

## 3 Toolbox: Collaborating with parents

### 3.1 How to develop a master plan for an information and communication set-up in school

Schools who are aiming at contacting as many parents as possible need to set up an information and communication master plan.

It is not a question of replacing existing paths of information and communication, but rather of extending the range of possible courses of action. Of course, personal dialogue or visits to homes cannot be replaced by web sites.

There follows a selection of ideas and materials to support internal decision processes on the development and optimum use of an information and communication set-up.

- 1. Status quo and planning
- 2. The internet as an information platform for school and parents
- 3. Insights into everyday classroom work – Blogs as an option
- 4. Shoulder to shoulder

Under M1/M2 there are two checklists which can help to structure the internal discussion/decision process in school. In the second checklist M2, the communication with parents who have a background of migration is explicitly dealt with. Both checklists are culturally influenced, so they have to be edited to suit the respective conditions.

The examples and considerations in section 2 can help to show how a school website can be used as an information platform to involve school and parents. With a view to the parents who have a low educational profile, reader-friendly and accessible texts and information must be employed. In this context, section 3 focuses on materials and tips. The catch phrase WEB 2.0 stands for the development of information and interaction possibilities which are available to users without IT knowledge. The following reality-based statement supports this focus:

“Research shows that children achieve more highly when their parents talk to them about their experience of school and learning. However, a recent report showed that 82% of parents felt left in the dark when it comes to their child's schooling.”

➔ [http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=oe&catcode=ss\\_es\\_fam\\_02](http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=oe&catcode=ss_es_fam_02)

#### Target Group

Internal planning groups with the participation of head teachers

### 3.1.1 Status quo and planning

“One central aspect of a lack of social capital that is relevant for succeeding in the education system of the immigration country is the generally weak or non-existent relations between educational institutions, teachers and the parents of migrant children.”  
(Heckmann 2008, S. 28)

Schools wishing to involve parents with a background of migration cannot afford to wait, on the contrary they must take the initiative. A precondition for this is the development of their own information and communication master plan. In comparison to other areas, where they are dependent on administrative decisions, schools have an extensively independent scope in this area of work.

#### M1 Developing home–school–partnerships – Points to consider

General points for schools	
Does the school have a range of approaches for communicating with parents and encouraging parents to communicate with the school?	
Does the school have a clear vision of what it is trying to achieve through its home-school partnerships and why?	
Do the arrangements for sharing information ensure that parents and schools have all the information they want, at the right time, in the right way and with the right kind of detail? How do you know?	
Does the school view its work with parents and families as both a key feature of its current work and a major element in its efforts to improve?	
Does the school provide parents with a range of opportunities to have a genuine say in, and be an active part of, its life and work?	
Is the school sensitive towards, and supportive of, the varying backgrounds, needs and circumstances of all pupils and their parents?	
Can parents attend school assembly or visit the classroom?	

<b>Schools sharing information with parents – specific issues</b>	
Has the school asked parents what they feel it is important to know about their children and the school?	
Has the use of letters and newsletters been evaluated? Do parents find them useful? How do you know?	
Is 'parent-friendly' language used in all written communication? Is it attractive, eye-catching, concise and easy to read? Does it encourage parents and thank them for their help? Is the advice of parents sought when producing literature for parents? Does the school send regular newsletters containing information about school events, reminders for parents, suggestions on how they can support their child, examples of pupils' work and achievements? Do parents read them? How do you know?	
Has the school considered using alternatives to written communication? For example, audio and visual (video) reports?	
How useful might email and texting be in communicating with parents?	
Have information-sharing events, e.g. curriculum evenings, been evaluated? Do parents find them helpful? How do you know?	

<b>Parents sharing information with schools – specific issues</b>	
Does the school let parents know what information teachers find it useful to know about the children?	
Have parents been consulted on how they can best share information with the school?	
Do parents feel that what they have to say is valued and seen as important by the school? Is it clear to parents when and how they can contact the school and whom they should be in touch with?	
If parents come to the school is there somewhere welcoming for them to wait and be at ease while waiting to be seen? Is there somewhere suitable for private discussion?	
Are parents involved in organising events for parents at the school before, during and after? Is their advice sought on suitable content for the event and its relevance?	
Have parents been involved in decision making? For example, using a focus group to discuss and agree school policies such as homework or discipline.	
When the school makes changes in the light of consultation with parents (either for an individual child or for some wider school issue), are the parents informed? Do they know their contribution has made a difference?	

➔ <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentsaspartnersinlearning/homeschoolpartnerships/communicating/sharinginformation/pointstoconsider.asp>

## M2 Involving parents in schools with a multi-cultural environment

### The status quo

Which of the following points fit your work, resp. your school?

		yes	no
<b>1. Contact between teacher and parents</b>			
1.	When taking over a new class, do you attempt to get to know and establish a relationship with as many parents as possible?		
2.	Do you give the parents practical tips when their kids have problems in school?		
3.	Are home visits included in 1 and 2 above? If yes, are you pre-informed of possible cultural habits of the respective ethnic group?		
<b>2. Parents' evenings</b>			
4.	Do you issue personal invitations to parents' evenings, in addition to the official one?		
5.	Do you encourage the parents to come with an interpreter from their family or circle of friends, if necessary?		
6.	Do you try to give the parents' evening a personal touch?		
7.	Do you use parents' evenings to tackle the following themes?- your expectations and those of the parents regarding school? background information on the school system- information on the educational concept of the school?		
<b>3. Multilingualism in the school</b>			
8.	Are there staff members who can interpret and mediate?		
9.	Are there parents who can interpret and mediate? If so, is their language ability checked out in some way? (For instance, when the children start school)		
10.	Is information available in different languages at your school?		
11.	Do you have parents' evenings in different languages at your school? (possible topics – the school system, marking, school career etc.)		
<b>4. Parent committees/ involvement</b>			
12.	Do you encourage the parents with a background of migration to participate in the class conference as parents' representatives?		
13.	Do the parents with a background of migration participate in the parents' committee?		
14.	Do you have advisers specifically for parents with a background of migration?		

<b>5. Parents' education</b>		
15.	Do you offer parents opportunities to come into your lessons?	
16.	Are their host country language countries for parents? In the morning? With teachers who have the same mother tongue?	
17.	Is there continuing education for parents in the school? Multilingual?	
<b>6. Help from parents in school/ particular courses for the parents</b>		
18.	Do you include the abilities of parents with a background of migration into your teaching or school life? (e.g. in project weeks, on class trips, in optional courses or helping out with the cafeteria etc.?)	
19.	Do the parents have a meeting point? (Parents' Café / Tearoom in the school)	
20.	Can rooms in the school be made available to parents?	
21.	Does the school offer help in filling out official forms that are difficult to understand?	
<b>7. Cooperation of different institutions in one part of town</b>		
22.	Does the school work together with other institutions in the same part of town in the area of parent involvement, in order to coordinate the various initiatives better? (e.g. the school psychologist, educational advice centres, parents' associations, religious communities, local initiatives etc.)	
23.	Do partners from schools and outside schools work together locally to coordinate events for parent involvement?	
24.	Can the school be used locally as a public space? (e.g. the school canteen can, at the same time, be a local cafe/meeting point, local educational courses...)	