

Vignette 4

Moving online to support and enhance communication

Abstract: From the range of digital technologies used, the school finds there are now more frequent communication to and from parents, which is often regular and ongoing. Having increased the use of digital technologies, the school finds that parents now tend to use email more to communicate, and this route maintains their engagement.

Full vignette

This post-primary school noticed a decline in parental engagement from year 10 onwards, and wanted to address this issue by encouraging parents to engage more. The school has some 28% of students on free school meals, about 10% are newcomers to the area, and over 20% have a statement of specific need.

The school uses SIMS Parent App¹ widely. Previously, reports were sent out on paper, four times a year. Time to do this and cost of paper were two reasons why the school decided to change to using SIMS Parent App. Attendance reports are now sent weekly, but achievement reports are the primary reports sent out to parents. Behaviour reports were initially ‘turned off’, so that parents could become accustomed to using the system gradually, and could be informed about certain facilities in advance of receiving reports. The ‘traffic lights’ system was also disabled, as it was found that parents tended to focus on the lights, not reading and interpreting the reports in a more holistic way.

Advantages of using SIMS Parent App have been recognised. It provides 24/7 access, all reports across the seven years of school are easily accessible, and family links can be easily made even where two learners in the same family attend two different schools. Deadlines can also easily be extended using the system, and office staff do not need to be directly involved. Drop-in sessions are provided for parents if they need support in using SIMS Parent App. It has been found that parents have generally accepted the system, and are not requesting reports in hard copy format.

Additionally, the school and departments use Twitter and Facebook, to send out messages about events, for example. The website has now become a more secondary facility in the school. From the digital technologies used, the school finds that there are frequent communications now to and from parents. Communication is often regular and ongoing. Having used digital technologies increasingly, the school finds that parents now tend to use email to communicate more, and that this is a route that maintains their engagement.

Outcomes and benefits:

- Communicating with parents about school events and activities enhances parental engagement
- Direct communications to parents about learning engagement, attainment and achievement has positive effects for all
- Regularly communicating cognitive data to parents can lead to regular communication, but this needs to be carefully managed
- Online discussions via email, when managed, means that issues are addressed early and in an progressive way

¹ <https://www.capita-sims.co.uk/products-and-services/sims-parent-app>