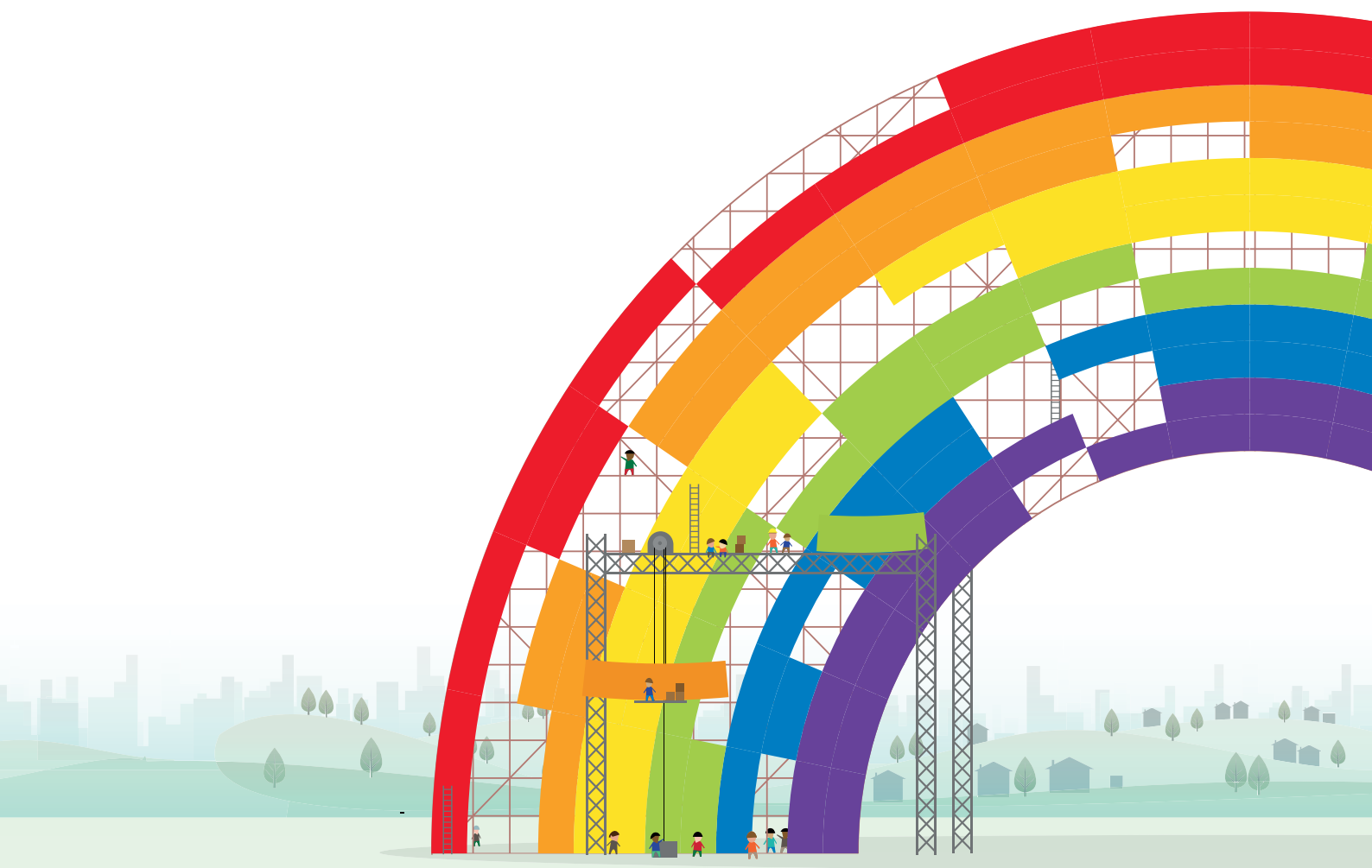


How primary and secondary schools help parents and carers to improve their child's learning

Guidance for schools



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Foreword

Evidence has shown convincingly that a parent's or carer's engagement plays a vital part in determining their child's learning and development. The most effective partnerships develop when schools welcome mothers, fathers and carers as valued participants in their children's learning and progress. There are significant gains to be made when parents are given the information, support and opportunities they need to support their children to do well. In this way the parent can better understand where their child is in their learning and development, where they need to get to and how to get there. Parents also benefit from opportunities to engage in family learning with their child, so they can model social and learning behaviours such as taking turns, questioning and asking questions. In some cases schools have an important role in helping parents and carers to access parenting support.

The Government has supported parental engagement in learning through encouraging parents and children to read together by providing free books to all families through Bookstart, Book Time and Booked Up; by improving access to information through Parent Know How, and by putting Parent Support Advisers in place in many schools. These measures have made a difference. Evidence shows that parents now feel more involved in their child's school life – up from 29 per cent in 2001 to 51 per cent in 2007 – and have an increasing appetite for engagement.

To increase parents' engagement in their children's learning and improve children's outcomes and attainment further, the Government has committed to a broad programme designed to support schools in changing behaviours among parents and strengthening practice among professionals and in schools. An important aspect of this programme is support for the development and sharing of effective practice in schools.

All parents and carers want their children to do well in school, including those whose personal experiences make them uncomfortable in the school environment. This guidance explores a range of strategies used in primary and secondary schools that have helped to engage parents and carers in their child's learning, and given them practical ideas to actively support their child at home. While this is only part of the wider agenda for ensuring that children experience appropriate conditions for learning, including addressing issues related to poor health and poverty, the schools who worked on this project are convinced their commitment to involving parents and carers makes a real and sustained difference to the educational achievement of children.



Sue Hackman

Chief Adviser on School Standards

1. Introduction

During 2008 and 2009, the DCSF supported a small-scale project to develop and share good practice in the ways schools help parents and carers to improve their child's learning.

The objectives of the project were to ascertain:

- How primary and secondary schools provide information for parents on current and upcoming teaching and learning.
- Best practice in how schools use this information to engage and activate parental involvement with their child's learning.

The project began in September 2008 when three local authorities (LAs) were identified that had good practice in parental involvement. These LAs were asked to work with a small group of schools that had already developed effective partnerships with parents, but would welcome the opportunity to work more collaboratively to share and develop their practice further. The three LAs were Ealing, Stockport and Surrey.

Each LA approached schools they knew to be prioritising the involvement of parents in their child's learning, and invited five schools to take part. Overall ten primary and five secondary schools participated in the project. A list of the schools can be found in Acknowledgements on page 27.

These schools all had a long history of working closely with parents and carers. They prioritised partnership and continually worked at being accessible, welcoming and supportive to parents and carers. Most had an 'open door' policy. They provided parents and carers with easy, direct access to teachers and communicated both successes and concerns about children's learning and progress. They recognised the potential value and impact of face-to-face meetings with parents. In most of the schools the headteacher viewed the engagement of parents as critical to their success in improving standards.

Building on the extensive good practice that can be found in schools, some of which is described here, the DCSF is undertaking further research to explore which elements of support for parental engagement have proved most successful in helping schools, local authorities and other stakeholders to direct their resources more effectively. This will inform the development of detailed guidance and materials highlighting good practice which will provide schools and other professionals with practical tools designed to improve their work with parents.

The DCSF is keen to understand existing evidence around the practice that supports the parents of school aged children in engaging with their child's learning and development. This includes evidence from specific interventions in and around schools. Please send information to: **parental.engagement@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk**

2. How schools help parents and carers to help their child

This guidance booklet focuses on the range of approaches used successfully by the project schools to engage parents and carers in their child's learning. Case studies capture the true flavour of the work of the schools involved in this study. A small selection is included on pages 17-24. The full range of case studies with examples of materials the schools use to engage parents and carers are included on the attached DVD. In addition the guidance explores the strategies that senior and middle leaders used to secure high levels of involvement by parents and carers (see section 4: Important considerations on page 8).

It is important to note from the outset that support for a child's learning does not just come from the parent or carer in a family. The schools involved in the project found that the contribution of other family members, including grandparents and older brothers and sisters, also had a positive impact on learning.

'I sometimes work with my sister if I have a problem with my work at home. She came to this school, so can help me more easily than my parents. The slides and resources for the lessons (on the VLE¹) are really helpful for this. It means we can talk about it together.' (Year 10 student)

'I thought this opportunity to work with my granddaughter was great for me and her – we both enjoyed it.' (Grandparent of Year 7 pupil)

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3. Different approaches to engage parents

The methods used by the project schools have been classified into five different 'approaches'.

The approaches are not totally distinct. Several of the participating schools focused their work on two or more of these approaches.

Approach 1

Sharing outline curriculum plans with parents with suggestions of activities for parents/siblings to work on together as part of homework

Approach 2

Using homework activities to communicate key areas of learning that parents can support

Approach 3

Giving parents access to curriculum materials for current teaching and learning on the school website or the virtual learning environment (VLE)

Approach 4

Involving parents in their child's lessons in school

Approach 5

Helping specific parents to work with their child on identified curricular targets

Each of the approaches is described in the tables that follow (section 5 on pages 11-16) and is exemplified with case study and associated material in section 6 (pages 17-24) and on the DVD.

As well as illustrating the approaches used by the schools, this guidance is intended to support primary and secondary schools in reviewing their current practice in engaging parents in their child's learning and to identify any aspects for future development. A self-evaluation sheet is included in the Annex to support this process.

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4. Important considerations

Effective communication underpins any approach that is used. In particular, important considerations include the style and presentation of information and the strategies that are used to increase the level of parent and carer engagement including, if relevant, those that are effective with 'hard to reach' parents.

a) Selecting the style of presentation

The style of presentation of any printed materials for parents is very important. In essence, the schools involved in this project felt it is important to ensure that:

- the language is straightforward;
- the style is visually attractive; and
- the amount of information provided is appropriate and fit-for-purpose.

Werneth School

The priority is to keep it simple and to 'cut out the jargon'. The school produce their parent information sheets in a magazine format with photographs of pupils and events, top tips and, very importantly, a visually recognisable, vibrant house style.

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

The weekly homework sheet is limited to one side of A4 for each class.

'It's good that it is just one side of A4. It doesn't get lost and makes it feel manageable.'
(Year 2 parent)

Ash Manor School

Information for parents is presented in short leaflets and these are distributed at 'Steps to Success' events which are additional to the more conventional parents' evenings.

Glebelands School

A parents' focus group is used as a sounding board to help shape the style and format of information to be shared with parents including booklets of independent learning tasks.

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b) Securing high levels of involvement by parents and carers

The schools used a range of strategies that helped them to successfully engage parents and carers in their child's learning, including:

- using direct contact or personalised letters of invitation;
- working closely with parent and carer representatives to agree suitable approaches;
- focusing on approaches to foster positive interaction between parents and their children;
- providing specific briefings on 'technical aspects', for example how to access and use the VLE;
- choosing a time when parents and carers find it easier to come into school;
- using an already well-attended event as the forum to work with parents and carers on how to help their child;
- getting parents and carers to work with their child during introductory sessions in school;
- adopting an attitude of mind where they expect and are prepared to give regular reminders; and
- making use of parents as links to others in their locality and of wider Children's Services staff, such as home school workers.

Werneth School

The school is working with parent representatives from one targeted community, introducing them to the new approach to sharing teaching plans and ways parents and carers can help so that they can support other parents and carers in the locality.

Northolt High School

Year 7 pupils wrote their own personalised letters of invitation to their chosen adult for a family learning day. The school gave parents and carers a choice of morning or afternoon sessions and started each with a complimentary meal. The pupils worked on practical and problem solving activities and puzzles with their chosen adult. The invitations did not specify the mathematics focus as the school feared this would deter parents and carers and one of their aims was to change perceptions of mathematics.

'It helped me to know my sister a lot better – thanks a lot. I loved working out the codes with her.'

'I enjoyed being with my dad because we talked together.'

Prospect Vale Primary School

The school has used games to increase interaction between parents and their children and encourage the development of social learning behaviours like turn taking.

Featherstone High School

Training was provided for parents and carers on the use of the student curriculum sections of the VLE during their target setting day. This day was chosen because typically a 98% attendance of parents and carers is achieved. Parents were allocated a session and worked with the help of their child to explore the potential of the lesson materials included on the site.

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Mayfield Primary School

The school runs mathematics and English workshops for parents and carers during the last 30 minutes of the school day so they just need to come a little earlier to collect their child. Teachers make a special effort to involve the harder to reach parents by phone calls, direct contact in the playground and further reminders by phone the day before each workshop. After the first few weeks, the children's enthusiasm to work with their parent or carer secured continued engagement.

Potters Gate Primary School

The school uses their Home School Link Worker (HSLW) to support harder to reach families. The HSLW organises workshops for parents and carers and facilitates meetings with teachers. The HSLW also helps the parents and carers to choose a homework pack including playing and exploring the games and activities in preparation for work at home. This enables the HSLW to model the use of the language and positive ways of working with their child.

'You don't think of it as homework, but it is helping us learn.' (Year 4 pupil)

'Sometimes you forget how good it is to sit down as a family to play a game or work on something together.' (A parent of a Year 3 and a Year 6 child)

Manorcroft Primary School

The school has set up a parents' forum group which meets twice a term. Initially specific parents were invited to join the forum to ensure that the school population was fully represented. The parents' forum is being used to shape many aspects of parental engagement and involvement in the school. For example, curriculum information evenings have been redesigned to include 'hands on' workshops addressing key areas of learning and the ways in which parents can provide support at home.

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5. Approaches to parental engagement – an overview

The following pages provide an overview of the materials developed by the participating schools for each of the five approaches they were using. You will see from the tables that most of the approaches include examples from both primary and secondary schools. Schools are likely to find it useful to look across both phases as all examples have the potential to be adapted across all age ranges.

Many of the examples provided both in this booklet and on the DVD are targeted at specific year groups. In most cases the schools were using or developing the same or similar approaches across the range of year groups in the school.

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Approach 1

Sharing outline curriculum plans with parents with suggestions of activities for parents/siblings to work on together as part of homework

'I look at the ideas on the grid and think "I can do that". It's practical and gives me more ideas.'
(Parent of a Year 7 pupil)

School	Focus	Materials available
Werneth School	English and mathematics English and mathematics curriculum grids providing a brief description of each unit of work, ideas for how parents and carers can help their child, an example of homework set and useful websites and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case study• English curriculum grid – extract• Mathematics curriculum grid – extract
Glebelands School	English, Science, History, Geography, RE A series of independent learning tasks to be completed on a two week cycle. The tasks are published together with marking criteria and guidance for parents in a booklet which is distributed to pupils and their parents and carers at the beginning of each term. (The tasks can also be accessed via the school's VLE.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case study• Year 7 independent learning task for reading – extract

Impact

'Early feedback shows that parents feel they have a clearer understanding of what was going on in school and the references they could draw upon to help their youngsters, for example places to take them and activities to share in a fun way.' Werneth School

Approach 2

Using homework activities to communicate key areas of learning that parents can support

'We can all play a game together. Sometimes my older child teaches it to the younger one.'

(Parent of Year 3 and Year 6 children)

School	Focus	Materials available
Potters Gate Primary School	Literacy, mathematics and science A homework 'play pack' of kitchen science activities, problem solving and logic puzzles, mathematics and literacy games. The packs contain activities that families can work on together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study
Prospect Vale Primary School	Nursery games share Games bags for use by children and their parents and carers at a coffee morning to explore the potential for learning together through play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study
St Mary's Catholic Primary School	All subjects Weekly homework/information sheets for a range of subjects that children take home every Friday. Sheets give information on the focus for learning during the week and suggests activities for talk and work together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 2 homework information sheet • Year 6 homework information sheet
West Acton Primary School	All subjects Weekly 'Let's learn' activity sheets with a selection of subjects and themes and suggested activities to try at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Let's learn' activity sheet 1 • 'Let's learn' activity sheet 2
Ash Manor School	Art, geography, history and technology A selection of homework tasks designed to promote independent learning skills and learning conversations with parents and carers presented in a short booklet together with success criteria and signposts to useful resources. The pupils select two tasks to work on each half term. Teachers provide further support for pupils and their parents and carers, if needed, at a weekly after school session.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Extract from Year 7 geography homework booklet • Year 7 parents' comment card

Impact

'In a survey in May 2009, 62% parents reported that they enjoy doing the homework project with their child. Parents report that it has helped their children to manage their time and to use resources other than the internet to do research. Children who do not usually do activities with their parents report enjoying doing the project together.' Potters Gate Primary School

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Approach 3

Giving parents access to curriculum materials for current teaching and learning on the school website or the virtual learning environment (VLE)

'Having access to all the materials for the lessons means it's like having a teacher in your home.'
(Parent of Year 10 student)

School	Focus	Materials available
Tithe Barn Primary School	Writing Using the class website to illustrate children's development of specific writing skills, including formative teacher comments, children's self and peer assessment and the subsequent redrafting of the writing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case Study• Screen save to illustrate
Featherstone High School	All subjects Developing VLE access to lesson resources for pupils and working with parents and carers to increase awareness of the potential of these materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case study

Impact

'Parents expressed a keen interest in this development and reported that they and their children looked at the website together almost every evening.' Tithe Barn Primary School

Approach 4

Involving parents in their child's lessons in school

'I realised how many 'props' for maths we have at home – playing cards, dice, board games'.
(Parent of a Year 2 child)

School	Focus	Materials available
St Mary's Catholic Primary School	Mathematics Demonstrating interactive teaching and learning in mathematics to stimulate more confidence in doing mathematics activities at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Mathematics questionnaire • Year 2 lesson plan
Mayfield Primary School	Literacy and mathematics Targeted parents and carers of Year 1 pupils who were at risk of falling behind. A series of family learning workshops for parents and carers and their children for the last 30 minutes of a day. The first term focused on literacy, the second term on mathematics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Literacy workshop programme – extracts
Northolt High School	Mathematics A targeted group of Year 7 pupils invited a family member to a family learning day when they worked collaboratively on puzzles and problem solving activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study

Impact

'Feedback indicated that families liked this way of working and felt more empowered to help their children with their homework.' Northolt High School

Approach 5

Helping specific parents to work with their child on identified curricular targets

'Doing the activities with my son helped me to see his strengths and weaknesses.'

(Parent of a child in Reception)

School	Focus	Materials available
St Clement's Catholic Primary School	Literacy and mathematics Targeted parents and carers of children who were not making expected progress in the reception class were invited to a short meeting with the teacher. The teacher shared the child's specific curricular targets and modelled activities and games that could be worked on at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study
Mersey Vale Primary School	Literacy and mathematics Curricular targets are shared at parents' evenings with the pupils in attendance. Parents and carers are encouraged to regularly ask the child about progress towards meeting the targets. Targets are worked on in class, particularly at the start of the day when parents are encouraged to spend a few minutes in the classroom with their child doing 'early work'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study

Impact

'When progress was reviewed at the end of the term all of the children had either met or exceeded their targets.' St Clement's Catholic Primary School

6. Case studies from three of the project schools

The following pages contain a small selection of case studies and example materials from three of the schools involved in the project.

Included here are:

School	Focus	Materials available
Werneth School, Stockport	How the school has developed curriculum grids to share plans for future learning and suggest family activities with parents and carers. Approach 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Extract from parents' curriculum grid for Year 7 mathematics
West Acton Primary School, Ealing	How the school uses a homework sheet for parents to communicate current learning with ideas of family activities. Approach 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Let's learn' sheet for parents
Tithe Barn Primary School, Stockport	How the school has developed the use of their website to illustrate the progression in the development of children's writing. Approach 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Screen save to illustrate webpage

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Werneth School, Stockport

Comments made by parents and carers of Year 7 students

"I look at the ideas and think 'I can do that'. It's practical and gives me more ideas."

"The links to TV programmes are really useful. We have watched programmes together and talked about things."

"They are really keen in Year 7. It's an important time to get involved as a parent. You want to get them off to a good start."

"The website ideas are great. I looked at these for maths with my daughter – then I couldn't get her off the computer, she was so enthusiastic. I've been using some of the websites with my other children."

"Before I struggled to find books to interest my son. The homework grids have helped me find authors that he enjoys."

"I like the grids. I know what homework my son has been set."

"It's empowering for children as well as parents. They can see what is coming up."

Werneth School has been committed to working with parents for several years and has tried different approaches to help parents and carers to help their child. The school developed a Parent Zone on the school website which gave details of topics studied and homework set. Feedback from parents and carers showed that, while useful, this website failed to provide the quantity of subject specific information needed to be able to provide support in a meaningful way. Demand for practical, accessible, subject-related activities was a key factor in the decision to create a comprehensive curriculum guide for parents and carers, accessible to all. Senior leaders knew that homework had been an issue for a long time. Homework was often poorly done by students and teachers were spending too much time chasing up missing work.

"Homework was causing a lot of angst for students, teachers and parents. Many pupils would go through the sequence: not fully understand in the lesson; getting homework they thought they couldn't do; return to school not having done homework; deeper problem... This approach to helping parents to help their child has helped us to move from homework to family learning." (Deputy Headteacher)

The school decided to focus on Year 7 curriculum plans in English and mathematics. The aim was to engage parents and to help them to support their children through use of websites, resources and local events in the community; English and mathematics were the chosen focus in response to requests from parents, but also in light of the introduction of 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics as a key performance indicator.

The mathematics and English departments worked on parent and carer versions of their curriculum planning documents. Initially, they were aiming to incorporate the following information for parents and carers into these grids:

- Topics studied with a brief explanation.
- Activities that a family could do together related to the topic – including questions that parents and others might ask.
- Useful websites and Dewey numbers for library loan titles.
- Related school and local events.
- Suggested television and film viewing.

In addition to the suggested family activities and websites, both departments wanted to suggest appropriate television programmes that parents might watch with their child to enhance their work in English and mathematics. They found, however, that this information is released at such short notice that it was difficult to incorporate into

the parents' curriculum grids. In future the school hopes to set up an email or text list to be able to inform parents regularly of useful programmes to watch. In addition the school plans to display this information on a bulletin board on their website.

After much discussion with parents and carers about the best way to present such detailed information, it was decided that a 'Homework Survival Guide' in the form of a vibrant newsletter would be distributed to parents. This contained information about the 'learning brain', including tips on sleep, diet, rewards, learning styles, etc. Within this Survival Guide, the parents' curriculum grids were explained in a detailed way. The curriculum grids were distributed within the survival guide and took the same format for both subjects.

The response was overwhelmingly positive when the materials were presented at Parents' Evenings, the Parents' Forum and coffee mornings. The information itself was considered to be useful, and the most commonly identified positive feature was the column 'How You Can Help Your Child' and the questions that a parent could pose of a child at home. In addition, the websites and resources suggested gave parents the opportunity to learn about the same topics as their child should they wish to support further.

Now more parents and carers are engaged than before. Early feedback shows that parents feel they have a clearer understanding of what was going on in school and the references they could draw upon to help their youngsters, for example places to take them and activities to share in a fun way.

Comments made by Year 7 students

"I was having trouble with Macbeth. Everyone seemed to get it but me. So me and my mum looked at the websites on the homework grid and found one with video. We looked at it together and discussed it. It really helped."

"I'm doing better with my homework now."

"Before if I had a problem with homework, I knew I couldn't ask my parents because they wouldn't know how to help. Now I can."

"It's good. It's reassuring. It empowers parents too."

"We exchange ideas. I explained the grid method of multiplication and my mum told me how she did it."

The best learning lesson for Werneth School was to keep it simple and cut out the jargon! Future developments include providing half-termly curriculum grids in this format for all year groups in all subjects. It is expected that, having had some experience of the grids so far, parents will be involved in reviewing, re-designing and publicising the updated versions later this year.

Supporting documentation

- Year 7 mathematics parent curriculum grid: an extract.

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Mathematics Year 7 Spring Term

Month	Subject	How you can help your child	Homework	Websites and resources
January	Mental and written calculations and checking Calculating using addition, subtraction, multiplication and division – both on paper and mentally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your child calculations (whole numbers and decimals) to do in their head. Use a calculator to check answers, or make it into a game with a sibling. Can your child work out a calculation in their head quicker than their brother/sister/friend using a calculator? • Ask your child to keep a running tally of money spent in a shop • Ask your child to work out the cost of a meal per head, dividing the total between the people eating the meal • Share different methods for working out the same calculation mentally • Watch 'Countdown' after school and encourage your child to try the number section. Make up your own 'Countdown' games! • Play card games to support your child's adding and subtracting skills 	How old are you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In hours • In minutes • In seconds? 	BBC Skillswise mental maths page www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/numbers/wholenumbers/addsubtract/mental/game.shtml Maths is fun numbers section www.mathsisfun.com/numbers/index.html Mental math blog http://wildaboutmath.com/2007/11/11/impress-your-friends-with-mental-math-tricks
January	Transformations and co-ordinates Using a grid with x and y axes, creating shapes and learning to rotate, reflect and translate them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your child to teach you about axes • Using any map, ask your child to find a particular place and give you co-ordinates, or give your child co-ordinates and ask them to tell you where the place is • Ask your child to talk you through how they have done a reflection, a rotation, a translation • Ask your child to explain what information is needed to do an accurate reflection, rotation, translation • Look for examples of reflections, rotations and translations at home 	Transformation game – a game to play in pairs	Games based on understanding transformations and co-ordinates www.mathsonline.co.uk/nonmembers/gamesroom/transform/transform.html e.g. play 'transformation golf' or use co-ordinates to direct a group of synchronised swimmers Transformation Tease http://nrich.maths.org/public/viewer.php?obj_id=1111

Month	Subject	How you can help your child	Homework	Websites and resources
February	Measures Understanding different units of measurement and when they are appropriate. Finding areas and perimeters of shapes made from rectangles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get them cooking! Use tools in the kitchen to measure out different ingredients using different measures, e.g. millilitres, grams, cups, ounces, fluid ounces, etc • Give your child the task of measuring up the kitchen for new cupboard doors – they must measure all aspects. Once complete, get them to convert the units, e.g. from millimetres to centimetres • When out and about, ask them to identify the appropriate unit of measurement for a given item e.g. milk: litre/pint, perimeter of football pitch: metres/yards, height of a bus: metres/yards, train journey: miles, volume of sound: decibels, area of patio: square metres/square yards, etc • Discuss estimates for height of a bus, area of a table top, etc • Get them to measure up a room for a new carpet. They must work out the area in square metres. If carpet is sold from rolls that are 3 metres wide, how many square metres would you need to buy? How much will be left over? 	'The greater the perimeter, the greater the area.' Is this statement always true, sometimes true or never true for a rectangle? Provide evidence for your conclusion!	Measures explained: www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks3bitesize/maths/measures/ Games and puzzles http://nrich.maths.org/public/viewer.php?obj_id=5994 http://nrich.maths.org/public/viewer.php?obj_id=6192

West Acton Primary School

Let's Learn!

Optional Homework Activities

Please help your child to complete the following activities over the week and return on the day specified in his/her Homework Book.

This week we are learning about
ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES

Talk about electrical appliances in your home. Show your child how they work and explain what they are used for.



Talk to your child about electrical safety.

Why not design an electrical safety poster?



We have been learning to sequence events.

- Ask your child to talk about the things they need to do to get ready for school.



Ask your child to give you instructions on how to clean your teeth in the right sequence!

This week your child has chosen a library book from our library.

Please take the time to read this book with your child. Look at the front cover and ask him/her to guess what he/she thinks the book will be about. While reading the book keep encouraging your child to predict what he/she thinks will happen, read on and see if he/she was right!



This week your child has a reading book chosen by the class teacher.

Some books will not have words so you will need to encourage your child to make up a story to go with the pictures. If your child's book has words encourage him/her to point to each word as he/she reads.



If you have any comments about the homework activities or your child's reading book please feel free to write them in the Home and School contact book.

Tithe Barn Primary School, Stockport

The school was struck by Charles DeForges' research which showed that parents who engage in their children's learning have a greater influence on their achievement than the school. The school decided to develop its website with the aim to engage parents and carers in their child's learning. Writing was the chosen focus.

The IT co-ordinator started the process by developing a class page or a 'blog' for his class. He included material that was current to learning and events in his class and updated this daily. Planned lessons were put on the school website for children and parents to discuss. This included the content of the lesson, the resources (e.g. a three hundred and sixty degree video of the temples of the pyramids) and other tools to support adventure writing. Homework was also posted on the class page.

The children were able to do their literacy homework and involve their parents by referring back to the content and the resources from the lesson. When they finished their writing they emailed it to the teacher. The teacher posted the piece of writing on the webpage with positive comments about it. Detailed comments on how the child might improve the writing in a second draft were placed on the comments section of the webpage. The teacher also asked other children and parents to comment positively on selected pieces of children's writing. Children liked receiving these comments so it was not long before all children were emailing their writing so the teacher could include it on the class webpage.

Naturally the skill levels of the staff being able to undertake this type of activity were variable. It was thought important that all staff should be helped to feel confident and capable of participating while not feeling under pressure to perform at a level beyond their grasp. To address this, an intensive training programme was implemented which enabled all staff to load photos, pictures and text to their class blog. Now they are learning to upload video clips of children explaining their learning.

The school had a meeting with parents and carers to share the developments with the website and to explain how they could make use of the opportunities. Parents and carers were exceptionally enthusiastic and voiced excitement about its potential. However, it did highlight some potential problems, for example concerns about the effect on the self-esteem of some children. Additionally some parents had unrealistic expectations of what teachers could reasonably provide on the webpage, both in terms of efficient use of teacher time and issues of confidentiality.

The meeting with parents and carers helped the school to plan the next steps in strengthening parental use of the website to help them to help their child. The school decided to focus on non-fictional writing as this had been identified as a key area for development to raise standards. Each of the six genres of writing was given an area on the website so parents could select. Each area included:

- examples of a child's first draft of a piece of writing, with comments and support materials that the child (and parent) could use to improve vocabulary, punctuation and structure;
- the child's own self-assessment of the piece of writing;
- a video clip of peer-to-peer assessment on the writing; and
- the next draft of the same piece of writing following the comments and discussions showing the improvements that have been made.

The intention was that children could then use the appropriate area with their parents when working on writing at home.

The school has found this process has led to improved attainment with some children progressing an entire National Curriculum level in a relatively short period of time. The school sees the involvement of parents and carers as a significant factor in these gains.

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The opportunities for sharing information and experiences with parents and carers continue to grow. The website now contains a wealth of video and photos relating to school work, for example the vegetables growing in the allotment. This enables common ground for discussions between parents and children about their learning each day on a detailed, specific, immediate, and continuous basis. For instance, when two ducks landed unexpectedly in the playground, a teacher photographed them, asked the children why they thought it happened, noted their comments and placed the responses on the blog. When the parents arrived at school several hours later having seen it on the blog, they spoke to their children about it, discussing with the children what they saw.

At the start of the project, Year 2 to Year 6 children were given a questionnaire to find out what technology they used at home, how they used the internet, their access, how often they used the school website and what more could be done to improve it. It indicated that they have a high level of use. However the website development has increased their use of the school webpages and they are now spending much less time on computer games. It has resulted in children using technology as a tool for learning and communication. Parents expressed a keen interest in this development and reported that they and their children looked at the website together almost every evening.

Supporting documentation

- Screen save: Year 5 poetry.
- Screen save: Parental and children's feedback on the poetry.

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Karen said,

ON MARCH 6TH, 2009 AT 11:26 AM

I think all the poetry is fantastic – so well done to Year 5!

I learnt something new from the poetry – I had never heard of a 'Capybara' but I have now. I think your choice of animals was very interesting.

Isabella said,

ON MARCH 6TH, 2009 AT 6:24 PM

I really like the poem about the cow, well done Dorothy. I especially like how you guess what the animal is. 🤔

Isabelle said,

ON MARCH 7TH, 2009 AT 11:41 AM

I really loved all the poems but my favourite is the "Urban fox" it's really creative. You must have worked really hard Kane, but I think everyone else's are really good too! WELL DONE EVERYONE!!!

Babette said,

ON MARCH 8TH, 2009 AT 12:08 PM

Well done everyone, I really like Maya's because it is a very strange animal to choose but good. If I had to write a poem about that animal I could not have done it. So well done Maya, you must have worked very hard on that and well done to every one else they are all brilliant. 😊

Annex: Self evaluation


Engaging parents and carers in their child's learning

Approach	Focus
1	Sharing outline curriculum plans with parents with suggestions of activities for parents/siblings to work on together as part of homework.
2	Using homework activities to communicate key areas of learning that parents can support.
3	Giving parents access to curriculum materials for current teaching and learning on the school website or the virtual learning environment (VLE).
4	Involving parents in their child's lessons in school.
5	Helping specific parents to work with their child on identified curricular targets.

Section A Initial Review

Approach	Examples of current practice
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Section B Overall judgements

Approach	To what extent do you make use of the various approaches? 1 – very much 4 – not at all				
		1	2	3	4
1	Sharing outline teaching plans.				
2	Using homework activities targeted at key areas of learning.				
3	Sharing resources via website or VLE.				
4	Involving parents in their child's lessons.				
5	Helping specific parents to work with their child on curricular targets.				

Section C Ideas for development

Approach	Ideas for development of existing provision
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

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Willow Tree Primary School

Secondary Schools

Featherstone High School
Northolt High School

Stockport

Primary Schools

Mersey Vale Primary School
Prospect Vale Primary School
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Tithe Barn Primary School

Secondary School

Werneth School

Surrey

Primary Schools

Manorcroft Primary School
Potters Gate Primary School
St Clement's Catholic
Primary School

Secondary Schools

Ash Manor School
Glebelands School

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