

# Parent engagement: keeping our families involved



Parental engagement in early years is consistently associated with children's subsequent academic success and social development. **Kirsty Ferguson**, early years class teacher details the importance of parent involvement.

**T**wo years ago, when my colleague and I decided to welcome our families into the classroom every morning, I didn't quite realise the impact and opportunities it would create. The first 30 minutes of the day was named 'Open School' and allowed parents, younger siblings, grandparents and other family members to observe how an early years setting supports their child's development and learning. Initially, I was incredibly apprehensive and nervous about having parents within the classroom everyday. However, it very quickly became one of my favourite times of the day. Parents were exposed to a variety of activities and staff could model and explain the importance of learning through play. I was able to build relationships with families and address any parent query. This eventually led to 'Open Lesson' where we invited parents to watch a phonics lesson and created an

opportunity for them to ask questions directly after. Feedback from parents was very positive and not only did my confidence as a teacher grow but I truly felt the families and I were becoming a team in supporting their child's learning.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 we have not been able to welcome our families into the building this academic year. I found it extremely difficult saying goodbye to families at the gate and being unable to show them the wonders of our classroom. Our first team meetings had us asking the questions; How can we keep our families involved safely? How can we support parents to feel part of their child's learning? What can we do virtually to keep families and schools connected particularly with phonics?

Since the beginning of the new academic year, we started to keep parents involved through 'Focus Days'. Each child in the class would have a day that was led by their interests and a carpet session involving the children sharing pictures from home. The information provided from families allowed us to complete some

fantastic projects and this worked well as a way of keeping parents and children at home connected safely. The children's interests varied from researching Song Thrushes, creating books about Knights, converting our home corner into an ice castle and making posters about Cyprus. This was then followed by a phone call after school which allowed the class teacher to discuss the day's activities and next steps. Parents often commented that they themselves did not learn how to read through phonics and they feel worried they might teach their child the 'wrong thing'. Creating videos and sharing them on our class blog seemed an appropriate first step in modelling initial sounds and blending. Recording myself teaching certainly does not come naturally to me but it is becoming easier each time (and doesn't take me 17 takes each time!). I have more recently recorded a phonics lesson with my current Reception class which is available to parents and new applicants to watch. I plan to use this video to explain to parents what is happening in each stage of the lesson using a voice over. I was delighted to be included in the parental involvement working group this year and will continue to develop and expand on ways to keep our families involved safely. Moving forward and taking everything we have learned from the last year into account, we will endeavour to find the best ways to involve families both virtually and at school. ■

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