

FaCE the challenge together: Family and community engagement toolkit for schools in Wales

Main guidance



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

www.gov.wales



Audience

Primary, secondary and special schools in Wales, nursery settings and pupil referral units.

Overview

This toolkit is designed to provide practical support for schools in Wales to help them develop and strengthen their approach to family and community engagement (FaCE). The emphasis is on engagement that helps families to actively support their child's learning. There is a focus on how to engage in particular with families of children who are currently underperforming, children from deprived backgrounds, those receiving less support for their learning at home.

The toolkit is formed of this document plus 24 associated resources.

Action required

For use in planning interventions to raise the attainment of learners living in poverty.

Further information

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This document along with other relevant guidance can be accessed from the Learning Wales website at learning.gov.wales/deprivation

Related documents

Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools (2014)

www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/rewriting-the-future-schools/?lang=en

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Ministerial foreword



Families exert a powerful influence on how children get on at school. Schools that are both ambitious and successful recognise that to raise standards and improve learner well-being they need to engage effectively with parents, carers and the wider community.

Involving parents and carers in their children's education removes barriers to learning and improves attitudes and behaviour at school. I have seen for myself that the most meaningful and effective family engagement develops when schools welcome mothers, fathers, grandparents and the extended family as valued partners in their children's learning.

Wider community engagement also has a positive influence. Schools that reach out and actively engage the community in the life of the school and the school in the life of the community have a positive impact on educational outcomes. Community engagement contextualises learning, improves adult basic skills and provides positive role models.

Family and community engagement is one of the four themes of *Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools* (2014), the Welsh Government's programme for raising the educational attainment of children from deprived communities. Schools tell us this is one of the most difficult aspects of their role. They have called for well-structured guidance and practical resources to help them plan and deliver effective family and community engagement as part of a whole-school approach. This guidance and toolkit of resources is our response to that call.

It is clear that there is some excellent work already in place in schools across Wales, but to be truly effective, family engagement must be part of a carefully planned cycle which establishes mutual priorities, builds trust and helps parents/carers and teachers to commit to a joint plan.

Welsh Government's 'Education begins at home' campaign lends further support to this priority. It encourages engagement in a child's education from the moment they set out on their learning journey.

I urge all schools, local authorities and regional consortia to make use of this resource, to develop an engagement strategy that best suits your context and circumstances. In doing so you will help ensure that collectively we take another significant step toward achieving my ambition to eradicate inequalities in learner outcomes so that all children across Wales meet their full potential, regardless of their background.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Huw Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Huw Lewis AM
Minister for Education and Skills

Introduction

Families and communities have a much bigger impact on children's achievement in school than has been realised.

Schools that are able to engage with their families and community groups as serious and practical partners in education will be exerting a powerful lever through which to raise standards and improve learner well-being. Engagement is also an essential tool for narrowing the attainment gap between learners from richer and poorer backgrounds.

However, family and community engagement (FaCE) can also be a challenge to do well. This toolkit is designed to be a practical resource for schools. It is not a prescription, but a framework to help schools on their self-improvement journey.

The toolkit is also designed to help schools to meet the requirements of the school development plan (SDP) regulations and the standards of partnership working expected by Estyn.

“ Parental engagement in children's learning makes a difference, a very big difference. It is the most powerful school improvement lever we have.”

Power and Goodall (2008)
Do Parents Know They Matter? (p.167)

The toolkit includes:

- a **framework** for building the school approach, structured around five themes
- descriptions of the basics (what all schools should be doing) as well as what successful schools do – aiming to provide a **direction of travel** for future work
- a 'selection box' of 24 **practical resources** that schools can pick and choose from, each designed to encourage reflection and action planning, and to provide examples of what other schools have done.

Why work with families?

Research shows that at age seven, the degree to which families engage with their child's learning has **six times more** influence over the child's educational attainment than the quality of the school¹.

The younger the learner, the bigger the relative effect of parents/carers on achievement – but even at age 16 the impact of parents/carers is highly significant, so that learners with enduring parental support perform better in their examinations². At age 16, learners with strong support but in lower quality schools outperform those with weak support in strong schools – the same 'parents trump school quality' effect can be seen. Furthermore, while many learners living in relative poverty do worse than their richer peers at school (the 'poverty attainment gap') those with strong parental support can buck the trend.

¹ Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment*.

² Dufur et al. (2013) *Does capital at home matter more than capital at school? Social capital effects on academic achievement*.

Given that children spend only 14 per cent of their time in school perhaps this shouldn't come as so much of a surprise. The question is can families be supported to engage more with their child's learning? Will their achievements improve as a result?

The answer is yes to both. Research shows that parents/carers, even in the most unpromising of circumstances, can be supported to make radical improvements to their child's school progress³. The magnitude of the impact can surpass what schools can do alone through teacher-only interventions.

It is important however to make a clear distinction between two types of family engagement.

“Think of family engagement as spinach. Now think of schools as Popeye. Put the two together and you have the strength to accomplish a lot.”

PTO Today

1. Engagement with the school in general

vs.

2. Engagement with their child's learning

The second is the ultimate goal that we hope schools will focus on, and is the one that bears fruit in terms of children's achievement. It relates to the attitude toward learning in the home, and what happens between adults and children in the family. Simple things that families do can make a big difference to how a child fares at school – like making sure they get a good night's sleep, asking them about school, making time to read or letting them know behaviour expectations. This is covered in Theme 4 of this toolkit.

The first, engagement with school life, is also covered in this toolkit (Theme 3), largely because it may be an important precursor to engaging with families as partners in their child's learning. It can also bring other benefits to the school.



In 2014 Welsh Government launched the 'Education begins at home' campaign to help parents and carers engage with their children's learning. This campaign supports schools in their work to engage with parents and carers, and, by using the resources in this FaCE toolkit, schools can build on the momentum that the campaign is creating.

³ Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary*, Department for Education (England).

Five reasons to work with families

1. Parents, carers and wider family members have a big influence on how well children behave and attain at school.
2. FaCE is one of the most powerful levers we have to tackle the impacts of deprivation on educational outcomes.
3. Parents/carers can make fantastic partners. Their unique knowledge about their children and diverse experiences, skills and volunteer time can enrich and strengthen school life.
4. Schools are required by law to incorporate FaCE into their school development plans and Estyn inspects schools on their partnership working.
5. All schools already engage with families to some extent. By incorporating engagement into the school ethos this can be a rewarding, positive experience rather than a challenging one.

The benefits of family engagement

For children

- Encouragement at home makes it easier for children to learn and is a protective factor at transition points.
- Their concerns can be sorted out more quickly when their families have a positive relationship with school staff.
- They are happy when their parents/carers are enjoying events in the school.
- They are more likely to continue their learning past the age of 16 when they feel their parents/carers support their learning.

For families

- They are better able to help and encourage their children, and their children do better at school.
- They can build their own confidence and skills.
- A positive relationship between parents/carers and their child's school brings benefits all round.

For the school

- Effective engagement should lead to improvements in learners' attainment and behaviour.
- Families' skills and time complements teachers' skills and expertise, so together parents/carers and teachers are able to do more than teachers can do on their own.
- The school will enjoy a better reputation in the community and better morale among staff.

Challenges in engaging with all families

Schools rarely find family engagement to be a level playing field – some families tend to interact with the school less frequently, some families have needs that are harder to accommodate. There will be parents/carers who themselves have additional learning needs; parents/carers who are under stress, for example through poverty; parents/carers who have had bad experiences at school themselves and are disaffected with education. There are also those who just see their children’s learning as being the sole responsibility of the school and feel ‘it’s nothing to do with me’.

It is critical that schools find a way of overcoming these barriers in order to reach, in particular, the families of those learners from deprived backgrounds, the families of learners who are currently underperforming, and the families who appear to be providing little support for their child’s learning. This issue is discussed further under Themes 3 and 4 of this toolkit.

Barriers to engagement

A family’s apparent reluctance to engage with the school could be due to one or more of these factors.

Time pressures of family life: parents/carers are busy people. They might be working full-time, with children at different schools, or working nights, or have additional caring responsibilities.

Family circumstances: the family structure may be complicated, with separations and new partners; there may be language barriers between home and school.

They may be overwhelmed by other issues going on in their lives and have little energy or ‘mental space’ to give to anything else – it is common for families to be dealing with very pressing issues such as poverty, caring responsibilities, health problems, general anxiety or post-natal depression.

Geography and physical barriers: families may live some distance away, may be reliant on public transport, and there could be physical barriers for those with disabilities or health problems.

Lack of confidence: parents/carers may find school brings back unpleasant memories of their own school days. They may feel their own lack of knowledge or skills puts them at a disadvantage, e.g. low literacy. They may fear being judged by other parents/carers or practitioners or fear being seen to ‘need help’ or to be a ‘bad parent/carer’. They could feel that they don’t fit in with the dominant middle-class culture of the school.

Suspicion and mistrust: parents/carers may believe they won’t be listened to and taken seriously by the school.

This toolkit describes some straightforward things that schools can do to help overcome these barriers.

Why make community links?

Schools do not exist in isolation: they are a key part of a network of statutory, private sector and voluntary organisations that serve and support the local community. They can make important contributions to cohesion and to community life – they can also draw on considerable support from this network, particularly for their family engagement work. Schools do not need to shoulder the engagement work alone.

“It takes a whole village to raise a child.”

African proverb

Multi-agency working with other statutory agencies is particularly important, e.g. through a Team Around the Family approach. It ensures that the needs of learners with additional learning needs (ALN) or from families facing multiple problems can be met, but also that the school can maintain its own clear focus on learning outcomes.

Other **community partners** can play an important role in the school’s family engagement activities, and they can also become partners in the children’s education in their own right. Through them schools can tap into a great source of support which can strengthen their school.

Both multi-agency working and community partnership are discussed further under Theme 5 of this toolkit.

Outline of the toolkit

This toolkit contains five themes, summarised in the table. These themes are expanded upon in the sections that follow, with specific resources that have been designed to help schools consider and build their approach to family and community engagement (FaCE).

Theme	All schools should ensure...	In successful schools...
<p>1</p> <p>Leadership for a self-improving system</p>	<p>The school's approach to FaCE is clearly set out in the school development plan (SDP) and there are named senior leaders who take this agenda forward. The school reflects on current practice and is planning future work.</p>	<p>FaCE is embedded in the school ethos and families are seen as partners in their child's education. Engagement is considered a priority area in order to raise standards, especially for learners from deprived backgrounds. The school has mapped out its self-improvement journey.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>Embedding a whole-school approach to FaCE</p>	<p>The school has taken steps to raise the awareness of the agenda among staff and to build the school's capacity for engagement. One or more senior members of staff lead the school's whole-school approach.</p>	<p>Many staff have engagement activities clearly defined as part of their role, and are provided with appropriate support and training. One or more staff have specific roles that support the whole-school approach, e.g. around attendance or engaging with particular groups of families.</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Welcoming families to engage with the school</p>	<p>The school is a welcoming place for families, uses a range of communications methods and provides a clear route through which families can express their views. The school makes extra engagement efforts around transition phases and to engage with families that it has previously struggled to reach.</p>	<p>The school tailors its communications and engagement activities to the needs of parents/carers based on an understanding of barriers to engagement. There are regular, inclusive 'get to know' events, other social activity and opportunities for families to volunteer to contribute to the school. Parents/carers are regularly consulted, their voices are heard, and they trust the school to handle complaints well.</p>

Theme	All schools should ensure...	In successful schools...
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>Helping families to actively support their child's learning</p>	<p>The school uses parents'/carers' evenings and some other activities to help and encourage families to effectively support their child's learning, focusing on families who appear to be providing less support for learning, and those of learners from deprived backgrounds or who are currently underperforming.</p>	<p>Families are involved as partners in children's learning and take part in a range of family learning activities that develop their skills. Engagement interventions are designed around an understanding of families' circumstances, wants and needs. Specific training opportunities are provided to support parents/carers of ALN learners.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Developing community partnerships and multi-agency working</p>	<p>The school has effective relationships with its feeder settings to smooth transitions. Staff are well-trained on safeguarding issues and use multi-agency working to support families facing multiple problems.</p>	<p>School transitions are planned and seamless. The school, working with parents/carers, takes a strategic approach to developing community partnerships and multi-agency working in order to strengthen family engagement, to strengthen the school, and drive up standards.</p>

Toolkit – Theme 1: Leadership for a self-improving system

Effective distributive leadership is essential for good family and community engagement. Many case studies of schools with exceptionally good engagement show that strong leadership from the top is the single most important ingredient.

All schools should:	Theme 1 resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make clear reference to FaCE in the school development plan (SDP) in line with the SDP regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School development plans (Resource 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a named member of the senior leadership team with responsibility for this agenda and perhaps also a named governor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders and governors (Resource 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct an audit of the effectiveness of current FaCE practice in order to stimulate reflection and planning for further work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple first-steps audit (Resource 3)
In successful schools ...	Theme 1 resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Ethos) leaders understand that families play a central and vital role in children’s education. They believe strongly that efforts put into working with families and forging community partnerships can pay dividends to the school. They communicate this to their stakeholders and adopt a whole-school approach in order to achieve this. FaCE is championed in every aspect of school life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders and governors (Resource 2) • FaCE PowerPoint (Resource 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Framework) all five themes of the framework described in this toolkit are taken forward in the school. 	(Described in this toolkit)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Self-improving system) as part of its self-evaluation processes and development of the SDP, the school periodically audits current FaCE practice and evaluates the impact of current activities. The school works with challenge advisors on this audit to analyse how it could refine its approach. The school builds its capacity through staff training and professional learning opportunities in the school cluster or through school-to-school support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced audit tool (Resource 5) • Evaluation (Resource 6) • Estyn inspections and FaCE (Resource 7)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Policy and targets) the school has consulted on FaCE goals which are then clearly set out as a priority in the SDP, together with associated targets. Engagement aims to help families to actively support their child’s learning, and there is a particular focus on reaching the families of those children who are underperforming, children from deprived backgrounds, and those receiving less support for their learning at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School development plans (Resource 1)

Snapshot

Primary

In **Herbert Thompson Primary School** creating stronger bonds with parents/carers is part of a wider vision to put well-being at the heart of the school's mission and work more closely with a range of community agencies, including the local authority children's services, families-focused organisations and Communities First. The school is looking beyond the school gate and addressing the barriers in the home and community. They place great importance on positive relationships between the school, families and the community. They work hard to build relationships with parents/carers so they play an active part in the life of the school and take a close interest in their children's education. This has involved interventions such as the Parent Council, whose objectives are engagement and parent/carer voice; the school's parent hub – which opens daily and allows mums and dads a chance to mingle on the school premises – and adult learning provision, but also appropriate staffing and professional development⁴.

Secondary

Since being appointed in 2010 the headteacher of **Rhyl High School** has led the school to develop its strategic partnership working in order to enrich the curriculum, with the additional aim of helping to address behavioural issues and re-engage disengaged learners. The school's external partners include youth organisations, Rhyl Football Club, Communities First and the local army camp. Disengaged learners work with learning coaches to pick subjects to study consisting of the normal curriculum but also including additional choices delivered by the external partners, such as gardening, sport in the community, public services and digital media. Key Stage 3 learners also benefit from the enriched curriculum. Attainment and attendance have improved, exclusions fallen and learners have become more engaged and confident about their futures⁵.

Special

St Christopher's Special School in Wrexham established a family support group led by the school leadership team. This highly effective forum for parents/carers enables them to contribute meaningfully to school life while creating a network of families that support each other. Through this parent/carer group the school can ensure that the needs of the families are met fully, and using the group's network, the school can reach out to other families who would otherwise be reluctant to engage. The group has also become a sounding board for new initiatives, and is active in many aspects of school life, being involved in new appointments or sharing their skills and expertise with staff.

⁴ Case study at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources/browse-all/herbertthompson/?lang=en and more information on Herbert Thompson's approach at www.estyn.gov.uk/english/provider/6812312/.

⁵ More information on Rhyl High School's approach in an Estyn best practice case study at www.estyn.gov.uk/english/best-practice/Signposts%20to%20best%20practice%20/.

Toolkit – Theme 2: Embedding a whole-school approach to FaCE

Evidence indicates that FaCE yields more positive results if it becomes everyone’s responsibility – from the class teachers to the receptionist, teaching assistants and headteacher. Many schools have found it useful to also have one or more staff roles to support the whole-school approach and perhaps take the lead on attendance, health issues or safeguarding.

All schools should:	Toolkit resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take steps to raise awareness of the agenda across the school, e.g. by running an INSET day or including FaCE as a standing item on the agenda at meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FaCE PowerPoint (Theme 1: Resource 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take steps to develop the school’s capacity for FaCE, e.g. through regular safeguarding training, professional learning around how to handle difficult conversations, and school-to-school professional learning opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development needs analysis for delivering FaCE (Theme 2: Resource 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have at least one member of staff who leads and supports the implementation of the whole-school approach – as a minimum this would be a named member of the senior leadership team (see Theme 1), but many schools have found it useful to have, in addition, a non-teaching member of staff in this role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FaCE staff roles (Theme 2: Resource 2)
In successful schools ...	Toolkit resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Clear roles) many staff have FaCE clearly defined as part of their role, and they have associated performance targets that are aligned to the SDP’s priority for FaCE and are linked to improved outcomes for learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FaCE staff roles (Theme 2: Resource 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Capacity building) a development needs analysis is completed for all staff (including non-teaching staff) undertaking FaCE activities and appropriate learning opportunities are put in place, making use of school-to-school learning opportunities and INSET days to meet these needs. Staff are supported during their FaCE work with support networks or supervision. Training or development opportunities are also offered to governors and members of parent/carer groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development needs analysis for delivering FaCE (Theme 2: Resource 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a key worker is identified for each learner/family – often the form teacher, but in some cases this may be a family engagement/liaison officer/pastoral support worker. Where schools are finding it difficult to engage with some families, efforts are made to ensure that families have a consistent and approachable point of contact, who has relevant skills and appropriate support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FaCE staff roles (Theme 2: Resource 2) Reaching all families (Theme 3: Resource 3)

Snapshot

Primary

Ysgol Glan Gele Infants and Nursery School takes a whole-school approach to FaCE, led by a dynamic head and supported by the governing body, parent/carer forum and friends group. FaCE is embedded in the school ethos and reflected in the roles of all staff. All teachers engage with their learner's families on a weekly basis through Learning Logs and 'share sessions' after school, and also through regular parent/carer partner sessions and at 'meet the teacher' events. Staff are also very involved in after-school activities, which include parenting classes, family activities and family learning projects. The whole-school approach is supported by the work of a family liaison teaching assistant (funded by the Pupil Deprivation Grant) who works to support target families and learners to ensure they are engaged and on track to succeed.

Secondary

Newport High School's whole-school approach involves all teaching members of staff – each has a one hour home contact session on their timetable, where they contact the parents/carers of their tutor group – usually positive phone calls to highlight one encouraging aspect of the student's academic achievement, approach to school life or behaviour. Staff logged 17,000 calls/messages in 2012–13. The whole-school approach is supported by a family engagement officer, funded by the Pupil Deprivation Grant, who works to increase the involvement in school life of families of learners eligible for free school meals. The whole-school approach also involves particular efforts around the Year 6/Year 7 transition (Year 7 tutors visiting primary feeders and meeting parents/carers), academic review days, and regular parent/carer workshops and learning events⁶.

Special

Tŷ Gwyn School is an all-age special school that caters for learners with profound and complex needs. The school has a Family Centre, open every day of the week in term time, staffed by one higher level teaching assistant and one senior teaching assistant. The centre provides a wide range of support and training for families with children aged 0–19, including Incredible Years training for parents/carers, therapy support, touch therapy, a toy library and assistive technology centre, counselling, home visits and outreach work, creative arts sessions and English as an Additional Language (EAL) lessons. The school evaluates all activities using questionnaires and face-to-face interviews and there is a high level of engagement and activity with parents/carers and the community due to the variety of opportunities available.

⁶ From evidence provided to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 13 March 2014. www.senedd.assembly.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=224&MID=1965

Toolkit – Theme 3: Welcoming families to engage with the school

Welcoming families to engage with the school, and fostering the development of mutual trust and respect between school and families, is the foundation from which the school can then go on to help families to actively support their child’s learning (Theme 4). This is sometimes called a ‘joining process’. Good two-way communication is a key ingredient.

All schools should:	Theme 3 resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make sure their school is welcoming to families, and take steps to get to know their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A welcoming school (Resource 1) • Getting to know your families (Resource 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make particular efforts to get to know families around transition points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitions (Resource 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make particular efforts to engage with some groups of families, such as the families of learners that are underperforming, those eligible for free school meals (eFSM), or those with additional learning needs (ALN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching all families (Resource 3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make a range of communication methods that are appropriate to families’ needs and preferences. All schools should be engaging with parents/carers outside of school letters and parents’/carers’ evenings and in particular should be making use of the day-to-day opportunities to contact parents/carers informally, at the school gate, at school social events, or via new communications technologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods of communicating (Resource 5) • Rethinking parents’/carers’ evenings (Resource 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide accessible routes through which parents/carers can express their views and be consulted on specific issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/carer groups and the voices of parents/carers (Resource 7)

In successful schools ...	Theme 3 resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Welcoming) the school is a welcoming place with space for parents/carers and clear indications that they are welcome and valued. Teachers engage with parents/carers in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis in order to build positive relationships, making use of new communications technologies to supplement face-to-face contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A welcoming school (Resource 1) • Methods of communicating (Resource 5) • Rethinking parents’/carers’ evenings (Resource 6)

In successful schools ...	Theme 3 resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Parent/carer voices) people are asked about what is important to them, and what they would like to see happening. The Parent Teacher Association/Parent Council or other group is empowered and supported to widen its scope to so that it plays an important role in FaCE and in providing a communication channel through which parents/carers can be consulted and their voices can be heard and acted on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/carer groups and the voices of parents/carers (Resource 7)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Inclusive and tailored approach) the school understands the barriers to engagement and the needs of particular families. The school also identifies ways to meet these needs through the use of specific external agencies that provide targeted support. It has developed ways of working that are supportive and inclusive. Wider family members are welcomed (grandparents, older siblings), and translation, transport or childcare may be provided to support engagement. The school recognises the reluctance of some parents/carers resulting from their own bad experiences at school and provides positive ways for them to be involved at a level they are comfortable with. Learners play a role in encouraging their parents/carers to get involved with the school and help generate ideas about how this could be done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know your families (Resource 2) • Reaching all families (Resource 3) • Costs of education (Resource 8)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Transitions) transition points (between schools, key stages and school years) are smoothed through use of informal 'meet the teacher/meet the family' sessions to develop relationships, and sharing of information (with necessary data protection protocols in place). Families are asked for suggestions on how to design events better. Home visits are conducted for some families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitions (Resource 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Social events) there are social events that make it easy for families to take part and develop positive relationships with each other and with school staff. Efforts are made to ensure that events and activities are inclusive, and that costs are not prohibitive. Parents/carers are encouraged to get other parents/carers involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching all families (Resource 3) • Costs of education (Resource 8)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Volunteering) the school provides a range of formal and informal opportunities for families to bring their skills and time to the school, in both regular (e.g. weekly) or one-off activities. Family members are asked directly and personally to participate, and the school matches their skills and enthusiasm to the needs of the school. Volunteers help out at family learning events. Family/community members often have the opportunity to develop their own skills at the same time (e.g. IT skills). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know your families (Resource 2)

In successful schools ...	Theme 3 resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Handling conflict and complaints) there are clear arrangements in place so that staff and parents/carers can resolve issues together, with support if necessary. The school handles complaints well in line with their published complaints procedure and most are dealt with at school level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handling conflict and complaints (Resource 9)

Snapshot

Primary

Barry Island Primary School's relationship with families is very strong. Parents/carers receive regular information about the life and work of the school through weekly class letters and through the outstanding use of social media. The school ensures that parents/carers are directly and regularly involved in school activities, including 'show and see' days, concerts, parental learning walks and 'Family Friday' sessions. The school runs an open café before many school events, which offers good opportunities for parents/carers to meet staff in a relaxed atmosphere. The school's recent 'Men behaving Dadly' project has enabled many fathers to support their children's learning effectively. All these successful innovations ensure that parents/carers feel very welcome in the school⁷.

Secondary

Bryngwyn Comprehensive School prides itself on its friendliness and the strength of its relationships with families. The school engages with parents/carers via texts, an app, virtual learning gateways, parents'/carers' evenings, prize evenings, special events, its website, and also through a 'student planner' which is designed to provide essential information to families and act as a vehicle of communication between home and school. By working closely with families, the school has drastically improved its attendance rate. Every absence is followed up with a voice message and text. The school's in-house educational welfare officer and attendance officer build relationships with many families providing support with family issues that often lie behind unauthorised absences.

⁷ From Estyn's 2014 Inspection Report.

Toolkit – Theme 4: Helping families to actively support their child’s learning

Schools can get the most out of family engagement when they clearly focus on working with families as partners in their child’s learning. The best ways for families to support their child’s learning changes as the child gets older. Engagement activities will have the most positive impact if they are designed to help families provide this support, and are based on an understanding of these changes. They also need to be based on an understanding of what parents/carers want and need from the school in order for partnership working to take place.

Families may face more challenges in supporting learning through secondary school, as their children gain greater autonomy, the curriculum is more complex, learners have more than one teacher, schools are larger and usually further from home, and parents/carers come into the school building less frequently.

In fact research indicates that it becomes less important that they are directly involved in learning activities (e.g. homework), but that there are other important, indirect ways in which they can support children to learn during secondary school, as shown in the following table. Families may also face more challenges in supporting learning if their child has additional learning needs (ALN).

“School-based family and parent support activities should have the improvement of children’s learning as a clear and consistent goal.”

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Best Practice in Parental Engagement – Practitioner’s Summary* (p.4)

“Parents have to engage with student learning in the home for any significant and sustained learning to occur.”

Harris et al. (2009) *Do Parents Know They Matter? Raising achievement through parental engagement*

Some of the most effective ways in which families can support children to learn (these are discussed further in the resources under this theme)

Foundation Phase	Primary school age 7–11	Secondary school age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations that encourage children’s natural inquisitiveness and love of learning while also developing language and communication skills. • Role play, to encourage purposeful talk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing interest in their school and school activities. • Communicating the value of education and helping them to feel that they belong in the school. • Ensuring that they go to bed at a regular time, have breakfast and attend school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating the value of education, modelling respectful relationships with teachers and helping their child to feel that they belong in the school. • Taking an interest in the topics they are following at school.

Some of the most effective ways in which families can support children to learn (these are discussed further in the resources under this theme)

Foundation Phase	Primary school age 7–11	Secondary school age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading stories, talking about the pictures. • Teaching songs and nursery rhymes. • Pointing out and playing with letters and numbers. • Painting and drawing. • Developing one-to-one correspondence, e.g. matching socks. • Visiting the library, museums and galleries. • Outdoor trips to parks, woods, beaches. • Supporting social and emotional learning. • Helping their child to be 'school ready'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending 10 minutes a day reading with the child, any text, anywhere. • Using opportunities in daily life to use numbers and talk about 'how big/much/many'. • Outings to museums, the library and art galleries and extra-curricular activities. • Working with the school to support the child with any particular issues. • Supporting social and emotional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping them focused on learning and homework, while also supporting their autonomy. • Ensuring that they go to bed at a regular time, have breakfast and attend school. • Communicating aspirations and celebrating achievements, both of which can be very powerful motivators for children at this age. • Providing an environment at home in which they can study (with no distractions). • Encouraging children to read, and to talk about the book they are reading, what they have read in the newspaper or the film they have seen. • Involving children in household tasks, such as how to understand bills and plan trips or plan spending/saving. • Outings to museums, arts and cultural venues. • Extra-curricular activities, such as sports or, creative and cultural activities, that help them to apply their knowledge and develop social and emotional skills. • Working with the school to support the child to work through any particular issues. • Supporting course selection and guiding children in plans for post-16 learning.

All schools should:	Toolkit resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make good use of parents'/carers' evenings to help families provide support for learning as well to provide quality feedback on the learner's progress in a way that parents/carers can understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rethinking parents'/carers' evenings (Theme 3: Resource 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take advantage of other opportunities to communicate to families the most effective ways in which they can support their child's learning, and support them to act on this, e.g. designing homework tasks that learners work on with their families, providing messages in homework or home-school link books, or providing resources such as story sacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation Phase – Engagement for learning (Theme 4: Resource 1) • Primary school age 7–11 – Engagement for learning (Theme 4: Resource 2) • Secondary schools – Engagement for learning (Theme 4: Resource 3) • Reaching all families (Theme 3: Resource 3) • Methods of communicating (Theme 3: Resource 5) • Evaluation (Theme 1: Resource 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put in place some additional activities to foster engagement with learning among families who do not appear to be providing much support for their child's learning, families from deprived backgrounds and/or those of children who are currently underperforming. Evaluate the impact of these interventions to develop and share information on what works 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify learners who do not appear to be receiving much support for learning at home and put in place some in-school interventions to help compensate (e.g. homework clubs, a lead worker or one-to-one working). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions for learners less supported at home (Theme 4: Resource 4)

In successful schools ...	Toolkit resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Two-way communications with parents/carers) the school is innovative about the communication methods they use, matching them to families' needs. The format of one-to-one discussions with parents/carers about their child's progress is based on a recognition that parents/carers are partners in the child's education. These discussions are just one part of an ongoing dialogue through which the school communicates what the child is learning at school. They give lots of encouragement to families on the ways in which they can support that learning, while families feed back information on the support that they want and need. Families and staff tackle areas of difficulty and concern together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rethinking parents'/carers' evenings (Theme 3: Resource 6) • Methods of communicating (Theme 3: Resource 5) • Handling conflict and complaints (Theme 3: Resource 9) • Foundation Phase – Engagement for learning (Theme 4: Resource 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Family learning activities) schools put in place a strategic suite of activities to promote family engagement in learning, designed in partnership around families' circumstances, wants and needs. These learning activities may be targeted at families whose children particularly need their family's support to overcome issues with or barriers to learning, or where support for learning appears to be lacking. These activities may also facilitate learning for family members (such as basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills) and in these cases adults are motivated to continue their own learning. Interventions are evaluated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary school age 7–11 – Engagement for learning (Theme 4: Resource 2) • Secondary schools – Engagement for learning (Theme 4: Resource 3) • Reaching all families (Theme 3: Resource 3) • Evaluation (Theme 1: Resource 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Specific activities to meet the needs of some learners) in-school interventions are put in place for learners who are not receiving much support from home, in order to help compensate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions for learners less supported at home (Theme 4: Resource 4)

Snapshot

Primary

Ysgol Parc Waundew Richmond Park School runs 'PEAS' (Parents Engaged Actively in School) and 'DREAMS' (Developing Reading, English And Maths) initiatives aimed at engaging with parents/carers to raise attendance, literacy and numeracy. Families are encouraged into school with 'Family Fridays', Learndirect Club and 'Generation Games' after school club where parents/carers and children attend and learn together, including ICT, reading and cooking skills, etc. The school helps families develop consistent approaches to literacy and numeracy ('teaching them to teach'). Online 'Bug Club' and 'Sumdog' accounts allow every child to access books and numeracy materials at home. Parent/carer reading volunteers help out in classrooms. Families are also engaged via Facebook and Twitter. Reading ages, numeracy centiles and attendance rates have all risen significantly.

Secondary

Fitzalan High School has 1,600 learners and 38 per cent are 'very new to English'. The school works hard to engage with families to support the children's learning. An online Learning Gateway service provides up-to-date reports on children's behaviour, attendance and learning progress. Parents/carers are engaged through parenting classes and 'teach your child to learn' evenings – including raising your child's self-esteem, how the brain works, how learners learn maths today, English for speakers of other languages in schools, how can you help your child, and coping with 'teenage turmoil'. They also provide families with toolkits giving advice on qualifications, learner support, coursework and other topics. Family engagement has increased attendance and helped increase outcomes across all key stages.

Special

Crownbridge Special School has been identified by Estyn as sector leading in the way it keeps parents and carers fully informed about their child's progress. Person-centred planning is an intrinsic element of all the work in the school. They seek out information from learners, their parents/carers and the wide range of partners involved with them, they listen to their views to develop a rich picture of what's important to them and important for the learner and what is working and what is not to form the basis of individual programme and pathways planning. As a result nearly all learners make excellent progress in meeting agreed targets. All staff are trained to ensure annual reviews and planning meetings follow this format.

Toolkit – Theme 5: Developing community partnerships and multi-agency working

Multi-agency working is important for supporting school transitions, and also to meet the needs of learners from families facing multiple problems. The starting point for this is what is important for the learner and their family. Community partnership working can support the school's family engagement work, strengthen a school in other ways and enrich school life. The starting point is what is important for this school.

All schools should:	Toolkit resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure staff are well-trained on safeguarding issues and use multi-agency working to support families facing multiple problems, using effectively the referral processes under the Team Around the Family approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-agency working (Theme 5: Resource 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that they have effective relationships with feeder settings to smooth transitions and identify and plan for any issues facing individual learners in the new intake – information is shared and appropriate data protection protocols are used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitions (Theme 3: Resource 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> get to know their community and develop some partnerships that will strengthen the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing community partnerships (Theme 5: Resource 1)
In successful schools ...	Toolkit resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Helping families find additional support) parents/carers get information from the school about a range of services and activities available in the community. The school accesses additional help for families that need it from a range of other services, including social services, speech and language therapy, health, and educational psychologists. Where possible, community services are located on the school site to improve service access and create the school as a hub of the community. Services might include a crèche, Flying Start, credit unions, Citizens Advice or Communities First. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-agency working (Theme 5: Resource 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (School transitions) the school has positive relationships with its feeder and onward settings, ensuring that transitions are planned and smoothed, and that issues or concerns around individual learners are communicated and planned for. Information is shared and appropriate data protection protocols are used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitions (Theme 3: Resource 4)

In successful schools ...	Toolkit resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Community partnership working) the school takes a strategic approach to community partnerships, planning which relationships to foster, agreeing outcomes, pooling resources where possible and evaluating the impact. Community partners help the school with its family engagement work. The school participates in major community events and has established relationships with the main groups in the area including faith groups, and contributes to 'social capital' in its community. The school uses other community venues for some of its activities – swimming pools, leisure centres, theatres and museums – and opens its own facilities up for use by local groups, such as adult community learning classes. Local shops and businesses support school events and contribute to children's learning by offering visits or work placements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing community partnerships (Theme 5: Resource 1)

Snapshot

Primary

Pembroke Dock Community Primary School uses a strong Team Around the Family approach, and effectively uses multi-agency working to support learner and family well-being. There is a Flying Start centre on the school site, and staff work with Flying Start and health visitors to identify the children about to start school who will need extra support. The school is a vital partner in Community First and Springboard projects and facilitates family and adult learning activities between 8am and 6pm at term time and also during weekends and holidays. All families are also actively welcomed into school life and engaged as partners in their child's learning.

Secondary

Coedcae Comprehensive School makes very effective use of the Team Around the Family approach to increase attendance, social engagement and inclusion, and to reduce numbers leaving without qualifications, young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and first-time entrants into the youth justice system. Weekly Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings are held at the school, chaired by school staff. The school is helping families to find the support they need, reduce the number reaching crisis point, and improve learning outcomes for the children involved. Attendance, attainment and emotional well-being have increased considerably, and the number of exclusions have been reduced.

Special

Portfield School, an all age special school, works closely with its community, professionals and parents/carers. The school has developed service level agreements with the Hywel Dda Health Trust to ensure multi-agency working for learners with complex needs is the norm. Monthly multi-agency person-centred planning meetings take place with parents/carers and a range of professionals to ensure all aspects of a child's life are considered and planned for. The school works closely with social services to support the 'Tots to Teens' after school and holiday club to provide valuable respite to parents/carers and provide learners with a social environment to play and mix with peers.

Links to other Welsh Government priorities

School improvement

Welsh Government sees strengthening FaCE as an important part of a school's self-improvement journey that can help to deliver on national priorities around literacy and numeracy. This is recognised in *Qualified for life – An education improvement plan for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales*.

“Most schools and colleges know that working with parents/carers, employers and their communities is an important part of what they do to support their learners to achieve their potential.”

*Qualified for life (2014)*⁸.

Tackling the impact of deprivation

Too many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are failing to fulfil their potential at school. Tackling the link between deprivation and educational attainment is a top priority for the Welsh Government, and in 2014 the Welsh Government published a programme for action – *Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools*¹⁰.

“The achievement of working-class pupils could be significantly enhanced if we systematically apply all that is known about parental involvement.”⁹”

For a variety of reasons, learners from deprived backgrounds are more likely to have parents or carers who are less involved in their children's education and who may find schools intimidating. Families with low literacy are more likely to see learning as a 'school-only' activity and less likely to see the importance of modelling reading at home. Families with few qualifications may be more likely to have negative perceptions and experience of schooling. Research indicates that effective engagement between families and schools can have a disproportionately positive impact on learning outcomes for those learners from poorer backgrounds.

FaCE is a key theme of the *Rewriting the future* programme, which contains the following two ambitions:

- engage families effectively in children's learning and school life
- make all schools 'community schools'.

We encourage you to read this theme of *Rewriting the future* in full in conjunction with this toolkit. Welsh Government is working to support schools in their engagement activities. Schools will be taking an important step in tackling the impacts of poverty when they use the resources in this toolkit to engage in particular with families of those learners who are eligible for free school meals.

⁸ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/allsectorpolicies/qualified-for-life-an-educational-improvement-plan/?lang=en

⁹ Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment*.

¹⁰ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/rewriting-the-future-schools/?lang=en

Many of the suggestions made in this toolkit can be put in place without the school needing to spend any additional money. In situations where there are costs involved, you may be able to use the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG). Guidance and support for tackling the impact of deprivation on educational attainment, and for how to use the PDG to the best effect, is available via the following links.

<i>Pupil Deprivation Grant – Essential guidance</i> <i>Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant</i>	www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolhome/deprivation/pdg-and-early-years-pdg/?lang=en
<i>What really works?</i> <i>What really works for the early years?</i>	www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources/browse-all/pdg-what-really-works/?lang=en
Pupil Deprivation, Estyn May 2014	www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/309390.9/pupil-deprivation-may-2014/?navmap=30,163,
Learning Wales resources relating to tackling the impacts of poverty	www.learning.wales.gov.uk/deprivation and browse resources

Parenting in Wales

Parents/carers play a central role in relation to outcomes for children. Welsh Government has published *Parenting in Wales – Guidance on engagement and support*¹¹ for all service providers in Wales who have a direct or indirect role in, and responsibility for, providing parenting support. It is intended to support local authorities, local health boards, third sector and other relevant commissioners, managers and practitioners in making decisions about:

- the type(s) of parenting support to provide
- how to provide it
- approaches to supporting and engaging parents/carers
- workforce development
- assessment processes, signposting and referral
- evaluation and monitoring.

¹¹ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/?lang=en

Your feedback

We welcome your feedback so that we can continue to improve this toolkit for schools. To let us know what you think please e-mail deprivationandengagement@wales.gsi.gov.uk or contact us at the address inside the front cover.

“ One of the most powerful but neglected supports for children’s learning and development is family involvement both in and out of school.

Over 40 years of steadily accumulating evidence show that family involvement is one of the strongest predictors of children’s school success, and that families play pivotal roles in their children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development from birth through adolescence.”

Weiss et al. (2009) *Reframing Family Involvement in Education: Supporting Families to Support Educational Equity*. Columbia University.

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