

A ground-breaking new award offers guidance and recognition to schools working closely with parents – a unifying theme of the Children’s Plan.

Margaret Booth explains

# The home front

In his foreword to the 2007 DfES report *Every Parent Matters*, Alan Johnson wrote: “Parents and the home environment they create are the most important factor in shaping their children’s well-being, achievement and prospects.” The *Children’s Plan: Building Brighter Futures*, published by the DCSF last December, repeatedly returns to the theme of parent partnership as it sets out the Government’s agenda for the coming decade.

At the same time, the work of education research expert Professor Charles Desforges and others has provided compelling evidence of the positive impact of parental involvement on the learning and achievement of pupils. There can be few schools that do not now recognise

the importance of engaging parents and carers in the educational development of children and young people.

The Government has repeatedly emphasised its position, regarding parents’ support for their children’s learning as “an essential foundation for achievement”, and working in partnership with parents as “vital at each stage of children’s development” (*The Children’s Plan*, 3.1 and 3.16).

But achieving real parent partnership can be both challenging and demanding. How often are questionnaires seeking parents’ views ignored and family learning courses undersubscribed? There are still school staff who prefer parents to keep their distance from the classroom. Equally, there are secondary students who are aghast at the very

Photo: A Parent helps out in the classroom



thought of their mums and dads setting foot on school premises. And does the average parent know exactly what their child is studying and how they can provide support?

The Leading Parent Partnership Award (LPPA) has been designed to help schools address these and a wider range of other issues, through the supported development of real partnership with parents. The award is equally suited to children's centres and schools with all age ranges of pupils and students. Whatever a school's starting point, the award gives credit for existing work with parents and supports further development.

### Theme 1: Commitment and co-ordination

In most schools, parent partnership is a complex matter. Staff will take on many responsibilities, including arranging activities and events, providing information on pupils' progress and managing communication through newsletters and the school website. Many parents are directly involved in school as employees, volunteers or governors. Pupils themselves are the key link between home and school.

Building parent partnership involves the commitment of all these groups. But who is co-ordinating their efforts to ensure that parents receive positive and consistent messages about the importance of their input? Experience suggests that co-ordination is best carried out by a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) or a member of staff who works directly with parents, closely supported by an SLT member. In either case, a clear plan of action, understood by all partners, is essential.

### Theme 2: Consultation

If parents are to be true partners in the work of the school then their views, once sought, need to be listened to. A range of simple, focused enquires might include a school gate survey, online consultation or focus groups designed to address specific issues. Having consulted with parents, providing feedback is essential. One successful approach is the publication of a simple three-point summary under the headings: 'We asked', 'You said' and 'We did'.

### Theme 3: Delivery

Seven strands form the core of the LPPA's delivery strategy. **Welcome** Many factors contribute to making schools welcoming and friendly. Key points on a welcome checklist might include: clear signage and a friendly receptionist; a comfortable seating area for visitors and a community room where activities can take place; and an open-door policy at the beginning and end of the day, with a drop-in service to provide support for parents.

**Adult and family learning** In some communities the provision of adult education opportunities for parents can be a great step in building parents' confidence in learning. Linking adult learning with the systematic provision of opportunities for family learning can make a real impact on parents' capacity to support their children's education. The possibilities are wide-ranging and might include parenting programmes, practical workshops, special events and web-based activities.



Photo: Parents get back into the Classroom

**Parent and child enrichment activities** Providing a well-managed programme of enrichment activities through which parents and their children can learn together will generate a real sense of excitement and a strong focus on supporting children's learning. The possibilities are endless, but successful strategies include: family-friendly homework; computer-based GCSE revision programmes for joint parent and student use; joint pupil and parent out-of-school visits; and showcasing classroom work and special curriculum days with a focus on parent and child involvement.

**Induction** Most schools take the induction of new pupils or students very seriously. But how far is induction provided for parents? What sort of welcome do they receive in their own right, and how valued are they made to feel, from the outset, as partners in their children's education? Schools that want to gain and retain the support of parents need to provide user-friendly information and face-to-face contact that will encourage participation in the full range of opportunities available.

**Supporting pupils' learning** At the heart of the LPPA process is the provision of information that will enable parents to support their children's learning. The strategies that are used need to enhance valuable but fairly standard procedures such as consultation evenings, or their equivalent, and the provision of school reports. Parents need to be kept informed, on a regular basis, about what their children are learning and, most importantly, be given very practical suggestions as to how they can provide support.

Practical help for parents who find supporting their children difficult, or are simply keen to know more, can be provided through family learning and enrichment activities and through the school's website.

**Policies and paperwork** School policy statements cannot be delivered effectively without parental support

# Parent partnership

– particularly those relating to attendance and punctuality, good behaviour and pupil progress. Parents need to be involved in the formulation and review of policies, which need to be easily understood and should include guidance for parents on how they can support achievement. For parents who do not come into school regularly, the policy documents and information they receive, on paper or on the school website, provide a key interface between home and school. They need to be top quality.

**Transition:** The transition of their children from one school to the next, and then into post-16 provision, can be an anxious time for parents. From pre-school settings, through the primary and secondary phases, there is much to be gained by actively supporting parents as well as their children through transition, in order that they enter the next stage with a continued willingness to engage in partnership.

#### Theme 4: Monitoring, evaluation and sustainability

In order to achieve the LPPA, schools must meet the key performance indicators relating to each of the award's four themes. There is, therefore, a strong emphasis throughout on the involvement of all partners, and especially parents, in monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes against the school's action plan.

The LPPA provides a supported framework for the development of effective parent partnership. The achievement of the award indicates that the LPPA standard has been attained at a given point in time. The aim of the award is not, however, for schools simply to acquire a one-off rubber stamp, but, through the LPPA process, to develop a sustainable approach to parent partnership which becomes embedded in the life of the school, to the benefit of all its partners.

Margaret Booth is a regional director for Prospects, which delivers the Leading Parent Partnership Award.



Photo: A mother and daughter work together

#### Case study

Arbourthorne Community Primary School in Sheffield is passionate about parental involvement. "We wouldn't be what we are today without our parents," says extended schools and LPPA co-ordinator Mandy Fenech.

Mandy's enthusiasm shines through as she talks about the difference partnership initiatives and the LPPA have made at Arbourthorne. An 'open door' policy was already operating when the school began working towards the award, but, says Mandy, "it reinforces what we had and helps us provide the evidence to demonstrate what we do.

"Our LPPA adviser has been very supportive – we have had so much of her time. She has been a constant source of information and help and Arbourthorne has achieved the Leading Parent Partnership Award in just over a year. Our last Ofsted inspection described our work with parents as 'outstanding'."

The 447-pupil school is in an area of high unemployment, and staff have worked consistently to provide a learning and caring environment for entire families.

The school moved into new premises three years ago, with a purpose-built community room which forms the hub of its parent partnership. Adult education and lifelong learning classes are held there, including Key Stage 1 literacy, Foundation Stage numeracy, parenting courses and GCSE English. Parents operate a milk and fruit bar for pupils in morning break times and a weekly coffee morning is open to all mums and dads – and school staff.

Mrs Fenech said: "We wouldn't be what we are today without our parents. Among pupils we have seen an increase in attainment levels, punctuality and attendance – it is good

for them to see their parents in school. Parents are increasingly getting involved with our adult education provision. They are realising how much they benefit as a family from school involvement."

Arbourthorne's motto is 'Every Learner Matters, Every Lesson Counts' and it seems the whole community is learning a vital lesson about the power of true partnerships.



# A parent's influence on a child's learning is **six** times that of their school



**Nobody disputes the potential benefits of effective and appropriate parental involvement but finding the right process to achieve it can be challenging.**

The Leading Parent Partnership Award is a recognised and externally validated quality measure, endorsed by the DCSF.

LPPA provides demonstrable benefits for schools, pupils and parents, with measurement a key element of the programme's success.

"Our last Ofsted inspection described our work with parents as **outstanding**"

"LPPA has been active during a period when standards at GCSE have **risen significantly**"

"We wouldn't be what we are today without our parents. Among pupils we have seen an **increase in attainment levels, punctuality and attendance**"

To find out how the Leading Parent Partnership Award could help make a real difference for your school simply contact:

**Prospects**  
Unit 1.07 Faraday Wharf  
Aston Science Park  
Holt Street  
Birmingham  
B7 4BB

**Tel: 020 8315 1246**  
Email: [lppa@prospects.co.uk](mailto:lppa@prospects.co.uk)  
Website: [www.lppa.co.uk](http://www.lppa.co.uk)