

Supporting Families at a Distance

Newsletter

Autumn Term 2020 Issue 1



Supporting Families at a Distance

What a few months this has been!!!!

The past six months has been a time of tremendous change for us all. For all education professionals, this has thrown up so many new challenges.

As we continue to support our pupils and their families, then collaboration is going to be key. Our LA's and supporting organisations must show us just how much they respect, value and trust those who are teaching and supporting our young people; our teachers, our schools' leaders, all of our education professionals are key to ensuring our families across Wales are receiving the very best support we can provide.

We have all had to critically review the way we are working with our families. It is much more difficult to engage our families from a distance. So how are you making a success of these troubling times?

The evidence from a research project in England suggests that one of the key elements of supporting families is to develop and maintain communication with parents about school activities and school work. Of course, we all knew that, but it is good to know that research clearly agrees with what we know to be right!!



Strategies for Supporting our Families

Communication Communication Communication!!

Be positive, personalise,
and ask:
'How can we help?'

The evidence from that research project also suggests that delivering parental engagement initiatives effectively can be challenging, partly due to demands made on parents' time. It is of course critical to its success that we plan, support, and monitor how our young people work with their parents, particularly carefully.

School communications with parents are likely to be more effective if they are personalised and framed positively to celebrate success.

All forms of communication will benefit from that positive tone. Text messaging, class Dojo, emails, all IT links are hugely important. But they can also be ignored.

If there are important messages for parents who are less involved, face-to-face conversations and phone calls are going to be more effective. This could even involve a visit home and socially distanced pick up of resources from school. Planning, as with everything else, is the key as we know.

Although the costs and time commitments of creating personalised communications may be higher, these are likely to be less than the costs of losing contact with the parents that we most want to reach.

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Websites

School websites have been a critical form of communication and we would love you to share how you have used your website with our colleagues across Wales.

Ty Isaf Infants school in Caerphilly have been very innovative.



“On our school website we made a Coronavirus update page where parents/guardians could find new information about school reopening/uniform/risk assessments/letters.

We also made a home learning page on the school website and uploaded ‘how to’ guides (videos) to show parents/guardians how to access Seesaw, hwb, Purple Mash, Schoop, MS Teams and Google Classroom.

There was also useful hyperlinks and websites for yoga, mindfulness, Joe Wicks, songs the children sing in assembly, phonics and numeracy websites—amazing!!” - Cerys Parry

Review all Processes for Communications

Schools tell us that it is very helpful to consider whether current forms of communication are effective at reaching less involved parents and could be replaced or supplemented with alternative approaches.

Many schools agree that face to face meetings and telephone calls are important in helping parents and families feel a sense of belonging or staying informed—and this may be an important precondition for messages. Communication should be two-way, including asking parents what they would find helpful in supporting their children’s learning.

Our discussions with schools tell us that parents respond better if:

- (a) they have been consulted;
- (b) schools respond to their preferences;
- (c) more topics of information are provided by schools; and
- (d) More engagement opportunities are available.

In a recent survey of 1000 parents, around half of parents say that they have not been consulted on their preferences for receiving information. Maybe working towards that could be helpful for supporting all of our families.

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Offer more sustained support where required

Some families, as we know, require a lot more support than others. To ensure we use resources effectively and to avoid losing contact with our most vulnerable families, schools tell us an analysis of need is the logical starting point. It is, of course, important that targeting is done sensitively to avoid stigmatising or discouraging parents.

However, where programmes are intended to benefit those with particular needs, it is especially important to make sure that the right families are identified and supported.

Evidence that identifies why families can be perceived as 'hard to reach' and what services can do to address this covers a range of thoughts. Parents' isolation from services may be involuntary (for example, owing to language differences, poor health, long or unsociable work hours, lack of money) or voluntary (for example, because engagement with services would be threatening or stigmatising). In an education context, parents' own poor experience of school can often contribute to a reticence to engage fully in their child's learning.

How can we support our families?

Flexibility, including home visits and outreach services for families.

Making services welcoming and less intimidating—for instance, by employing staff who can relate to parents, and making repeated attempts, if needed, to engage the families concerned.

Recruiting parents who could become Parent Ambassadors, securing referrals from peers, advertising services in places frequented by families and translating promotion materials into relevant languages.

At the heart of all of this is building trust and relationships

Supporting behavior - something that requires a great deal of trust!!

Strategies that support parents and schools to take a consistent approach to behaviour are going to be beneficial. Some of these strategies could be:

Parents and teachers setting goals for their child.

Agreeing, and implementing specific strategies that can be implemented at home and school to help their child's behaviour.

Responding consistently to children's behaviour.

Gathering information to assess their child's progress.

Advice, structured, targeted interventions for parents aimed at improving children's social, emotional, and behaviour outcomes, to support them during these very difficult times.

Supporting parents to interact positively (for example, how to interact on the child's level during play and letting the child take the lead).

Consistency with discipline responding to a behaviour in the same way with the same consequence.

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Now it is over to you..!!!



How are you supporting your families at a distance?

Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen in Bridgend have also been extremely busy, as Sarah Curley, Pastoral Leader, tells us.

“Being a Head of Year 9 during lockdown was not easy with the challenge of trying to make sure all pupils were engaged on Google Classroom. I managed to phone all pupils (221) and speak with parents and pupils to ensure they were doing okay and had access to a device and their school email.

Some parents would phone and ask for help in getting their children to work or out of bed. So, they would give me their child's mobile number and I would give them a ring and tell them to get out of bed and start working! In all fairness, many would work after my persistence of nagging 😊.

I also went out delivering devices to those families who were shielding or unable to drive. My relationship with families has grown immensely during lockdown where they feel they can call or email me at any time for support. This, in my eyes, can only be a positive.”

Sarah Curley, Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen, Bridgend

Ysgol Maes y Coed Special School, NPT have been very proactive during the lockdown period.

“Just wanted to let you know what we have been getting up to at Ysgol Maes y Coed during the Lockdown. For the first few weeks, a team of staff were in school and helping to distribute free school meals to our high proportion of vulnerable families. Following the Easter holidays, the focus was supporting learning at home and teams of staff were called in to help get resources ready to send home. These resources were anything from toys, sensory packs to worksheets and activity sheets. The Deputy Head was able to get a deprivation grant for the pupils and we were able to purchase resources which were chosen by families to send home on a delivery. This was ongoing through to summer holidays.

All through the lockdown period, teachers were in contact weekly with parents using Class Dojo and telephone calls depending on the need and enquiry. I felt that it was not the appropriate way to communicate with my pupils, as the texts were going to parents, so I would video myself with a little blog on what I had been getting up to, introducing my dog Bronwen, doing some yoga and a science experiment. This went down very well, and pupils were sending photos back of what they had been doing. It also really developed the relationship between myself and the families, with lots of communication asking how I was and putting smiling emojis on messages. The school Dojo had a weekly activity for everyone, and several teachers made videos, yoga or tai chi, to name but a few. These were available on the web ite.”

It was a whole school effort to support our Ysgol Maes y Coed family

Esther Casey Howells, Ysgol Maes Y Coed, Neath Port Talbot

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Ty Isaf Infants School

“All pupils were able to access Seesaw and complete any work that was planned. Home learning packs were also sent home at the start of Lockdown and then continued via Seesaw. When children returned to school in June, the children that were still home learning had packs made up for them and parents/guardians came into school to collect them.

Planning was uploaded fortnightly (2 weeks of work) and phone calls were made to parents/guardians by teachers and headteacher to ask if everything was okay? Is there anything we could do to support them? How were the children coping with home learning and could we help them in anyway?

We held a virtual celebration assembly on a Friday morning on Seesaw for the child/children that had been engaging in work that week. This gave more encouragement for other children to become engaged and had certificates on return to school in June. (This happened in school on a weekly basis so we just changed it to being virtual).

We provided laptops and dongles (WiFi access) to those families that needed them.

We communicated with parents/guardians via phone, school e-mail, Seesaw (messaging), Schoop and the school website.

On our school website, we made a coronavirus update page where parents/guardians could find new information about school reopening/uniform/risk assessments/letters.

We also made a home learning page on the school website and uploaded ‘how to’ guides (videos) to show parents/guardians how to access seesaw, hwb, Purple Mash, Schoop, Teams and Google Classroom. There was also useful hyperlinks and websites for yoga, mindfulness, Joe Wicks, songs the children sing in assembly, phonics and numeracy websites.”

Cerys Parry, Ty Isaf Infants, Caerphilly

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Distance learning at Cwmaber Infants

Issues of distance learning

- Engaging all parents in their child's learning.
- Learning how to use different platforms for sharing activities and teaching the parents/children how to use them.
- Ensuring all children had access to the learning activities.
- Parents' anxieties and supporting them in engaging their children.

Successful ideas that worked for us at Cwmaber Infants

- We used a range of platforms to provide parents and children with the distant learning that they needed e.g. Teams, Purple Mash, Mathletics, Lexia, Twitter and the school website. Through these platforms, we ensured that we gave them a range of resources e.g. videos, worksheets, 'how to's', so that they could access and use the ones they felt comfortable with. We found that by doing this, nearly all of the children were accessing the blended learning through at least one platform.
- The teachers and staff worked hard to learn how to use some of the unfamiliar platforms by supporting each other and completing courses. All the platforms are still now being used to support learning and share activities with parents and this is helping alongside the daily activities provided for the children in school. Parents have been given simple instructions on how to use the various platforms and all passwords and usernames were emailed to them.
- We supplied laptops and dongles and delivered hard paper copies of activities to those families who were struggling to access the activities and this ensured that all pupils could complete the learning being provided to them.
- All staff were readily available on the phone, email and through Teams, to discuss any anxieties or offer support to parents. Staff answered queries about IT equipment, provided support with form filling, gave ideas for engaging children and regularly just 'chatted' with the parents and children over the phone or through emails. Parents and staff shared pictures and videos through Twitter, Teams and Purple Mash.
- We also ensured that the latest guidance and support provided by the Government/Local Authority was promptly shared with parents so that they could access schemes such as free school meals and key worker status.

Sali Davies, Cwmaber Infants, Caerphilly