

### **The issues:**

- Inequitable support for children
- Barriers to parental engagement

**Long-term aim** - To work in partnership with external agencies to improve educational outcomes for children through addressing barriers to parental engagement. The issue addressed through the strategic change initiative was *inequitable support for children*. I began to address this problem within our establishment by working in partnership with external agencies to improve educational outcomes for children, through addressing barriers to parental engagement.

### **Short term objective 1: To engage with the wider educational community regarding partnership working**

I communicated with various educational practitioners throughout the engagement process in a bid to make improvements. Attending Education Scotland's *Learning Conversation Day*, at Ayr Racecourse, was one opportunity to consult a range of professionals. During this event I successfully gained ideas to promote good practice with regards to parental involvement and engagement. Through discussion, colleagues and I discussed how beneficial a Support Directory to help support parents address barriers to engagement would be.

### **Short term objective 2: To engage with parents and staff regarding partnership working**

Engaging with parents initially proved to be challenging. Due to sections of parental questionnaires being unanswered I gained limited information. But that was only one approach, so in an attempt to build on some of the issues presented through the questionnaire I organised a *Focus Group*. Attendance was poor. As a final attempt, I further consulted the Parent Council. I was hoping not to rely solely on their input as the Parent Council at this point in time did not represent a true reflection of the parent body. However, in an attempt to ensure some parents were involved in the engagement process, and to allow them to have their say, I used a Parent Council meeting as a face-to-face opportunity. I reminded them that parental engagement/involvement was a priority on our school improvement plan, discussed the associated actions that needed to be met and promoted the benefits of being involved. As a result, the parents were motivated. From this meeting, I established their support in organising and assisting up and coming parental involvement opportunities. I also went into the playground and personally invited parents to future meetings in a bid to promote diversity amongst the Parent Council. As a result of these efforts our numbers have grown to between 10 and 15 regular members.

Through the questionnaire administered to parents, the majority overwhelmingly requested that a text messaging system be set up as a method of communication. This has since been established and has proven to be more efficient than sending letters home, increasing our level of parental involvement.

In an attempt to identify specific strengths and next steps around parental engagement, I carried out a self-evaluation exercise using *How Good Is Our School 4* (Education Scotland, 2016). On reflection of the strengths and next steps collated it became apparent that I had to address staff's perception of what constitutes effective partnership working in order to allow change to happen. Staff were very familiar with the benefits of partners supporting the school, however they were not as aware of the benefits of a two-way partnership where the school plays an

active role in supporting the community. Reflecting on research I provided a professional learning opportunity for staff in a bid to challenge their existing beliefs and practices around partnership working and to prepare and re-assure them about the change in practice they would face through the implementation of the strategic change initiative. As a result of the professional learning resource, it became clear through conversation, that staff were not resistant to partnership working being a two-way process. For most, they were simply used to the status quo, and had not considered the benefits of partnership being mutually beneficial.

**Short term objective 3: To devise and implement a strategy for effective partnership working**

Our Nurture teacher and Community Practitioner took on the role of collating the support agency contacts into a *Support Directory*. They had existing knowledge of some agencies and they had the necessary communication skills to collaborate successfully with them to find out more information if required.

The senior management team then analysed a range of information in a data analysis exercise, in a bid to identify the parents that were not engaging with their children's education and the barriers that were preventing them from doing so. The senior management team continue to use effective data analysis for this purpose. In March 2017, we were able to employ an Early Years Practitioner (Community) using our Pupil Equity Funding. With the Early Years Practitioner Community's support, we are able to address these barriers. The Support Wheel is used as a tool to identify possible partners who could work with the school to support families to overcome barriers to engagement. As we continue to build relationships, we will further establish and sustain collaborative working to support the enhancement of teaching and learning using a targeted approach.

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