



Leading and developing parental engagement

A tool to help you audit and improve your practice

Resource

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Introduction

In 2009/10, the National College for School Leadership (National College) worked with 10 settings around the country to gather case studies on good practice in parental engagement. The resulting report, [Leadership for parental engagement](#) was published in 2010. These case studies complemented research over the last 10 years which has consistently shown that parental involvement in children's education makes a significant positive contribution to pupil achievement. In 2003, Professor Charles Desforges concluded:

- The most important finding...is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of school/children's centres. The scale of impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.
- Differences between parents in their level of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health and also with parental perceptions of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it. Some parents are put off by feeling put down by school/children's centres and teachers.
- Research offers a clear model of how parental involvement works... In essence, parenting has its influence indirectly through shaping the child's self-concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations.

Desforges, 2003:5

A follow-up survey on parental involvement in children's education in 2007 supported Desforges's findings:

- Parents are now more likely to see a child's education as mainly or wholly their responsibility. This represents a shift from previous years, when parents were more likely to see it as the school's responsibility.
- Two in three parents said they would like to be more involved in their child's school life.

Peters et al, 2007:

Who is the resource for?

This resource is for school leaders, children's centre leaders and stakeholders (including teachers, governors and local partners) who are already engaging parents in children's education, at whatever level, and who wish to audit and improve their practice in this area of work. This could include addressing specific barriers or challenges in their own context, or refocusing their parental engagement strategy using desired outcomes – improved teaching and learning for example – as a starting point.

Resource phases

There are three phases in this resource:

1. **An introduction to the theme of parental engagement:** This asks you to explore assumptions around parental engagement, and to identify your reasons for engaging more closely with parents, including the challenges you want to address and outcomes you want to achieve. It is supplemented by a link to the DCSF (2008) publication, [The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education](#). You are advised to read this document before starting to use the resource.
2. **An audit of practice:** These activities ask you to identify your position on a simple development continuum and are supplemented by case studies from the National College (2010) report, Leadership for parental engagement. The outcomes of phases 1 and 2 lead naturally to the third and final phase.
3. **Prioritising:** This final activity enables you to identify the actions that **must** be taken, **should** be taken and **could** be taken to achieve your parental engagement objectives.

Phase 1: Why should you involve parents in their children's education?

The purpose of phase 1 is to ensure understanding of and commitment to engaging parents more fully, particularly in the context of your own setting and community, so that phase 2 (an audit of current practice) is meaningful and important: part of (rather than an addition to) the school's work.

The starting point for the activity that follows is to consider where your school or children's centre is in its commitment to parental engagement, with a recognition that appropriate approaches and levels of commitment vary depending on the context of your setting and community. For example, you may be looking to do more or better; to maximise impact with reduced resources; or to develop your parental engagement strategy to address a gap you have identified.

It may be helpful to reflect on these questions:

- Why do we need to involve parents in their children's education?
- What challenges and barriers do we need to address in our school, children's centre or community?
- How would parental engagement support our outcomes and priorities for children?
- What is preventing us from doing more with our parents?

Following reflection on these questions, test out your answer on the following simple statement: **parents in our context are currently insufficiently involved in their children's education.**

Alternatively, you might wish to ask:

- What could we do to engage our parents in supporting their child's education?
- Are we doing enough to involve our parents in supporting their child's education?

These questions generate a different statement to test out: **parents in our context should be involved in their children's education.**

It is intended that the next activity is completed primarily by the leaders of the school or children's centre, but it could also be completed collectively across the school, involving all staff (teaching and non-teaching), and parents too where possible, perhaps from the school's governing body or local partners. If the number proves too large, just use a representative group from the above.

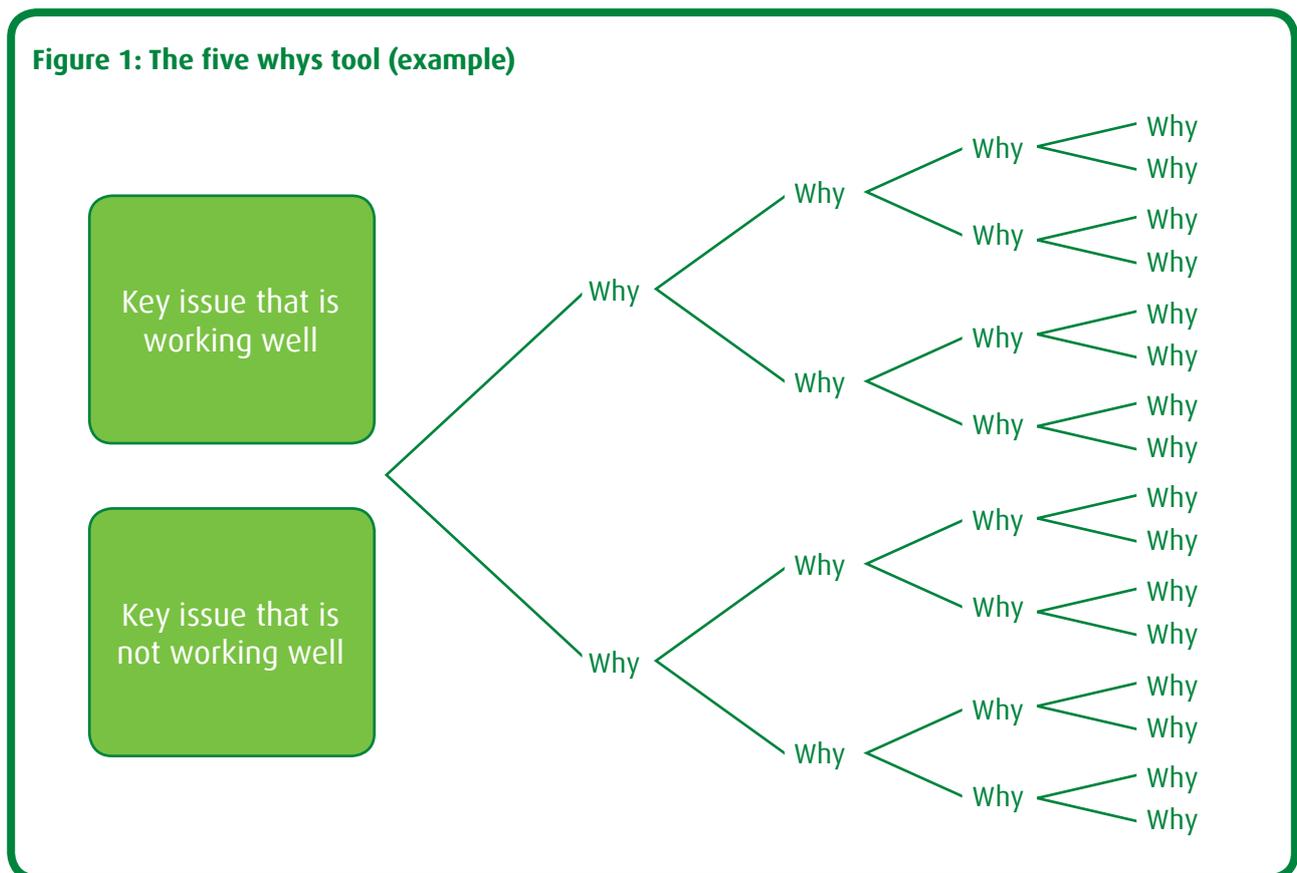
Five whys tool

From a given theme or issue, this tool allows a group to identify the root reasons for committing to an idea which can then be translated into purposes that will shape future actions. Without such an analysis, groups can often move into action before they have really appreciated and understood what needs to be achieved.

The process is as follows:

- Clearly define the issue or theme to be addressed, eg 'parents should be involved in their child's education' or 'parents are currently insufficiently involved in their child's education'. Write this on the left-hand side of a sheet of flip-chart paper.
- Using the example in Figure 1 below as a template, complete the chart by moving from left to right. Move from the issue or theme statement by asking the group the question: why?
- Note the responses either by writing them down on the sheet or using post-it notes.
- For each response, again ask the question: why?
- Continue to move across the sheet as far as any of the threads allow. Try to go to five levels of asking 'why?'. Now put the outcomes to one side for retrieval later.

Figure 1 is an example of the five whys tool.



Phase 2: Audit of practice

Having identified why parental engagement is important for you, phase 2 focuses on how well you are doing currently on this issue.

The following tool is designed to enable a school or children's centre to audit its current practice against five key themes that arose from an enquiry into the leadership of parental engagement by the National College involving 10 clusters of school and children's centres across the country (National College, 2010).

The research aimed to discover:

- in what ways parents are being encouraged to involve themselves in their children's achievements at school or in a children's centre
- what difference this is making to the lives of the children and their families

Activity 1: Preparation

Read the opening section of the National College report (2010) on pages 4-8 to understand each of the five themes highlighted and to see how they arose during the research. Note that the picture is less positive in secondary schools than in primaries. The five themes are:

- Vision, values, culture and strategic direction for parental engagement (pp 9-13)
- Leadership of parental engagement (pp 13-16)
- Parental engagement in action (pp 16-23)
- Collaborative work beyond the school, centre and cluster (pp 24-26)
- Sustainability (pp 26-27)

Activity 2: The audit

We hope this tool will enable you to reflect on your practice, stimulate discussion among staff, parents and other partners with whom you work, and help you shape your next steps.

The process is as follows:

- As you approach each theme, first locate the findings of the report for that theme and remind yourself of the contents of the section and associated case studies that illustrate it.
- Using your reading, interpret and agree as a group what the theme means for you in your own words.
- Using the case studies as benchmarks, identify where you think you lie currently on the continuum. Remember to cite your evidence for this, and give the actions and impact, checking with your colleagues the reasons why your school or children's centre is not higher or lower than the category chosen.
- Finally, highlight at the foot of the page, what you believe:
 - you **must** do next or what is critical
 - what you **should** do next or what it would be good to have
 - what you **could** do next or what can be left until later

When you have completed all five themes, complete the final chart and consider whether there are any overlaps between themes and actions.

You may wish to photocopy and enlarge the audit sheets that follow to maximise the space available for recording your evidence. Alternatively, write contributions on post-it notes and attach them to flip-chart sheets fixed to the wall. The aim is to actively engage as many people as possible in this activity.

	Not currently part of our work	A developing part of our work	A strong and well-developed area of our work
Theme 1: Vision, values, culture and strategic direction for parental engagement			
Please use the boxes to record notes on your rating.			
There is a clear and shared understanding about what we mean by parental engagement, underpinned by a clear value set that guides what we do.			
We have a clear and explicit vision for parental engagement.			
Parental engagement forms a core part of our strategic direction.			
Our vision is clearly communicated to all partners and organisations with which we work.			
Our work on parental engagement is aligned with and forms part of the vision of the wider cluster.			
<p>From the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — what must we do next? — what should we do next? — what could we do next? 			

	Not currently part of our work	A developing part of our work	A strong and well-developed area of our work
Theme 2: Leadership of parental engagement			
Please use the boxes to record notes on your rating.			
There are clearly identified leadership roles for parental engagement in our school or children's centre that are known to both parents and other schools and children's centres.			
Parental engagement is a clear leadership responsibility distributed among all staff, both teaching and non-teaching.			
Clear lines of accountability for parental engagement exist across key members of staff.			
Staff who lead this work are passionate, committed and believe strongly in the work they do.			
Staff who lead this work are skilled at developing relationships built on trust.			
<p>From the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — what must we do next? — what should we do next? — what could we do next? 			

	Not currently part of our work	A developing part of our work	A strong and well-developed area of our work
Theme 3: Parental engagement in practice			
Please use the boxes to record notes on your rating.			
We offer parents regular and frequent opportunities to talk to staff about their child's progress.			
We offer a range of opportunities to help parents support their children's learning.			
We have strong systems in place to evaluate parental engagement work that is clearly focused on learning, progress and outcomes.			
Our parental engagement work is focused on ensuring that parents are widely consulted about and directly involved in decision-making for future provision.			
We have strategies in place to involve parents who do not usually engage with our school or children's centre.			
We offer parents a range of opportunities to gain new skills and engage in interest- or work-related learning.			
<p>From the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — what must we do next? — what should we do next? — what could we do next? 			

	Not currently part of our work	A developing part of our work	A strong and well-developed area of our work
Theme 4: Collaborative work beyond the school, centre and cluster			
Please use the boxes to record notes on your rating.			
Our work with other schools and children's centres focuses on the specific needs of families in our local community.			
Our parental engagement work is aligned with the agreed priorities of the local area.			
Our parental engagement work is clearly linked to work with the whole community and other public sector agencies.			
Our parental engagement work includes partnerships with voluntary organisations.			
Our collaborative work signposts and provides parents with access to a range of services.			
<p>From the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — what must we do next? — what should we do next? — what could we do next? 			

	Not currently part of our work	A developing part of our work	A strong and well-developed area of our work
Theme 5: Sustainability			
Please use the boxes to record notes on your rating.			
Our governors and local partners have a clear understanding of and support the work we do on parental engagement.			
We have formal governance or partnership structures in place to support the work we do with parents.			
Key posts supporting parental engagement are funded through sustainable routes, and are part of the development plan for our school or children's centre.			
All staff are committed to and actively seek to increase parental engagement as an integral part of their core work.			
Social enterprise forms an important part of our strategy for ensuring sustainability.			
<p>From the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — what must we do next? — what should we do next? — what could we do next? 			

Summary of audit results

For each theme, carry over from the audit tool your possible actions and impact and write them down in the table below. You will immediately be able to see overlap or repetition which could be helpful when identifying the amount of work involved in engaging parents more fully. For example, by addressing one issue, you may cover more than one theme.

Themes Actions	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Must					
Should					
Could					

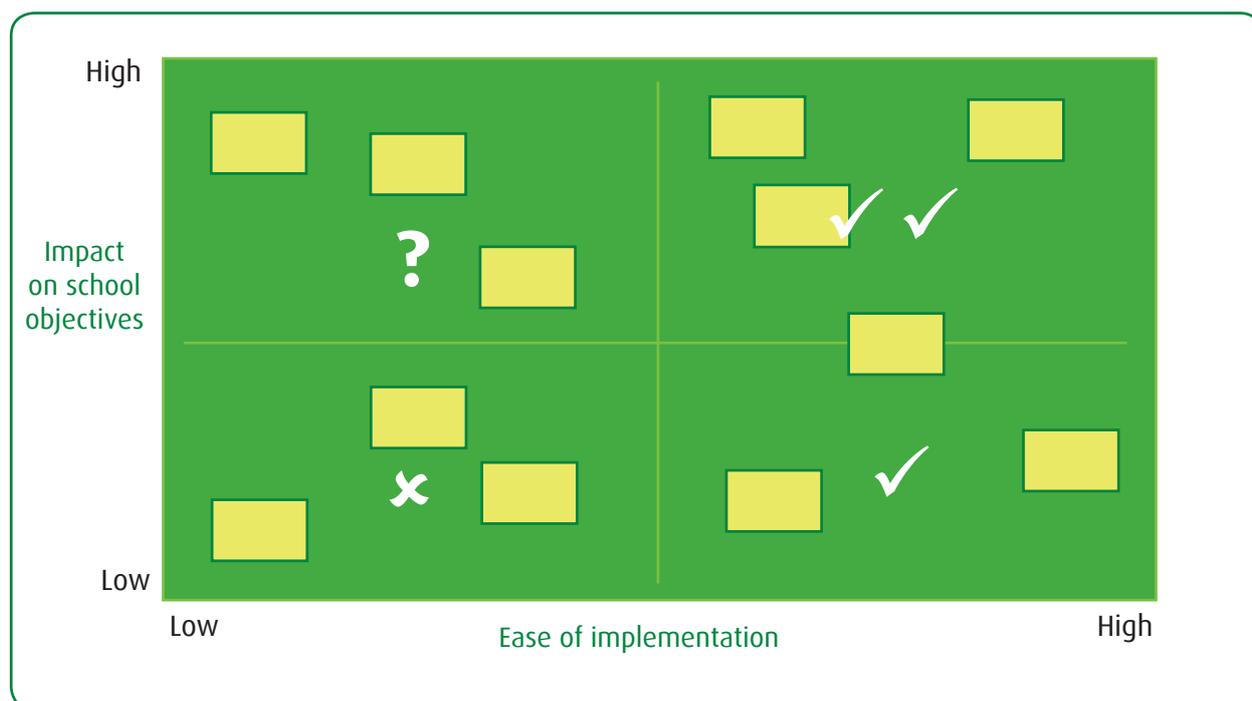
Phase 3: Prioritising the actions to be taken

Prioritising is essentially a matter of choice using the outcomes of the five whys and audit tools.

The following process may be helpful in identifying which actions to take first. For example, it will help you see what might be a quick win to celebrate early success, and what requires long-term resourcing to produce maximum benefit and impact.

Prioritisation matrix tool

This is a tool or framework to help prioritise a number of options or alternatives. Each option is rated in terms of the impact it would have if it were implemented and in terms of how do-able it is, with the results plotted on paper (Figure 2).



The process is as follows:

- Explain that there are two aspects against which you will be comparing each action identified in your audit of practice: impact and ease of implementation ('do-ability').
- Clarify what you mean by impact so everyone is working from the same understanding, eg impact on whom, about what?
- Similarly, define what you mean by do-ability. This probably includes effort, cost, time, resources, risk etc. You may draw up a weighted do-ability score, allocating weightings to different aspects according to the issue, options and circumstances of the school or children's centre. For example, time may be more critical than any of the others and therefore would be given a higher weighting.
- Now consider the list of musts, shoulds and coulds from the audit tool. You will be drawing primarily on your list of musts but you have the option of drawing on the shoulds and coulds too, particularly if they offer you some quick wins.
- Work through your list, asking the group to agree scores (1 = low and 4 = high) for impact and do-ability for each option.
- Make sure that everyone is happy with the score before proceeding.
- Plot each score on the prioritisation matrix drawn on a flip chart.
- To ensure that the results are calibrated, the group can challenge them: for example, does option 5 have more or less impact than option 7? If option 5 has less impact than option 7, is it a quicker win, requiring fewer resources and that we can celebrate early on?

Finally, check your priorities against the outcomes from phase 1: will the priorities chosen meet any or all of the reasons and purposes highlighted by the five whys tool? The answer will ensure that there is a clear connection between purpose and outcome.

Now you are ready to move on to discussing and agreeing with your partners and/or your senior leadership team the outcomes you have identified and the strategies to achieve them.

The diagnostic tool can be revisited at a later date to see what has changed and what has moved forward in your parental engagement work.

References

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