

# Leading Learning Trust – Parental Engagement Policy

**Applies to: Selwyn Primary School  
and Portway Primary School**

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<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Leadership team
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**Leading  
Learning Trust**



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## 1 - OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY MANAGEMENT PROCESS

### 1.1 Document history

Date	Document title	Version
May 2017	Initial draft of the policy released.	1.0
July 2017	Policy approved by LLT trustees.	1.0
Sept 2020	Updated by the CEO as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Updates further to the Trust's new vision</li><li>- Operational updates due to evolution of systems and processes in place to engage with and communicate with parents</li></ul> 2.6 - Covid-19 additional paragraph re how our strong engagement has meant that we have been able to work closely with parents to support our children's learning at home.	

### 1.2 Review and approval

The Leading Learning Trust trustees have overall responsibility for the policy.

The CEO and the Head teachers are responsible for the operation of the policy within the schools, as well as for the maintenance of a record of concerns raised in accordance with this policy and the outcomes.

This policy is reviewed every three years by the School Leadership Team, and is then ratified by the Leading Learning Trust Board of trustees.



## 2 - THE POLICY

### 2.1 Introduction

This policy outlines the way in which our schools work with parents and the wider community in order to support our children to achieve their potential. As per the Schools White Paper (Department for Education 2010), this policy sets out how parental and community engagement and involvement can support our aims of raising achievement levels, improving children's behaviour, and closing the attainment gap.

This policy supports our whole school strategy around parental and community engagement across our schools. As per the 'key messages' of the 2010 research paper (the Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement), all elements of this strategy have '*...as a clear and consistent goal the improvement of children's learning*' (p.20). Whilst this paper (which is referenced at various points in this policy) specifically addresses the issue of *parental* engagement, our parents all live within the local community – hence, many of the principles underpinning our parental engagement strategy also reflect our community engagement strategy.

### 2.2 Aims

Through the implementation of this policy, we hope to support parental and community engagement and involvement at our school, which have been shown to improve learning outcomes for children.

### 2.3 Background

The Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Paper (Department for Education, 2010 - a summary of which is available [here](#)), argues that '*parental*<sup>[1]</sup> *involvement in the form of "at home good parenting" has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation*' (Desforges, 2003, in the Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Paper, 2010, p.3). Furthermore, '*in the primary age range, the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools*' (ibid<sup>[2]</sup>).

The summary of this paper states that, '***the more parents are engaged in the education of their children, the more likely their children are to succeed in the education system.***' (ibid, p. 16).



Finally, more recently, Professor John Hattie, in his paper 'First Steps: A new approach for our schools' (CBI, 2012) states that, '***the effect of parental engagement over a student's school career is equivalent to adding an extra two or three years to that student's education***'.

This evidence, and the insights provided by the research paper, both shape this policy and inform our practice across our schools. This policy also outlines how we have implemented the recommendations of the academic research into our planning, designing and carrying out of parental and community engagement strategies at our schools.

## 2.4 Scope

This policy will, as per the report, focus on both outlining the difference between engagement and involvement, and consider the following three areas of our practice:

- School-home links
- Support and training for parents
- Family and community based interventions

## 2.5 Aim

The aim of this policy is to outline the way in which we as the Leading Learning Trust support the three areas of engagement and involvement as outlined in the scope above. It also describes our approach to parental engagement, as defined in the next section.

Our schools are friendly, inclusive places where we have high aspirations for our children, and where everyone is valued and respected. All members of our community are welcome. Our adoption of the Information Commissioner's Office Model Publication Scheme (available on [this page](#) of our Trust's website) ensures that anyone who is interested is able to access our school policies that outline how we go about our work in order to ensure the best outcomes for our children.

## 2.6 Covid-19

Covid-19 has presented our Trust and our schools with enormous challenges. Many of the challenges posed by the pandemic have been in areas addressed by this Policy: Section 2.7 states that we believe that 'engagement' includes learning at home, communication between home and school, in-school activities, participation in decision making and collaborating with the community. In some of these areas, the changes mandated by the pandemic have led to enhanced engagement; in others, the changes have meant that we have had to work particularly hard to mitigate against the negative impact on engagement (eg. no opportunity to welcome parents to school).



Ways in which we have built on and further developed our engagement strategy through the challenges posed by the pandemic include:

- Extensive, regular, adaptive communications, using the digital platforms that we have in place, to ensure that we offered reassurance and support to our families;
- Close liaison between the schools in the Trust, but with each school able to structure communications to address the particular needs of their communities;
- Building on our detailed knowledge of all our children and families, in order to ensure that targeted support was provided to each and every child;
- Using our well-developed digital capability to rapidly ensure that remote learning could be effectively delivered;
- Issuing devices to children who are not able to access these at home; and
- Using our digital platform to ensure that we were able to continue regular and effective governing body meetings (members of which include parents).

We will continue to use our digital strengths to engage our community, including:

- The development of an ambitious digital strategy, which will include the setting up of in-school 'IT hubs' for use by our parents;
- The permanent adoption of a number of digital tools that have improved engagement - eg. video-conferencing for some governor meetings, video-conferencing for learner conferences;
- The wider provision of devices to children to enhance our provision, at home and at school; and
- Greater use of video to engage parents in school life.

## 2.7 Definitions

There is a difference between 'parental involvement' and 'parental engagement'. Typically, 'involvement' means that:

- only a select group of parents take part in the activity or intervention;
- other parents often find it difficult to join the group, or to make their contribution;
- the focus tends to be on fundraising activities or other specific 'volunteering' roles at school; and
- the school typically 'tells' parents what to do.

Typically, these 'involvement' activities are not 'bad', but as Felazzo and Hammond (2009) argue, that the broader conception of parental engagement (that includes sensitively managed parental involvement) results in even better outcomes.



On the other hand, it is effective parental engagement that, as outlined in the Background section above, does indeed have a measurable positive impact. As stated on page 16 of the report: *'Where schools build positive relationships with parents and work actively to embrace racial, religious, and ethnic and language differences, evidence of sustained school improvement can be found'*. Fostering even greater parental engagement is thus a key part of our school action plan.

Various researchers have pointed to a dictionary definition of 'engage' that includes the concepts of 'coming together' and 'interlocking' – in other words, engagement is about all parents, care-givers and the wider community working *together*. The focus is on *listening*, from all sides, in order to work together as strong partners: partnership is a key element of how we work at both Selwyn Primary School and at Portway Primary School. This approach reflects the aim of the Leading Learning Trust, which is for all our schools to be places where children, staff, parents, volunteers, governors and the wider community can learn. Through the Trust's vision of 'Transforming Lives', we aim to support our children, their families and their communities, in order that they can thrive and grow. 'Transforming Lives' informs and guides the work of our Trust and our schools. Further information is available on the [vision and values](#) page of our website.

As we see engagement, it includes[3]:

- learning at home: help with homework, subject skills, other skills and talents, values, aspirations and behaviour;
- communication: school-home and home-school;
- in-school activities: volunteering, helping in classrooms, parents' evenings, educational visits, open day events, being a member of an audience;
- decision making: undertaking roles such as local governing committee membership or being part of other organising groups or committees; and
- collaborating with the community: community contributions to schools and families, as well as family and school contributions to the community.

## 2.8 A model of effective practice

The assumptions underpinning our approach to parental engagement and involvement at our schools have been informed by research published by Estyn (2009)[4] who states that *'...schools should understand that parents:*

- *like to be involved in their child's school;*
- *want the school to know them personally as individuals and be kept well-informed about the progress made by their children;*
- *need clear information about day-to-day matters that affect their children;*



- *feel more confident if they know the staff and have a basic understanding of the curriculum;*
- *are willing to support school events and provide practical help but are less likely to join a committee;*
- *become more supportive the more they are involved, particularly if they have attended training events; and*
- *like to have clear rules for their children that are applied consistently'*

## **2.9 How we use this model to engage effectively with parents and our community**

The Review Paper quoted extensively above categorises effective parental engagement as sitting within one of the following areas:

- school-home links
- support and training for parents
- family and community based interventions

Properly designed interventions in each of these three areas have been shown to have positive effects on children's learning. Our approaches to each, as well as the challenges, are outlined below.

### **2.9.1 School-home links**

At Selwyn Primary School and at Portway Primary School, parental engagement is integral to our school ethos and strategy. Our staff are also trained and supported to ensure that they are comfortable supporting both the children in their care and their parents. Specifically:

- when children start at school, they receive a copy of our Home School Agreement that outlines the mutual expectations and acts as a 'code of conduct' for all parties. It is signed by school, parents, and children (in Key Stage 2), ensuring that everyone agrees to and supports our partnership approach. Additionally, a copy is available to download on the [Behaviour page](#) of our website, which is accessible to anyone;
- our websites for both our schools have been designed to ensure that all information for parents is easy to access. It has a clear navigation structure of 'Our School', 'Parents' and 'Governance'. News items and a full termly calendar are available on the home page.
- the websites have a strong emphasis on behaviour, with both a summary of our approach to [behaviour at school](#) and a copy of our full policy readily available on both the Selwyn and Portway websites;



- we hold regular Learner Conferences with parents, where their child's progress is discussed on a one-to-one basis. In scheduling these, we ensure that we provide parents with a number of options re both the day and time at which they can make an appointment, in order to remove any possible barriers to attendance;
- regular written communications, including weekly newsletters, are sent home every week through Parentmail;
- we send home report cards on a regular basis;
- parents are regularly invited to school as members of audiences to support a variety of productions;
- we set clear expectations around homework, which is given out on a weekly basis. [Information regarding homework](#) is published on our websites, which emphasises that we see homework as supportive of our working in partnership with parents; and
- we hold regular informal events at school, such as coffee mornings, details of which are published on our websites.

### **2.9.2 Support and training for parents**

In this area, we ensure that, first and foremost, all parents are aware of our open-door policy at our schools. In addition to the approaches described in 'home-school links' above, we:

- ensure that every day, at the start and end of the school day, teachers, support staff and members of our senior leadership team are available for parents to speak to;
- our school websites provide a wealth of information and support;
- our websites also details both our [wrap around care provision](#), and our [extra-curricular clubs provision](#). Each term, a new Club Timetable is published and parents are encouraged to enrol their children; communication is via both the website and via hard copy letters sent home. We offer an on-site Breakfast Club in each school to provide additional support to parents, and, via the Leading Learning Trust, are able to offer after school care at Portway Primary School in our 'Mix till Six' Club;
- this variety of support has, amongst other things, led to an improvement in our attendance figures;
- we have a designated Family Support Worker based at our schools;
- we have an Attendance Officer based at our schools, who works in partnership with parents to ensure that attendance remains good. Our focus on attendance is also communicated to parents via our website.

### **2.8.3 Family and community based interventions**



At Selwyn Primary School and at Portway Primary School, we believe that one of our key strengths is that we are a community school. All our children, and a majority of our staff, live locally: we have a number of parents who were themselves pupils at our school.

Whilst we have a well-developed local focus at our schools, that enables us to treat each child as the unique individual that he/she is, with unique skills, talents and needs, we also work more widely within our community. Specifically:

- Selwyn Primary School is Newham's Resourced Provision for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children. We thus work with the wider community, not just children at our school, to ensure that outcomes are good. Information about how we do this, and about how these children are integrated into the life of our school is available on the [Inclusion page](#) of our website;
- We ensure that all parents feel that our school leadership team and our local governors are approachable and responsive to their needs;
- we regularly hold community events at our schools such as summer and winter fayres, which are increasingly well-attended; and
- we work closely with local and national agencies across all areas of school life, to ensure that every one of our children is given the support and guidance he/she needs to achieve his/her potential.

## 2.10 Roles and responsibilities

Further to the detail provided in the preceding section, the following roles and responsibilities apply:

- Estyn (2009) argues that the most important factor in ensuring that parental and community engagement is successful is the enthusiasm of the head teacher. Our Chief Executive Officer, Emma Nicholls, has been instrumental in both the development and rigorous application of this policy at school, and acts as a role model for the staff body across the Trust in this regard.
- *Senior Leaders and all staff:* are supported and encouraged to be open, approachable and friendly towards all parents at all times, and to understand that the involvement with and support of parents is a key part of their role.
- *Specialists:* such as our Family Support Worker and our Attendance Officer in place at Selwyn Primary School and Portway Primary School, as well as our Teachers of the Deaf, are at all times given both the physical resources and the professional support to carry out their roles effectively.

## 2.11 Footnotes to the text



[1] Note that throughout this policy, 'parental' is taken to mean anyone with care-giving responsibilities.

[2] Denotes that the reference is the same as the previous reference.

[3] This list is taken from the Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Paper (Department for Education, 2010), p. 6.

[4] Quoted in the Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Paper (Department for Education, 2010), p. 10.