



Beyond the classroom: Engaging parents with their child's learning

25th November 2021



[Learning with Parents](#) is a charity working to ensure that every child is supported at home to fulfil their potential.



The [Parental Engagement Network](#) (PEN) work with schools to improve their parental engagement and build better relationships between home and school.

Please note that both organisations use the term 'parents' to apply equally to parents, carers and other adults who care for children.

Why now?

Only 14% of the gap at the end of primary is due to what happens at schools, but 49% is related to parental education, background, attitudes, and behaviours (IFS), so as a sector we need to focus on how we can better support families.

Studies by the EPI and Renaissance Learning for the Department of Education found that although 'lost learning' has reduced over the last year, (a huge testament to all the hard work during this time), much of the progress in closing the disadvantage gap has been lost. At Learning with Parents, we see parents as central to solving this together and there's a lot to be hopeful about.

Many parents have become significantly more involved in their child's learning and supporting parents has moved up the agenda. Here, there is an opportunity to build on this and make parents more central players in their child's education.

Understanding parental engagement in your context

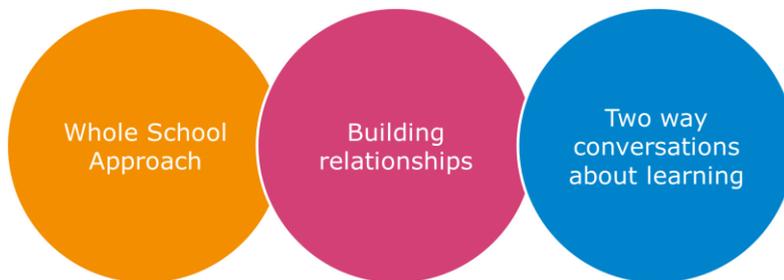
Poll: Since the pandemic, relationships between my school and parents are...

Many attendees reported that relationships with parents had stayed about the same and we were encouraged to see that some had got a bit better. However, 14% felt relationships had got worse. This diversity of experience for schools and parent communities across the country highlights that understanding where your school is at with parental engagement is key to determining next steps.



By parental engagement, we mean parents' engagement in their child's learning, rather than involvement with the school. Parental engagement in children's learning directly supports children's outcomes and is where both PEN and Learning with Parents' work is focused.

PEN advocate a whole school approach to parental engagement. Once there is a commitment to prioritising parents, schools can build their relationships with them. Parents need to trust the school and feel listened to, then teachers can open two-way dialogues centred on learning.



An eight-step parental toolkit is then used to audit and improve parental engagement at PEN

1. Leadership, staffing, and management seeing parental engagement as a priority
2. Welcome, ethos and positive relationships and focus on positive environment
3. Transition as a key opportunity to involve parents
4. Reporting to families, evaluating comms with parents, including accessibility
5. Helping families to support children's learning and development
6. Communication and consultation, and improving accessibility and listening
7. Support/intervention for parents/carers and how interventions communicated
8. Involving parents and community links

How Learning with Parents design activities that encourage and support engagement in learning

1 Activities are positive, enjoyable, and child-focused



Before schools started Learning with Parents, we surveyed parents to understand the barriers they previously faced to engaging in their child's learning. Parents frequently reported that their child not wanting to do homework and the resulting tension at home created a real barrier to engaging with their child's learning.

Families are busy and it's important we can help to ensure that those interactions we're encouraging at home, are positive ones for everyone. Making home learning enjoyable must be a priority to help involve more parents.

2 Only use available and appropriate resources

It is so important to recognise that different families have access to different resources at home. For some, using grapes or dried pasta would be a great resource, for others this would be wholly inappropriate. Therefore, planning carefully what the resources families need, helps reduce barriers to engagement. Low resource activities can also help reduce both parent and teacher workload.



3

Question what outcomes or outputs are really needed



Does there need to be a markable outcome? Can the aim be for families to explore or enjoy a topic rather than complete something ready to be brought into class?

At Learning with Parents, an activity may include building a tower, playing a phoneme hunt, or a game of skittles with empty water bottles. In each of these, the creativity and the boundaries for how families engage in the activity are widened as soon as there's no requirement to bring anything back to school.

However, the learning is still happening.

On our programme, families leave comments or photos to let teachers know how they got on, a valuable result for both the child and teacher. With any activity you're sending home, really question what you want to happen at home and what you want to know in return.

Finding out more to develop your parental engagement

PEN membership



- Network Meetings held twice a month for each phase
- A wealth of resources to download and keep
- Access to courses and funded projects
- Family Home Learning Sheets linked to the curriculum

Get in touch to find out more: rachel@penetwork.co.uk

Learning with Parents

Through our programme, teachers set topics in line with what they are teaching in class. Parents receive a short child-led video explaining what their child is learning in class and is then given two to three games and activities to explore with their child. Finally, parents share feedback with parents through comments and photos.



Please get in touch if you would like to chat! hello@learningwithparents.com