

Improving relationships with parents

How does your school communicate with parents – face-to-face at functions, by phone, email and text... or with great difficulty?

Improving relationships with parents was the topic of a recent talk2learn discussion, suggested by Mark Ludlow from Blurton High School through talk2learn's Open Forum.

Key points included:

- the need for face-to-face contact with parents
- practical ways to draw parents into learning
- the importance of reporting 'good news'

Several contributors stressed the importance of face-to-face contact with parents but some also felt it was becoming a challenge.

Jo Franklin, head of house at a large secondary school in Norfolk, said: *"Face-to-face contact can make a huge difference to the relationship between school and home.* However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain this relationship as we move away from formal parents' evenings and replace them with data. That has been done with the best of intentions – to reduce teacher workload; *however, both parents and teachers feel that the loss of face-to-face dialogue is having a detrimental effect."*

But when personal contact is difficult for practical reasons, electronic methods do help, said Karen May, an administrator at a special school in Oxfordshire.

"As most of our children come in on transport we don't get to see parents and carers very often so we have tried various ways of keeping in contact. We have a home-school diary system that teachers, teaching assistants and parents use to communicate. *We also use email and I think the texting idea is a good one.*"

Besides frequency of communication, language is important, said Karen Chapman a finance officer in West Midlands – "I have found



that, despite good intentions, letters and notices may be issued using jargon known by the author but not necessarily a parent."

Zoe Millest, head of year 11 in Lancashire school where a number of parents speak little English, said home liaison staff were charged with maintaining the relationship.

"One member of the team is well-known within the Asian community which goes a long way to building up two-way communication. *He is well placed to influence and encourage parents to support the school while showing he understands their concerns too.*"

Elizabeth Burke, a teacher at a primary school in North London, suggested a good tactic to bring parents into the school is to ask for support in subjects or topics that have traditionally been difficult to manage, such as D&T, cookery and some areas of maths.

"After ascertaining their ability, availability and willingness to help we create a support rota. *Parents love this as it makes them feel as though they are an integral part of the learning process,*" she said.

Finally, said Mark Klekot a primary headteacher in the West Midlands, it's important for schools to accentuate the positive.

"Parents only tend to hear from schools on bad news days but I always make sure that when I phone them it is because they have done something good. *It soon gets around the community that you are approachable and then people start coming to you.*"

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities.