

# Parents as partners in teaching: Trimdon Grange Infant and Nursery School

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**URN:** 114071 / EY465431

**Region:** North East, Yorkshire and Humberside

**Remit:** Schools/Early years

## Provider background

[Trimdon Grange](#) is a small infant and nursery school in County Durham. At the heart of its community, children travel from a number of outlying villages to attend. Since 2013, the school has provided funded early education for two-year-olds. The early years of the school operates as one unit, allowing all children, regardless of their age, to learn and play alongside each other. Both the [school](#) and the [two-year-old class](#) are rated outstanding.

## Brief description

This example shows how one school has forged excellent relationships with parents and families to strengthen the learning, development and well-being of their children. The headteacher of this school is clear: 'Parents have a fundamental role to play in their child's early education ... we have a moral responsibility to support them to do this, in a range of accessible and non-threatening ways, to help maximise the most important years of their child's life.'

This is part of a set of eight good practice examples showcasing good practice in early years to support the report: '[Teaching and play in the early years – a balancing act?](#)'

## The good practice in detail

Central to the school's ethos is that the most powerful learning occurs when more and less experienced learners work together to achieve a common goal. Not only is this philosophy evident in the integrated early years unit, where children from the ages of two to five learn and play together, but also in the work undertaken to support and engage parents and families in their children's development. At this

school, everyone is an educator – children, staff, parents and grandparents are all considered partners in teaching. Each has something they can contribute (teach) and something they can gain (learn) from the carefully planned experiences on offer.

The school recognises that parents and families will want to engage in different ways and at different times depending on their levels of confidence, interest and commitment. Therefore, staff use a raft of strategies so that everyone, whatever their circumstances, can engage and contribute productively to their children’s learning and development.

These strategies include:

- communicating regularly with parents, through home visits, weekly ‘learning letters’, contributions to children’s learning stories and an open door policy to ‘stay and play’ with their children
- planning away-day visits to places of interest in the local area so that children and parents have the opportunity to take part in activities they might not otherwise experience



- hosting family days in school where children, parents, grandparents and staff can work together, as a family group, in a non-threatening way, on a project of common interest.

## Sharing and exchanging information

Staff at Trimdon Grange understand the importance of working with parents, first and foremost to share and exchange information about their child. Set routines for arriving and leaving the school ensure that key staff are available to interact and talk to children and parents informally every day. While this includes conversation to ensure continuity of care and well-being, discussions also focus on children’s interests, milestone achievements (such as going to the toilet on their own for the

first time) and home-learning experiences. Staff value all interactions they enter into and create an environment in which all parents, regardless of their confidence, can share important learning stories about their child.

A welcoming, open and engaging environment supports parents to interact and share these stories. Displays, in particular, are large, vibrant and focused on celebrating the achievements of all children. Huge photographs adorn every available space, capturing children 'in the moment' as they engage in their learning. Snippets of overheard conversations, written alongside the photographs and concrete examples of what the children have created, give a taste of the language and concepts being developed. Parents can see that their children's learning takes centre-stage. They are eager to contribute to the living stories on the walls of the setting with their own comments and quotes from home.

As well as sharing the successes, the school also helps parents to engage in the development of their children's learning. Weekly learning letters inform parents of the themes for the week and suggest what can be done at home to echo and complement the learning that is taking place in school. When necessary, these learning letters also include examples of particular strategies used by staff so that those at home can be sure that they are working in complete tandem with school. For example, when children are learning about addition, staff send home detailed information about the stages of development children will go through so that parents can reinforce these ways of working at home.



### Family learning events

The headteacher recognises that, 'parents and grandparents can be highly skilled and instinctive educators ... the school has a key role in offering contexts and resources for them to play and learn with their children alongside school staff and other families.'



A range of interesting, engaging and non-threatening activities are therefore planned to bring different generations of the same family together each term for a common purpose.

This year, events have taken the form of a 'light and dark party', with families challenged to work together to make paper lanterns for their night time feast in the woods, and a 'go-kart workshop' where families, particularly dads and granddads, built a vehicle from scratch to race in the school yard.

Staff are clear about the advantages of this way of working. As the headteacher explains, 'family learning days provide the right conditions and context for adults to raise children's expectations, challenge their thinking and demonstrate problem solving and perseverance. Their presence in school gives value to the fascinations and lines of enquiry children have generated. The positive communication and cooperation between children and adults, of all ages, promotes success through sensitive explanation, demonstration and questioning.'

### **What are the features of family learning days that make them so successful?**

- Whole families work together as a group, including children from across the school and different generations of the same family.
- Events are planned each term so that they are known 'special days' in the calendar, which allows family members to plan their attendance.
- Staff choose topics that interest the children and develop their fascination in building, constructing and exploring key concepts about the world around them.
- Informal activities are planned to incorporate a range of skills so that everyone can contribute successfully.
- Events culminate in a shared celebration, providing a social opportunity to bond as a community, reflect on what has been achieved and reward everyone's contributions from the day.

## Learning about the wider world together



The school's decision in 2013 to work with two-year-olds provided a further opportunity for staff to engage with parents and families and build positive working relationships from an even earlier starting point.

This work has focused on providing educational experiences for two-year-olds and their parents that allow both to form closer bonds with each other and create supportive networks. This helps children to gel as a group and reduces the social and emotional issues associated with starting and moving through school. It also provides a way for new mothers and fathers to form friendship groups of their own in a potentially isolated village community.

Parents themselves suggest and agree the places to visit with the school using its budget flexibly to enable the educational visits to take place. To date, two-year-olds, parents and staff have visited a farm, a local centre that promotes children's literature and storytelling, a theatre and a local gym and have undertaken swimming lessons. All of these encounters, in varied environments, have given parents the opportunity to share and enjoy some vital experiences with their child that, due to economic constraints, may not have been viable opportunities otherwise. A greater trust and sense of camaraderie with school staff and other parents in the community is generated and the headteacher and staff agree that, 'children and parents all know each other and are more secure in their relationships as a result'.

In all of the activities undertaken at Trimdon Grange, 'family' matters. An exceptionally strong sense of community has been created that undoubtedly contributes to the high levels of success children experience in their learning and development during their time at school.

## How has this school enabled parents to be partners in teaching?

- An open door policy, approachable staff and a series of 'stay and play' sessions enable parents to share their children's interests, achievements and worries and observe them learning in action.
- Large, vibrant displays explain the processes and characteristics of effective learning, celebrate the achievements of all children and value the parents' voice through the learning stories they share from home.
- Learning letters share forthcoming activities, events and key ideas, and include explanations of key teaching strategies so that home and school work in tandem, especially in relation to early reading and mathematics.
- Workshops and informal visits for two-year-olds to everyday places in the local area builds a sense of trust, respect and camaraderie between children, parents and staff.
- Family learning days celebrate what can be achieved when different generations of the same family group work together through events such as the 'Light and Dark Party' and 'Construction Afternoons' to achieve a common goal.

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For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Complete our survey [here](#).

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