

THE STARTING SCHOOLS PROJECT 2008

The Starting Schools Project is part of the DfES strategy for supporting parents** through extended schools, Every Child Matters and Every Parent Matters. It is intended to strengthen and *complement* existing work with parents, children, young people and their families and is therefore not intended to *replace* what may already be happening.

Many families go through a rapid adjustment phase as each child starts school and then later moves to secondary school. There are few opportunities to exchange information and share experiences between parents and schools, especially for families with older children and adolescents. Such contact between parents and schools can be reassuring at a time when families may be uncertain about what to expect.

Starting School information sessions for parents can help to:

- Lay the foundations of effective home/school partnerships
- Give all parents information, ideas and an opportunity to discuss parenting issues.
- Give parents information about local and national services which offer information, advice, help and support.
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Starting school information sessions can often be offered as a single one-off event where parents attending have the chance to:

- Hear about the stages of child development that all children go through
- Meet staff of the school and local agencies
- Take away information about people and organisations that can support children, parents and families.

Starting school parent information sessions contribute to the overall school improvement plan and OFSTED self-evaluation form. To view or download the School Improvement Know How Guide visit:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=10747>

WHY PARENTS MATTER?

Here's a quick question for you. **How much waking time do you think children spend in school between birth and the statutory school leaving age at 16?**

The answer to that question often leaves people rather shocked:

It is only about **15%** - and a fifth of that may also be playtime or between lessons. Therefore parents are responsible for their child/children **85%** of the time.

If you imagine that as a family size pie the school gets a very small slice. In fact by the age of 16 most children have spent more time watching television than they have at school (averaging 14 - 21 hours per week) Now for a few educational and socio-economic stats to support this idea why **parenting support** forms part of the 'core offer' for extended services.

PARENTS' INFLUENCE ON A CHILD'S LIFE CHANCES

At home good parenting has a **bigger** effect on children's achievement at primary level than differences in quality of schools, evident across **all** social classes and all ethnic groups.

Charles Desforges, *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement*, DfES Research Report R433 (2003)

'**Parental interest**' in their child's education has **four** times more influence on attainment at 16 than socio-economic background.

Feinstein, L. & Symonds, J. (1999). *Attainment in secondary school*. Oxford Economic Papers, 51, 300-321

80% of children from the top two socio-economic groups go to university, but only **20%** from the bottom two socio-economic groups.

Higher education minister, Bill Rammell, Education Guardian 16 November 2005.

Less than 30% (28%) of working class children go to university compared with 80% of the top two socio-economic classes.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (Hesa) – www.hesa.ac.uk/

Poor parental supervision is the **biggest** factor in juvenile delinquency.

Uting, D, Bright, J, & Henricson, C, *Crime and the Family*, Family Policy Studies Centre, 1993, pp 13-14

Troublesome behaviour by boys at age 8-10 is one of the best predictors of later delinquency.

Uting et al (1993), *Crime and the Family*, pp 13-14

A child with persistent antisocial behaviour at age 10 will cost, on average, ten times more by age 28 than one with no problems, amounting to £70,000 extra public spending at 1998 prices.

Scott, S., Knapp, M., Henderson, J. and Maugham, B, (2001) *Financial Cons of social exclusion: follow-up study of antisocial children into adulthood*, BMJ 323:191 (28 July)

Research by the Social Exclusion Unit identified "support to children and families in the early years and a key transition points throughout their journey to adulthood" as a way of breaking cycles of disadvantage.

Social Exclusion Unit, *Breaking the Cycle: Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future*, Office of Deputy Prime Minister (Code: 04SEU02456), Sept 2004, Summary.

Family relationships are the **most important** single factor affecting personal happiness.

World Values Surveys, Eurobarometer & US General Social Surveys, cited in Lanyard, Richard: *Happiness: Lessons from a new Science* (2006), Penguin.

SO WHAT DO PARENTS WANT?

50 – 60 % of parents said they want **more** information about bringing up children.
Parentline plus – Ipsos MORI

Most parents want specific, practical information on specific things they can do at home to help their child learn and do well at school.

They also want:

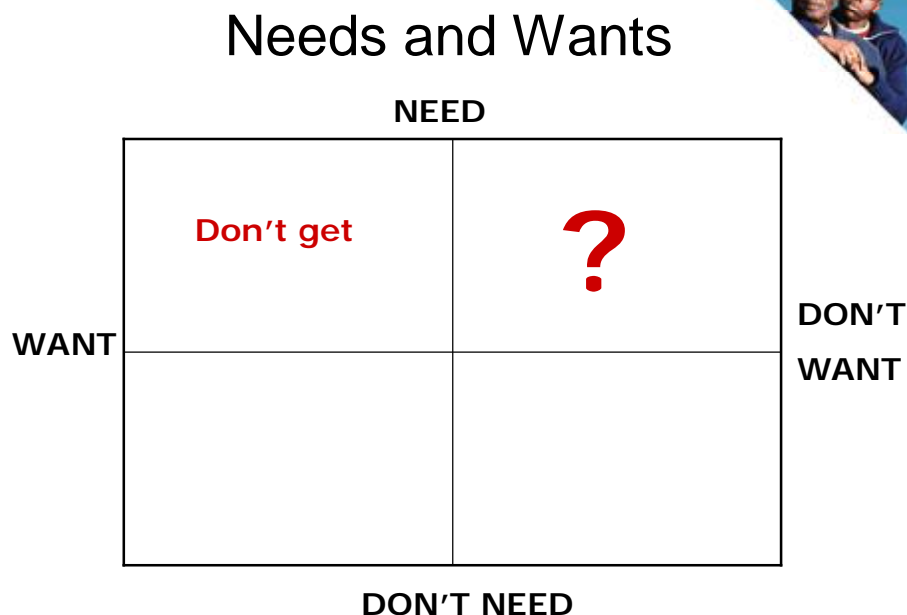
- Flexible services which acknowledge their busy & pressured lives
- To be listened to and treated with respect
- Services that recognise that they have needs which may be different from those of their children

Parents highlight significant gaps in current support, particularly for special needs, relationships, finance, help with transport (especially in rural areas) and opportunities for respite.

Moorman, A. & Ball, M., Ed. Henricson, C., *Understanding Parents Needs: a review of parents' surveys*, National Family and Parenting Institute, 2001.

So what is it that parents worry about when their child starts secondary school?

Getting bullied – 53%
Drinking/drugs/smoking – 20%
Whether the child will be happy there – 17%
Making friends – 15%
Peer pressure – 13%
Getting in with the wrong crowd – 13%
Whether their child will do well academically – 11%
Parentline plus – Ipsos MORI



WHAT IS A PARENT INFORMATION SESSION?

The Starting School information session is often (although not always) a single, one-off hour long session for parents of children settling into primary school or moving onto secondary school. Schools and indeed the communities they serve are very diverse across Hampshire, therefore the information sessions should be tailored to the community the school serves.

The first consideration is how the school reaches *all* parents at transition. Consider for instance:

Working parents

'Hard to reach' parents/carers

Parents who may have special needs (mobility, sensory loss etc.)

Black & ethnic minorities

Speakers of other first languages, and

Parents who simply don't come to things.

Therefore would it be worthwhile considering adapting an existing session where parents traditionally *do* turn up?

Now consider the following questions...

What information do parents already receive at transition?

How does the school monitor that this is the information parents actually *want*?

Are parents asked what sort of information and advice may be useful?

Do they have an opportunity to tell you what went well, what didn't go so well and make suggestions?

And most importantly – reflect for a moment whether your parents feel happy that that the school is fully committed to every parent matters? Do you believe that **every** parent feels welcome and respected when they walk through the school gates?

Finally, consider how a session that incorporates parenting advice can support the school's strategy and school improvement plan for working with parents as part of the extended services 'core offer'.

THE TOOLKIT

The National Parenting Institute (NPI) has produced a useful toolkit for schools to use. This material can also be adapted, i.e. inserting a school logo and/or deleting/inserting items for personalisation at these information sessions. The toolkit including the following parenting factsheets:

Bullying

Childcare

Internet safety

Effects of family conflict

Families newly arriving in the UK

Fathers

Drugs & alcohol

Relationships & sex education

Health

Keeping safe

There is also a facilitators' guidebook (Susie has managed to obtain one per school)

Sample questionnaires

Sample evaluation exercises

Ice breaker game

Pilot project feedback

The factsheets can be offered for parents to pick up and take away to read. To complement this information, multi-agencies from various local voluntary and statutory organisations can also be encouraged to set up a 'market-place' during these sessions where parents can view resources and ask questions. Perhaps some of the key school community partners (health, library services, extended services, youth workers, connexions, children's centre managers, faith organisations, locality team, voluntary groups, police, sports partnerships etc.) may be encouraged to introduce themselves and tell parents how they work with parents and their children during their school life.

Freebies such as pens, posters etc. to take home are always popular too!

Most importantly of all – there is a small amount of funding being made available at the end of March to facilitate a 'coffee shop' style of presentation for these sessions (or you may wish to explore other creative ideas for using these resources to deliver parenting information at transition). But consider how a parent with poor past experience of compulsory education would feel when they walk through the door to be warmly welcomed at the door? Then they walk on to find that the intimidating school hall they remembered from their past now resembles a cosy cafe. Try to imagine the school setting with small tables, tablecloths, quality refreshments (fresh fruit and homemade biscuits for instance) and a small display of flowers on each table instead of rows of chairs vividly remembered from past assemblies. At these sessions older pupils may even like to be involved as greeters, cloakroom assistants, waiters and car parking attendants. Or the school may even wish to have some music playing – perhaps a school band or talented musician can offer a delightful alternative.

The facilitator then plans the session to be fully inclusive for *all* parents by creating round the table discussion, open questioning and hopefully a little bit of humour.

For evaluation purposes – rather than using a written evaluation sheet, perhaps you fancy creating a graffiti wall in the entrance area with post-it notes and marker pens for parents' suggestions?

These very small and manageable changes may even encourage those 'hard to reach' families and lay small stepping stones towards future engagement.

It is hard to engage **every** parent and you may need a lot of input for a small output.

SOME IDEAS FOR ENGAGING PARENTS

Personalised invites from the school (for tea & cakes for instance) to **sell** the session.
Provide an incentive to attend (vouchers/goodie bag) or raffle. Provide refreshments
Talk to parents at the school gates at home time.
Heads/teachers/pastoral workers to be available in the playground at transition times
Provide parent support groups or mentoring. Provide 'buddy' opportunities for families who may traditionally be hard to reach
Link with children's centre outreach workers or home school link workers to establish what barriers to participation may be a common thread throughout the local area
Home visits from the school to encourage school visits from families
Choose an accessible, suitable venue (it doesn't always have to be school)
Attend to basic needs – childcare, transport etc.
Make sure that sessions are offered at flexible times e.g. weekends/evenings

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

More information and materials for the Starting School Parent Information Sessions Project can be downloaded at:

<http://www.familyandparenting.org/materialsTIS>

Support materials and information about extended schools can also be downloaded via the DfES teachernet site at:

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/teachernetgovukcoreoffer/parentingsupport/transition/

The materials are designed to be adapted for local use according to local needs, including any feedback from consultations with parents.

Starting Primary School toolkit – presentation built around how parent can support their children to be happy, safe and learning at school; additional material on key topics such as health, fathers, use of Internet & mobile phones, safety, child development.

Moving On to Secondary School toolkit – presentation built around how parents can support their child to be happy, safe and learning at school; additional material on key subjects such as health, fathers, use of Internet & mobile phones, sex & relationships, child development, drugs & alcohol.

General factsheets for parents to take home

Specific factsheets for special schools

Susie and Les also have examples of all the downloadable support materials available from the Family & Parenting Institute and 4Children.Organisation (factsheets etc.). Also available to view are examples of how the Starting Schools Parent Information Sessions were delivered across the pilot schools.

Please feel free to contact your Extended Services Coordinator (ESCO) or your Education Welfare Officer (EWO) on an individual basis if you wish to discuss how this may be rolled out in *your* school. This really is a fantastically simple '**quick win**' as part of your extended services core offer; therefore I would really encourage full participation of **all** schools in my two cluster groups. Resources will be available very soon to support your school's creative ideas for engaging your new September parents.

Susie Higgs
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FEEDBACK FROM THE PILOT PROJECT

The following is some of the feedback from the pilot Starting School Parent Information Sessions:

A good opportunity to meet with school staff on an informal basis
A good opportunity to feel more confident about talking to school staff
Free childcare (i.e. a creche or storyteller) during the sessions was appreciated
Parents liked receiving an invitation in the post (children can design them for a more personal touch)
Parents expressed that they were surprised and encouraged to realise that they have such a big influence on their children
It offered an opportunity to signpost parents to other sources of help and also helped professionals find out what else parents thought might be useful...for example, parenting courses and promoting websites (such as www.parentlineplus.org.uk)
The list of websites and the leaflets were useful.

** Please note that the term '**parents**' is used throughout this document to mean mothers, fathers, carers and other adults with responsibility for caring for a child, including step parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents and other family carers, gay or lesbian parents and their partners, residential care workers, and carers of young offenders.