

Increasing parental involvement and engagement - Portmoak Primary School

'It is all the little things that make the difference in school and relationships are at the heart of everything'.

(Louise Gordon, Headteacher, Portmoak Primary School, 2018)

This document from Portmoak Primary outlines how the school have changed their approach to involving and engaging parents. Developing and enhancing partnerships with parents and community partners has raised attainment as well as increased parental engagement in their child's learning and wider involvement with the school.

What brought about this change and why?

Previously within the school the majority of parents were not clear about what their child was learning and the progress they were making. There was a lot of work to be done to build staff confidence in sharing learning at home. The Parent Council operated very differently and was more focused on difficulties or issues raised by parents than the supportive partnership which now exists.

Going Digital / Getting Communication Right

Portmoak Primary have moved in a digital direction with their communications over a number of years. The school use the text messaging system for quick questions and text polls as well as to inform and remind parents of key dates and information. Changes were made to ensure that the school had an email address for all parents. Contacting parents to seek permission to use email for school communications was also a useful way to engage parents in the change process. Parents and pupils at Portmoak Primary have engaged well with the digital approach – with 100% uptake on email from parents and 100% of pupils able to be on the well-used twitter feed. Individual conversations were held with parents who were unsure of the new communication methods to provide clarity and reassurance. Notes were taken of any photograph restrictions. Maintaining a tight control over what is tweeted and who has access to this social media platform is essential.

The relationships built as a result of the two-way communications with parents helps ensure issues are more easily responded to and handled with a personal touch.

Parental surveys are run during a parent contact week so that staff can personally ask people to complete it. Email and text reminders are distributed prior to and after the parent contact week and slips are given out on the night. School surveys generally have over 60% return rate. Google forms are used to collate the data and this saves significant administrative time. The high returns of parental feedback allow the majority of parents to have a direct say on the school's improvement work.

Parent Council members help to analyse the results and guide the next steps. Information is fed back to parents via the school newsletter and display boards on 'you said...', and 'we are planning to....' as a result of the survey. Evidencing the action taken as a result of the parent survey continues to increase the response rates each time. A pupil and parent friendly version of the school improvement plan created by House Captains are on display to provide transparency on the areas that the school is working towards.

And Sometimes Not so Digital

If a child is crying first thing in the morning, a quick text later on to let parents know their child has settled will make a big impact to the rest of their day. Children who for whatever reason arrive late to school are met with a smile. A positive welcoming start is always appreciated by everyone!

Parents can be invited into Portmoak Primary either for a more formal type of meeting, focus group or for parent workshop evenings (with parents influencing the titles and content of the workshops). A range of informal opportunities such as:

- a French café
- sharing learning assemblies
- Macmillan open morning
- Book launch
- Termly coffee and catch ups in the library after drop-off – supported by the Parent Council and fundraising team.
- Special guests such as a member of staff from the High School, new own new members of staff, Pupil Support Teacher, members of our support team, community link worker.

These events are great opportunities to help new families build relationships with other parents in the school.

In addition to the annual online survey, exit polls are held at the end of events. This allows quick changes to be made where required. An example would be the queuing system for the Pantomime which was sorted in time for the second performance!

The biggest impact can be found in the smallest of things. Parents are offered a cup of tea when they come for meetings, smiling and chatting to parents at the beginning and end of the school day goes a long way towards building lasting relationships. Parents say they feel more comfortable coming to discuss tricky situations or difficult times as staff are approachable and friendly. Developing positive and effective partnerships with parents as well as increasing parental involvement and engagement happens when parents understand that staff:

- have their child's best interests at heart
- go the extra mile for their child
- do the right thing for the school

Parent Council

Portmoak Parent Council see their role as a supportive one to the work of the school as well as a sounding board for ideas and suggestions.

The Parent Council are also regularly involved in consultations at Local Authority and national level to ensure that the voice of the wider parent forum is represented. Examples of this are the Cost of the School Day analysis and the Governance Review consultation and feedback. Portmoak Parent Council are involved in setting priorities for and contributing to the school improvement plan. Other areas of involvement include: the review of home learning; reviewing class newsletters to include plans home to parents; and decisions on the Daily Mile.

The Parent Council also run a talent bank for parents to offer their skills and interests to the school. This is particularly helpful when support is needed for school trips, gardening or outdoor activities or exemplifying developing the young workforce - skills for life and work – employment – careers.

Our Parent Council run an events and fundraising sub team. Membership of this sub-team is more fluid, with day time meetings to allow parents who can't attend in the evenings to be involved. These fundraising efforts have impacted significantly on children's experiences in school. They have also provided a beautiful and well-resourced school library, a number of iPads and a promethean panel (interactive whiteboard) for every class, as well as events for pupils e.g. school discos.

What is the impact?

We have been successful in creating a community, family friendly ethos in the school. Parents work together in partnership with the school and its community partners. Staff, parents and the wider community are extremely positive about the school and about their role within the improvement plan and journey. Parent surveys are consistently positive, particularly in, for example evaluating parents' happiness with the school, methods of communication, feeling valued and feeling listened to. Partners feel valued and welcome in the school.

Portmoak Primary is a happy place to be for our children and their families.