

Engaging parents and families to improve attendance in school

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1.1 Who is this resource for?

This resource is intended to support practitioners and educators in settings, schools and local authorities who work with parents and families to improve attendance at school. It will also support delivery of the vision for Scottish education to raise attainment and improve outcomes for children, young people and families. At the heart of the resource is relationships based on trust, meaningful and open communication, mutual respect and collaboration. This work is by its very nature ongoing and so this resource will support continuous improvement and progress.

1.2 How to use this resource

This resource provides some background context and information for practitioners and educators who work with parents and families and/or who are involved in improving school attendance. Practitioners and educators may also wish to access other resources, key documents, legislation, and research from the [Parents and Families](#) theme page such as reviews, frameworks, case studies, wakelets and toolkits.

1.3 How was this resource developed?

This resource has been developed in partnership between Education Scotland, Scottish Government, partner and stakeholder groups, Parental Engagement Officers, Family Learning practitioners, parents and families, children and young people.

1.4 Guiding principles and policy frameworks

A key finding from '[The Improving Attendance: Understanding the Issues](#)' Report (2023) highlighted the need for schools to work in partnership with parents and families to remove barriers that impact on school attendance. Additionally, Action 2 of the report stresses the need to consider information from parents and families on the reasons for children and young people not attending school. Further research was then commissioned by Scottish Government to gather the views of parents and families, to inform future communications activity. Details of the findings are outlined in Section 2 below.

The Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework [Parent Communication Plan](#) (2016) sets out the principles that should underpin all communication with parents, carers and families. These principles were developed in partnership with national parenting organisations

and they capture examples of good practice in communicating with parents which is essential when children and young people are absent from school or not engaged in their learning.

Although this is a national communications plan, the principles are relevant at a local authority and school level. The principles are:

- simplicity and clarity
- transparency
- relevance
- partnership
- flexibility and adaptation
- timeliness

The National Improvement Framework Parent Communication Plan (2016) focuses on three key priorities. These are:

- Priority 1 Explaining what the National Improvement Framework is, why it has been developed and where it is relevant to parents
- Priority 2 Answering the questions that are most important to parents and families
- Priority 3 Supporting good quality dialogue between parents, teachers and headteachers

1.5 Legislation and guidance on school attendance and the right to a full-time education

The [Schools General \(Scotland\) Regulations 1975](#) stipulates that ‘an attendance register shall be kept at every school attended by any day pupils’ (Regulation 9).

The [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#) sets out the legal framework for the provision of education in Scotland. Under these provisions, it is the duty of every local authority to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education. Additionally, it is the duty of the parent of every child of school age, to provide efficient education for their child which is suitable to their age, ability and aptitude. This education can be provided through their child or young person of school age attending a public school regularly, or by other means (Provision 30).

School age in Scotland is defined in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 as a person who has attained the age of five and has not attained the age of sixteen (Provision 31).

The law in Scotland entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient education which is suitable to their age, ability and aptitude. [Articles 28 and 29](#) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child focus on the child's right to an education and on the quality and content of education.

All children of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In specific circumstances, pupils may receive their education partially from one school and partly at another educational setting. The only criteria for reduced learning hours under [Section 21](#) of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 is:

- where the pupil's wellbeing would be adversely affected
- where matters out with the authority's control make it impracticable to make the prescribed hours available
- where other circumstances that Ministers may prescribe by regulations apply.

A part-time timetable can also be used as part of a phased return from exclusion. More information on interrupted learning is available on [Parentzone Scotland](#).

The [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act](#) came into force in 2006. Within the Act, Scottish Ministers and local authorities have a duty to promote the involvement and engagement of parents in their child's ELC setting or school, and their learning. The Act recognises the benefits of involving parents in the wider life of the school and the vital role they play in supporting their children's learning. Providing and strengthening the framework to support parental involvement and engagement is therefore a key focus of the Act. Parents are encouraged to express their views and have these taken into account not just on matters affecting the education of their children but also the school's arrangements for promoting parental involvement and engagement, as well as other matters or issues of interest to parents.

Scottish Government's national guidance [Included, Engaged and Involved \(Part 1\)](#) (2019) provides a focus on approaches that can be used to ensure that attendance at school is clearly linked to the overall approaches to promoting positive relationships and behaviour and ensuring all children and young people are included, engaged and involved in their education.

1.6 Terms

'Parent(s)' – The term 'parent(s)' in this document refers to people with parental responsibilities (within the meaning of Section 1(3) of the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#)) and others who care for or look after children or young people. A person with 'parental responsibilities' refers to someone with the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child. Individual family units will comprise a wider range of people who might also contribute and support a child's learning at home, in the community and in settings or schools.

'Child' – For the purposes of support for children and families, 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years.

'Family' – In relation to a child, family includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom the child has been living ([Children \(Scotland\) Regulations, 1995](#)).

2. Reflections from research

2.1 Research commissioned by Scottish Government

Qualitative research was commissioned by Scottish Government during the summer of 2024 with 64 parents and 18 children and young people in Primary 7 to S4. Interviews were undertaken via online group discussions (parents) and online in-depth interviews (pupils)¹. The purpose of the research was to:

- generate a greater understanding of the barriers and motivators for parents (and pupils) around school attendance
- explore current interactions and relationships between schools, parents and pupils, and look at how interactions can be improved in relation to school attendance
- investigate what parents and pupils feel they need and want to improve school attendance
- explore who has the greatest scope for influencing school attendance
- explore reactions to different message territories (these are key ideas or topics that help guide what to say and how to say it)
- overall, determine which territory or territories have the greatest scope to prompt action across the audience.

The research identified five main reasons for children and young people not attending school. These were:

1. The child or young person dislikes school and sees no value in it. For example, they feel bored, prefer practical learning, find it too theoretical and perceive school to not be useful, and not for them. Many of these children or young person regarded themselves as 'non-academic'.
2. The child or young person does not feel like they fit in. For example, due to falling out with other children, being excluded by friend groups, extreme introverts, bullying issues.

¹ Research was undertaken by an independent research agency, JRS Research Consortium. Fieldwork was conducted 9-25 July 2024. Parents and pupils were in [socioeconomic groups C2DE](#). The sample was skewed towards those who were persistently absent.

3. The child or young person feels they have unmet Additional Support Needs or needs support. For example, un/diagnosed condition, home circumstances such as being a young carer.
4. The child or young person has difficulties with their mental health. It should be noted that mental health issues can be the cause or effect of absenteeism and can be a thread running through the above four reasons for not attending school.
5. Parents believe it is ok for their children or young person to miss school because they consider there is something better for them to do. For example, to attend another learning opportunity such as dance classes or football training for children or young people aspiring in these areas. This also includes those who miss school for cheaper term-time holidays that they would otherwise be unable to afford. This reason was not as common as the reasons above and, the research suggested:
 - it was more likely to be used by parents whose child or young person have relatively lower levels of non-attendance (that is for parents whose child or young person's attendance was 90-95%)
 - this reason for missing school overlaps with the other reasons for absenteeism.

Parental barriers to engaging with their child's school

Parents who participated in the research and who wanted the school to support them increase their child's attendance, identified three key barriers which they felt were preventing them from engaging with their child's school. These were:

- some parents believe that the school cannot help, with many recognising that schools do not have the resources to deal with the challenges they face, in a meaningful way
- parents don't know what to expect. They often feel powerless. Some may have tried to engage with their child's school, nothing has changed, or their child's attendance has deteriorated further. Parents may not know what they can or should ask for, or what they are entitled to. They know that there is no one-size-fits-all but they do not know how to find the right solution for their child
- the belief that there is no unified front - some parents feel that they have to tackle this on their own. Both parents and pupils can feel left out of finding a solution to improving attendance. They would prefer a more unified approach, with parents, pupils and the school working together in partnership to improve attendance

Parents would like to have information on alternative options for their child and suggested a number of options such as:

- get out of class cards (to support mental wellbeing)
- use of a wellbeing zone or access to an alternative learning hub
- access to a member of staff who can support their wellbeing
- access to additional support to meet their needs (for a child or young person with additional support needs)
- flexible timetables
- flexible programmes such as a combination of school and work experience, volunteering, day release at college etc.

To address the attendance issue, parents would like schools to consider:

- minimising generic messaging around mental health, and isolation because of bullying, as this is not relevant for all pupils who do not attend school. They did, however, recognise that providing information for children and young people about how to reduce stress and manage anxiety would be helpful
- avoiding messages that blame or make parents feel guilty about their child's attendance. For example, by implying that (all) parents are happy for their children to miss school or that all responsibility for absenteeism rests with the parents, will alienate those who understand the importance of school but still struggle to support their child to attend
- avoiding messaging that parents who have tried hard to get their child to attend school may find patronising. For example, talking about the benefits of attendance
- being cognisant of the complex issues that lie behind young people not attending school. Avoid too much focus specifically on generic messaging about 'mental health', and isolation because of bullying, as these will not be relevant for all pupils who do not attend school. The parents did, however, recognise that providing information for children and young people about how to reduce stress and manage anxiety would be helpful
- offering practical support
- avoid implying that attendance issues is solely the responsibility of the parents. Instead, show that the school is keen to address the issues through a unified front with parents, pupils and the school working together

- promoting messages such as ‘Together we can make a difference’ and ‘Support is available at your child’s school’
- offering more information, potentially through school websites or social media pages, can help parents meaningfully engage with the school

Parents, families, children and young people also felt that settings and schools should focus on support. While this may not result in improved attendance at school immediately, a commitment and united approach from all parties was felt likely to improve attendance longer term.

Talking directly about mental health in an accessible way and providing information, helped reduce stress and anxiety for children and young people.

2.2 Key message

While this research has highlighted a number of key reasons for non-attendance this is not an exhaustive list. Settings and schools should undertake their own consultation with parents, families, children and young people in their own learning community to obtain more specific contextual intelligence. This will help interventions to be tailored to the needs of the children, young people, parents and families.

3. Building strong relationships and working in partnership with parents and families

Developing relationships and building the capacity of Scotland's parents to improve the life chances of children and young people is key to improving attendance and raising attainment. Practitioners from a range of backgrounds and sectors including family learning, home-school link, community learning and development, colleges, third sector, ELC settings, schools, local authorities, family support, health, and social services can help build parental capacity. Establishing and maintaining positive and effective relationships between parents, families, settings and schools is everyone's responsibility.

Working with individual parents, families and parent groups to build relationships, identify needs, establish support and services at a universal level is a key first step before extending this to targeted or additional interventions and parenting and family support. The importance of, and time required, to build relationships and establish trust with families should not be underestimated. Additionally, relevant, effective and timely communication with parents and families through disseminating information will help them progress to more targeted interventions.

Some parents and families may find it more difficult to engage with their child's setting or school. For example, parents and families for whom English is a second or other language, or parents with an additional support need. Additionally, parents and families from different cultural backgrounds may be unaware of the legal requirements in Scotland for children and young people to attend school. Practitioners and educators may wish to consider some of the following approaches as ways of engaging.

3.1 Utilising a Family Learning approach

Family learning is an approach that supports improved attainment and excellence and equity which leads to positive outcomes for adults and children and young people. Family learning, although offered as universal provision with open access, can also be utilised as an early intervention and prevention approach which reaches the most disadvantaged communities. Family learning helps close the attainment gap through breaking the inter-generational cycles of deprivation and low attainment. The effects of family learning are known to extend beyond the duration of the intervention and provide lasting impacts and improved outcomes.

Providing opportunities for families to learn together can impact not only the child or young person, 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.

Learning outcomes and benefits resulting from family learning approaches can be categorised into five key areas: new skills; increased confidence and understanding; improved communication; changed behaviours; and changed relationships with community and family. Family learning also facilitates increased parental participation and engagement, improved school attendance, reduces persistent absenteeism and can increase pupils' attainment. The wider outcomes of family learning are shown through skills development, employability, progression into further education opportunities, and interactions within the family, as well as improvements in parental confidence and parenting skills.

A family learning approach gives parents, families, children and young people the tools from which they can continue to learn at home together.

Further information can be found in the Family Learning [Review](#) and [Framework](#).

3.2 Home-school link partnerships

Schools and local authorities may have access either within their setting or school to other services and partners that can help support parents and families who find it challenging to engage in their child's learning and feel excluded from the work and life of their child's early learning and childcare (ELC) setting or school. Supporting and encouraging parents and families through all stages of their child's learning journey is important. When parents, families, home-school link workers, partners, staff in ELC settings/schools work and learn together, this helps build relationships, fosters positive attitudes, makes a difference and improves outcomes.

3.3 Cost of the School Day

The Child Poverty Action Group launched a revised [Toolkit](#) which is designed to raise awareness of the Cost of the School Day. It aims to help settings, schools and the wider learning community review and make changes to the Cost of the School Day. Every setting and school is unique and the Toolkit will help practitioners and educators develop plans that reflect

their local community and context. The Toolkit sets out the Cost of the School Day process in five straightforward steps. It features: editable action plans; updated information; resources to facilitate whole school conversations about the barriers that costs create and how to tackle them; and practice suggestions. Further work is required to continue raising awareness of the revised toolkit and ensure that settings and schools are taking this forward.

3.4 Understanding protected characteristics

Research commissioned by Scottish Government suggests that some families within the protected characteristics group may be at a higher risk of increased absenteeism. This has been linked to increased mental health issues, post COVID-19, social media influences and bullying. Practitioners should be aware of the different demographics within the protected characteristics groups to develop early intervention and prevention strategies informed through working with parents and families.

3.5 Transitions

For many children and young people transitions can result in non-attendance for a variety of reasons including anxiety, stress and additional support needs. Parents and families can equally be affected in the same ways during transition stages.

Consideration should be given to the effects of transitions at key stages for children, young people, parents and families. Ongoing support should be made available at the earliest stage and throughout the transition process. This will help mitigate the risk of non-attendance.

Further information to support parents is available on [Parentzone Scotland](#) website.

3.6 Key messages for communicating with parents and families

Listed below are key messages from the research in Section 2 which can inform and support practitioners and educators who work with children and young people, parents and families in this area.

Things that make a difference:

- parents, pupils and schools working together as a team towards a shared goal
- building relationships in a sensitive and supportive manner, being cognisant of the individual barriers and needs of families
- acknowledging and building on parents' efforts to get their child or young person to school
- providing meaningful and holistic practical support and strategies
- messaging that highlights to parents that they are not in it alone. Schools should be viewed as a partner and as a source of support
- acknowledging that improving school attendance may not be a 'quick fix'
- being clear and concise about the focus of any communication with parents and families around non-attendance
- demonstrating the desire to work with parents and families to help pupils overcome any anxieties that may be impacting attendance through supportive and relevant coping strategies
- recognising and reflecting the journey of improving attendance. Parents and pupils may not know that improving attendance can take time and may need a variety of strategies to be successful. It is important that this is communicated to set realistic expectations

Things that will not make a positive difference:

- over focusing communications on mental health and isolation through bullying, as this is not applicable to all non-attenders
- patronising communications and messaging that lacks empathy
- general messages about the benefits of high levels of attendance
- making parents feel that the matter of non-attendance rests entirely with them
- making parents, children and young people feel that attending school is the only option where there is a serious situation or mental health crisis that needs to be addressed first

3.7 Aligning a shared vision

Findings from research undertaken by the Brookings Institute showed that aligning 'around a shared vision of the purpose of school is a powerful way for schools and families to shape the deep structures guiding how schools operate.....collectively defining and aligning the purpose

of education, and the values that drive it, are among the essential enablers of system-wide transformation' (Winthrop et al, 2021, p13-14). The findings also show that 'parents....have a unique set of beliefs and expectations – and that frequently there is misalignment between parents and teachers' (Winthrop et al, 2021, p68).

Given the numerous challenges during COVID-19, it seems the right time for practitioners and educators to collaborate with children, young people, parents, families and learning communities to re/align beliefs to support a united holistic vision of education in their setting or school. International research indicates that 'parents' beliefs about school are dynamic' and change 'greatly with their children's age' (Winthrop et al, 2021, p84). Exploring this across Scotland will not only strengthen collaborative working but help early learning and childcare settings and schools to consider next steps and plan for the future.

It is important therefore that cognisance is taken of this and work continues to re/build the school community and create an inviting environment for parents and families which is predicated on being welcoming and approachable. This will support any re-engagement strategies which are implemented. For many settings and schools, engagement with parents and families has increased in a variety of ways including through their Parent Council, online forums and family learning programmes both online and in person. Building on this good work which has already taken place should be encouraged as settings and schools move forward together with children, young people parents and families.

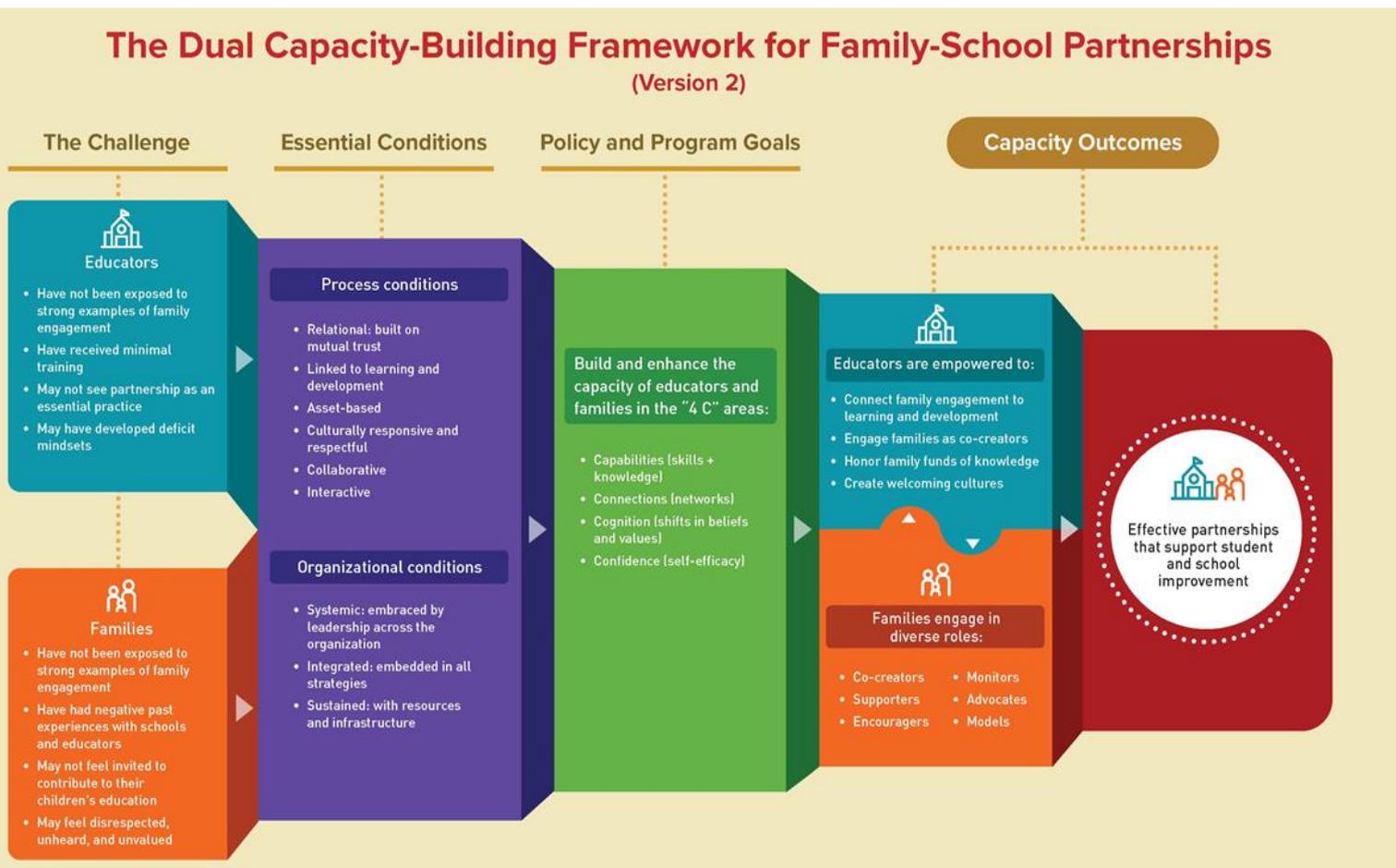
Dual-capacity building framework

In 2014, Dr Karen Mapp released a pioneering framework to help settings and schools productively and equitably engage parents in their children's learning experience. Following the collation of evidence on the ways that the guidance was and could be used, a revised version was then released in 2019 which places trust at the core. It is designed to support the development of parental engagement strategies, policies and programmes.

The Dual Capacity Framework below (Figure 1) can be used by settings, schools and local authorities when developing or reviewing their Parental Engagement Strategies. This Framework (2019 revised version) can be viewed as a compass to lay out the goals and conditions necessary to chart a path towards effective parental engagement efforts which are then linked to raising attainment and school improvement.

Further information and a [video guide](#) showing how practitioners and educators can use the Framework to build trust with families can be found on [Harvard Graduate School of Education's website](#). As per the legislative requirements in Scotland, parents and families should be encouraged to be part of the process to develop and review Parental Involvement and Engagement strategies.

Figure 1: Dual Capacity-Building Framework (For a full descri



(See Appendix 1 for text in the above diagram)

3.8 'The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better'

Extensive research (Anderson and Winthrop, 2025) has been undertaken to understand why so many adolescents are disengaged from learning. It highlights that in or out of school, young people will require learning environments and opportunities which deeply engage them in their learning.

To support practitioners to understand why adolescents are disengaging they identified four modes of learning which young people use to navigate through the shifting academic demands and social dynamics of school. Understanding a child or young person's mode of engagement is necessary to support their success in school and nurture their ability to drive their own learning both now and in the future. The four modes of engagement are described below:

Resister mode: When children and young people resist, they struggle silently with profound feelings of inadequacy or invisibility, which they communicate by ignoring homework, playing sick, skipping class, or acting out.

Passenger mode: When children and young people coast along, they consistently do the bare minimum and complain that classes are pointless. They need help connecting school to their skills, interests, or learning needs.

Achiever mode: When children and young people show up, do the work, and get consistently high grades, their self-worth can become tied to high performance. Their disengagement is invisible, fuelling a fear of failure and putting them at risk for mental health challenges. They need help taking on new challenges and encouragement that they matter beyond their achievements.

Explorer mode: When children and young people are driven by internal curiosity rather than just external expectations, they investigate the questions they care about and persist to achieve goals. This is the pinnacle where kids become resilient learners and build skills to help them thrive.

As children and young people get older and more independent, many parents and families can feel powerless to support their child to be actively engaged in their learning. Schools can work with parents and families to support them to understand the different reasons for their child's disengagement and how to work through this together.

4. Developing a plan, policy and guidance

A whole school approach to maximise attendance should be an integral part of the school's ethos and culture. Developing a positive attitude towards learning and the benefits of attending school should be a central part of the school's vision, values and rationale. This is important to develop children and young people's attitudes towards lifelong and life-wide skills and to break generational cycles of non-attendance and poor educational attainment.

When developing or reviewing a local authority or school policy on attendance, settings and schools should engage with the parent forum and Parent Council to obtain a better understanding of potential barriers that may exist at a local and/or family level. Any consultation or engagement should include families from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds. Information on how to effectively develop plans, policies and guidance is available [here](#).

Gathering evidence on attendance data is crucial to inform any plans, policies and guidance that may be developed. Presenting this in an easily understandable way will allow for meaningful discussions with staff, parents, families, children and young people and Parent Council members. Consideration can then be given to developing an action plan to improve school attendance. This should be evaluated and reviewed regularly. It should also form part of the School Improvement Plan.

4.1 Communicating with parents, families, children and young people

Practitioners and educators should be mindful of the circumstances which families are experiencing and be respectful of those who are facing challenges to get their children and young people to school, attend class and be engaged in their learning. Communicating clearly and sensitively with parents, families, children and young people, where appropriate, about the importance of working together to improve attendance at school is vital. Care should be taken not to alienate parents and families who are currently struggling to get their child to attend. Ensuring sufficient time and resource is dedicated to attendance, along with professional learning for practitioners and educators is paramount. Identifying trained practitioners, educators and partners who can work with parents and families, conduct home visits (where appropriate) and collaborate with school leaders will be key to improving attendance.

Setting and communicating high expectations for good attendance and punctuality to pupils, parents and families through a variety of communication methods on a regular basis is important. It is also necessary to recognise the challenges that families face and communicate the school's ability and willingness to work collaboratively with them to support attendance. This will help parents and families to understand what is expected of them and why good attendance at school is important for their child's social, emotional wellbeing as well as their attainment and wider development.

Clarity should be provided on the short- and long-term consequences and educational detriment of not attending school regularly. Reviewing and updating messages, processes and policies on a regular basis is a continuous cycle. A new cohort of parents and families may require new approaches. As part of this, parents and families should be aware of the importance of keeping the school informed if their child is not going to be in school. Early identification is necessary to ensure the safety of children and young people. It will also enable targeted early intervention and prevention strategies to be put in place as quickly as possible. This will help ensure that children and young people who are identified as having minimal absences do not progress to chronic absenteeism.

Parents and Parent Councils should be made aware of the attendance figures within the setting or school and involved in supporting general communications and campaign initiatives to maximise attendance and learning.

Parents, families, children and young people should be assured that any lateness as a result of family circumstances will be treated in a respected, considerate and supportive manner. If children and young people do arrive late or have been absent for a period of time, they should be welcomed and not singled out, made to feel like they have missed out, or are falling behind. This will help mitigate any additional feelings of apprehension about coming to school. When practitioners and educators become aware of any difficulties or challenges, they should be supportive and where required, work in partnership with parents, families, children and young people, other services and agencies to address any barriers. Schools should be cognisant of the fact that additional support may be required to enable the child or young person to catch up with their learning.

Registration and recording lateness will be different in primary schools compared to secondary schools. Providing parents with information about the processes around the recording of

attendance in their child's school is important to provide clarity on what triggers an absence record, where and how this is recorded and what it means for their child. Language and tone used by settings and schools should be supportive and sensitive.

Further information on registration and recording lateness can be found in the [Included, Engaged and Involved \(Part 1\)](#) (2019) national guidance. Information on the responsibilities of parents in relation to a child's attendance at school and support can be found in Scottish Government's '[School attendance: a guide for parents](#)'.

[Parent Club](#) has information for parents about talking to their child's school regarding attendance and strategies to help them support their child.

5. Developing the workforce

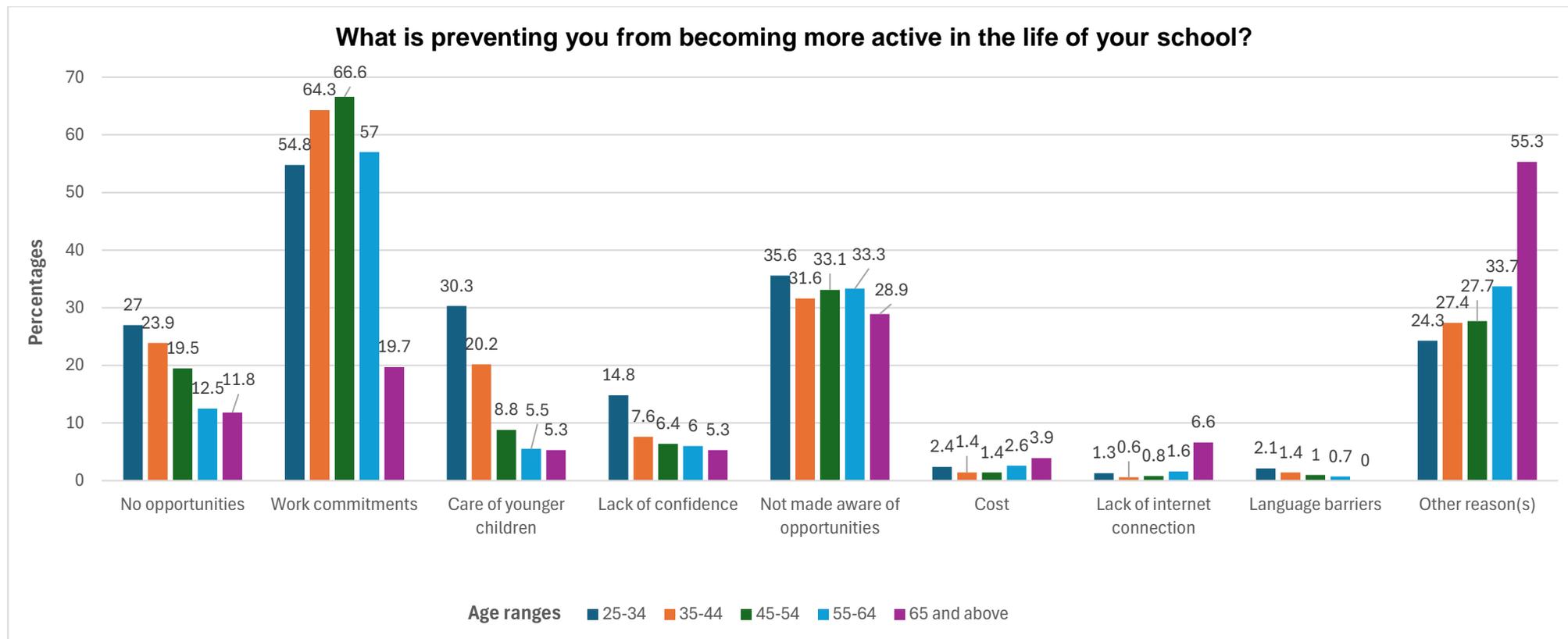
Parents have identified many barriers and factors over the years which has restricted their ability to be more involved and engaged in the life of the setting or school and in their child's learning. These fluctuate from external barriers out with a parent's control, to individual obstacles specific to personal life circumstances. External barriers can be multifaceted. Individual barriers can result from a parent's socio-economic circumstances such as poverty, working patterns, or social exclusion and/or their own learning needs. Some parents have personal assumptions about what their level of involvement or engagement in their child's learning should be (Scottish Executive, 2005). Scottish Government, in close partnership with Education Scotland, national organisations, partners and stakeholder groups, work collaboratively to provide practitioners and educators with the tools to address barriers and engage all families.

Equipping the workforce and ensuring they have access to, and are signposted towards professional learning opportunities, resources, case studies, research and current examples of good practice is vital. It is also important to ensure that staff have the required competencies, skills and values needed to work with parents and families to support their child's and their own learning journey. Developing the workforce can be challenging during ever changing complex economic and financial circumstances but it is crucial to building trusting relationships.

Further information is available in the '[Professional Learning Guide – Involving and engaging parents and families](#)'. This Guide has a specific focus on addressing barriers which might be preventing parents from getting involved in the wider life of their child's setting or school and from engaging in their child's and their own learning. Information is also available in the '[Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners](#)'.

Findings from the [2022 Parental Involvement and Engagement Census](#) identified barriers by age groups, which were preventing parents from becoming more active in the life of their child's school. When engaging with parents and families, practitioners and educators should consider potential barriers as identified in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Barriers to engaging parents and families

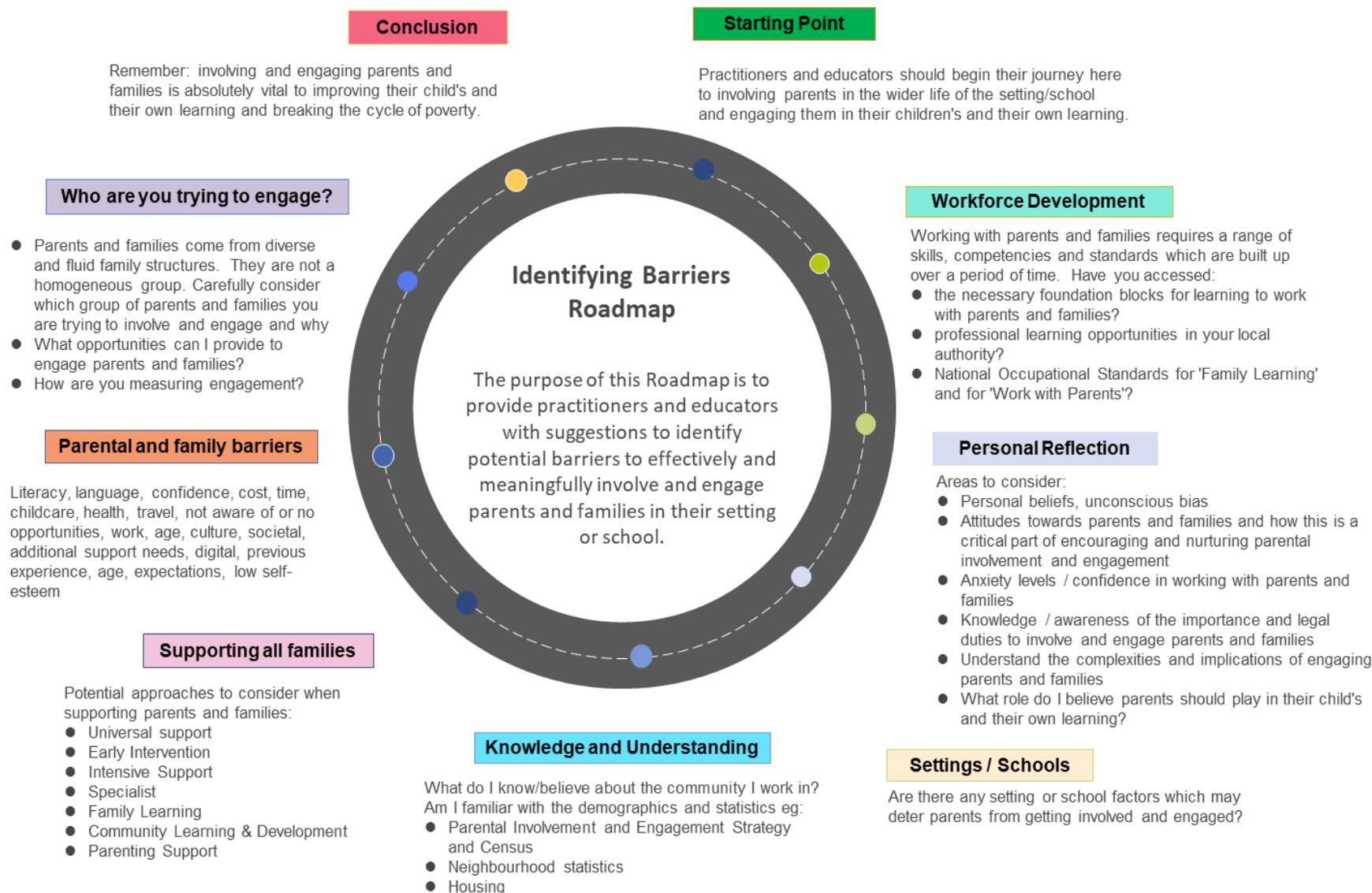


(Figure 2 above shows the barriers parents said were preventing them from becoming more active in the life of their child’s school)

Practitioners and educators are also encouraged to consider the roadmap in Figure 3 below when considering potential barriers to effectively and meaningfully involving and engaging parents and families in attendance.

Further information on engaging parents and families can be found in the [‘Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners’](#), the [‘Professional Learning Guide – Involving and engaging parents and families’](#), and the [‘Family engagement in secondary schools’](#) resources.

Figure 3: Involving and Engaging Parents and Families Roadmap



(See Appendix 2 for text in the above diagram)

5.1 Reflective questions

Settings and schools who are working on improving attendance will all have different starting points and take slightly different approaches. Attendance is everyone's business in settings and schools. Practitioners and educators may wish to consider the following reflective questions when engaging with parents and families about attendance.

Whole school approach

- What is working well in your setting or school in relation to pupils attending school?
- What opportunities are there in your local authority, setting, school or community for pupils and their families to work in partnership and consider attendance issues and barriers?
- How do you ensure your setting or school takes the time to listen to, understand and empathise with pupils and their families about why they are not attending school?
- In what ways does your setting or school set high expectations for all pupils to attend school? Are these expectations communicated clearly and consistently to pupils and their families?
- Are the right people in place and sufficiently trained to have meaningful and sensitive conversations with pupils and their families about attending school?
- To what extent are there systems in place for systematically and accurately recording attendance and analysing for patterns, trends and to identify issues at the earliest stage?
- How does your setting or school evaluate the impact of the work and processes in place with pupils and their families to address school attendance?
- What is your role in contributing to building pupil's attendance and engagement in your setting or school?

Professional learning

- What professional learning do practitioners and educators undertake to be able to work with parents and families?
- Are practitioners and educators skilled and confident in communicating with all parents in a meaningful and sensitive manner, including families in protected characteristics groups?

- Do practitioners and educators have knowledge of relevant information and local resources to support attendance at school?
- Are practitioners and educators confident in ensuring that support to attend school would be tailored to match the individual needs of pupils and their families?

Parents and families

- In what ways can parents and families in your setting or school access information and support their children to attend school?
- How well do you work in partnership with relevant agencies to support the mental health and wellbeing of parents and families in your setting or school and at home?
- In what ways are parents and families made aware of the processes and importance of attending school?
- What opportunities are there for peer mentors and positive role models to speak to children and young people who may be on the cusp or are already refusing to attend school?
- In what ways are you providing opportunities to support parents and families to value and be informed of their child's experiences in school?

Communication

- Have you worked with the Parent Council to identify and develop initiatives for the wider parent forum and school community about school attendance? You may wish to liaise with other settings or schools in your cluster or wider local authority for examples of best practice and what has worked well.
- How well do you pro-actively communicate with families who do not live together and have shared parenting responsibilities to ensure their child attends school?
- Have you involved young people in your communication strategy on attendance, ensuring that their voice is heard?
- How well do you adapt your communications with families to ensure that English as an Additional Language (EAL) families have access to information about school attendance in their own language?
- How well do you consult and communicate with parents, families, social workers, foster and kinship carers and others about school attendance?
- How well do you involve parents in your school Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy to take account of the points above?

Appendix 1 – Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

See Section 3.7 above for the Dual Capacity Framework diagram

The Challenge

Educators

- Have not been exposed to strong examples of family engagement
- Have received minimal training
- May not see partnership as an essential practice
- May have developed deficit mindsets

Families

- Have not been exposed to strong examples of family engagement
- Have had negative past experiences with schools and educators
- May not feel invited to contribute to their children's education
- May feel disrespected, unheard, and unvalued

Essential Conditions

Process Conditions

- Relational: built on mutual respect
- Linked to learning and development
- Asset-based
- Culturally responsive and respectful
- Collaborative
- Interactive

Organisational conditions

- Systematic: embraced by leadership across the organisation
- Integrated: embedded in all strategies
- Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

Policy and Programme Goals

Build and enhance the capacity of educators and families in the “4 C” areas

- Capabilities (skills and knowledge)
- Connections (networks)
- Cognition (shifts in beliefs and values)
- Confidence (self-efficacy)

Capacity Outcomes

Educators are empowered to:

- Connect family engagement to learning and development
- Engage families as co-creators
- Honor family funds of knowledge
- Create welcoming cultures

Families engage in diverse roles:

- Co-creators
- Supporters
- Encouragers
- Monitors
- Advocates
- Models

Effective partnerships that support student and school improvement

Appendix 2 – Involving and Engaging Parents and Families Roadmap

See Section 5 above for the Roadmap diagram

Identifying Barriers Roadmap

The purpose of this Roadmap is to provide practitioners and educators with suggestions to identify potential barriers to effectively and meaningfully involve and engage parents and families in their setting or school.

Starting Point

Practitioners and educators should begin their journey here to involving parents in the wider life of the setting/school and engaging them in their children's and their own learning.

Workforce Development

Working with parents and families requires a range of skills, competencies and standards which are built up over a period of time. Have you accessed:

- the necessary foundation blocks for learning to work with parents and families?
- professional learning opportunities in your local authority?
- National Occupational Standards for 'Family Learning' and for 'Work with Parents'?

Personal Reflection

Areas to consider:

- Personal beliefs, unconscious bias
- Attitudes towards parents and families and how this is a critical part of encouraging and nurturing parental involvement and engagement
- Anxiety levels / confidence in working with parents and families
- Knowledge / awareness of the importance and legal duties to involve and engage parents and families
- Understand the complexities and implications of engaging parents and families
- What role do I believe parents should play in their child's and their own learning?

Settings / Schools

Are there any setting or school factors which may deter parents from getting involved and engaged?

Knowledge and Understanding

What do I know/believe about the community I work in? Am I familiar with the demographics and statistics eg:

- Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy and Census
- Neighbourhood statistics
- Housing

Supporting all families

Potential approaches to consider when supporting parents and families:

- Universal support
- Early Intervention
- Intensive Support
- Specialist
- Family Learning
- Community Learning & Development
- Parenting Support

Parental and family barriers

Literacy, language, confidence, cost, time, childcare, health, travel, not aware of or no opportunities, work, age, culture, societal, additional support needs, digital, previous experience, age, expectations, low self-esteem.

Who are you trying to engage?

- Parents and families come from diverse and fluid family structures. They are not a homogeneous group. Carefully consider which group of parents and families you are trying to involve and engage and why
- What opportunities can I provide to engage parents and families?
- How are you measuring engagement?

Conclusion

Remember: involving and engaging parents and families is absolutely vital to improving their child's and their own learning and breaking the cycle of poverty.

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