



high school
braes



Family Engagement in Secondary Schools

Advice and Guidance Resource

August 2024

For Scotland's learners with Scotland's educators

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1. Background

Under the [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#), local authorities are required to have a strategy outlining how they will involve parents and families in the wider life of the school and meaningfully engage them in their child(ren)'s learning.

Involving and engaging parents in the wider life of the school along with their child's and their own learning is important to improve outcomes for children and families. Research clearly shows positive impacts on areas such as children's behaviour, attainment, attendance, confidence, health and wellbeing and aspirations when their parents and families are actively and meaningfully engaged in their learning.

[Family Learning](#) has been utilised throughout Scotland as an approach to support increased parental engagement and act as a catalyst to re-engage parents with their own lifelong learning journey. This is particularly important where there is an identified generational issue with low educational attainment, poverty and low self-efficacy.

Intelligence gathered from a range of sources identified the need to support the secondary sector with Family Engagement. This was further highlighted in the [Parental Involvement and Engagement Census](#) which indicated a lack of opportunities for parents to be actively and meaningfully involved in the wider life of the school and their child's and their own learning. Parents indicated strongly in the census, their request for more opportunities to be involved and engaged with their child's school and their learning. However, research highlights that this can be more challenging to achieve in the secondary sector for a number of reasons including work commitments, childcare, language barriers, lack of confidence, timing of events, cost and travel.

To address this, Education Scotland worked with Braes High School, Lornshill Academy and Dunoon Grammar School to scope out how we can support the secondary sector to develop their own strategies to meaningfully engage parents and families. All three secondary schools involved in designing this resource were identified as having strong Parental Engagement Strategies and have embedded Family Learning opportunities throughout transition processes and year stages.

Throughout the resource, the term 'Family Engagement' is used. This is to provide an umbrella term for all schools to capture the breath of active and meaningful engagement with parents and

families. Effective 'Family Engagement' extends across sectors and reinforces learning in multiple settings where children and families learn including at home, in settings, schools and the community. While the role of parents will change as children grow and develop into adulthood, 'Family Engagement' is continuous throughout their life. As with Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home, Family Engagement is a shared responsibility for settings, schools and communities.

2. The Four Key Areas of Family Engagement

Several key areas for successful engagement with families were identified across the three secondary schools. For the purposes of this resource, it was agreed to focus on four specific areas for Family Engagement. It should be noted that within secondary schools and settings, these key areas may differ according to demographics and specific needs of families. Further information can be found in the three case study exemplars below.

2.1 Working together for improvement

Direct feedback highlighted that parents and families appreciated opportunities to be actively and meaningfully involved in the wider life of the school. To enable them to do so, communication with families should be multifaceted, clear and concise and include regular feedback on how their views are represented within school policy and planning.

Improvement planning works best when consideration is given to specific strands and perspectives. These included hearing from parents, pupils, staff and considering the priorities for the school.

Calendar opportunities

- Provide regular opportunities for families to join in and have their say, and make these clear on school calendars/documents.

Show the impact

- Rather than families thinking so what? Share the impact that their input has had on the school and decision-making processes.

Be open to feedback

- Feedback from families can be wide ranging so be receptive to all feedback and use it as an opportunity to reflect on what's happening in your school.

Embed into improvement plans

- Incorporate elements of family feedback and ensure this just becomes part of the thinking across all areas.

Examples

- Calendar - utilise your school calendar to integrate Parent Council meetings and family focus groups to build opportunities to contribute to improvement openly and honestly.
- Impact- show the impact families have by making visible through "You said, we did" noticeboards and online platforms.
- Improvement plans - consider how to use family focus groups or questionnaires as part of the review process across each priority.

Testimonials

"It is clear that the school values what we have to say. The fact we get so many opportunities to feed into such a variety of topics is brilliant" (**S4 Family**).

"Families seem to appreciate what we do to bring them into the life of the school, we can't wait to plan even more opportunities for them to do so" (**Teaching staff**).

"We really appreciate the school taking our views into account when deciding what the priorities are to be next year" (**Families**).

Lornshill Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) Plans

We are using our Pupil Equity Funding in the following ways:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To work better with our primaries so we really know our young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To develop our staff by focusing on improving learning and teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help our students understand how to learn successfully	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help us ensure all students are engaged in their education

2.2 Building relationships

Parents and families value positive and meaningful relationships with school staff. These should be nurtured prior to pupils transitioning to the school and continue to be developed throughout the child's learning journey. Pupils benefit from and settle into secondary school more easily when they see collegial relationships and closer partnership working continuing to develop between home and school. This in turn helps any issues to be addressed at an early stage.

Staff working with parents and families should be aware of the provision within the community that also support their parents and families. Working together as a community ensures that families can access to right support at the right time and be responsive to changing needs.

Know your community

- Consider how your engagement with families addresses the attainment gap whilst taking into account the context of your community.

How family engagement is operated

- Families should be involved at every opportunity so communication platforms that are being used should be accessible to all.

Make participation easy

- Think about how you promote events to families whilst being aware of the barriers they may face.

Get in early

- Utilise and build upon opportunities that key transition phases provide to support families.

Examples

Know your community

- Be aware of the context and use different groups in your local community to support families. Examples could include working with local/national charitable organisations.

How Parental Engagement is operated

- Engage families by being flexible in how these are accommodated. For example, consider the timings, locations and settings through open mornings and informal events. Many families may find attendance difficult for many reasons so speak with families and find out what they want and need.

Make participation easy

- Provide a variety of opportunities and use these to collate the opinions of our families. For example, during parents' evenings conducting small-scale surveys.

Get in early

- Establish early connection through P7 transition events, enhanced transitions for pupils that require additional support and a follow up S1 event. Use the first few months to make meaningful connections.

Testimonials

"If you hadn't kept phoning and coming around, I wouldn't be sitting here, filling in an application for a job. Thanks for doing that" (**Ex-pupil**).

"It's been great to see how the school uses our feedback to help students and shows us what difference our comments make" (**S3 Family**).

Braes High School

Ideas on how to reduce the cost of the school day	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Free School Meals and School Clothing Grants https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/schools-education/education-benefits-support/free-school-meals-clothing-grants/	
Get help to apply by contacting: @BRAESHIGH or @ONANDUPBHS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Free period products: https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/people-communities/free-period-products.aspx	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learn 'n' earn with EMA: https://www.gov.scot/policies/young-people-training-employment/education-maintenance-allowances/

2.3 Family friendly communication

Parents and families are not a homogenous group. It is important therefore that schools develop a robust engagement strategy that takes account of differing parental communication needs and requirements. This can include the needs of English as a second language, additional support needs families, British Sign Language families, travelling community, and service families.

Appropriate communication

- Ensure communication is tailored to families by ascertaining what is appropriate and accessible to families.

Tailored offers

- Ensure communication is appropriate and varied by focusing on factors such as location, time and technology.

Listen and show

- Ensure communication received from families directly informs future planning and feed this back to them frequently.

Regular communication

- Build regular, consistent and open channels of communication to continually engage families.

Examples

Appropriate communication

- Adapt communications to remove subject-specific language, abbreviations and unnecessary jargon.

Tailored offers

- Seek family input when considering location and utilise local facilities such as sports halls and community centres. Aim to provide different meetings at different times to fit around schedules and provide child-friendly activities for those with young families.

Listen and show

- Provide feedback on how their ideas have been implemented and allow families to get involved in the implementation of their ideas. If ideas aren't feasible, explain why.

Regular communication

- Utilise alternative methods of communication that allow for regular contact. This could be dedicated sections of newsletters or group calls; local notice boards in shops and organised community events.

Testimonials

"I've made good friends, and we now have our own wee support group chat" (**Parent from Brew and Blether Group**).

"It's been great to see how the school uses our feedback to help students and shows us what difference our comments make" (**Families**).

"It is clear that the school really values what we have to say. The fact we get so many opportunities to feed into such a variety of topics is brilliant" (**Families**).

Braes High School

Family Support	
Braes Learning Together – Family Group	Family Learning Room
Learning together through Flourish	Barnardo's
Onwards & Upwards	Family Learning Calendar
Braes on Screen – School events on YouTube	Braes Bites Home Learning Videos

2.4 Learning together

Providing opportunities for families to learn together can impact not only the child but also re-ignite a parent's love of learning. It can support and encourage learning that takes place at home or in the community as well as impacting on attainment, attendance, behaviour, and health and wellbeing.

Providing tools and resources

- Consider whether all families have the necessary tools and resources to learn together with their young person.

Create opportunities

- Liaise with departments, faculties and the whole school to identify and create opportunities for families to learn with their young person or learn and teach their young person skills and knowledge.

Building and maintaining skills

- Create and maintain enthusiasm to ensure that learning for families is continuous and provides progression opportunities.

Reduction of barriers

- Support families in reducing potential barriers to learning.

Examples

Providing tools and resources

- utilise funding opportunities that are available (such as Pupil Equity) within your department to reduce the costs of access to education. For example, provide families with cooking utensils for Health and Food technology; access to literature for English; calculators and other tools for Maths.

Create opportunities

- have an awareness of potential opportunities that departments could provide families. For example, Breakfast clubs with family volunteers and members and/or supporting practical experiments in science to prepare for exams.

Building and maintaining skills

- structure opportunities to allow the development of skills. For example, recipes progressing in complexity in breakfast club along with cooking skills badges and certificates; and literature responses becoming more insightful and analytical.

Reducing barriers

- providing a variety of supports to those who require it. For example, overlays and digital supports.

Testimonials

“Coming to the Parent Group made such a difference for me. I left school with no qualifications and hope to get some by coming here” (**Parent/Carer**).

“Two parents/carers in our Brew and Blether group have now achieved their Level 2 Food and Hygiene Certificate” (**Family Learning Co-ordinator**).

"We really enjoyed working with families supporting their understanding of what we do in Maths. It was great to see them working alongside their children on numeracy problems" (**Teaching staff**).

"Giving families the opportunity to cook together has been really rewarding. They've really enjoyed coming into school for a really positive reason and it seems to have helped break down some barriers" (**Teaching staff**).

Braes High School

Financial Support	
Uniform exchange	Meet with our Income Maximisation Officer
Braes Backpacks	Pop Up Shops for clothes and resources
Help to apply for Free School Meals, Clothing Grants and Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)	Take what you need trolleys
Breakfast club	Support with funding for school trips
Digital devices	
Talking about money can be difficult but we are here to help	

3. Case Study Exemplars

In this section you will be able to access examples of strategies used for successful Family Engagement from Braes High School, Lornshill Academy and Dunoon Grammar School. These exemplars can be used as a guide to help support you to develop your own Family Engagement approaches.

[Braes High School, Falkirk Council](#)

[Dunoon Grammar School, Argyll and Bute Council](#)

[Lornshill Academy, Clackmannanshire Council](#)

Further information

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<https://education.gov.scot/learning-in-scotland/programmes/scottish-attainment-challenge/>

Websites

Braes High School - <https://www.braeshigh.com/support-for-families/family-learning>

Dunoon Grammar School - <https://www.dunoongrammar.argyll-bute.sch.uk>

Lornshell Academy - <https://lornshellacademy.org.uk/index.html>

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