3.2. Setting targets

Take another look at Nos. 1-25. Decide which three points you would specially like to work on in the following school year and say why you chose these three.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Please remember you will have to select the sections relevant to your school.

Regine Hartung, Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung – Hamburg Beratungsstelle Interkulturelle Erziehung Regine Hartung Leitung BIE und Gestaltungsreferat ➲ http://www.li-hamburg.de/fix/files/doc/BLK_Hausarbeit%20Aktivierende%20Elter narbeit%20in%20Schulen%20mit%20multikult%20%20Umfeld-06-07-07.pdf

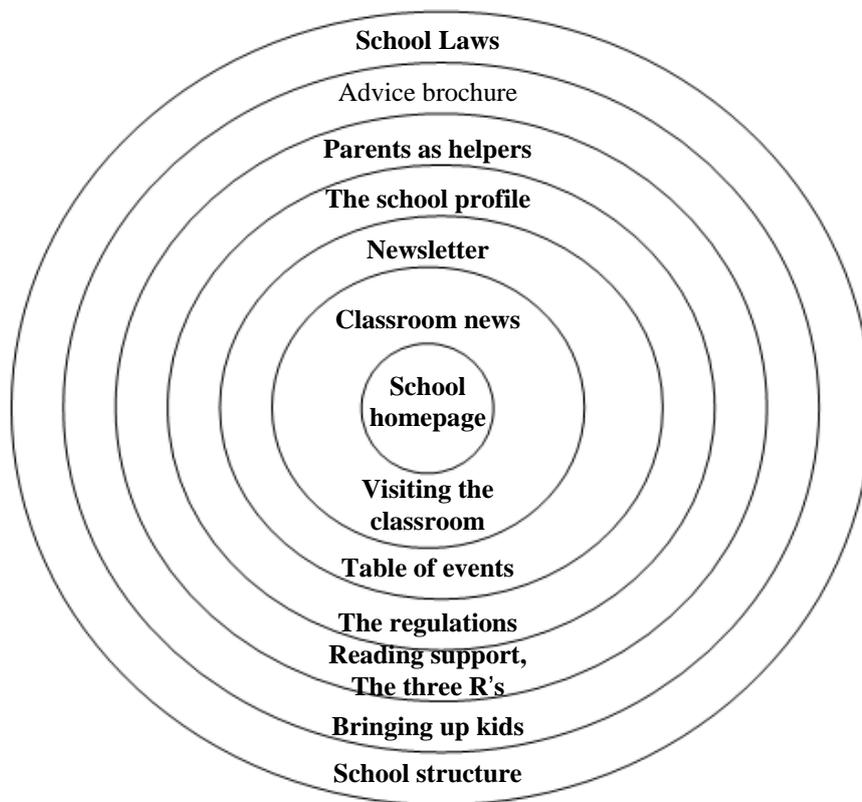## 3.2.1 The internet as an information platform for schools and parents

In some countries there are well advanced plans to use IT on a broad basis to improve parental improvement. The Scottish education authorities intend to enable parents to read reports on their children of secondary age online from September 2010 onwards. The primary sector will follow two years later.

Individual school communication networks or facilties using the internet should and can be developed and extended as information platforms for the school and parents independent of larger, more comprehensive solutions. The focus should be on parents with a low educational profile and parents with a background of migration. Access to user-friendly information, including simple news and views on school life and the children's work, should be quick and uncomplicated.

The parents could be offered more information on the school homepage on

- School Laws – School structure
- Advice brochure – Bringing up kids
- Advice brochure – School and learning
- The school profile – the Regulations
- Information on life in the school – Newsletter – Dates and Times – Events
- Information for the parents of a certain class
- Information from the classroom.

Example of an "information platform for parent"

```
                    School Laws
                  Advice brochure
                 Parents as helpers
                 The school profile
                    Newsletter
                  Classroom news
                   ┌─────────┐
                   │  School │
                   │ homepage│
                   └─────────┘
                  Visiting the
                    classroom
                  Table of events
                  The regulations
                 Reading support,
                   The three R's
                 Bringing up kids
                  School structure
```

This is what is offered on the homepage of a Scottish school

➲ http://www.balfronhigh.org.uk/index.htm
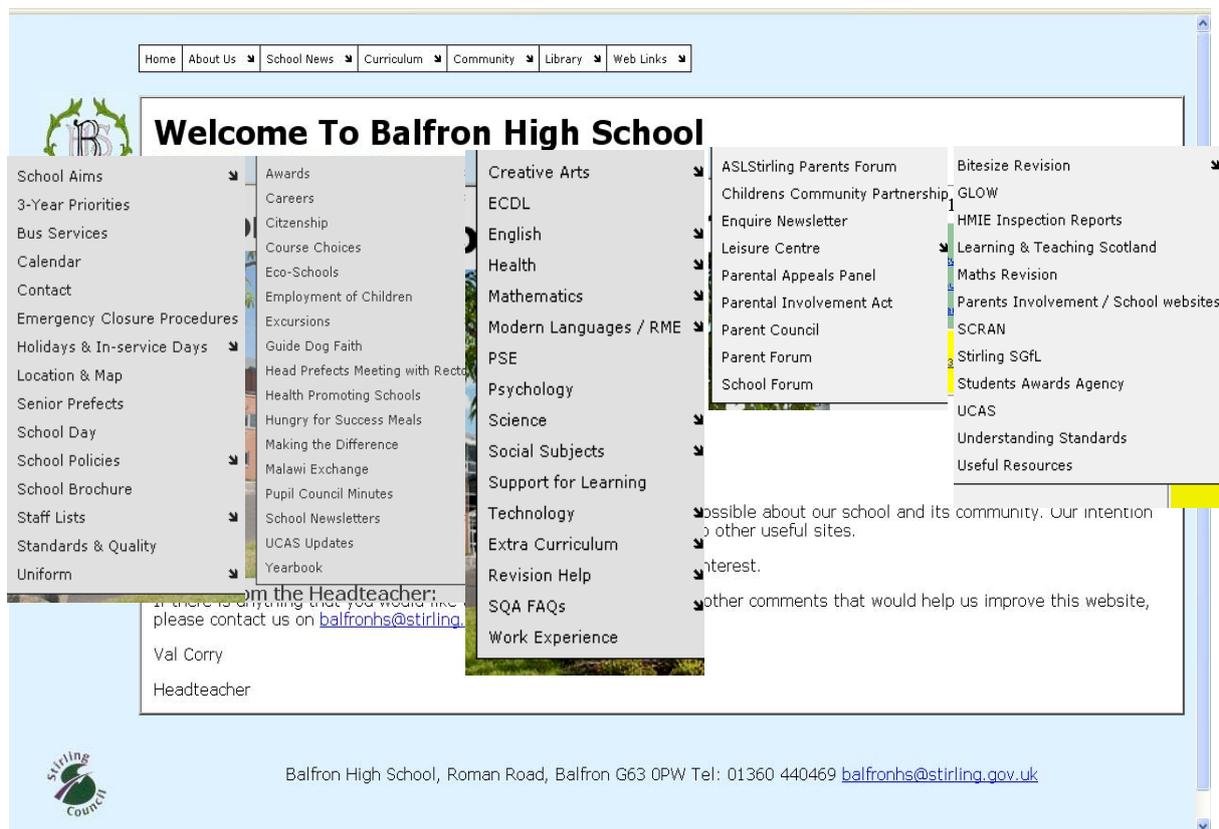
Parental involvement in Scotland covers a whole range of activities to support parents in their own task of bringing up their children (Parents' Empowerment), so there is a whole range of information offered on the homepage.
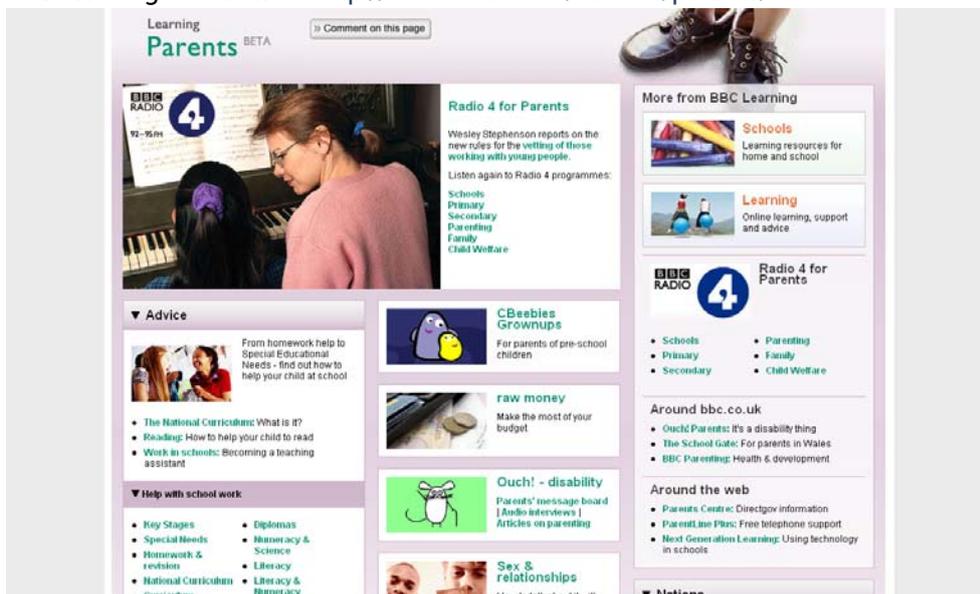
Other offers of information can be found on ParentzoneInformation with more about education in Scotland and ideas to help parents support their children's learning
⊃ http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone/index.asp

or

BBC Learning – Parents: ⊃ http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/

Tips on the readability and the attractiveness of information offers

If parents with a low educational profile and especially those with a background of migration are to be reached, it is extremely important to think about preparing the information for the addressees.

The "Head Start" programme for compensatory education, which has been running in the USA since 1965 is intended to improve the educational opportunities of children from socially challenged families. In the framework of this programme handbooks were developed for the trainer personnel, in which, among other things, the importance of readability is underlined for the parent groups mentioned above. In fact, the two groups often overlap. There is thus every reason to learn from the Head Start project's ideas and suggestions.

In the handbook "Communicating with Parents", the module deals with the topic of "Using Plain Language Writing"[1]. The aim of this module is "to help participants evaluate whether a print sample is written at a level that will successfully communicate information to the intended readers." (p. 56) Readability refers to the reading ability of the addressees in this context. The question is therefore: "Are the materials written at a level that matches the reading skill of the intended audience?" [2]

The suggestion is made that the texts should be examined with software tools to establish their level of difficulty to be able to judge whether they will provide a challenge to their prospective readers.[3]

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[1] US Department of Health & Human Services (ed.). Communicating with Parents". Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Communities -
➲ http://www.headstartresourcecenter.org/fatherhood/Resources/root/data/Training%20Guides/communicating_with_parents.pdf

[2] Vgl. dazu ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (2003). Communicating with Parents. ERIC Digest.-
➲ http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-3/parents.html

[3] Free software to check out readability – mainly for English texts – can be found under
➲ http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp
Comparable online tests exist for other languages, see under ➲ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesbarkeit

3.2.2 School newsletters

Newsletters can provide a steady stream of information from the school to the home. They are used by many schools. A quality newsletter may well be the least expensive way of informing families of school activities and expectations. Newsletters provide readers with "news" in an informal "letter" style. They are useful when careful thought is given to: "Why have a newsletter?" "Who is the audience?" "What do we want to communicate?" "How should we present the information?"

Content

Timely, brief, and lively reporting are the hallmarks of an effective newsletter. Newsletters often include:

- How the school is working to improve the basics and discipline.
- Recent accomplishments of students in academic, athletic, artistic and citizenship areas.
- New services of the school or changes in organization.
- Upcoming school events, schedule changes, conference times, and testing dates.
- Human interest items featuring students, parent volunteers, teachers, and other staff, or written by them.
- Articles on curriculum and teaching innovations.
- Scholarship application information and school - college connections.
- School - business partnerships, particularly family-friendly employers and school-to-career opportunities.
- Activities scheduled for parents, students, and community members and related transportation arrangements.
- After-school child care and education programmes.

Interactive features

To promote two-way communication, newsletters can:

- Encourage parents to write letters to the newsletter.
- Provide an "op-ed" column that is open to anyone from the school community.
- Contain short questionnaires soliciting reader opinions on a variety of topics.

Format and design

To attract the attention of parents, newsletters should be attractive, well-organized, and easily read. Assume that some parents may not be comfortable with reading or with English as their primary language. This suggests:

- Keep both sentences and paragraphs short.
- Use easy words unless a difficult ('big') word is needed for a precise meaning.
- Avoid education jargon and abbreviations.
- Use language that is familiar and direct.
- Use simple techniques, such as boxes, graphics and illustrations to call attention to special items.
- ➲ http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachFam/oncom.html - visited 31.10.08

An example of a good newsletter is under
➲ http://www.ardnamurchan.highland.sch.uk/newsletters/newsletterlatest.htm

3.2.3 Insights into everyday work in the classroom

BECTA, *the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency, pleads for the use of the internet on its website with the argument that it enables children to show their parents what they are doing at school.*
"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

Schools do not have to participate in a comprehensive programme like BECTA for teachers to open a window on the everyday work in their classroom per Internet. [4]

Anyone wishing to publish texts, pictures, videos and sound files on the internet does not need special IT knowledge. The advantage for teachers is that there is no deadline pressure, and for the parents there are far less inhibitions involved.

The internet means low costs, less time involved, up-to-date information and a multimedia approach. Weblogs can be useful for schools to communicae with parents free of charge via the internet.

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[4] "Online reporting means parents are able to have secure online access to information on their child's progress, achievement, attendance and behaviour. It enables parents to get closer to and support their child's learning, enabling them to work with you as equal partners in improving learning outcomes for their child. This can be achieved through the effective use of established management information systems, without increasing the workload of teaching staff."
➲ (http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=oe&catcode=ss_es_fam_02)

The following modules offer ideas and inspirations for INSET COURSES on how to improve or intensify the contact between parents and teachers.

A window on the world

Visiting the homepage of the Ormiston Primary School in Scotland, there is much to be found that can be seen on the homepages of other schools ➲ http://edubuzz.org/blogs/ormiston/.
There are reports on projects in which the school is involved. Coming events are noted and there is a page for announcements fort he parents etc.

Each class has its own page with announcements on trips and news of other events, and there are reports of acivities in the classroom. There is a story how of how class 5 went on a June trip to an age-old yew tree to close their unit on „Plants and Flowers". More can be found by clicking on the report itself and a slide show. By way of contrast, the class 7 report of November 2008 is not so easy to find your way through. The class had taken part in a workshop on biological diversity. Different activities are mentioned. For someone who was not there, a lot of questions remain unanswered.

There is a high frequency of contributions. Taking February 2008, there are ten different contributions alone. The individual reports are given a short description on the starting page. From the headers a link takes the user to the detailed text. Pictures are included, but there are also videos and podcats (sound files). Weblogs are used typically for their commentary function. Especially the kids literally go for it throwing spelling to the winds – it's the writing that counts!

The uses are many
– reaching parents via weblogs (class weblogs and class diaries)
– publishing in the internet with no IT knowledge (think of youtube, see also wordpress.com)
– restricting access (class cooperation tasks, staff cooperation groups)
– class weblogs can inspire the children to write creatively
– photos to inspire the children (of themselves, of others)
– sound and video for better staging of invitations etc, easy access to information
– commenting on events and activities
– keeping up to date
– handbook downloads for specific topics

The following modules offer ideas and inspirations for INSET COURSES on how to improve or intensify the contact between parents and teachers.

Literature

Heckmann, Friedrich: Education and Migration - strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools and societies. A synthesis of research findings for policy-makers. Report submitted to the European Commission by the NESSE network of experts
April 2008 - ➲ http://www.efms.uni-bamberg.de/pdf/NESEducationIntegrationMigrants.pdf