escalated into vandalism and confrontations with staff. While a conflict between teacher and learner, the events of 2023 highlighted schools' challenge in maintaining discipline in school and so likely eroded trust with many parents.



WHERE THE TRUST BROKE



AND THE IMPACT?

Learners ultimately experience the worst consequences of this breakdown in school and home relationships. Like children amid an acrimonious divorce, they are pulled and tugged between the negative attitudes of one group toward another. If a parent agrees to a child refusing school instruction, it undermines the ability of a teacher to maintain discipline of a whole group. When school leaders take a defensive position and fail to consult with parents can feel frustrated at home and that can challenge the child's educational outcomes.

Low attendance is the most significant manifestation of this breakdown. Dr Sally Burtonshaw and Ed Dorrell from Public First labelled this a national crisis. The presentation of data linking poor attendance to lower attainment is unsurprising. However, the emotive language of hopelessness and distress in their report shows most young people need a solution. Burtonshaw and Dorrell most powerfully express this as a loss of future prospects and a sense of potential unfulfilled.

SUMMARY

- Much evidence suggests the social contract between home and school has broken
- There is some consensus that this breakdown occurred due to COVID-19
- School staff are experiencing much greater levels of abuse
- Some parents are becoming more activist because they feel unheard
- Social media and smart devices have influenced people since before the pandemic and we cannot disregard the impact
- Some students experience the impact of lower results and lower enjoyment of school

THE PROBLEM IN STATISTICS

Attendance

- 22.3% of pupils in England were persistently absent (missed 10%+ of school) in 2022-23, double pre-COVID levels (*Department for Education, 2023*)
- 1 in 10 pupils missed more school days than they attended in 2023 (*The Guardian, Sep 2023*)
- Monday and Friday absences have spiked, indicating strategic 'long weekends' (*Public First analysis, 2023*)

Parent attitudes and disengagement

- Almost half of parents in a 2023 study no longer believe daily attendance is essential (*Public First, 2023*)
- 56% of parents in the same study said the pandemic had changed their view of schooling 'permanently' (*Public First, 2023*)
- 1 in 5 parents admit to taking their children out of school for a term-time holiday in 2023 (*The Independent, 2023*)

Parent-Teacher Conflict

- 82% of school leaders experienced parental abuse in the last year (2023)
- 85% verbal abuse
- 68% threatening behaviour
- 46% online abuse
- 10% physical assault (*NAHT Survey, 2023*)
- 1 in 3 school leaders said parental abuse is becoming 'endemic'. (*NAHT, 2023*)
- 2/3 of UK schools reported a rise in parental complaints in 2023 (*Browne Jacobson / The Times, 2023*)

Impact on learners

- Absentee students are three times more likely to fail their GCSEs (*Education Endowment Foundation, 2023*)
- Students who miss school regularly are twice as likely to report mental health difficulties (*NHS Digital, 2022*)

Impact on teachers and schools

- Nearly half of teachers consider leaving the profession due to stress and conflict (*Education Support, 2023*)
- 1 in 5 headteachers had to ban a parent from school grounds in the past year (*The Times, 2023*)





Why has COVID-19 caused such a breakdown in the home-school relationship?

In this article, we explore the extraordinary impact of COVID-19 on education and its lasting consequences for learners. As parents gained an insider's view of school life, not everyone liked what they observed. The primary culprit for the breakdown in the social contract, the COVID-19 pandemic, has altered the relationship between home and school, likely forever.

Some schools have always enjoyed excellent relationships with parents, and some parents have found their school have not fulfilled their children's needs and vice versa.

The business of supporting a young person's personal development is highly charged. Nothing is stronger than the bond between a parent and their child, and a passion to make a difference underpins a teacher's vocation. The relationship might be easier if ensuring a child's education was an intellectual endeavour. It is, however, founded in emotion, and can become charged.

COVID-19 was a pivotal moment for school-home relationships because of the fraught nature of a national crisis. Schools and parents were well outside their comfort zone as they had to imagine a whole new way of continuing the education and wellbeing of young people.

As catalysts go, two years of national lockdowns was powerful, and the situation magnified even the slightest fracture in the relationship between school and home.

HOW COVID-19 CHANGED EVERYTHING

The need for students to learn from home could have gone in two directions.

Direction 1: Some parents were so glad of the extensive support the school had organised at short notice that the relationship was strengthened, and the community was brought closer together.

Direction 2: Schools were understandably ill-prepared for a national lockdown and the need to facilitate the whole curriculum through home-based learning, and some parents felt abandoned and out of their depth.

Many schools would have needed a superhuman effort to adapt immediately to such a cataclysmic change. The first lockdowns were likely dominated by the second direction and some schools were able to adjust for later lockdowns.

This is a moment for no judgement. Teachers, school leaders, and parents are human beings who were thrown into a crisis and coped the best way they could. And, as with any situation, there were bound to be consequences.

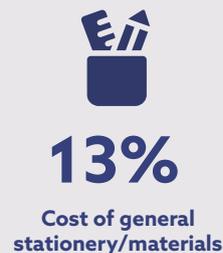
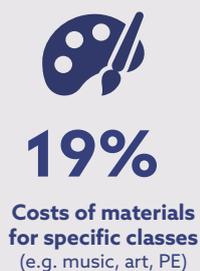
According to an article in The Guardian, the lockdown 'broke the spell' of daily school attendance being an unquestionable norm. Equally, the view behind the curtain of education left most parents uninspired by what their children were being offered, and they became less respectful of full-time education (The Independent). According to a report in The Telegraph, parents became much more willing to complain about the standard of education. Rather than respect the teacher's autonomy, parents were open to challenging decisions.

A report by the public policy research agency Public First drew on conversations with parents from different backgrounds across the UK. The main message of these conversations was that many parents are no longer subscribing to the belief that their children need to be in school full-time. The report writers labelled this a 'seismic shift.'



PARENTS TOP SCHOOL COST CONCERNS

Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school which, if any, of the following are of particular concern to you?



COST OF LIVING, MENTAL HEALTH, AND LIFE FEELS SHORT

Other consequences of a national pandemic impacted many families and made education harder. First, the financial impacts caused a cost-of-living crisis that meant that covering schooling costs became prohibitive. Parentkind research has shown that education is far from free, and the cost of uniforms, school trips, equipment, etc., has become an increasing challenge for many parents post-pandemic.

The pandemic also deprived young people of a critical period of development, during which they hone social skills and other essential qualities. There has been a notable mental health crisis in the young that has challenged some parents and schools alike. Understanding how to support young people adds difficulty to an already stressed situation.

Finally, there is the impact on the parents. Working from home has become common and has made it easier for many parents to keep children at home for the smallest of reasons. It also means many experience a more flexible work schedule and are likelier to take time away during the week. More than anything, a health crisis on the scale of COVID-19 and the millions of deaths created a 'life's too short' attitude and a desire to maximise time with their children, and going to school seems not to fit this bill.

THE CONSEQUENCES

While attendance and the resultant decline in results is a flashpoint, the consequences are much more profound than this.

The increased level of challenge and loss of respect from some parents to teachers and school staff has caused a significant decline in teacher wellbeing and morale. Frequent abuse and confrontations with parents create a climate of fear for staff. In one survey, over a third of school leaders said parental abuse is becoming 'almost endemic' (*The Telegraph, 2023*). Unions warn that many teachers are considering a change of careers.

Some students experience lower results, an increase in disruptions in the classroom, and a lack of boundaries as they feel free to challenge teachers because their parents sanction negative attitudes toward learning. The mixed messages over school rules can make it difficult for a child to understand how to succeed and who to believe.

THE SOLUTION

The only genuine solution is to win back parent buy-in. Without parent participation, any school initiative will likely falter. Why? For a school initiative to work, the child must attend school regularly. More fundamentally, the partnership between school and home enhances stability and boundaries and creates a strong foundation for the child to thrive. As a powerful African proverb notes, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' The combined community of a school and home working together is the village our children need now more than ever.



SUMMARY

- The pandemic significantly shocked the nation, and many adults and children struggled to adapt
- The expectation that schools would be capable of rapid adaption to 100% home-based learning was unrealistic, and many parents may have felt abandoned
- Seeing that teachers covered the curriculum in one to two hours per day during lockdown challenged many parents' perception that everyday attendance was essential
- Parents saw behind the curtain of education, and most claimed to be unimpressed
- Other factors such as poor mental health, cost-of-living and a challenge to many parents' sense of mortality also factored in
- It takes a village to raise a child, and the stakes are too high not to re-establish trust within the school and home community

How has life been for parents in the last five years?

The National Parent Survey 2024, conducted by Parentkind, provides a compelling snapshot of the current experiences and concerns of over 5,000 parents throughout the UK. Their voices highlight the daily realities behind the statistics, from difficulties affording school meals to coping with the emotional toll of family life.

COST-OF-LIVING AND EDUCATION EXPENSES

The survey highlights that around 3.7 million parents struggle to pay bills, and 2.8 million families earn under £20,000 per year. One parent shared, 'I had to choose between buying my daughter new school shoes or paying the gas bill. I bought second-hand shoes and felt awful.'

The rising costs of uniforms (47%), school meals (43%), and school trips (27%) are pushing many families to the brink. Some parents described skipping meals to ensure their children could eat at school.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

More than half of all parents said their child had experienced mental health challenges in the past year. One mother recounted, 'My son stopped wanting to go to school. He'd cry in the mornings, and I just didn't know how to help him.' These struggles ripple outwards: 58% of parents reported withdrawing from social circles, and over a third had to miss work due to their mental health. 'It feels like I'm on autopilot,' one parent wrote, 'just trying to survive each day.'

SCREEN-TIME AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

The average child spends more than three hours a day on devices outside school, with 38% of primary children exceeding that average. As one parent said, 'We argue every night about the iPad. It's the first thing he wants in the morning and the last thing he gives up at night.'

More than 4 million households report regular screen-time conflicts, revealing a growing digital tension between kids' habits and parents' expectations.

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Despite their desire to help, a third of parents feel they lack time to support their child's learning, and many express frustrations over the lack of guidance from schools. 'I want to help with homework but don't always understand it. And there's no information from the school, just assumptions that we know what we're doing.' Half of secondary school parents said schools don't give them enough information to stay meaningfully involved.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND HOLIDAYS

Over 6 million parents admitted they would consider taking their children out of school for a holiday because prices during school breaks are unaffordable. 'I was fined last year for a long weekend we could afford. A beach trip in June cost a third of what it would have during half term.' While 44% support fines for unauthorised absences, 50% oppose them, citing fairness and flexibility.

WHAT PARENTS TOLD US

**3.7
MILLION**

parents are
struggling to
pay their bills

**2.8
MILLION**

parents are
worried
about affording
their rent
or mortgage



**ONE IN
FIVE**

parents struggle to
afford the cost of
sending their
child to school



**HALF OF
WORKING
PARENTS**

regularly work
from home



**ONE IN
EIGHT**

working parents have
had a flexible working
request denied



**NEARLY
ONE
IN FOUR**

children don't attend
activities after school,
paid or unpaid, rising to
three in ten teenagers

**MORE
THAN
2 MILLION**

parents have poor
mental health



**MORE
THAN
5 MILLION**

children have experienced
a mental health challenge
in the last year

**MORE
THAN A
QUARTER**

of children experiencing
poor mental health have
missed school



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

More than
A THIRD of poorer
parents have poor
mental health



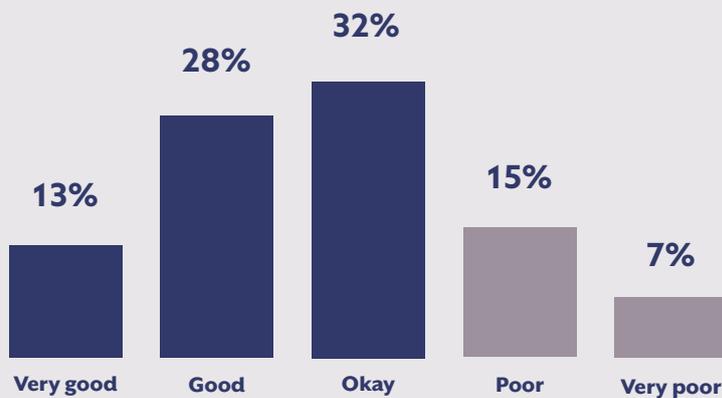
More than FIVE MILLION
children have experienced a
mental health challenge in
the last year

More than a quarter of
children experiencing
mental health issues
have missed school

Children are more likely to
have a mental health issue if
their parent's own mental
health is poor

PARENTS OWN MENTAL HEALTH

How good has your own mental health and wellbeing been over the last 12 months?



More likely to be poor/ very poor for

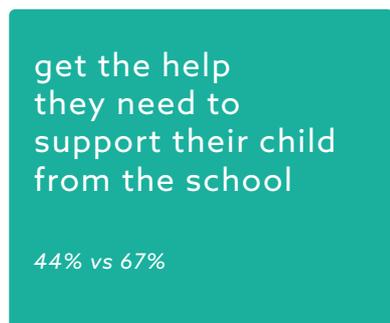
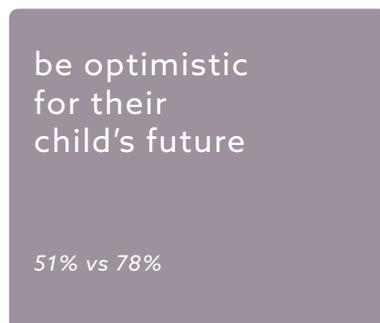
- poorer parents
- parents with a disability
- parents with a child with SEND
- parents from the East Midlands or the South West
- mothers

Sample: 5,490 parents in England (3,012), Scotland (1,313), Wales (862) and Northern Ireland (303) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All UK respondents, weighted

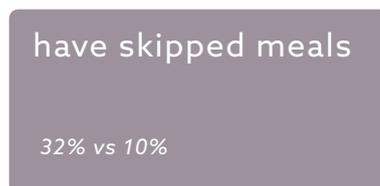
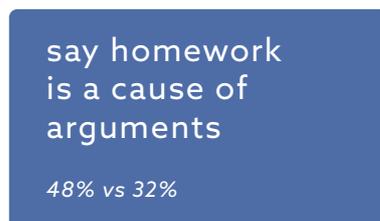
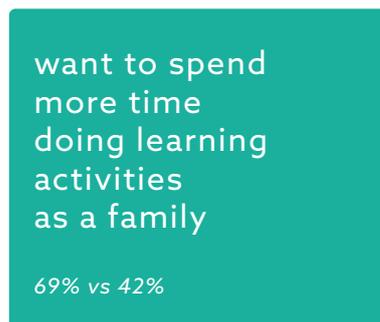
“Children are facing more and more pressure and challenges, such as academic pressure, social pressure and so on. Parents need to pay attention to their children’s mental health and provide the necessary support and help, but how to do this is also a challenge.”

- Parent response

PARENTS WITH POOR MENTAL HEALTH ARE LESS LIKELY TO...



MORE LIKELY TO...



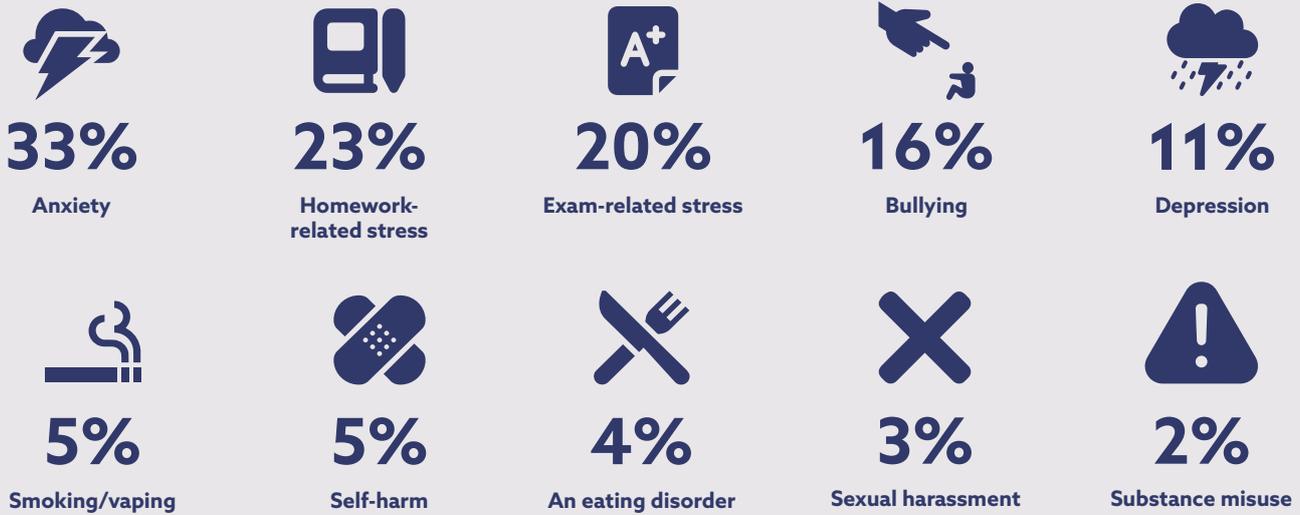
...THAN PARENTS WITH GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Sample: 5,490 parents in England (3,012), Scotland (1,313), Wales (862) and Northern Ireland (303) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school

Base: All with very poor or poor mental health (1,203) versus all with very good or good mental health (2,214)

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

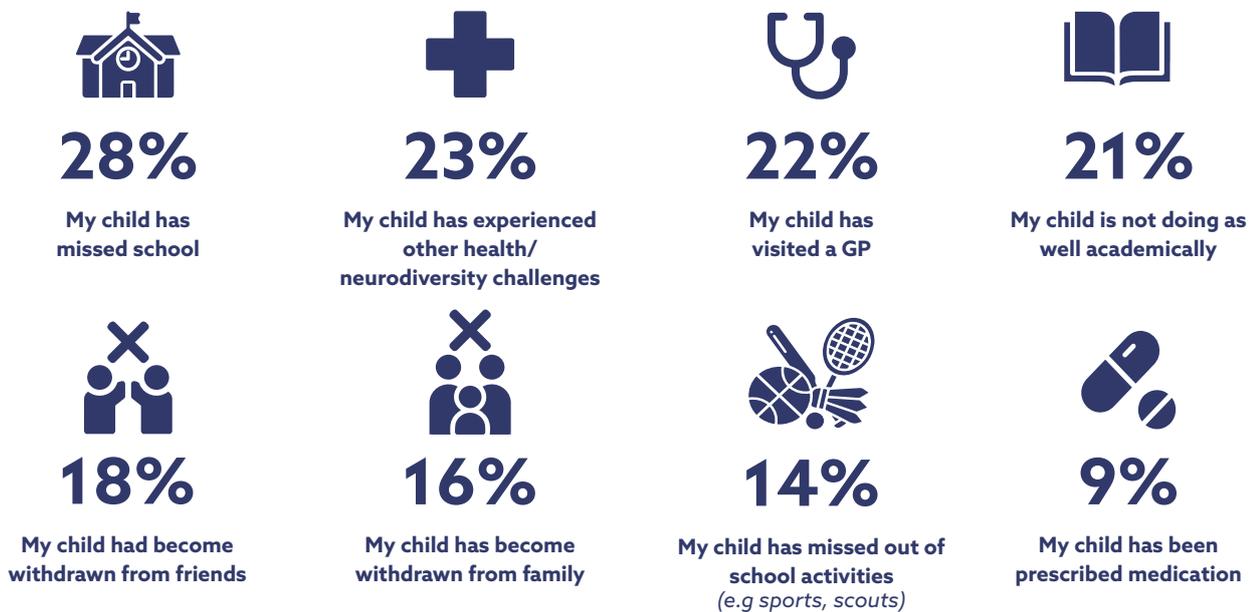
In the last year, has your child experienced any of the following?



Sample: 5,490 parents in England (3,012), Scotland (1,313), Wales (862) and Northern Ireland (303) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All UK respondents, weighted

THE IMPACT OF CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Thinking of your child's mental health experiences which, if any, of the following has happened as a result?



Sample: 5,490 parents in England (3,012), Scotland (1,313), Wales (862) and Northern Ireland (303) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All whose child has experienced a mental health issue (2,821)



Insights from the Sutton Trust



The Sutton Trust

Since 1997, the Sutton Trust has worked to address the low social mobility in Britain through programmes, research and policy influence. We fight for social mobility from birth to the workplace so that every young person - no matter who their parents are, what school they go to, or where they live, has the chance to succeed in life.

All parents want what is best for their children but unfortunately some parents have more resources to provide the best opportunities for their children than others. Sutton Trust research looks at the impact of poverty on children and how higher income parents use their resources to capitalise on educational opportunities for their children.

What resources do parents have?

Many households' financial situation has worsened during the cost-of-living crisis, building on the impact left by the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents are facing increasing financial challenges, which also impacts their ability to meet the costs of the school day. This is having a direct effect on young people and their ability to succeed at school, resulting in wider attainment gaps between disadvantaged young people and their better-off peers. 14% of all respondents to a Sutton Trust/TeacherTapp poll of teachers in Autumn Term 2022, stated that over half of their pupils lived in families facing considerable financial pressures that they felt were affecting their ability to succeed at school. This figure increased to 43% when looking at schools in the highest quartile for children eligible for Free School Meals (*Cost of Living and Education, 2022*).

Over a third (38%) of state school teachers reported an increase in the number of children coming into school hungry, while over a quarter (27%) reported an increase in pupils being unable to afford the equipment they need for school (*Cost of Living and Education, 2022*).

Struggling parents are increasingly turning to their schools for help, with around four in ten (39%) state school teachers reporting an increase in families asking for additional support from their school, and 17% reporting an increase in families asking for referrals to a foodbank (*Cost of Living and Education, 2022*).

The COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities (COSMO) study is a major national youth cohort study examining the short-, medium- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing cost-of-living crisis on educational inequality, wellbeing and social mobility. It's the largest study of its kind that investigates the effects of these crises on the life chances of a generation of young people.

It found that during the pandemic, four in ten (39%) households reported worse financial health, and just 16% reported better. Gaps between households has widened, with over half (52%) of disadvantaged households reporting worse financial health, compared to around a third (34%) of others (*Cullinane et. al., Briefing No. 6 - Financial Inequalities and the Pandemic, 2023*).

One in ten young people (10%) were living in households classed as food insecure, with many reporting running out of food, skipping meals, and 5% of parents reporting going a whole day without eating. 8% of parents used a food bank during the pandemic period, three quarters of whom had also used food banks pre-pandemic (*Cullinane et. al., Briefing No. 6 - Financial*).

There is an ever-growing strain on parents to provide the resources their children need to survive, before they even begin to think about how they can provide them with further opportunities and advantages.





How do parents use their resources?

A particular pressure point for parents can be seen in securing a place at a high-quality secondary school for their child. Whilst many of us assume that children tend to attend their local school, pupils eligible for Free School Meals are less likely to attend a top-performing school than their more affluent peers, even when one is available locally (Latham, *Selective Comprehensives*, 2024).

Financial reasons are a significant consideration here. Demand for places near a good school impacts the local housing market, and parents with the means to do so can secure a place for their child by buying or renting within the catchment area. Houses in the catchment of a top-performing school were £45,700 more expensive than other local houses in 2017, which clearly risks pricing out lower-income families (Cullinane et. al., *Selective Comprehensives*, 2017).

Even if parents do manage to secure a place at a top-performing school, the cost of transport can quickly become an issue, with lower-income families more likely to cite the cost of transport as a very or fairly important factor in school choice than higher income families (Cullinane & Montacute, *Parent Power*, 2018).

Moreover, the general cost of school has an impact on school choices with 56% of working-class families saying 'hidden costs' affect where they send their children to school. (Cullinane & Montacute, *Parent Power*, 2018).

Ultimately this means that children from lower-income families are not getting the same educational opportunities and school choices as parents who can afford to spend more money on this.

The pressure of this is clearly having a negative impact on parents with some resorting to ethically dubious strategies to securing a place for their children. These strategies include attending religious services to secure a place at a faith school and using a relative's address to gain access to a specific school. (Cullinane & Montacute, *Parent Power*, 2018).

Once at school the cost of attending and 'keeping up' continue to be an issue. In recent years there have been changing patterns in spending of Pupil Premium funding. 55% of senior leaders report making cuts to trips and outings meaning that parents of children eligible for the pupil premium will either have to cover the cost themselves or accept that their children miss out on the opportunity. Similarly, 34% have reported cuts to sports and extra-curricular. (*School Funding and Pupil Premium 2025*).

Tutoring is another area that children from low-income families miss out on. Children in professional/managerial households were twice as likely to receive private tutoring than those in routine/manual households. Regional disparities also exist with those living in London most likely to receive tutoring. (Cullinane & Montacute, *Tutoring: The New Landscape*, 2023).

What impact does this have on parents?

All of this can create the perception to parents that they are having to accept a second-rate educational experience for their children than those with more financial means, which could have an associated mental health cost for those parents.

Pandemic financial experiences were closely linked to mental health. Among families finding it very difficult to get by financially, rates of psychological distress were 82% among parents – four times higher than for those living comfortably (Cullinane et. al., Briefing No. 6 – Financial Inequalities and the Pandemic, 2023).

Rates of psychological distress were also substantially higher in households who started using foodbanks in the pandemic, 63% among parents.

With child poverty on the rise, parents need more support than ever, and it should be a major priority to ensure that children are not left behind at any stage of their education, and that parents have the support they need to make the most of the educational opportunities available.

This report was compiled by:

Ryan Frost, Senior Public Affairs Officer

Charlotte O'Regan, Senior Schools Engagement Manager



A MOMENT TO REFLECT

IN THIS SECTION WE HAVE:

- Explored the breakdown of the social contract between home and school
- Considered how, when this fracture occurs, the parents lose trust, and the relationship becomes more difficult and often conflict-ridden, in turn making it harder for schools to deliver the quality of education they aspire to
- Reflected on how COVID-19 and national lockdowns worsened the problem
- Presented findings that suggest the cost-of-living crisis, poor mental health in young people, and a genuine sense that life is too short have also impacted the connection between home and school
- Evaluated the impact on learners which includes lower or poorer attendance, worsened mental health and a lack of preparation for the future
- Reflected on the impact on school staff, including additional stress, demotivation and poor results
- Presented Parentkind's National Parent Survey 2024 results, which highlight parents' challenges in affording education and managing household difficulties

AN INVITATION TO APPLY CRITICAL THOUGHT

The title of this section is 'The problem'. It focuses on the challenges of parent participation using reports and media resources designed to challenge schools and parents to do better. It is essential to reflect on how much you recognise the situation described in these pages and how it relates to your context. Some of it will resonate, and some will feel hyperbolic.

SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU REFLECT

This section highlighted how emotionally-charged conversations about the school-home relationship can be. How did you feel as you read these articles? Give yourself space to acknowledge and try to understand those feelings before moving on to considering the questions below.

1. How far do you recognise the situation portrayed? Was there any data or insight shared that surprised you or challenged your thinking?
2. How robust is the social contract between your school and its parents?
3. How would you characterise the relationship between your school and its parents? What do strong relationships with parents look and feel like in your setting? How might this be built upon or extended?
4. If you could evaluate the situation objectively, how much is anyone to blame if there is a breakdown in this social contract? How helpful or not helpful is the concept of blame in trying to plan positive steps forward?
5. If you were to share these questions with other colleagues and key stakeholders in your school, how much do you think the answers might differ from your own? Why do you think that?

“Education... is painful, continual and difficult work to be done in kindness, by watching, by warning, by praise, but above all, by example.”

JOHN RUSKIN

THE OPPORTUNITY





The power of parent participation

In this article, we explore research into the potential of parent participation. Even if we rely entirely on common sense, we can conclude that if the adults in a child's life collaborate, the child is more likely to thrive. Yet, what does the research say about the nature of this impact and how much it contributes to a child reaching their potential?

To contextualise the patterns of parent participation, it is necessary to also consider the underlying socio-educational backgrounds of parents, which may significantly shape both their capacity for participation and the nature of their involvement.

It seems easy to conclude that parents significantly impact learner outcomes, but it is worth telling the story of the data. The Institute of Fiscal Studies, in partnership with the Economic and Social Research Council, released a report in January 2025 with a powerful narrative of parental influence. The opening charts focused on the inequalities in cognitive development by parent grouping at the age of three:

1. Learners whose mothers' qualifications stopped at GCSE or below have 14% in the top quintile of cognitive attainment compared to 29% for parents whose mother has a degree or more
2. Learners from the poorest quintile have 9% in the top quintile of cognitive attainment compared to 32% for those in the wealthiest quintile
3. Households with one parent have 13% in the top quintile for cognitive attainment compared to 22% for those with two parents

What is significant is how this inequality persists. Those with high cognitive skills aged three are 11% more likely to achieve five passes at GCSE and 26% more likely to earn a university degree.

You may wonder why economists are interested in the role of parents in early years' education. They extrapolate that these early indicators threaten the exchequer and the future growth of the country's wealth, as though 11 years of schooling may have no impact in between.

Whether a logical extrapolation of this data narrative or not, the question we are posing is: if parents can so adversely impact the outlook of the learner, then with support and close partnership with the school, can this impact be significantly positive? The Education Endowment Fund's research (2018) suggests this is true, as 'effective parental engagement can lead to learning gains of +3 months over the course of a year.' To achieve these results, the EEF offer four suggestions to schools:

1. Critically review how you work with learners
2. Provide practical strategies for dealing with home-based learning
3. Tailor school communications
4. More sustained, intensive support where needed

A study conducted by the University of Plymouth revealed that children from low-income families with engaged parents often outperform their peers from similar backgrounds whose parents are less involved. This research highlights that parent participation can positively influence a child's academic achievement, regardless of age or socioeconomic status.

Encouraging participation

We hear you. Another initiative, another set of priorities to deliver, a prevailing sense that you have little more to give. This might be how you feel when faced with another dimension of education to consider. It is fair to presume that encouraging the full participation of all parents in their child's learning is an ambitious project and might feel unmanageable. However, evidence from research suggests that even small efforts can deliver a significant impact.

One small step for parent participation

The National Bureau of Economic Research collaborated with US schools to use text messages to engage parents in literacy teaching. Imagine sending a text to a parent explaining how rhyming helps young children hear the sounds within words and begin to recognise patterns. Then, provide the parent with a rhyming game for the way home, asking, 'What rhymes with tree?' or 'What rhymes with car?' and so on, as they travel.

This simple activity of texting tips to parents increased children's literacy levels and engagement with them. After the study was compared, testing showed a statistically significant improvement. The survey by York and Loeb (2018) indicated that such straightforward initiatives could also have broader impacts on the relationship with home.

As a result of the US program, the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) has designed similar research in 160 UK schools. Their reasoning for undertaking the study is that it is a low-cost, low-effort scheme that could significantly impact outcomes. The results of this study will be released in 2026, but the outcomes are predicted to mimic the American research.

Delivering systemic change

Of course, the goal would be to introduce more systemic change, significantly altering the relationship between schools and parents. 80% of school leaders believe that engaging parents is the job of all staff, yet only 28% provide training for the team, and less than a quarter of schools measure parent participation (EEF, 2024). In fact, very little meaningful research has been done on the role of parents in educating their children.

Therefore, in addition to beginning with small tactical changes such as Tips by Text, a school can take the first step in more meaningful change by introducing training and measures of success. Preparing the team and setting a goal for improvement sets the tone for the change you hope to see.

Practical support and guidance

With a lot of evidence and noise about the need for parent participation and a shortage of studies on what works, we all need to work together. Parentkind and PiXL have pooled our collective resources to find the best examples and case studies to support you in delivering improvement. We have chosen some inspiring examples and some where the strategy is easily replicated across contexts.

SUMMARY

- Parents impact learning outcomes more than schools
- Even small projects can deliver significant outcomes
- Systemic change begins with training and measuring parent participation
- PiXL and Parentkind are here to provide practical strategies and inspiring stories to help you



Strengthening school communities: a case study

In partnership with Doncaster Council and the Doncaster Opportunity Area, Parentkind led a focused initiative to strengthen and sustain parent participation in schools facing high levels of persistent absence. The project aimed to build long-term strategies that empowered schools to work more effectively with parents, recognising their vital role in supporting regular school attendance and improving pupil outcomes.

A STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO A PRESSING NEED

In response to rising levels of persistent pupil absence across Doncaster, the local council and the Doncaster Opportunity Area (DOA) identified a critical need: schools required deeper, more strategic partnerships with parents to support attendance, learning, and community cohesion. To meet this challenge, Parentkind was commissioned to design and deliver a borough-wide intervention to implement effective parent participation practices in schools—particularly those most affected by disadvantage.

What followed was a deeply collaborative and multi-layered project that engaged intensively with 21 schools, 14 primary and seven secondary, to transform parent participation from an ad-hoc activity into a structured, whole-school priority.

Laying the foundation

Parentkind introduced its Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools to the project, a proven framework built on five key pillars: leadership and ethos, two-way communication, parents supporting learning, parent participation in school life and community engagement. The work was rolled out in four key phases: design, discovery, delivery, and closure. During the initial stages, schools conducted in-depth audits exploring their current engagement practices, identified barriers and gathered insights from parents and staff. This data-informed tailored action plan was co-created with each school's leadership team and supported by a dedicated Programme Coordinator who provided hands-on guidance. Training served as a cornerstone of the intervention. All participating schools engaged in full-day workshops aimed at developing a comprehensive whole-school approach to parent participation. In several schools, this training was supplemented with tailored in-house sessions to assist staff in reflecting on their own context and implementing strategies more effectively.

REAL CHANGE IN REAL SCHOOLS

The project delivered much more than frameworks, it catalysed genuine transformation on the ground. At Askern Littlemoor Infant Academy, an effort to raise attendance evolved into a broader cultural shift. The school established a formal parent participation policy with the involvement of a parent governor. It began implementing small yet meaningful changes, such as celebratory phone calls home and personalised communication. During the pandemic, the school quickly adapted, utilising phone-based surveys and weekly check-ins to maintain connections. This period of disruption ultimately deepened their understanding of what effective communication with families could look like, and how significant it was.

Meanwhile, Trinity Academy, a large secondary school, recognised that having a parent on the governing board was not the same as genuinely engaging with the parent community. They established a Parent Council that gave families a seat at the table and a voice in strategic decision-making. The council quickly made an impact, contributing to the redesign of student progress reports to ensure they were clearer and more accessible to families.

At Bentley High Street Primary, a new approach to literacy support arose from their audit findings. With assistance from Doncaster's Adult, Family and Community Learning team, they conducted phonics workshops for parents of Year 1 pupils. These sessions clarified the phonics screening process and helped parents gain confidence in supporting reading at home. One parent was motivated enough to volunteer at the school, unlocking new personal aspirations.

In another part of the borough, Brooke Primary Academy experimented with a low-barrier entry point for parent participation. They organised a Valentine's Disco to gauge interest in forming a parent fundraising group. The event raised £650 and sparked the establishment of a new volunteer team, proving that even small events can have ripple effects when families feel included and empowered.

Woodlands Primary School, which had previously faced challenges with both performance and morale, utilised the project to foster connections with the wider community. Staff participated in training, reevaluated their communication strategies, and formed partnerships with local churches and businesses. They organised family learning events and rebuilt trust with parents, many of whom had felt disconnected from the school in the past.

IMPACT AND INSIGHT

The qualitative and anecdotal outcomes of the project are significant. Teachers in primary schools reported high levels of confidence in engaging with parents, and although secondary school staff showed slightly lower levels, training and structured support were helping to bridge that gap. Parents involved in the project expressed a strong belief in the importance of their participation in their child's education, with many reporting increased confidence in interacting with schools compared to before.

Schools developed clearer strategies for parent participation at the systemic level, often incorporating these into broader school improvement plans. Leadership teams that were fully invested in the work observed the most progress, especially when they empowered a staff member to lead the project and provided them with the authority and resources to advance it.



What we learned

The Doncaster project confirmed what Parentkind has long championed: parent participation must be intentional, strategic and embedded within the school, not simply added as an extra initiative. It also emphasised the importance of context. Tools and surveys must be accessible, considering factors like digital exclusion and literacy levels, while projects must be flexible enough to accommodate the realities of school life.

Perhaps most importantly, the project reinforced that parent participation is not merely about improving communication. It is about shifting mindsets, among educators, parents and students alike, to create schools that genuinely view parents as partners in education.

Legacy and looking forward

Despite the project concluding without a formal final evaluation because of the pandemic, its legacy is already evident. Schools have implemented new policies, established active parent councils, improved their relationships with families and, perhaps most importantly, reignited the belief that collaboration between schools and parents can lead to meaningful change.

As schools in Doncaster continue to rebuild and recover, the foundations established by this programme will serve as a lasting reminder of what is possible when home and school are truly in partnership.



21 SCHOOLS ACROSS THE DONCASTER LOCAL AUTHORITY

ACROSS SIX MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTING OUR FRAMEWORK, SCHOOLS ACHIEVED:

7.5x

INCREASE IN PARENT STRATEGY CLARITY FROM THE SCHOOL TEAM

100%

OF PARENTS FEELING THEY PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

37%

INCREASE IN POSITIVE RESPONSES TO SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO PARENTS

2x

INCREASE IN POSITIVE RESPONSES TO THE SCHOOL'S PRIORITISATION OF THOSE WITH THE HIGHEST NEEDS WITHIN THE SCHOOL

50%

INCREASE IN POSITIVE RESPONSES OF ACTIVE LISTENING AT PARENT-TEACHER MEETINGS AND 33% FOR VARIETY OF COMMUNICATION METHODS

50%

OF STAKEHOLDERS FEELING THE SCHOOLS CONSIDERED THE NEEDS OF VARIOUS GROUPS WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH HOMES, UP FROM 0%

100%

IMPROVEMENT IN SIGNPOSTING PARENTS TO COMMUNITY SERVICES



Meeting families where they are: a case study

CONTEXT

Bantock Primary School, located in the heart of Wolverhampton, serves a richly diverse community, with over 400 pupils from Early Years to Year 6. Approximately 60% of its students are classified as disadvantaged, and a significant proportion are pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The school community includes new arrivals to the UK who face multiple layers of vulnerability, including language barriers, limited understanding of UK systems and economic hardship.

Due to the highly mobile nature of the community, around 50% of the pupil population turns over each year. Despite this, Bantock is now a fully subscribed school with a growing waiting list, demonstrating the trust and value families place in the education and care provided. Parents often make significant efforts to keep their children at Bantock, even if it means long commutes involving two buses.

INTENT

"It is about our ethos, and this should ooze out of everything we do." Ms Sarai, Headteacher

Faced with a complex, ever-shifting pupil base, Bantock's leadership set out to establish a robust, inclusive, and relational school ethos. Their core intention was to meet families where they are, understanding their contexts, needs and challenges and building systems of support that make school feel like an extension of home.

They recognised that parents are essential partners in their children's success and sought to empower them, particularly those who might otherwise struggle to engage due to cultural, linguistic or economic barriers. This meant not only improving communication but also creating meaningful, two-way relationships where families felt heard, welcomed and safe.

IMPLEMENTATION

Induction for parents and pupils

Every new pupil goes through a thorough induction process alongside their parents. The induction is comprehensive and tailored to the needs of families often unfamiliar with the UK education system. Topics include:



Inductions are hosted in the school's central hub and facilitated by staff and parent ambassadors - trusted community members who speak up to nine languages, including those spoken by Roma, Romanian, and Czech Roma families. These parent ambassadors play a pivotal role in breaking down cultural and linguistic barriers.

Over 107 new pupils have joined the school in the current academic year, each receiving this tailored induction.

Building daily relationships

For the past 13 years, the school's leaders, including Headteacher Ms Sarai and Deputy Headteacher Mr Thomas, have greeted families at the school gates every morning and afternoon. This daily ritual fosters a culture of openness, trust and personal connection. Over time, it has created a school environment where parents feel welcome and proactively greet staff, reinforcing the strength of these relationships.

When parents face challenges, they now approach the school with trust, knowing they'll be listened to. Even when tensions arise, such as a recent incident where a parent swore at a teacher in frustration, the school chose a restorative approach. A support worker from the same community explained the school's efforts to the parent, who later returned to apologise. This approach turns conflict into connection.

Transformative parents' evenings

Parents' evenings at Bantock are not just academic consultations, they are community celebrations. Held three times a year, each event spans two evenings and transforms the school into a community hub. Features include:

- Catered meals, offering families a chance to sample school food and enjoy a shared meal
- Book fairs, enabling families, many of whom may struggle to access bookstores, to purchase quality books
- School nurse consultations and vaccination outreach, supporting health awareness and public health initiatives
- Wolves Foundation representatives, using the draw of local football to promote the importance of mental health and well being
- Uniform shop with minimal branded items to reduce costs for families
- Digital safeguarding workshops, where a technology lead inspects devices with parents and helps them ensure proper safety settings are enabled

The events are well-attended and inclusive, offering multiple layers of support, celebration and learning. Parent ambassadors attend to provide live translation and cultural liaison. Children are encouraged to attend with their parents, especially important when children are needed to translate.

Digital access and safety

Bantock is a Microsoft Showcase School and provides a 1:1 device for every child in Key Stage 2. Devices are filtered and monitored and are central to home learning. After the pandemic, the school recognised the need to upskill parents and now regularly offers workshops to ensure safe digital practices at home.

If children attempt to access inappropriate content, staff are alerted and work with children and parents to address issues. The school's approach to digital education is proactive, integrated, and constantly evolving.

IMPACT

Exceptional parent participation

The most recent parents' evening saw 90% parental attendance, a remarkable figure in any context, let alone in a school with such high mobility and linguistic diversity.

This increase from an already strong 82–83% attendance in previous years reflects growing trust and deepened relationships with families.

Remarkably low exclusion rates

Zero suspensions or exclusions have been recorded in the current year. Notably, in 13 years, the school has never excluded a GRT (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller) pupil despite this group being nationally overrepresented in exclusion statistics.

This is a direct result of Bantock's preventive, relationship-based approach and commitment to inclusion and early intervention.

Powerful alumni outcomes

One former pupil, who later became a victim of gang violence and was stabbed at 14, has now turned his life around and speaks publicly as an anti-knife crime advocate. His time at Bantock was described as pivotal to his development, as he stayed the course with the close connection and support from the whole school team. His early foundation helped anchor him through adversity.

Responsive leadership

Annual parent surveys include both Ofsted-style and school-specific questions. When parents identified a desire for more after-school clubs, leadership acknowledged this and began working creatively, despite staffing and budget constraints, to provide more enrichment opportunities.

NEXT STEPS

Strengthening secondary transitions: Bantock is advocating for stronger handovers and even closer collaboration with secondary schools, especially for vulnerable pupils who thrived at primary level but risk exclusion without continued care

Enhancing extra-curricular provision: In response to parent feedback, the school is exploring partnerships and creative staffing solutions to offer more clubs and activities

Sustaining core values: The school is committed to maintaining its daily gate presence and community-led ethos, ensuring every child and family feels seen, valued and supported

Expanding parent participation models: Bantock hopes to share its model of inclusive, relational engagement with other schools, demonstrating that lasting change is possible through cultural intelligence, proactive systems and warm leadership

Bantock's story stands as a beacon of what's possible when a school places community, empathy and proactive support at its core. With strong leadership and a united staff team, it continues to reimagine parent participation as not just a tool, but a mission.



Photography supplied by Bantock Primary School



Making sure everyone is heard: a case study

Over recent years, Clapton Girls' Academy in Hackney has undertaken a powerful journey in understanding and embracing the value of student and parent voice, particularly in ways that reflect the rich diversity of the school community.

The starting point

In 2021, the school identified a growing number of students with autism who were struggling with the return to in-person learning after lockdown. Some were experiencing emotional based school non-attendance (EBSNA). Colin Gall, Assistant Headteacher and SENDCo, recognised the complexity of the issue and believed that student voice should be the starting point for finding meaningful solutions.

In collaboration with Dorothy, a Sixth Form student at the time, a dedicated student group for individuals with autism was established. The aim was to create a supportive, non-judgemental space where students could share experiences, build a sense of belonging, and help the school better understand how to support them.

The impact of the group extended beyond the individuals involved, fostering a sense of agency and significantly reducing anxiety among participants. The work reached into the wider community as well, with students engaging feeder primary schools, supporting younger peers, and working alongside local health service providers.¹

Engaging parents

To complement the progress made with students, the school recognised the need to bring parents along on the journey. Initially, sessions were held for parents and carers of students with autism/ASD, featuring input from educational psychologists and other experts. However, it became clear that these formal, content-driven sessions were not meeting the deeper needs of the parent community.

Reflection revealed that many parents felt similarly isolated from school life, mirroring their children's experiences. In response, the school adopted a new, more informal approach, establishing a parent-led group for carers of students with autism.

A culture of mutual support

Now in its second year, the parent group has evolved into an open, welcoming, and non-judgemental space. It provides two crucial forms of support. First, practical guidance: parents share experiences navigating health and education services, offering insights and local knowledge to those newer to the system. This peer-to-peer support helps demystify a complex and often overwhelming process.

Second, and perhaps more profoundly, the group provides emotional support. It allows parents to feel seen and heard by others who understand their challenges. Many share difficult behaviours they observe at home, only to find reassurance in hearing similar experiences from others. Some members, themselves autistic, offer uniquely valuable perspectives from lived experience.

Insights gained from the group have also led to concrete changes in school provision. For instance, in response to concerns about dyslexia assessment waiting times, the school invested in training Colin as a dyslexia assessor. As a result, students eligible for free school meals will soon be able to be assessed onsite, reducing stress and uncertainty for families.

Attendance: A shift in perspective

Like many schools, Clapton Girls' Academy has prioritised improving attendance. Initially, the leadership team took a firm stance. However, through listening to the parent group, the school recognised the need for greater flexibility, especially for students with SEND.

While the goal of 96% attendance remains, accommodations are now made where necessary, informed by conversations with parents about the specific 'push' and 'pull' factors influencing attendance. This inclusive approach has helped foster a shared understanding of the importance of attendance and the legitimacy of making context-specific adjustments.

Addressing disparities

As both the student and parent groups developed, an emerging concern caught Mr. Gall's attention. Fewer global majority students were being referred for autism assessments compared to their white peers. This disparity prompted a closer examination of how cultural norms and differences may be affecting referrals, especially in a school with a predominantly white teaching staff.

Ongoing staff training has addressed some of these issues, but the school also turned to the power of community voice. Efforts were made to ensure that under-represented students and parents felt aware of and included in support groups. This work was supported by the school's Global Majority Parent Group and a committed Educational Psychologist.

Ensuring all voices are heard

Today, the student and parent groups at Clapton more faithfully reflect the school's diverse community. A key to this has been the intentional creation of environments where all voices are valued equally.

A structured approach to group discussions, inviting parents to speak in turn, has helped ensure balanced participation. Attention is paid to the social dynamics in the room, including addressing the discomfort that may arise from disparities in wealth and experience. Honest, respectful conversations have been instrumental in maintaining an inclusive tone.

The school also provides translators where possible and benefits from multilingual parents who assist those newer to English. Attention is given to accessibility, including choosing meeting spaces that accommodate sensory sensitivities, such as moving from a bright, echoey library to a more calming environment in response to parent feedback.

While the work is ongoing and not without its challenges, the progress made is significant. The fact that a parent felt comfortable enough to request an accommodation **speaks volumes about the trust and openness the school has fostered.**

^[1] You can read more about Colin's brilliant student group in Issue 1 of PiXL Insights on Improving Inclusion for Learners with SEND.



Transforming parent participation in underperforming schools: a case study

THE THINKING SCHOOLS FEDERATION APPROACH

"When children see their parents, culture, and language valued at school, they develop a strong sense of belonging - and belonging fuels success." Kulvarn Atwal, Principal Learning Leader

At The Thinking Schools Federation, parent participation isn't a strategy, it's a way of life. Led by the Principal Learning Leader Kulvarn Atwal, the Federation has transformed traditional notions of education by creating schools where every family is a partner, every child feels seen and valued and every teacher is trusted to lead. This is the story of how a bold commitment to belonging, high expectations and community empowerment reshaped not just outcomes, but lives.

A foundation built on belonging

In diverse communities, where many families speak languages other than English at home, Kulvarn recognised something fundamental: if children could see their identities respected and celebrated within their school, they would feel more confident, secure and, ultimately, more successful.

Research shows that even from a young age, children pick up subtle messages about value and intelligence based on behaviour and environment. Kulvarn understood that fostering true belonging would open the door to emotional wellbeing and academic excellence.

In this vision, parent participation was not about asking parents to do more, but about recognising their vital role and bringing them into partnership with the school community.

"Parental engagement isn't about protecting the families, it's about unlocking the potential within every home." *Kulvarn Atwal*

Challenging and transforming expectations

When Kulvarn first took leadership, he faced deeply entrenched low expectations of what families could contribute. Some colleagues worried about sending children's books home, afraid they would be lost, damaged or cause parents to question teachers' marking.

But Kulvarn challenged this thinking head-on. If barriers could be imagined, they could also be dismantled. Instead of retreating, he provided practical support, like giving children sturdy zip wallets for their books, while confronting the deeper issue: a lack of trust in the community.

His approach was bold and clear: if the school expected excellence from children, it must also expect excellence from its engagement with families, not suspicion, not protectionism, but genuine collaboration.

The change was profound. Families responded with pride and commitment. Conversations about learning flourished at kitchen tables across the community. Trust grew. And children thrived.

Empowering children to lead

The cultural transformation was not confined to parent relationships. It echoed through every part of school life.

At one of the Federation's largest schools, pupils as young as Year 3 lead their peers responsibly and respectfully across the school site, assembling independently without adult direction. They walk, line up and sit, all coordinated by their peers through nonverbal signals.

Even pupils with additional needs are empowered to lead and uphold these standards. The expectation is universal, and so is the excellence. In Kulvarn's words, children will rise to the expectations you set for them if you believe in them fully.

Achievement that leaves no one behind

For Kulvarn, a school cannot succeed if even a single child is left behind. It is not enough for the majority to do well; every child must feel valued, included and capable of thriving.

This philosophy translated into remarkable achievements. Under his leadership, the Federation's schools were awarded the Mayor of London's Schools for Success Award for five consecutive years, recognising their outstanding impact on the progress of disadvantaged pupils, placing them among the top 6% of schools in London.

Yet, Kulvarn sees the objective measure of success not in awards, but in the lived experience of every child and every family.

"If even one child is left behind, it's not good enough. Every child must feel valued, included and thriving." *Kulvarn Atwal*

Empowering teachers to transform schools

Perhaps one of the most powerful testaments to Kulvarn's leadership is what happened inside the staffrooms. The very same teachers who were once told they were 'not good enough' led their schools from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Outstanding', without replacements or removals.

What changed was not the people, but the belief in them.

By building trust, setting clear and ambitious expectations, and empowering teachers to lead confidently, Kulvarn proved that transformation doesn't come from discarding staff, but investing in them.

A model for the future of education

Under Kulvarn's leadership, the Thinking Schools Federation presents a compelling vision of what education can and should be: a place where every family is a partner, every child is celebrated and every teacher is empowered to lead. Parent participation is not an extra project. It is the foundation of thriving, inclusive and ambitious schools.

Through trust, high expectations and an unshakeable belief in human potential, Kulvarn Atwal and The Thinking Schools Federation set a standard for what is possible when schools truly work with and for their communities.

A MOMENT TO REFLECT

IN THIS SECTION WE HAVE:

- Presented the impact that parents' educational and social background can have on a child's expected educational outcomes
- Considered how parent participation can positively impact on outcomes and therefore represents a powerful opportunity to improve outcomes and life chances for young people
- Explored four different case studies – a council, a primary school, a secondary school, and a federation – where parent participation is having a positive impact

PICTURE THIS

If you were to imagine an ideal relationship between school and parents, what would it look like? Give yourself time to really picture this in detail:

- What type of conversations would you have?
- When and where would you interact with parents?
- What would this look like from a learner's perspective?

What do you notice about your own answers?

Now that you've thought about this, consider what actions could move you closer to this ideal? Try to focus on things that are within your sphere of influence. For example, we cannot control someone else's behaviour, but we can control our response to them.

UNEARTHING THE OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR SETTING

This is a short activity that you may want to complete on your own or with a group of colleagues. This section has highlighted how important it is that parent participation is embedded into the school's strategy and not seen as a bolt-on. We've also seen how small tweaks, such as the literacy prompt text messages, can have a significant impact.

Give yourself a set amount of time (however much you can spare!) to try and come up with as many **small-scale opportunities** for potential participation as you can. If you're doing this on your own, keep it to ideas that you can implement within the remit of your role, or if you're working in a group perhaps consider different curriculum areas.

Try to think about where learners might benefit most from some extra support. For example, if you want to help learners revisit some knowledge from an earlier unit, could a text home to parents with some questions to ask their child about that topic be useful? Or if you are wanting to encourage more spoken language, could talk topics be sent home? These can be accessible ways to support.

Once your time is up, reflect on what you've come up with. Which one might have the most impact? Commit to giving it a try over the coming weeks.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU REFLECT

- Are you convinced by the opportunity presented by promoting parent participation? Why/why not?
- What existing strategies are there in your setting, whether academic or pastoral, that could be strengthened by parent participation?
- What data do you have access to that can help you build a picture of current parent participation or engagement? What questions does that data answer? What questions does it ask? What is missing?
- Are there certain groups of parents that are under- or over-represented in your school? Are you aware of any barriers that may be stopping certain groups of parents from engaging with you?
- What opportunities are there for sharing expertise and experience across your parent community? For example, how parents of neurodiverse children at Clapton Girls' Academy are able to share their experiences with different services through school-facilitated parent groups.



“We’ve undertaken this research so that busy school leaders can prioritise actions and deliver fast impact.

This framework is our gift to UK schools. Working together, we can create stronger parent participation for the benefit of all.”

JASON ELSOM, CEO, PARENTKIND

THE BLUEPRINT FRAMEWORK FOR PARENT PARTICIPATION





Introducing the Blueprint

THE BLUEPRINT FRAMEWORK FOR PARENT PARTICIPATION

Delivered by Parent-Friendly Schools

The evidence is clear: strong parent participation leads to higher attendance, better education outcomes and stronger school inspection preparedness.

Our schools consistently tell us that once they have made the journey to higher parent participation and removed the barriers that prevent it, all feel the results. The data gathered from our five years of school-based testing of the Blueprint framework backs this up.

Our framework will give you the springboard you need to raise standards at your school. The Parentkind team is on hand to provide endless support and help you realise the benefits of strong parent participation.

Key inspectorates are increasing their focus on parent participation. For example, Ofsted now have **11 references** in their new framework.

Parent participation can equate to **4 months** of additional academic progress per year.

Attendance is a key issue, with **17%** of primary school and **25%** of secondary school learners having a key challenge.

There is up to a **14%** gap in parent satisfaction between a child with high absence rate and a child regularly attending school.

WE ASKED 5,500 SCHOOLS

They were clear: there is **will** but no **way** to stronger parent participation.

Schools are overstretched and under-resourced. The school evidence shows that schools want to strengthen parent participation, but lack the roadmap and resources to truly make a difference.

WILL

85% of teachers agree that parent participation in school life has benefits and **75%** agree that it improves outcomes

WAY

Only **1 in 6** schools have a Parent Participation Strategy and **79%** have no guidance on handling complaints from parents

THE BARRIERS FOR SCHOOLS

Schools face these barriers to stronger parent participation and need support to remove them:

- **Seeing barriers to participation**
- **Staff confidence in engaging parents**
- **Not having a participation plan**
- **Not having a participation lead**
- **No means to track or measure engagement**
- **Lack of time**
- **Disengaged parents**
- **Difficulties in involving parents**
- **Challenging parent behaviour**

WE ASKED 5,500 PARENTS

They were clear: there is **will** but no **way** to stronger parent participation.

Our parents are subject to more pressures than ever before with many facing financial and emotional stress which hinders their participation. The evidence shows that parents want to be more involved with their child's school and education, but lack the guidance and confidence to do so.

WILL

90% of parents want to be more involved in their child's school and **85%** want to play an active role in their education

WAY

1.5m UK parents are unhappy with their child's education and **4m** households fight about homework

THE BARRIERS FOR PARENTS

Parents face these barriers to stronger parent participation and need support to remove them:

- **Lack of time**
- **Not being asked to participate**
- **Not having skills/knowledge to offer**
- **Finding the idea of involvement intimidating**
- **Not feeling listed to**
- **Working and childcare**
- **Language barriers**
- **Knowledge of the system**
- **Negative experiences in school**
- **Struggles with costs**





The Framework

5 key drivers, 25 initiatives and 325 measures of a UK school's strength in parent participation. Crafted from millions of data points over five years of trial research.

The following pages present the Parent-Friendly Schools Blueprint framework, with descriptions tailored to be accessible to all UK schools. The Blueprint provides valuable guidance for schools and parents seeking a roadmap to enhance parent participation and engagement.

Our accreditation service identifies a school's starting point, an action plan and recommendations from a pool of 672,980 potential unique reports. Resources, templates, ideas, and toolkits are available to further assist with implementing the action plan.

Additionally, our training and advisory services are offered to any school requiring extra support to convert insights into action. They are centred around the blueprint to coach, empower, and elevate standards at your school.





1: ETHOS AND BEHAVIOURS

Effective parent participation in schools is guided by leadership, strategy, and the resources that foster a positive and inclusive environment. The parent experience is powered by a welcoming atmosphere, prioritised support, and the school team's culture.

OUR BLUEPRINT FRAMEWORK FOR DRIVER 1 - ETHOS AND BEHAVIOURS, HOLDS 61 MEASURES ACROSS 5 INITIATIVES

1.1		Strategising parent participation	The school has a clear, documented strategy that values parents, which is regularly evaluated.
1.2		Leading parent participation	The school has clear leads on parent participation, who are known by parents and the school team.
1.3		Fostering the school culture	The school supports the whole team to model behaviours and work effectively with parents.
1.4		Evolving the school environment	The school provides a welcoming environment that is inclusive, secure and accessible for parents.
1.5		Prioritising parent support	The school prioritises parent support for those with the highest need in all parent interactions.



2: TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Parent participation is at its best when there is impactful, accessible, inclusive and reciprocal communications. The school's review of processes, the actioning of parent feedback and the efforts to raise parent's capability, helps them to engage with school activity.

OUR BLUEPRINT FRAMEWORK FOR DRIVER 2 - TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION, HOLDS 80 MEASURES ACROSS 5 INITIATIVES

2.1		Diversifying communication channels	The school uses a variety of communication methods in a timely way to reach parents effectively.
2.2		Creating inclusive communications	The school reflects the needs and preferences of all parents so all can feel a sense of belonging.
2.3		Evaluating communication impact	The school regularly monitors effectiveness and reviews all communications with parents.
2.4		Enabling parent feedback	The school uses all opportunities to invite feedback and takes action based on the views of parents.
2.5		Making communications accessible	The school effectively resources parents, breaking down communication challenges and barriers.



3: HOME-BASED LEARNING

The relationship between school and home can be strengthened by referring to additional resources and areas of specialism. Maintaining a diverse network of partnerships with local and national groups, schools can better support families facing challenges.

OUR BLUEPRINT FRAMEWORK FOR DRIVER 3 - HOME-BASED LEARNING, HOLDS 61 MEASURES ACROSS 5 INITIATIVES

3.1		Motivating learning at home	The school equips parents to inspire their child's learning and understand the value of their impact.
3.2		Sharing learning progress	The school manages parent expectations through frequent updates on their child's progress.
3.3		Managing learning at home	The school actively shares homework, assessments and curriculum with parents in a variety of styles.
3.4		Building parent skills	The school coaches parents to build academic and non-academic skills to support their child.
3.5		Supporting effective transition	The school provides initiatives to support parents as children progress through educational stages.



4: INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL LIFE

Engaging parents with a wide variety of inclusive activities significantly improves the school's resources and skills. With strong active parent involvement, schools can foster trust and establish long-term collaborations that enhance educational outcomes.

OUR BLUEPRINT FRAMEWORK FOR DRIVER 4 - INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL LIFE, HOLDS 51 MEASURES ACROSS 5 INITIATIVES

4.1		Recruiting parent volunteers	The school offers a broad range of volunteering roles that enable all levels of parent representation.
4.2		Ensuring inclusive volunteering	The school targets particular parent groups to encourage involvement of under-represented parents.
4.3		Coordinating parent volunteers	The school matches parents' time and talent with school needs to encourage different parents to add value.
4.4		Empowering the PTA	The school encourages formal parent-led volunteering groups to be part of the school community.
4.5		Ensuring accessible volunteering	The school identifies and takes steps to reduce parent barriers and inequalities in involvement in school life.

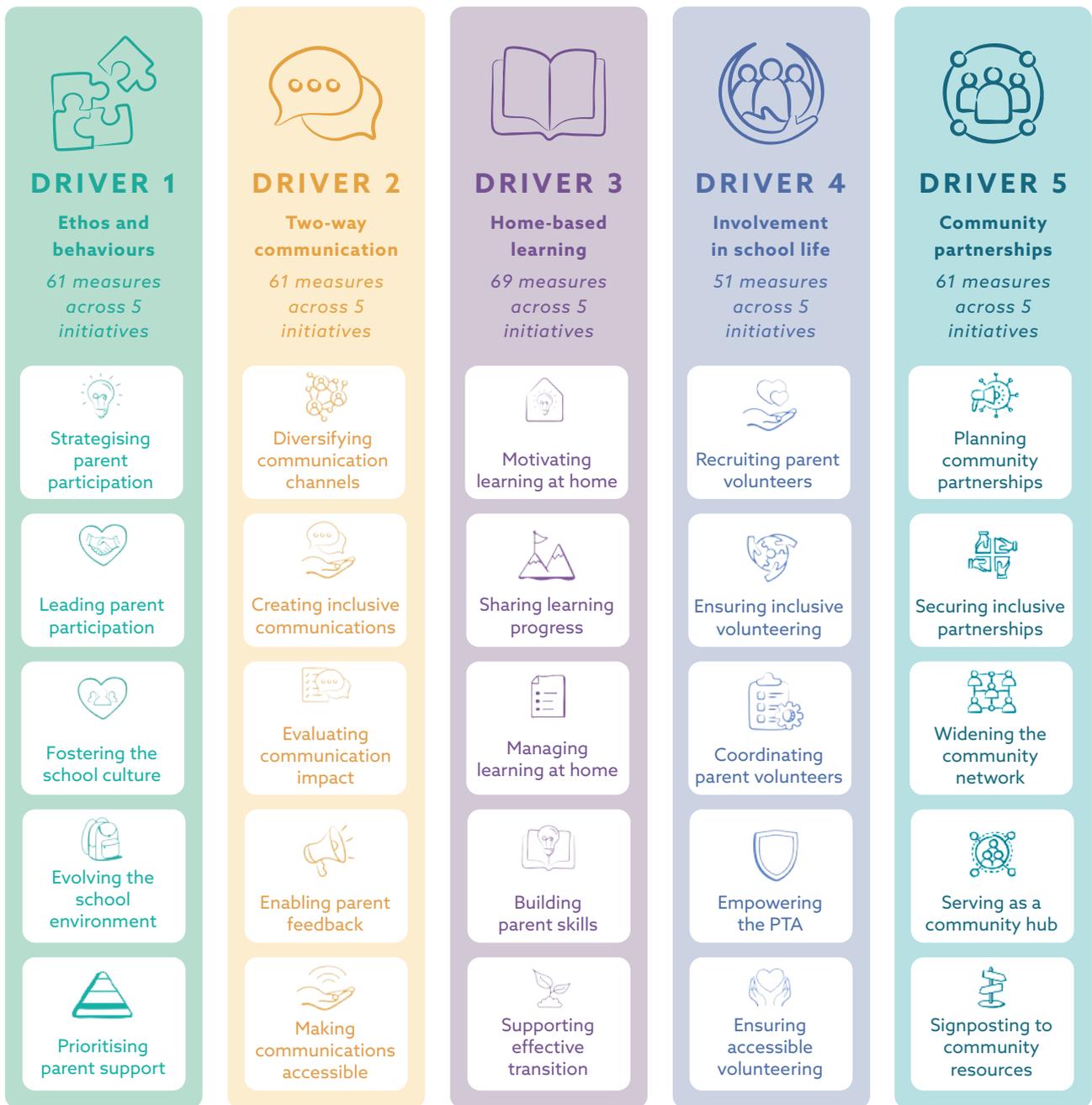


5: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Essential for fostering support, inclusion and diversity, developing strong connections with local groups and leaders allows schools to better reach and support families, face challenges and leverage specialised resources to meet parents' educational and wellbeing needs.

OUR BLUEPRINT FRAMEWORK FOR DRIVER 5 - COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, HOLDS 61 MEASURES ACROSS 5 INITIATIVES

3.1		Planning community partnerships	The school has a clear commitment to outreach, going to where parents are to engage them.
3.2		Securing inclusive partnerships	The school proactively connects with under-represented groups through community partners.
3.3		Widening the community network	The school works with community partners to meet children's personal, social and physical needs.
3.4		Serving as a community hub	The school attracts community partners to collaborate for mutual benefit as a valued community hub.
3.5		Signposting to community resources	The school directs identified parents to a wide range of community partners to meet their needs.



HOW WE GOT HERE

In autumn 2018, Parentkind commissioned the Research Centre for Children and Families at Canterbury Christ Church University to help shape a Parent Participation Framework. The team carried out an in-depth review of research and practice, aiming to strengthen the framework and identify what works when it comes to involving parents in education.

Their work focused on five key pillars: leadership and ethos, two-way communication, support for learning at home, involvement in school life, and community engagement. Using a mix of academic and grey literature, they drew on UK and international studies, highlighting promising practices and where more research is needed.

Alongside this, the team gathered real-world examples from schools and proposed practical measures for assessing success. They also tackled the confusion around terms like 'involvement' and 'engagement,' choosing 'participation' to reflect a broader, partnership-based approach between schools and families.

The report laid the groundwork for wider consultation and future development, offering schools and policymakers a clearer, evidence-informed foundation to strengthen parent-school relationships.

“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy are the noise before defeat.”

SUN TZU



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES IN ACTION





Practical strategies for busy schools

On the next few pages you will find case studies from schools that embody aspects of each of the five drivers. We hope they help you visualise what the drivers can look like in practice, and how varied the approaches can be depending on each individual setting's journey and context. These are then followed by two longer, more holistic case studies. There is an opportunity to reflect on these at the end of this section.

Quick practical wins

A framework with five drivers, each of which represents a significant undertaking in a school, can feel intimidating. One of the initiatives within a driver can take the whole academic year for a Parent Participation Leader to deliver.

Rather than leaving people feeling overawed at the challenge, we want to give some achievable wins and deliver impact. On this page, you can find some quick practical ideas to help spark your thinking.

Communication wins

- Use WhatsApp groups or text alerts for reminders
- Translate key communications into home languages
- Use short video updates from teachers or school leaders
- Ask parents how they want to be communicated with (survey)
- Offer drop-in hours for questions or chats with staff

School environment wins

- Make reception areas welcoming (signage, friendly staff)
- Include parents' involvement in school displays, such as a 'Thank you' wall
- Have tea/coffee available at parent events
- Set up a dedicated parent room or space
- Use child-led tours to show off the school at open days

Relationship-building wins

- Personally invite parents to events (especially under-represented ones)
- Use a 'buddy system' to link new parents with experienced ones
- Hold regular 'Parent Voice' roundtables
- Host a 'Tea with the Head' informal Q&A session
- Send personal thank-you notes to involved parents

Learning at home wins

- Share simple activities parents can do at home (no equipment needed)
- Create 'Learning in 5 Minutes' tip sheets
- Offer workshops on supporting reading or maths at home
- Post 'Conversation Starters' on homework slips
- Set up a lending library for games or books

Events and activities wins

- Run 'Stay and Play' sessions for younger children
- Try themed parent-child events (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) night, cooking, etc.)
- Offer flexible timings for events (morning and evening)
- Provide crèche or childcare during events
- Offer incentives like raffles or refreshments

Feedback and voice wins

- Use short pulse surveys after every event
- Have a suggestion box (digital and physical)
- Create a parent working group or ambassador scheme
- Conduct termly check-ins with a small sample of parents
- Ask parents to co-design workshops or projects

Practical barrier-busting wins

- Provide transport support for those who need it
- Offer interpreters or bilingual support
- Schedule meetings at different times to suit varied work hours
- Provide clear information about who to contact for what
- Reduce forms/paperwork and streamline sign-ups



DRIVER: 1 ETHOS AND BEHAVIOURS

INITIATIVE 1.3 FOSTERING THE SCHOOL CULTURE CASE STUDY: PARTNERS IN EXCELLENCE, CARLTON BOLLING SCHOOL

Carlton Bolling in Bradford refer to parents as their partners in excellence. They make clear from the outset that parents play a crucial – and highly valued – role in the education of their students.

Their regular parent forums invite parents to contribute to the school's current thinking on an issue to help shape the school's approach. For example, parents had a significant say in recent updates to the school's rewards policy.

Leadership commitment

The numerous and often competing demands on school leaders' attention have led the team at Carlton Bolling to adopt a wide SLT (Senior Leadership Team). This includes an Associate Assistant Headteacher, Ross Mezals, working on the pastoral team who is a non-teaching member of staff. This means he can ensure that any pastoral concerns are dealt with quickly and efficiently, without disrupting teaching. Ross leads the Head of Year team and the work they have been doing building relationships with parents has contributed to a significant improvement in attendance at the school.

Healing community division

Over the last five or six years, Carlton Bolling has been trying to restore the relationship that the local

community had with the police. This has included opening their doors to the police so that they feel more like part of the school community. The school hosts the police cadets' graduation ceremony every year. This year, they were proud to have three of their own students join the cadets for the first time.

CASE STUDY: BEING RESPONSIVE AND CARING, FLAKEFLEET PRIMARY SCHOOL

At Flakefleet Primary School in Lancashire, they are constantly looking for ways to better support their community and its needs at any given time. Based in a small town seven miles north of Blackpool, they have experienced the persistent economic decline that has affected many coastal areas over the last fifty years. The average household income in the area falls well below the average for England and Wales (according to NOS data), and they see a lot of issues associated with this in their community, including limited job opportunities, high crime rates and mistrust of schools, police and social care.

Their support for students and their families begins with a universal commitment to kindness, openness and care.

A welcoming environment

Headteacher, Dave McPartlin, and the team have thought carefully about how they could make the school environment more comfortable and inviting for parents. Inspired by the Danish principle of hygge, a cosy and warm atmosphere, they aim to make parents feel as comfortable as possible, recognising that schools, and

particularly meetings with leadership, can often cause anxiety. Their leadership office, where parents will often be if they are meeting with a member of SLT, has comfortable sofas, deep warm painted walls and fairy lights: "We want it to feel less like a school and more like a living room", says Dave.

A relational approach

The school takes a relational approach to student behaviour, which has also informed how they communicate with parents. Their aim, always, is to demonstrate understanding and kindness. In emotionally heightened exchanges, the team have worked a lot on ensuring they stay calm, do not raise their voices and – in situations where parents may have left a conversation abruptly – check back in with them and ask how they are. Dave says this has paid dividends: parents trust the school, they believe the leadership and staff genuinely care for them and their child, and it has made handling disagreements much easier.

The leadership team is also committed to resourcing, within tight budget constraints, to ensure they are responding to these issues strategically and with care.

SEND/SERF Unit

In September 2024, they opened a new KS1 SEND unit and an EYFS and KS1 SERF unit (Special Education Resource Facility). These provide specialised support for 16 children across Lancashire. They are dedicated spaces where each child receives personalised attention, supported by a high ratio of adults to children to meet every child's unique needs. The unit is for pupils with communication and interaction difficulties.

The Little Lighthouse

The Little Lighthouse is a nursery provision for two-year-olds, which supports transition into full-time school for some children. Children enjoy continuous provision both indoors and outdoors. One of the drivers behind this was that the school wanted to help non-working parents return to work earlier (if they wanted to) and to support low-income parents to remain at work.

Dedicated family worker

As part of their pastoral team, they have a dedicated family support worker who can lend a supportive ear and work individually with parents when needed. Parents are strongly encouraged to reach out if they are struggling, and they do what they can to support.

Magic Breakfast

At Flakefleet, they believe no child should ever be too hungry to learn. They are supported by the registered charity Magic Breakfast, whose aim is to end morning hunger for good. Magic Breakfast is available daily for all children from reception to Year 6.





DRIVER 2: TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

INITIATIVE 2.2 CREATING INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATIONS CASE STUDY: CELEBRATING LANGUAGE DIVERSITY, OASIS ACADEMY WOODVIEW

"Our community is a microcosm of many cultures characterised by the 42 languages that are spoken across our academy, which we think is amazing [...] we wanted to do something to say 'you belong' at Woodview. A lot of the children were not aware as to how diverse and rich they are making our community, which should be celebrated."
Kiran Satti, Deputy Principal at Oasis Academy Woodview and National Lead Practitioner for Reading

Over the last academic year, Kiran has been working to celebrate this diversity in various ways, many of which directly involve parents.

Over the summer holiday, Kiran put together a large map display outside her office, marking the countries of all the languages spoken in the school.

"What was lovely was that the children came back from the summer and they would say, 'oh, that's my language!', 'that one's mine!' And that, for me, was the real magic of it. When you display something, you're saying it's important."

The school library has invested heavily in dual-language books, making it easier for students (and parents) who are newer to English. It also continues to celebrate and signpost the diversity of the school.

Kiran attended the Reading Rights Summit, where she met colleagues from The Book Trust, Pan Macmillan and Children's Laureate Frank Cottrell-Boyce. "We were talking about inclusion and what it really means: what sort of work can we do to make sure that children and families feel seen in literacy?"

Many incredibly popular titles - such as Julia Donaldson's *The Gruffalo* - have been translated into over 100 languages, which is critical to the book industry. This got Kiran thinking about their plans for celebrating World Book Day and how they could include parents. This is when Kiran and Alyx Price from Pan Macmillan publishers started their collaboration.

The team invited parents to a special story-writing workshop that celebrated home languages and heritages. As part of the workshop and follow-up activity, children and parents worked together to translate stories from the classic Pan Macmillan series of books *Tales of Acorn Wood*. 130 families participated in the workshops, a huge number for the school.

The sessions were open to all, not only those with dual heritage. Facilitated using Google Translate, some children didn't choose to write in their home language, but in someone else's. "Arabic was quite a popular one – I think because the writing looks so beautiful on the page!" Kiran also reflected on the workshops as a brilliant opportunity for parents to share their stories, identities and cultures. An experience that has been powerful for parents and children alike.

"The outcomes from it are incredible – the pride in the work, the presentation, just the love that's gone into it. It's absolutely brilliant."

The plan going forward is that the stories will be distilled down and each year group will have a page from *Acorn Wood* which will hopefully then be bound together to create a completely unique edition featuring all the languages of the school. The workshops will continue every year and will become part of the school's tradition.

INITIATIVE 2.5 MAKING COMMUNICATIONS ACCESSIBLE

CASE STUDY: PARENT AND TEACHER PARTNERSHIP – A MUM'S STORY, MINERVA SCHOOL

From a parent's perspective, supporting a child through the early years of education can feel both rewarding and uncertain. For Layla, a reception-aged child with a strong desire to 'get everything right the first time,' this journey was made smoother and more meaningful through a close partnership between her mum, Amber, and her teacher, Mrs Perry.

Layla's mum speaks warmly of the support received: "Mrs Perry has been brilliant in boosting Layla's confidence and happiness. The communication between us has really helped both at home and in school."

The teacher's approach was deeply informed by what was happening at home. When Layla's parent noticed her daughter struggling with perfectionism, they gently taught her that mistakes are part of the learning process. Rather than working in isolation, Mrs Perry extended this lesson into the classroom. In her one-on-one sessions with Layla, she reinforced the same message, helping Layla internalise that it's okay to make mistakes and that growth comes through trying, failing and trying again.

Communication played a key role in this partnership. Amber and Mrs Perry kept in close contact through the ClassDojo app. Mrs Perry regularly sent messages celebrating Layla's progress in class, while Amber shared photos and updates about learning moments at home. This two-way sharing allowed Layla to experience a sense of consistency, encouragement and support in all aspects of her life.

"Mrs Perry has also helped me understand the strategies she uses to encourage Layla's independence," Amber reflects, "so I've been able to carry those techniques over at home." This alignment between home and school created a cohesive learning environment for Layla, where expectations, praise and routines all worked in harmony.

Even small gestures had a significant impact. On one occasion, Mrs Perry noticed Layla riding her scooter into school, a huge personal achievement for Layla. By praising that moment with the same enthusiasm to celebrate academic work, she validated Layla's efforts and reinforced her emotional wellbeing. These moments built trust, confidence and a sense of belonging.

Importantly, Mrs Perry maintained clear professional boundaries while supporting each child and their family on an individual level. Layla's school strongly emphasises understanding how children are doing, not only academically, but also emotionally and socially.

From Amber's point of view, the experience has felt like being part of a team. "It doesn't feel like the school teaches Layla one thing and I teach her another, it feels like we're all helping Layla learn together, as one team."

This case illustrates how open communication, mutual respect and shared goals between teachers and parents can create a nurturing, consistent and empowering environment for young children like Layla to thrive in school and beyond.



DRIVER 3: HOME-BASED LEARNING

INITIATIVE 3.4 BUILDING PARENT SKILLS

CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING PHONICS AND READING, OASIS ACADEMY WOODVIEW

At Oasis Academy Woodview, where over 42 home languages are spoken, they have been working to support parents with phonics and literacy training. Parents are invited to teacher-led phonics and reading workshops, and more informal read-aloud sessions with their child. The latter creates an environment where parents feel happy to ask teachers questions about how they teach aspects of literacy and how they can help.

Originally, these sessions were not designed to be repeated, but at the request of parents, the school has made them more of a regular feature.

Beyond this, where parents have younger babies and toddlers, the school runs a *Bambinos and books* group. "We want the babies and toddlers in because the message I want to share with families is that we are a community. And even though your youngest children aren't necessarily registered with us yet at school, we still want to be invested in your child's learning journey and reading journey." *Kiran Satti, Deputy Principal, Oasis Academy Woodview*

The *Bambinos* group has a relaxed atmosphere and helps support parents, particularly mothers, with anything they are struggling with while also providing early socialisation opportunities for the babies and toddlers. But through that, Kiran is also sharing messages around the importance of shared reading: why they should do it, how it supports brain development and the impact it will have on them in school. "We give them lots of different facts, for example, that a baby has to spend at least 15 seconds on one frame – and that's why certain books for children look really simple and why we need to make sure we take that time when we're sharing books."

INITIATIVE 3.5 SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE TRANSITION

CASE STUDY: STRENGTHENING TRANSITION FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS, BROOKVALE GROBY LEARNING CAMPUS

"It's hard to overstate the importance of a smooth transition into secondary school for students. We know that the move up to 'big school' can be an anxious time: we want incoming Year 7s to feel welcome and to understand the culture of the school they are joining. The same is true for their parents and carers – we want to get off on the right foot." *Will Teece, Headteacher*

At Brookvale Groby Learning Campus, facilitating a smooth and supportive transition into secondary school is a key priority for students and their parents. Headteacher Will Teece outlines a proactive and relational approach that ensures Year 7 students and their families feel welcomed, informed and integrated into the school community from the outset.

Building strong primary links

Since becoming a headteacher, it has been part of Will's professional philosophy to develop strong links with primary partners. Brookvale Groby has over 30 feeder primary schools and they want to ensure that each student feels equally welcome.

For their main primary feeders, Will personally visits them every year to meet with their students and introduce the school to them. For the smaller primary partners, or those who may only be sending one or two students to Brookvale Groby each year, the team arrange for them all (parents included) to come and visit the campus on the same day, instead of visiting schools individually. "We recognise that students transitioning to us with very few of their primary school classmates can experience the process of transition very differently, and so we try to make them feel part of a group as early as possible," explains Will.

Early engagement and belonging

"From my perspective, as soon as a child has a confirmed place at our school, they are part of our school community, and we try to signal that belonging as early as possible," Will Teece says.

Once a student's place is confirmed, they receive a personalised welcome postcard that reinforces their sense of belonging. The school also invites incoming students and their families to events such as theatre productions and science showcases in the lead-up to September, helping them acclimatise to the campus and culture.

Communicating school culture

"We want our parents to understand who we are as a school and why we do what we do: it's hard to get parents to buy-in to something if they don't understand the rationale behind it" *Will Teece, Headteacher*

A two-day summer transition event, Learning Camp, provides students an opportunity to settle in, while a concurrent parent assembly explains the school's values, routines and educational approach. A dedicated document outlines the school's culture and how families can actively support their child's success.

Clear and proactive communication

We recognise that the nature of the relationship that parents have with school changes with transition from primary school." *Will Teece, Headteacher*

Where in Primary school parents may be used to speaking to a class teacher for five minutes on the school gate, this just isn't always possible in a large secondary school. The team at Brookvale Groby try to anticipate this by being very proactive in how they communicate with parents.

They make very clear the communication pathways for how parents can get in touch if they have something to discuss – whether it be pastoral or academic. The school also holds 'Meet the Tutor' events in the first half term of Year 7, which give parents an early opportunity to discuss any concerns or questions. "We find it really helps us have a productive and reassuring start to their child's education with us," says Will.



DRIVER 4: INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL LIFE

INITIATIVE 4.1 RECRUITING PARENT VOLUNTEERS CASE STUDY: THE TRANSFORMATIONAL ROLE OF PARENT AMBASSADOR, BANTOCK PRIMARY SCHOOL

One of the most impactful strategies Bantock Primary School has embedded is the use of parent ambassadors – trusted members of the school community who bridge the gap between home and school for families facing cultural, linguistic and systemic barriers.

Bantock's parent ambassador programme is not a token gesture; it is a strategic, deeply embedded pillar of the school's ethos. These ambassadors are multilingual, culturally representative and relationally skilled. Between them, they can speak and understand eight to nine different languages, allowing the school to offer induction and support in families' first languages, often in settings where no English is spoken.

This is especially vital for reaching hard-to-engage communities such as the GRT (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller) population, which has historically experienced marginalisation both in their countries of origin and within UK systems. Bantock employs ambassadors from both the Roma Romanian and Czech Roma communities – two groups that often experience inter-community tension. By intentionally recruiting representatives from both, Bantock sent a powerful message: we are here for all, and we model cooperation and respect.

THE AMBASSADORS ARE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN:

Parent inductions – They translate and explain complex school systems and expectations.

Daily school life – They greet families at the gate, help with communication during drop-offs and pick-ups, and serve as consistent, familiar faces.

Parents' evenings and community events – They provide live translation and cultural context during conversations with teachers, help set up community stalls and ensure no parent feels out of place or lost.

Pastoral support – They act as mediators and advocates in emotionally complex situations. For instance, one parent ambassador successfully intervened in a case where a grieving family struggled to access support after the loss of their baby. She liaised with authorities, facilitated communication and ensured the family could finally hold a funeral.

Their presence is not just helpful, it's transformational. They prove that the school values lived experience, community knowledge and empathy as essential educational tools. They embody Bantock's ethos of relational trust and co-creation ethos with families, rather than a top-down parent engagement model.

Ms Sarai, the headteacher, credits the ambassadors with significantly increasing the school's reach and effectiveness in working with families who may otherwise remain isolated or disengaged.

"It's the difference between being in the community and being with the community," she says. "We couldn't do what we do without them."

DRIVER 5: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

INITIATIVE 5.4 SERVING AS A COMMUNITY HUB

CASE STUDY: A HUB AT THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY, FLAKEFLEET PRIMARY SCHOOL

"For us, belonging starts with our relationship to our community. We believe that if the school truly feels like it belongs to the community, it will help individuals feel like they belong at our school. So, we place a lot of focus on ensuring that our school and its approach are harmonious with and responsive to the needs of the community we serve. Because of our socioeconomic context (and not in spite of it), we take an outward-facing stance, with much of our work centred on building strong bridges between the school and the community. We want our school to fit seamlessly into Fleetwood." *Dave McPartlin, Headteacher, Flakefleet Primary School*

The Strive Café

Through the multi-agency relationships developed in their community (Headteacher Dave McPartlin chairs the regeneration council for their ward), they could secure investment to build the Strive Café on their site, which was formerly a Children's Centre and had been sitting empty. This fully-staffed public café on their school site has become a real hub in the community.

It is used not only by students and their families, but also by school staff and members of the wider community, from their local NHS workers to a regular group of retirees attending after their Wednesday aquafit classes! To help maintain their close links with the local police force, they offer free bacon sandwiches on Fridays to their local community police officers.

The café is an extension of the school. It operates by using community volunteers throughout the summer holidays (albeit with reduced hours) and offer organised activities several times a week, which really helps to maintain the school's relationships with the community over the summer. It also symbolises their investment and belief in their community. They believe what they can make together can compete with the big brand chains!

INITIATIVE 5.5 SIGNPOSTING TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES

CASE STUDY: COMMITTING TO CARE, CARLTON BOLLING SCHOOL

"We want to signal to our students and parents that we genuinely care for them." *Mohammed Azum, Headteacher, Carlton Bolling School*

Ensuring that parents are aware of wider support in the community is central to how the Carlton Bolling team demonstrate their care.

Parents' evenings at Carlton Bolling in Bradford are attended by the local NHS providers. At these events, parents can have their blood pressure checked, for example. This touchpoint is valued by the parents – particularly those who are new to the country – as it signposts them to other services available in the community.

In the past, the school has run employability workshops, particularly for unemployed mothers, which have helped them build their CVs and highlighted opportunities in the community. Where possible, and appropriate, this includes providing volunteering opportunities for parents.

To celebrate International Women's Day, and to echo their 'Carlton Girls Can' initiative to encourage more of their female students to participate in extra-curricular sports, the school ran a free ten week health and fitness initiative in the local area which was attended by over 100 parents.

The school is part of the Warm Welcome Spaces initiative. They try to be as bespoke as possible in supporting families through their participation in this scheme. Sometimes, this has included buying extra mattresses and bedding, as well as a hot meal for students at the end of the day in the cold months. They work very carefully with their safeguarding and pastoral teams to ensure they are supporting their most vulnerable families in ways that will have the most impact for them.



Parent Power: building power with parents to create educational change

Research has shown that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, it can have a positive effect on aspirations, attainment and access to university. But for families from underserved communities, there are often significant barriers – from time pressures and language differences, to a lack of trust in the education system.

There is growing evidence that parent engagement is even more powerful when done in a relational way. At The Brilliant Club, we've seen how building stronger relationships with parents and carers can help overcome these challenges. Through our Parent Power chapters, we work with parents from underserved communities where access to higher education is historically low – helping them build relationships, share experiences, and advocate for change.

Parent Power is rooted in broad-based community organising – a values-based methodology for creating social change. Community organising focuses on building strong relationships with and between local people, leading to community-led solutions to local issues. In each of our Parent Power chapters, we have a trained Community Organiser conducting one-to-one conversations with parents and working with them in group meetings to plan campaign actions. The aim is to build enough relational power to create change on these issues, with parents leading the way. There are parent-led campaigns across our chapters which seek to improve rural connectivity, work experience opportunities and access to mental health support.

Here are three key lessons we have learned that can support schools to meaningfully build capacity to create change with parents:

ACTIVE LISTENING

For many of the parents we work with, this is the first time anyone has actively listened to them. In our Fenland chapter, parents raised the lack of transport options for the children as the fundamental issue limiting opportunity in the region.

As Joanna said: "There's not so many people [from Fenland] going to university because there's no transport. Young people are not able to move freely or visit nearby towns to socialise or go to events. There are very few people in March who actually go beyond the area regularly."

Fenland parents have successfully campaigned to build a cycle lane in their local area that will allow young people to access a train station, opening a new world of extracurricular and work experience opportunities. By establishing a reciprocal relationship with parents through listening, schools can consult with parents to best represent the needs of the local community

BONDING AND BRIDGING RELATIONSHIPS

The community-organising process builds bonding relationships between people within a community, but it also builds long-term relationships between institutions and the communities they serve. Effective educational organising is intentional about the type of relationships it builds between parents, teachers and decision makers, as well as how they are sustained.

In Bradford, Dixons Academies Trust welcomed parents to their Dixons Trinity school to meet and discuss what matters to them. The primary issue that emerged was a lack of affordable tutoring options for parents. Through these conversations, the school was able to offer support to the group to develop a parent-led tutoring scheme. Consequently, a bridging relationship based on trust has developed between families and the school, which will see benefits beyond the tutoring campaign. We must be intentional about how we develop these relationships in the education sector and how we train parents to do so in a way that builds winning campaigns.

ACTION AND BELONGING

Research by UCL (University College London) and the National Education Union has shown that belonging in school matters – it's been shown to improve pupil attainment and wellbeing. Building capacity with parents

improves the sense of belonging for families, and there are growing examples of this approach in the UK, such as Reach Academy Feltham and other schools working with the Reach Foundation. However, we need to see this become standard practice across the UK to improve outcomes for young people.

I recently travelled to the US as part of my Churchill Fellowship to learn more about how schools have developed as anchor institutions over time using community organising. At Mastery Schools in Philadelphia, organising is placed at the heart of their strategy, intentionally sharing power with parents and building capacity with their communities in the long term. Parents talked about how the organising process facilitated by the school had supported them to take meaningful action to support their children's education, creating a sense of belonging within the school.

BUILDING POWER WITH PARENTS TO CREATE CHANGE

Capacity building with parents is essential for schools. If it involves genuine listening, relationship building and leadership development with local families, it can be transformational for both the school itself and local communities.

If you are interested in establishing a Parent Power chapter, please get in touch with Jimmy Pickering, Director of Communities at The Brilliant Club on jimmy.pickering@thebrilliantclub.org

This report was compiled by Jimmy Pickering, Director of Communities, The Brilliant Club





It starts with trust: a case study

It starts with trust: unlocking aspiration through family and school partnership.

Within the heart of Kent's educational landscape, EKC Schools Trust stands for something powerful: opportunity, belonging, and ambition for every young person. Since its foundation in March 2020 with four schools, the Trust has grown into a vibrant family of nine, encompassing both primary and secondary education. United by the unwavering belief that education transforms lives, EKC Schools Trust extends a profound sense of belonging, not only to students, but also to parents and community members actively engaging them in its mission.

EKC Schools Trust offers more than lessons and qualifications. It provides care, compassion and community.

- It champions the uniqueness of every learner, embracing diversity in all its forms
- It empowers schools to retain individuality while benefiting from shared expertise and collaboration
- It nurtures students and families, recognising that strong partnerships between home and school are the foundation for lifelong success

Through innovation, courage and collaboration, EKC Schools Trust is building schools that are places of learning and belonging.

EAST STOUR PRIMARY SCHOOL

East Stour Primary School (as with all schools across the Trust) is its community's greatest champion. Its passion for inclusion, belonging and raising aspiration drives their work with children and its engagement with and support for families.

East Stour is a school full of potential, rich in spirit, ambition and the determination to create a brighter future. The staff are committed to building strong, trusting relationships with families, recognising that empowering parents and carers is key to raising aspirations and securing long-term success for every child.

East Stour's approach is gentle but transformative:

- Inviting families to share their voices, not just receive information
- Celebrating the small successes, from a parent's first meeting to a family event that feels truly welcoming
- Listening sincerely to what parents hope for and what they fear, and providing supportive approaches (tailored for vulnerable groups)

And the impact is already visible:

- Children thrive knowing their families are part of their school life
- Students feel more secure, confident and motivated when they see home and school working together
- Parents believe their voice matters and is essential to their child's success

SHEPPEY SECONDARY

In September, EKC Schools Trust proudly welcomed a new member into its family: EKC Sheppey Secondary (EKCSS). Formerly part of another Trust, Sheppey Secondary is embarking on a new chapter rooted in EKC values and its specific mission: that EKCSS is 'where belonging meets brilliance'.

This was not just a change of leadership; it was an act of hope on an island where decades of challenging circumstances around secondary school education have historically failed the local community.

EKC Schools Trust saw potential rather than problems, recognising that to truly transform a school, particularly given the historic challenges, they had to transform the parent/carer and wider community's relationship with the school, rebuilding trust, ambition and a shared sense of pride.

- Consistent and meaningful parent engagement that celebrates children's victories and is built on creating quality relationships
- Building trust, that in regularly championing their child any call for parent support in course correction equally comes from a place of championing their child's success
- Establishing ways for parents to have a genuine voice

With thoughtfulness and vigorous energy, the school's efforts are transforming students' educational experiences and shifting the local community's perception, trust and faith.

They weren't just building a better school but restoring belief in what education could achieve.

A GROWING IMPACT: CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

While each of the individual academies in the EKC Schools Trust is precisely that – individual, each with its unique and distinctive character and communities to serve – the Trust connects everyone around a central purpose. It galvanises the work being undertaken in each school under the EKC banner.

For children, the impact of the shared commitment to parent participation is profound:

- When parents feel welcomed, informed and listened to, children feel prouder, safer and more supported in their learning
- When families are involved, pupils are more likely to attend school, engage in lessons and aspire to brighter futures
- Children begin to believe that success is not just possible; it's expected, achievable and theirs

For families, these schools are places of trust instead of barriers, where parents can speak, contribute and feel part of a shared mission. Parents who may have felt disconnected from their own school life are empowered to participate, whether through conversations, volunteering or simply showing up to celebrate their child's success.

For the wider community of Sheppey, seeds of change are being planted. Stronger schools mean stronger communities, which will change the trajectory for generations to come.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FROM EKCSS

1. **Build trust:** Start by listening to parents' and carers' views, concerns and experiences. Meet them where they are to build and foster a strong parent-school relationship, engagement and advocacy.
2. **Break down barriers:** Trial an online group to support engagement from parents challenged by in-person forums or transform your SEND newsletter into an inclusion newsletter distributed to all families.
3. **Be flexible:** Create events with flexibility to give parents every chance to engage, such as drop-in sessions with no fixed time and opportunities for informal conversations.
4. **Engage parent champions:** No matter how difficult, continue to engage parent champions and incentivise their participation with simple gestures like offering cake.
5. **Empower parents:** Run sessions that empower parents and award them certificates in assemblies to role model achievement and foster a shared sense of pride for their children.
6. **Positive communication:** Call parents with positive news. Help them overcome the fear and negativity associated with school contact. Establish trust as their child's champion, so they can better trust in and hear a show of concern.



Building trust and partnership with parents – TEAM’s journey of collaboration: a case study

INTRODUCTION

TEAM Education Trust is deeply committed to fostering strong, lasting partnerships with parents and carers. Recognising that many families face complex challenges, and that a high proportion of students within TEAM have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), TEAM has built its approach around a simple but powerful principle: trust and partnership are the foundation of success.

Here, we will outline TEAM’s strategic journey to develop authentic partnerships with parents, working alongside them as equal advocates for their children’s educational and personal growth.

TRUST-WIDE CONTEXT

- **Number of schools**
5 current schools, 6th joining in September
- **Student numbers**
943 students enrolled in total
782 students of statutory school age
- **Pupil Premium eligibility**
60% of statutory-aged students are eligible for Pupil Premium

- **SEND proportion**
65.6% of students across the five schools have SEND (3 specialist settings)
- **Attendance Rates**
Special schools combined attendance: 84.5% (above national average)
Primary schools combined attendance: 95.3%

These achievements are particularly significant given the demographic and socio-economic challenges many of TEAM’s families face.

THE CHALLENGE

Families within TEAM often experience a variety of barriers. Some students are non-verbal or pre-verbal, making parents vital partners in communicating their child’s needs and advocating for the appropriate support.

In addition, many students’ experiences are largely confined to home and school, with limited access to wider community spaces. Strengthening the home-school relationship was therefore not just important, it was essential.

At the outset, trust was fragile within some of the communities TEAM serves. Parent participation was inconsistent, communication structures were underdeveloped and opportunities for genuine partnership were limited.

TEAM'S APPROACH

Embedding parent voice at the heart of school life

TEAM focused on deeply listening to parents and valuing their unique insights.

Each school within TEAM is required to complete the Parentkind Accreditation, embedding its action plans into the School Improvement Plans, specifically under the Leadership and Management sections. This has made parent participation a non-negotiable trust-wide requirement. All schools completing the accreditation achieved Parent-Friendly School status, which has become a vital method for communicating the trust's ethos.

A Parent Engagement Lead role was created centrally, each school is appointing a Parent Liaison Officer, and PTAs were linked in to the Trust's Business and Community Breakfasts to develop direct connections with external support and resources.

This interconnectivity is critical to achieving better support aligned to wider priorities and opportunities for our children.

In addition, TEAM continues to produce a parent Trust newsletter three times a year, showcasing good practice, promoting projects and ensuring consistent, accessible communication.

STRENGTHENING SUPPORT THROUGH EARLY HELP

TEAM's Early Help Team, consisting of three dedicated staff members, is crucial in building trusting relationships with families.

The Early Help Team:

- Conducts home visits and delivers school-based interventions
- Facilitates referrals to financial hardship support and food banks
- Provides bespoke emotional support, including social stories tailored to family needs
- Supports ongoing communication with parents through events, school gates, and home visits

This person-centred approach ensures families feel supported, not judged, changing the narrative from 'what parents lack' to recognising the strengths they bring. The Early Help Team are a proactive force that has done much to prevent parents' worries and concerns from growing into complaints.

A FOCUS ON PRACTICE: WHALEY THORNS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Whaley Thorns Primary School provides a powerful example of TEAM's trust-wide strategies being applied locally.

When new leadership was introduced in September 2022, Whaley Thorns faced a significant challenge: a community that was cautious and, at times, distrustful of formal education settings. Building strong, trusting relationships with parents became the immediate priority.

Through a sustained and relational approach, Whaley Thorns achieved:

- **100% parental attendance** at all parents' evenings
- **100% of parents** signing **home-school agreements** that were co-created with clear, shared expectations

Communication methods were adapted to fit the community's needs, combining formal meetings with informal check-ins through phone calls, doorstep conversations, and flexible follow-ups. Achieving 100% required a good deal of creativity, and it was up to the school to ensure every parent was included.

The key parent participation initiatives in the school include:

- Establishing regular community events, such as a **colour run**, **Easter fairs**, and **family nature walks** which all promote informal engagement. Walking side-by-side with a parent is a much easier way to form a partnership than in formal face-to-face meetings
- Raising over **£3,000** through sponsorships, business partnerships and fundraising activities
- Creating a **food and clothing bank** on site, expanded to include an **adult clothing swap shop** following feedback and quality assurance visits. The leadership team know the community and wants to be a central hub for all within it
- Providing **parent learning opportunities**, including **maths workshops** and **air fryer cooking classes**, linked to incentives such as free equipment

Strong collaboration with the Early Help Team, the Business and Community Champions and local governors ensured seamless and holistic support. Parents were encouraged and empowered to become active participants in their children's education and the school's life. Something as simple as a local shop owner being a School Governor means parents can hear the rationale for decisions in the community and assuage any concerns.

As Whaley Thorns continues its development journey, the school is now preparing to formalise its successful community engagement work into a newly established PTA.

A FOCUS ON ONE STRATEGY: ADDRESSING THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Trust-wide approach

Recognising the severe impact of the cost-of-living crisis on its communities, TEAM made it a strategic priority to support families experiencing financial hardship. Informed by direct feedback from families and national trends across the education sector, TEAM launched a **Trust-wide Cost-of-Living Strategy** to mitigate financial pressures and remove barriers to parent participation and pupil success.

The strategy was developed collaboratively across all schools and focused on four key areas:

- **Financial support:** Facilitating referrals to the Household Support Fund (HSF) and other local assistance schemes
- **Accessible resources:** Establishing food banks, uniform banks, and household essentials swap shops within schools
- **Community partnerships:** Working with local businesses, charities, and community groups to source donations of food, clothing, school equipment, and seasonal hampers. The Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) offer free sessions for families who claim benefit related free school meals and are provided by a range of local organisations and groups
- **Dignity and accessibility:** Creating a 'no stigma' culture where families and staff could access support discreetly and respectfully

The **Early Help Team** was critical in implementing the strategy, providing direct assistance with HSF applications, organising food parcel distribution, and signposting families to wider support networks.

TEAM built sustainability into its cost-of-living response by working with local business networks to secure ongoing support, ensuring that initiatives were not reliant solely on internal funding or one-off donations.

At Whaley Thorns Primary School, the cost-of-living strategy was tailored to meet the specific needs of a community facing significant social and economic challenges. The school recognised early on that trust would be fundamental, not just in offering support but also in ensuring parents felt safe and respected when accessing help.

Key initiatives at Whaley Thorns included:

- **Expansion of food and clothing banks:** Starting with a preloved uniform exchange, the school grew its resources into a comprehensive clothing bank and later an **adult clothing swap shop** following feedback from families and staff
- **Sustainable resource networks:** Through partnerships with organisations like BLAST and TEAM's business network, Whaley Thorns secured regular food donations, HAF Christmas hampers and financial contributions to support hardship cases
- **Community recycling initiatives:** Whaley Thorns worked with a local recycling project where parents could weigh in clothing donations. Some chose to retain the proceeds, but many parents donated the funds to the school budget, strengthening the sense of shared community investment
- **Parent learning workshops with practical benefits:** Recognising the need to provide immediate aid and empower families, the school offered practical workshops such as **air fryer cooking classes**, where participants received free air fryers at the end to help with low-cost meal preparation at home

Throughout these efforts, Whaley Thorns strongly emphasised **dignity, discretion, and empowerment**. Support was offered in a way that normalised assistance as part of the broader school culture, rather than singling out individuals in need.

Furthermore, recognising that many staff members are part of the same community, Whaley Thorns extended support to school staff facing hardship, embedding the principle that **everyone deserves access to help without judgment**.

IMPACT

The results of TEAM's approach are clear:

- Stronger parent-school relationships across all settings
- Increased parental attendance and meaningful engagement
- A reduction in complaints and a rise in positive feedback
- A culture of shared ownership, aspiration, and excellence for every learner

Most importantly, TEAM's families feel **valued, heard, and supported**. Staff, governors, and community partners work together to sustain these positive relationships.

A MOMENT TO REFLECT

It's always good to hear what other schools are doing. Firstly, you can copy excellent practice and reap the benefits of experience. Secondly, you might feel inspired to believe everything is possible, even when relationships with parents are challenging.

Important themes are the focus on truly listening to parents, being empathetic to their situation, finding creative ways to communicate and being a partner that helps parents feel less alone in challenging times.

APPLYING SOME CRITICAL THOUGHT

But then, there might be times when you don't feel good enough because of all these fantastic examples of schools going the extra mile to support their parents. Sometimes, it can give you a little wash of exhaustion thinking about it.

When people tell stories about their school, they say a little bit about the problem, a little bit about the solution, and then something about the impact. Occasionally, they might express some of the challenges in the journey. Still, they probably don't express the moments of doubt, overwhelm, and tiredness that come with being ambitious to make a difference.

Everything worth doing is going to be difficult. You may need to fill in the gaps in the case studies where the school and its team have had to make heroic efforts to achieve impressive impact.

MAKING THE MOST OF WHAT YOU'VE READ

Reflect on how to make the most of these examples for your context.

1. Shorten the list of best practices you've read by removing those you already do and those that are completely impractical for your setting. Be sure to do a little dance when you realise you have already done many of these things.
2. With your now much shorter list, put a star next to those that are achievable and likely to significantly impact your school.
3. For those you have starred, put them in an order based on importance, urgency, or opportunity (whatever makes most sense to you right now).
4. Go back and reread the case study where this strategy was explored and start hatching your school plan.

BE EXCITED TO SHARE YOUR STORY, TOO.

At Parent-Friendly Schools, we constantly search for examples of excellent practice to share with other schools. We want to help, and the best way to do this is to be the conduit for all those practical strategies that work.

Please email us to arrange a chat at parentfriendlyschoools@parentkind.org



**“Education is the passport to
the future, for tomorrow belongs
to those who prepare for it today.”**

MALCOLM X

THE FUTURE







The future, schools and the relationship with parents

In this article, we will explore how the relationship between home and school may evolve over the next few years. We live in tumultuous times, and the only constant seems to be change. The challenge for many parents and schools, guiding young people into an uncertain future, feels greater than ever. Here, we explore potential issues and their impact.

TECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN EDUCATION

Unsurprisingly, technology comes at the top of the list of factors that will impact both home and school and the bridge between the two. On a positive note, platforms like ClassDojo and ParentSquare have significantly improved school-parent communication. These software packages allow teachers to share updates, assignments and feedback instantly. It is also a place where parents can offer input or engage in purposeful two-way communication.

Companies hope to develop AI tutors that integrate with these homeschool software packages. Khanmigo is one of the earliest attempts at an AI tutor, and the Khan Academy is developing it. The hope is that this innovation can offer personalised learning in the home and give parents insight into the day-to-day performance.

Such software means that children's learning is increasingly monitored and tracked. Introducing AI into children's learning also increases privacy concerns. Read the OECD Education and AI report for more potential implications. Parents and teachers must be alert to learners' online safety and wellbeing. Equally, the UK's Children's Commissioner has raised concerns about the wealth of data collected on learners and the implications for long-term privacy. Parents will probably demand more transparency and control over a child's data and how it is used, and schools will need robust data policies.

However, the broader implications of AI and technology are more significant and more challenging to predict. AI replaces many job roles that young people may have previously wished to undertake, especially threatening careers in the creative industries. It increases opportunity for those interested in STEM subjects, which has been reflected in educational policy over the last decade.

Teachers and parents can tackle this by working in partnership to understand the future of work and guide young people effectively and coherently.

CHANGING WORK PATTERNS

Work patterns are evolving in ways that are hard to predict. Some organisations demand a return to the office and are removing the flexibility enjoyed during COVID-19. Some organisations are now completely remote, and many parents can work around other commitments. There are also hybrid roles.

This presents a complexity for many parents and schools. Working from home gives many parents more opportunities to attend school when required. Conversely, children can message parents and know they are home to receive the message, meaning parents are more likely to engage with the school instantly. More pressingly, the current trend of some parents keeping children out of school more because childcare is easier will continue and needs to be addressed.

Some parents' return to the office creates unequal access to school events. There has always been an issue with parent-teacher conferences for those who work shifts. However, using software to work from home also means many parents are more open to parent-teacher conferences via technology.

Many schools have already adapted, offering virtual parent-teacher meetings rather than asking them to enter the building. It is worth reflecting on whether technology, when overused, could become a barrier as well as a facilitator of communication. Humans are social creatures, and we humanise others when we meet them in person.

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL SHIFTS

There is so much going on in the world that it is hard to calibrate our emotions and security. Most of us clearly would not want to grow up in today's world.

You will likely have watched or heard about the Netflix television series *Adolescence*, which raised issues of masculinity, social media and the challenge for many schools and parents in keeping children safe. There are many issues raised, from the influence of people such as Andrew Tate and the wider manosphere in peddling concepts such as the 80/20 rule of dating, to the complex iconography of emojis inaccessible to most adults.

The shifts are also impacting curriculum decisions. In the US, there are debates over critical race theory and a recent move to remove LGBTQ+ issues from schools. In the UK, there have been increasing concerns over the content in Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) and Health education. It has led to increased parent activism, which has been intensified with the help of social media and other digital tools.

It is challenging to keep two adults on the same page about these complex issues. Teachers and parents could be on different sides of an ever-divided world, which makes keeping up a united front increasingly difficult. Parents may feel that school is entering areas that they have sole say in, and teachers may be compelled to deliver content that challenges this.

Schools must become even more skilled in stakeholder engagement and conflict resolution, particularly in culturally or politically diverse areas.

SUMMARY

- We live in complex times when change is the only certainty
- Technology will likely be the most influential factor in the parent-school relationship, and it will present both opportunities and risks
- The increasing data collection on children facilitates personalised learning, but also means that their privacy could be threatened
- Political and cultural divides might place schools and parents on opposite sides of contentious issues
- It is challenging to be a young person in a world swamped with information, opinion and imagery; as an adult, keeping up with what children consume is difficult. Parents and teachers are both responsible for staying up to date to help safeguard learners' mental health



Empowering parents: a closer look at the UK government's approach to parent participation

For decades, the UK education system has recognised a simple yet profound truth: outcomes improve when parents are engaged in their children's education. However, it was only recently that this acknowledgement transformed into a structured, strategic component of government policy. Across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, initiatives have been introduced to place parents at the heart of their children's learning journey, not just as supporters at home, but as active partners in schools, communities, and policymaking.

In England, this policy direction gained traction through the introduction of initiatives like the Every Child Matters agenda and the accompanying Children's Plan, which positioned parents as central to children's success in education and beyond. Schools were encouraged not only to listen to parents, but also to work with them as co-creators of learning environments. Parent councils, advisory boards, and local partnership forums became increasingly common.

One of the clearest examples of the government's push for parent participation was the establishment of Parent Councils in Scotland, formalised under the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. This landmark legislation legally required schools to actively promote parent participation, mandating that parents have a say in school decisions and the strategic direction of their children's education. It reframed parents not as spectators, but as stakeholders.

On the ground, the impact of these policies has varied. In some communities, such as those involved in the Doncaster Opportunity Area programme, parent participation has been a core part of efforts to raise attainment and strengthen community bonds. Funded by the Department for Education, the initiative worked with organisations like Parentkind to train schools in best practices for engaging families, particularly those from traditionally underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds. Parents weren't just encouraged to show up; they were invited to help shape the culture of the school itself. The results included not only better attendance and academic progress, but also improved relationships between teachers and families.

Meanwhile, in Wales, the government's education strategy emphasised the importance of parent participation as part of the 'whole school approach' to wellbeing and learning. Initiatives like the Family and Community Engagement (FaCE) toolkit provided schools with practical tools to assess and improve their collaboration with families, recognising that strong home-school links are essential for narrowing the attainment gap.

Today, the call for meaningful parent participation continues. Organisations like Parentkind advocate for a national strategy to embed parent participation at every level of the education system. The evidence is clear: when parents are empowered to participate, not just informed or consulted, they provide invaluable insight, energy and commitment to schools and services. This is not merely a question of policy, it's a matter of trust, respect and the shared belief that every child deserves to succeed, supported by the adults who know and love them best.

As the UK continues to navigate educational reform, social inequality and recovery from the long-term effects of the pandemic, parent participation stands as a powerful and essential thread. It is not simply about attendance at school gates or evening meetings; it is about co-creating the future of education, together.

THE 2025 VISION: EMBEDDING PARENT PARTICIPATION IN POLICY

In 2025, the UK government took significant steps to formalise parent participation within its educational framework. Central to this effort is the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which introduces measures aimed at enhancing the welfare and educational standards for children across the country.

One of the bill's key provisions mandates that local authorities offer family group decision-making meetings before applying to take a child into care. This initiative aims to empower families to collaboratively develop care plans, ensuring that children's welfare is addressed within the context of their own family networks.

Furthermore, the bill emphasises the importance of parent participation in school governance. Schools are now required to consult with parents on significant decisions affecting their children's education, including curriculum changes and school policies. This initiative aims to ensure that parents have a direct voice in shaping the educational experiences of their children.

To support working families, the government has expanded early education and childcare entitlements. Beginning in September 2025, eligible working parents of children aged nine months and older will have access to 30 hours of free childcare per week. This policy not only alleviates financial pressure but also encourages parent participation by providing more opportunities for parents to participate in their children's early learning experiences.

In parallel, organisations like Parentkind have been instrumental in advocating for policies that prioritise parent participation. Their six-point plan for the new government includes calls for mandatory parent consultation at all levels of education policymaking and targeted support for establishing Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in underserved areas.

As these policies take shape, the UK education system moves closer to a model where parents are not just participants but partners in their children's education. By embedding parent participation into the very fabric of educational policy, the government acknowledges the critical role that families play in shaping the future of the nation's children.

SUMMARY

- An appreciation of the power of parent participation has been reflected in government policy since the early 2000s
- Education is a devolved issue, and different strategies have been undertaken across the UK
- The current government has taken significant steps to increase the role of parents in education with the introduction of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill



School inspection puts parent participation at the heart of school evaluation

As the voice of parents in education, Parentkind has welcomed the prominent role parent participation will play in the way we inspect and evaluate schools.

Parent participation is already part of inspecting schools in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and later this year, Ofsted will publish a new framework for inspecting schools in England. Parent participation is set to play a significant role, something we have campaigned for on behalf of parents.

"We know that an effective partnership between school and home is a cornerstone of the most successful of schools, enhances pupil wellbeing and can add the equivalent impact of up to three years of education.

Schools increasingly face issues with attendance, behaviour and the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils.

Years of evidence show that getting parent participation right is vital to reducing these challenges, which is why we welcome inspectorates across the UK to ensure the voices of parents are heard.

School inspectorates, including Ofsted in England, increasingly recognise the need for school leaders to focus on building sustainable, long-term partnerships with parents and the role of parents in helping improve behaviour and attitudes to learning, attendance and personal development and wellbeing. Getting this right will deliver significant benefits for schools and children."

Jason Elsom, CEO, Parentkind

PARENT PARTICIPATION AND SCHOOL INSPECTION ACROSS THE UK

School inspectorates across the UK increasingly recognise that engaging parents is an integral part of the inspection process and what makes a successful school.

School inspectors will consult with parents as a standard, but increasingly, they are incorporating parent participation into inspection frameworks, making parent participation something that school leaders are assessed on during the inspection itself.

In Northern Ireland, the Education and Training Inspectorate challenges school leaders to think about how they engage with parents to support learning in a series of questions to school leaders as part of the inspection process. In Wales, Estyn requires schools to develop productive relationships with parents to support children and learning in the classroom. In Scotland, Education Scotland embeds engagement with parents throughout their 'How Good Is Our School?' guide for school inspection.

In England, Ofsted is moving towards a new inspection model with a 'Report Card' starting in autumn 2025. Following extensive consultation, Ofsted is set to integrate parent participation into school inspections. Under the proposed new approach to inspection in England, a school's ability to effectively engage with parents will influence its ratings across a range of new measures.

England will soon follow Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in making parent participation part of the inspection process.

Effective school-home partnerships enhance pupil wellbeing and can contribute significantly to educational progress, equating to up to three additional years of learning. Parent participation is an increasingly important aspect of the school inspection process, regardless of your school's location.





Parent-Friendly Schools accreditation

The Parent-Friendly Schools accreditation, which launched in Spring 2025 by Parentkind, is more than just a quality mark, it's a comprehensive framework designed to help schools establish meaningful, lasting partnerships with parents. At its core is the belief, supported by decades of research, that strong parent-school relationships lead to better learner outcomes, including improved attendance, behaviour, attainment and wellbeing.

WHAT MAKES THIS ACCREDITATION VALUABLE FOR SCHOOLS?

A clear framework to guide practice

Schools begin with a self-assessment audit based on the five drivers of parent participation:

1. Leadership, ethos and resources
2. Effective two-way communication
3. Supporting learning at home
4. Parent involvement in school life
5. Community engagement

This structured approach helps schools identify what they're already doing well and where there are opportunities to grow, offering a clear roadmap for action.

Tailored support and practical tools

After completing the audit, schools receive a personalised report with recommendations and links to tried-and-tested resources. Schools aren't left to figure it out alone; they are supported every step of the way by Parentkind's team of experts.

Whole-school impact

Becoming a parent-friendly school is not just a communications initiative, it's a comprehensive development opportunity for the entire school. Schools that emphasise embedding parent participation as part of their culture often report:

- Higher attendance and participation from families, particularly those who were previously less involved
- Increased staff confidence in fostering positive relationships with parents
- Stronger governance and leadership that reflects the needs and voices of the school community
- Improved learner outcomes, particularly where home learning is actively supported

Recognition and trust

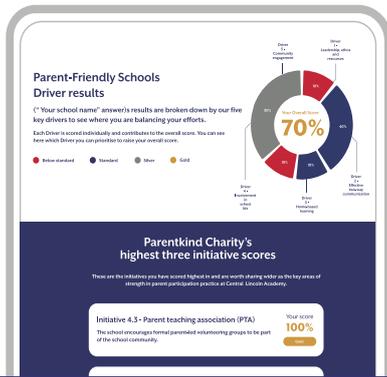
Once accredited, schools receive a Parent-Friendly Schools badge, demonstrating to current and prospective families, as well as Ofsted, local authorities, and trusts, that they are committed to inclusive, high-quality parent participation. This helps build trust with the community and reinforces the school's reputation as a place where every family matters.

Strengthening the school community

The process encourages schools to listen deeply to parent voices, creating more responsive, inclusive environments. It's particularly effective at helping schools re-engage with under-represented families, ensuring that all parents, regardless of background, feel welcome and empowered to participate in their child's learning.

The Parent-Friendly Schools accreditation is not just about ticking boxes — it's about creating cultural change. For schools looking to make a real impact on learner success and community cohesion, it offers both the structure and the support to make that happen.





30 minutes
325 measures
1 parent-friendly school

Our accreditation is designed for busy school leaders to complete with ease and accuracy.

Want to know your parent-friendly score, how your school measures up against the national framework, or how your efforts on parent participation benchmark against other schools like yours? Get started by choosing an option below.

THE STANDARD AWARD

We aimed to provide a means of accreditation that offered value while being considerate of the workload of school leaders. We understood that our accreditation needed to have significance for the school, and there was a journey most would need to undertake to enhance the partnership with parents.

Your first step to becoming a Parent-Friendly School is to complete our survey. You are taken through each driver, asked a series of questions and you press submit. The decision about your status is instant, and you receive a detailed report and action plan in your inbox. We don't ask for evidence, we encourage honest reflection.

You can only be awarded the Standard Award by completing this survey. To do this, you must achieve over 40% in our survey. However, we will indicate where you may have Silver and Gold Award level practice.

To achieve the Standard Award, we ask that you have a clear strategy for parent participation and that it is understood by all stakeholders.



Once you commit to becoming a Parent-Friendly School, you become part of our community. For one year, you may utilise the survey tool as often as you wish. You can obtain a revised action plan based on new information. You will also have an opportunity to learn, join discussions, and seek support from your Parent-Friendly School coach.

Our mission is to restore the social contract between parents and schools, and we aim to be a positive support for you on your journey.



Our video-assessed award that defines great practice in a school, with offline video interviews with one of our expert assessors.



THE SILVER AWARD

To succeed in our Silver Award, you need to give richly detailed examples of how parents participate and make a difference in your school. We use VideoAsk software to ask the questions – you can answer them whenever you like. You can also delete and re-record your answers as many times as needed. You submit your video answers to your assessor.

We are looking for an effective strategy for parent participation that ensures parents are actively engaged in school life.

Your assessment will begin with a few questions about you, your context, and the importance of parent participation within your school. All schools are unique, and we want you to feel reassured that your assessor knows you before they begin evaluating you for the Silver Award. These questions are not an evaluation; we are just getting to know you.

We want to help you represent yourself in the best way possible, so we give you every opportunity to tell us about all the positive practices in parent participation. There is a question for every driver, followed by a separate question about impact, and a final question that gives you the opportunity to speak about your plans.

Your assessor will write a detailed report, and you will have complete transparency regarding how they arrived at their decision. Our approach to assessment is based on years of experience with national examinations.

And yes, we were teachers once, too. You can look at the mark scheme before you record your videos.

Schools above 60% in our assessment will achieve Silver Award.

THE GOLD AWARD

Our Gold Award Schools are those that have a strong partnership with parents. It is for those who have achieved 80%+ in our accreditation process.

To achieve this award, we ask that there is exemplary practice in place, which could be used as a case study for others.

Before offering our Gold Award, we visit your school and evaluate your evidence with you, exploring all that your school is doing to engage with parents. We will interview key stakeholders, review your strategy, talk with parents and teachers, and gain insights into how your school fosters a welcoming atmosphere for the wider community.

Every school will receive a detailed report from our assessor. The criteria are available and are the same as those applied for the Silver Award. There are no mysteries here, we work with you to reach a point where parents can support you in unleashing the potential of all young people.



Training and resources from Parent-Friendly Schools

Building skills in schools, helping them partner with parents

Parentkind is the UK's largest charity for parents. Our core mission is to empower parents to better support their children. Part of this is helping bridge the gap between home and school, and evolving skills with a proven record of strengthening relationships.

Our training, coaching and resources are mapped to the Blueprint Framework for Parent Participation. We have a complete package to support a school, developing any action points offered in the accreditation process.

Any school signing up for our Standard Award accreditation receives a one-year subscription to our free resources and webinars. These partner schools also receive a 50% discount on any of our INSET training (In-service Education and Training) and boot camp courses. All our courses are priced to cover the costs of the charity while offering powerful insight and challenge.

Training tailored to your needs

Three training levels are available, which have been chosen to reflect the challenge involved in delivering the driver.

PRACTICAL

These one- to two-hour sessions deliver practical strategies to small groups through online training. They ensure all participants walk away with a tangible outcome that can drive parent participation forward.

How the Blueprint Framework for Parent Participation can support improvement

An overview of the five drivers, each with five initiatives, that help us celebrate your school and help us partner to diagnose areas of school improvement

How to write a Parent Participation Strategy

Using the Blueprint Framework for Parent Participation to create a bespoke strategy that can work within your school

How to write a Community Engagement Strategy

Exploring the context of your community and pinpointing the mission, goals and tactics for community engagement

How to be an effective parent participation lead

Defining the role of the Parent Participation Lead and shaping a training programme that supports them to deliver impact

How to make the school environment parent-friendly

This is a practical exploration of how a school can be more inviting to parents, removing some physical and psychological blockers that a school building can present

How to make school communication more inclusive

This is a practical exploration of approaches to communication that are more inclusive and remove barriers to parent participation

How feedback can be powerful when progress reporting

Evaluation of current practice of progress reporting and how schools and parents could work more innovatively to make this more effective

How to support parents through signposting

Sharing good practice in helping parents access the community support they need in the timeframe demanded by circumstance



BOOTCAMP

These courses run for six weeks and evolve the best practice of key leaders and other staff responsible for improving parent participation. These sessions explore more challenging and impactful strategies.

How to power communication between home and school

Reimagining the ways schools can engage parents in the giving and receiving of feedback that best supports the outcomes for their children

How to help parents motivate learning

Practical approaches to support parents with reluctant home learners

How to build an active PTA

Deploying 65 years of experience to give the best approach to setting up and activating the potential of a PTA

How to build a parent volunteer network

From defining your parent volunteer network to making it accessible to all, a practical set of workshops for making the impossible feel possible

How school leaders role model parental relationships

Leaders benefit from the power of coaching and receiving strategies for coaching team members so that everyone can engage parents in school life effectively

How to build a triangle of support for better learner outcomes

A series of practical sessions that help you understand how to create a solid triangle of support between school, home and outside agencies that keeps a child feeling safe and empowered

INSPECT

Completely personalised to your school, these whole-school team sessions explore the underlying issues, blockers and parent participation opportunities. This training assumes that every staff member in a school has a part to play in connecting with parents.

How to reintroduce parents to schools and build partnerships

Uncover some of the blockers that prevent parent participation and ideation of strategies for breaking down these barriers

How to maximise communication with personas

Explore practical marketing strategies that will inspire and engage parents

How to create a parental support tier to maximise impact

Empower classroom teachers/form tutors/pastoral leads to generate the criteria for triaging and best supporting parents

How to upskill parents to support home-based learning

Work as a team to devise a strategy to help parents balance home support and childrens' independence

How to effectively handle parental complaints

Introduce communication strategies that help de-escalate and reframe parental objections

Bespoke training on any of the drivers is available for your school. If your accreditation action plan suggests something that you feel is vital to your development and you would like our support in addressing it, we can design the training that can help.



OUR PARENT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY GENERATOR

We want to do the hard work for you. There is too much to do each day and we want to support you in prioritising the actions that will deliver results.

How do we help you build your strategy?

1. The ten thousand-foot view: Our strategy generator will first ask you to give each driver a priority level. Only those drivers you mark as high priority will be included in your strategy for this academic year.
2. Getting granular: For these high-priority drivers, you will be asked to prioritise each initiative. Again, only those initiatives you mark as high priority will make it to your strategy this academic year.
3. Designing the intervention: For high-priority initiatives, you will be asked to consider what tactics and measures of success will deliver results. You will allocate responsibility and decide when you will begin the work.
4. You click submit and your strategy will be delivered.

For each high-priority initiative, your strategy will include:

SMART objectives: A page that summarises the specific initiative you have selected (S), the measure you are going to use to assess impact (M), the action you are taking (A), the person responsible (R), and when you will begin this work (T).

QUICK action: A page that summarises the question you are addressing (Q), the understanding required to carry out any actions (U), and the information that needs to be communicated to others (I), completing the action (C) and the knowledge to be shared after the action has been completed (K).

TRUE measures: A page that summarises the topic (T) to be measured, the results (R) you are looking to gather, the understanding gained from the results (U), and how you will use this understanding to continue to elevate practice in the school (E).

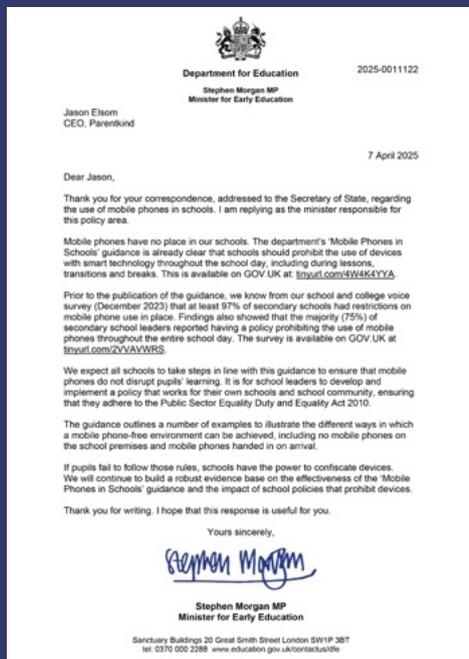
You can use the strategy generator as many times as you like. You can also edit the PDF report using word processing software. When faced with a blank page, this is the perfect way to help you understand the art of the possible and shape your practice for the next academic year.



HAVE A LOOK AT OUR
PARENT PARTICIPATION
STRATEGY GENERATOR
parentfriendlyschools.org/strategy

MORE FROM PARENTKIND

DRIVING POLICY



Parentkind advocates for a ban on smartphones in UK schools due to their harmful effects on children's wellbeing and education. Jason Elsom, CEO, calls smartphones 'harmful electronic drugs' that expose kids to online bullying and inappropriate content.

A March 2024 Parentkind poll found that 83% of parents believe smartphones harm young people, with 77% of primary school parents supporting a ban for those under 16. Despite the UK government's February 2024 guidance allowing schools to ban mobile phone use during the day, Jason urges political parties to include a smartphone ban in their manifestos to protect children's education and mental health.

LEADING RESEARCH

The National Parent Survey

Too often parents are overlooked when it comes to big policy debates, so we designed The National Parent Survey, the UK's largest annual parent poll, to **give parents a voice** in policy decisions that affect them or their children. It is Parentkind's flagship annual research, and consistently reveals the **scale of challenges that parents are facing**, wherever they are based and whatever their background.

The National Parent Survey sets out clear evidence of the concerns parents have around their finances, balancing work life and family time, mental health, screen time, children's enjoyment of school, access to learning opportunities outside of the school day and much more besides.

In 2024 we commissioned YouGov to speak with **5,490 parents** across all four nations, to enable us to publish a report covering the whole of the UK plus reports for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, London, parents of children eligible for Free School Meals, and parents of children with Special Educational Needs. The survey contains more than 100,000 different pieces of data on parental attitudes across a wide range of topics, all made available for free at NationalParentSurvey.com



In 2024 The National Parent Survey was covered extensively, with over 220 mentions in the media from local news to national titles with an audience of almost 50 million and an advertising value equivalent of £134,000. **Over 5,000 people have read the report online to date.** The report was launched in November 2024 by Stephen Morgan MP, Minister for the early years at an event in Westminster, and was disseminated to all MPs, MSs, MLAs and MSPs with briefing sessions taking place in each Parliament/assembly, as well as with the Secretary of State for Education.

The 2025 survey will be bigger than ever and published in September. We expect to delve further into the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) crisis in our schools, behaviour at home and in the classroom, and how parents are dealing with an ongoing cost of living crisis and getting children to attend school, amongst other topical subjects.

Parentkind uses The National Parent Survey to inform our policy work and ensure the voice of parents is heard by decision makers and key education stakeholders, as well as to inform our own work supporting parents.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN

The No Cold Child 2024 campaign, a collaboration between Parentkind and FatFace, delivered over 9,000 winter coats to vulnerable children across the UK. With over 849 PTA orders placed, the initiative helped more than 9,000 children stay warm, enjoy outdoor playtime, and focus better on learning. This campaign represented the UK's largest effort of its kind, addressing the urgent need identified by research showing that 144,000 children go without a winter coat annually. More than half of the recipients were eligible for free school meals, indicating the campaign's significant reach into disadvantaged communities. Feedback from parents and PTAs highlighted the campaign's life-changing impact, praising both the quality of the coats and the relief they provided amidst the cost-of-living crisis. The overwhelming demand exceeded supply, demonstrating a clear call for expansion in 2025.

EMPOWERING SCHOOLS

Asda's Cashpot for Schools campaign, in partnership with Parentkind, stands as a powerful testament to the difference everyday actions can make when united by purpose. From September to November 2024, families across the UK turned their weekly shop into a lifeline for their local schools, raising an incredible £5.7 million through the Asda Rewards App, simply by choosing to care.

With over 17,500 schools registered, the campaign became one of the UK's largest community-driven education movements, reaching more than 900,000 children and transforming the lives of those who need it most. In the face of funding shortfalls and growing inequality, Cashpot delivered hope, equipping classrooms with vital resources, supporting mental health and inclusion through sensory spaces, and ensuring that no child is left behind because of circumstance.

From books to school meals, playgrounds to uniforms, every pound raised has become a building block for brighter futures. With Asda's passionate Community Champions and Parentkind's deep grassroots network leading the charge, this campaign did more than just raise money; it built connections, inspired generosity, and proved the incredible power of community. Cashpot for Schools shows what's possible when we come together, not just to give, but to uplift a generation.

SUPPORTING PTAS

PTA Launchpad

We believe every school should have a PTA, because we know through almost 70 years of experience just how much value they bring to children and parents, to the school and to the wider community.

Having a PTA can be the difference between a school being able to fund the set-up of their library or not, the difference between all children having access to a computer while learning from home during a pandemic or not. PTAs are a crucial vehicle for parent participation in education, and an enormous positive force within our education system. They raise a phenomenal amount of funding each year to provide children with educational and enrichment opportunities. And alongside their financial contribution, they play a vital role in bringing home and school together, building a thriving community.

The parent volunteers in our membership raise around **£100 million** and give **4 million hours** of their time each year, worth over **£35.4 million** a year for schools. **84%** of our volunteers are dedicating this time alongside full or part-time employment.



Parentkind has in-depth knowledge and decades of experience supporting PTAs to form, run effectively, raise funds and bring their whole school community together. Our new **Community Engagement team** are now taking that expertise and targeting schools not currently benefiting from a PTA with hands-on support and guidance, particularly focusing on those in disadvantaged communities. Participating schools will get support to overcome barriers to parent participation, and establish strong parent-volunteer groups that can generate significant funding for enhanced educational opportunities for years to come – from school trips,

to sporting opportunities, school libraries and sensory gardens. New PTAs will benefit from practical support, resources and tools, plus seed-funding to kick-start their efforts and ensure they are set up for success.

Our expert team also help schools and parents to access the broader support that Parentkind can offer, bringing home and school closer together for the benefit of children and young people.

Parentkind

MORE FROM PiXL

At PiXL, we are committed to supporting school leaders on their journeys to improving outcomes and life chances for all young people. Our members have access to a rich and diverse offer of resource, strategy, support and events – allowing them to tailor the support that they receive. Here are just some of the ways that we are on hand to support you in your leadership journey:

LEADERSHIP AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING

We are unashamed advocates of school leaders taking the time and space they need to reflect on and strengthen their own leadership. Great leadership is at the heart of all truly impactful strategies.

- We have two podcast series hosted by our CEO, Rachel Johnson, that have leadership at their heart: **PiXL Pearls** are short episodes that combine storytelling and leadership reflection; **PiXL Leadership Book Club** focuses on a different leadership book in each episode and features two guest school leaders who reflect on the impact the book has had on their leadership
- Our **School of PiXL Leadership** courses offer high quality leadership CPD and training for leaders at all levels, from middle leaders up to experienced school leaders
- To help schools make the best use of our offer, each member school is assigned a **PiXL Specialist** who is on hand to support their **improving outcomes journey** – meetings can be booked as and when leaders want them
- In addition to meetings with specialists, member schools can access a whole range of **surgeries** for targeted support – from reading to wellbeing, assessment to coaching-style conversations for leaders
- Our **National Conferences**, held three times a year for each sector, are designed to help leaders maximise the impact of having time out of school. They feature thought leadership, the latest insights from across the sector and practical strategies from schools and colleges across the network
- PiXL CEO, Rachel, is so committed to ensuring that leaders give themselves time to think, that she's literally written books about it: **Time to Think**: the things that stop us and how to deal with them, and **Time to Think 2**: the things that stop our teams and what to do about them. Both are published by Hachette Learning (formerly John Catt).

NETWORKING AND SHARING PRACTICE

As Robert John Meehan famously said: “the most valuable resource all teachers have is each other,” - and we couldn't agree more. That's why we do everything we can to bring schools together to discuss and share ideas. Here are just some of the ways that we do that:

- Our **National Conferences**, mentioned before, always strongly feature contributions from member schools across a whole range of topics and areas of school improvement: from disciplinary literacy to building belonging
- We host **online networks** where schools can come together to collaborate and crowdsource insight and practice. Networks are sometimes cross-phase and sometimes sector-specific, and the topics they focus on are always chosen at the request of our members: from developing oracy in EYFS settings to supporting access to universities for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Our **online topical forums** bring the latest thinking and insight from leading experts through chaired panel discussions – we've previously run forums on school responses to the RAAC crisis as well as navigating masculinity in schools
- We have filmed a series of documentary-style films titled **PiXL in Action** which explores practice across a wide variety of schools and a range of topics, from wellbeing to transition
- For a more immersive experience, we host regular **Open Days** at PiXL schools. These days focus on particular areas of strength for individual schools, such as closing the disadvantage gap

We will be thinking very carefully about how we can use these channels to continue the conversation around parent participation into academic year 2025/26. If you are interested in joining us, do reach out on membership@pixl.org.uk

If you are interested in joining us, do reach out on membership@pixl.org.uk – guests at our National Conferences are always welcome!

A GUIDE TO 'WHAT NOW'?

At PiXL and Parentkind, we want to do all we can to help you improve your relationship with parents and unlock their support in the education of their children. We are so keen to help that we have now provided a million and one ways to make a difference. Let's give you some suggestions for what you might do first.

Choose the level that describes where you are in your parent participation journey. Select one thing to do. Then, you will have started your journey.

FIRST STEPS

Go through the reflection questions that explore the concerns about parent participation and consider how much this reflects your situation

[Page 29](#)

Review the Blueprint Framework for Parent Participation and do a quick reflection on how well your school is doing

[Page 59](#)

Take a moment to be inspired and regain some energy for what is possible in a school, even with challenging parents

[Page 44](#)

Go to the free Parent-Friendly Schools pre-accreditation checker and do your first evaluation of parent participation

parentfriendlyschoools.org/checker

Choose one of the quick wins to experiment with in your school

[Page 62](#)

Explore the role of Ofsted in parent participation and use this to help you build your case to present to your senior team

[Page 86](#)

MAKING HEADWAY

Test yourselves against a case study where a trust is going above and beyond to mend a community using parent participation with the school as its tool

[Page 74](#)

Compare the results of the National Parent Survey with what you know about your community. Evaluate how this impacts your empathy with parents. Do you need a parent survey?

[Page 20](#)

Explore the training and resources available to help you get to the next level of parent participation. Choose one option to sell to your senior team

[Page 92](#)

You are probably a parent-friendly school already. Celebrate the win by signing up to gain the Standard Accreditation

parentfriendlyschoools.org

Read what a parent told us about her primary school and the impact on their child. Can you collect testimonials from your parents?

[Page 56](#)

Read about the Silver and Gold Award. Could you become a stand-out school for parents in your area?

[Page 90](#)

MAKING IMPRESSIVE STRIDES

Complete the Parent Participation Strategy Generator to explore where you and your school can go next

parentfriendlyschoools.org/strategy

Become a case study to inspire others

Contact us:
parentfriendlyschoools@parentkind.com

Reach out to schools in your area and form a support network determined to forge a strong partnership between home and school and unlock children's potential

READING LIST

Education Endowment Foundation – Parental engagement (accessed May 2025)

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The Sutton Trust – Parental engagement in early learning

<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/parental-engagement-in-early-learning>

Ofsted – Schools and Parents: A report on parental engagement

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<https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/learning-loss-and-catch-up-the-challenge-ahead>

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<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-on-grades>

The Times (2023) – Parents inundate schools with complaints amid stretched budgets

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/complaints-from-parents-overwhelm-schools-6m9zhq9bw>

Ofsted Annual Report (2023/24) – Behaviour and attitudes post-pandemic

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-2023-to-2024-education-childrens-services-and-skills>

The Guardian (2024) – TikTok-fuelled school protests spread across UK

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/03/pupil-protests-across-england-and-wales-spread-by-social-media-experts-say>

Education Support (2024/25) – Teacher Wellbeing Index

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/research-reports/teacher-wellbeing-index>

NAHT (2024) – Abuse towards school staff must stop, says NAHT

<https://www.naht.org.uk/news/press-room/abuse-towards-school-staff-must-stop-says-naht>

Ofsted's official consultation and report card proposals (gov.uk) (accessed May 2025)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-sets-out-proposals-for-fairer-education-inspections-and-new-more-detailed-report-cards>

Independent research on parent support for Ofsted report card proposals (accessed May 2025)

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