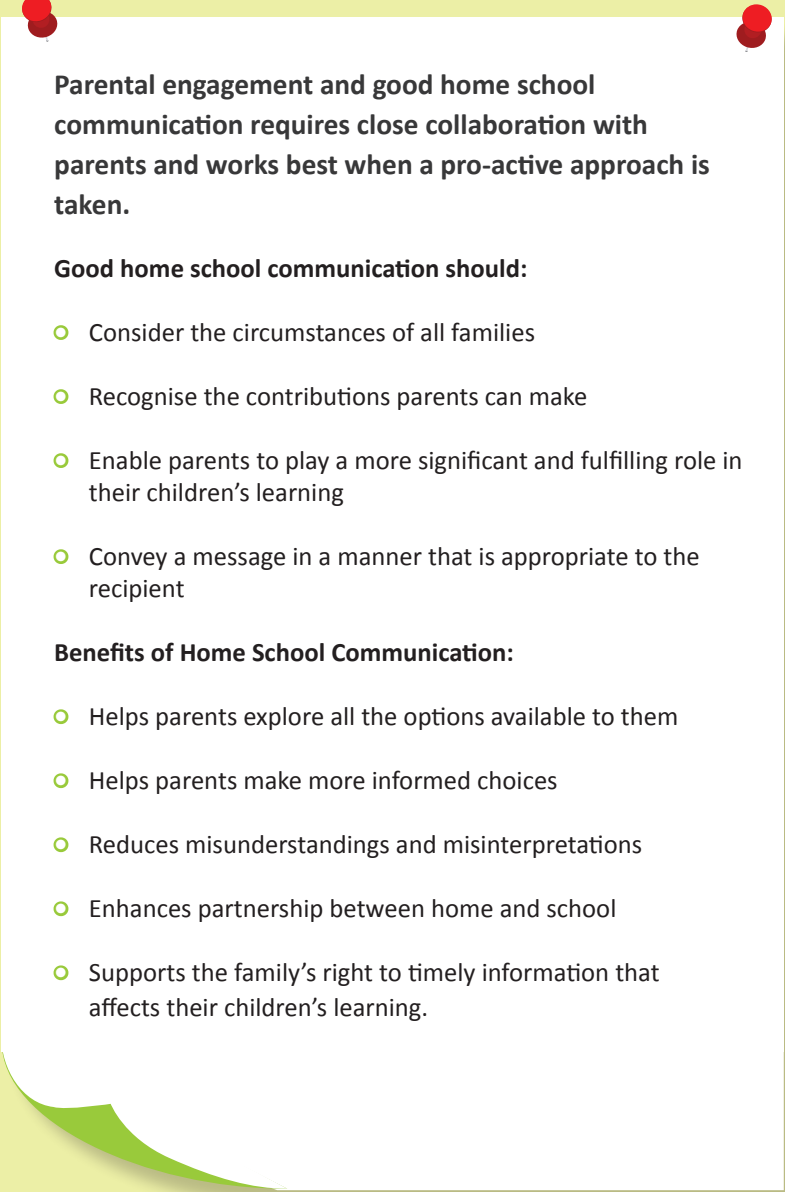


Traveller Education Support Service (TESS)

Home School Communication and Parental Engagement with Traveller Families

This information leaflet is designed to help you focus on home school communication if there are Traveller families in your school.

It is not however, exclusively for use with Traveller families.



Parental engagement and good home school communication requires close collaboration with parents and works best when a pro-active approach is taken.

Good home school communication should:

- Consider the circumstances of all families
- Recognise the contributions parents can make
- Enable parents to play a more significant and fulfilling role in their children's learning
- Convey a message in a manner that is appropriate to the recipient

Benefits of Home School Communication:

- Helps parents explore all the options available to them
- Helps parents make more informed choices
- Reduces misunderstandings and misinterpretations
- Enhances partnership between home and school
- Supports the family's right to timely information that affects their children's learning.

Communication

Communication by Telephone

- Ensure parents know the name of the person they were speaking to
- Reassure the parents the call is not an emergency
- Ask parents if it is convenient to talk
- Clarify who you are, your role in the school and explain the reason for calling
- Give parents an opportunity to ask questions
- Summarise key points at the end of the call for clarification
- You may find keeping a call log useful

Remind parents to update their phone numbers if necessary

Mobile numbers change regularly



Face to Face Communication



- Consider the venue, timing and privacy. 'Soft', informal areas may work better between the two parties
- Welcome any additional support the family may want to bring eg. TESS Officer or Traveller Support Group worker
- Introduce each person, explain roles, explain purpose of the meeting including the reason for taking notes and summarising key points at the end
- Reassure parents that all action points will be followed up and done so confidentially. If appropriate they should receive copies of any reports or notes arising from the meeting

Face to face communication helps to reduce misunderstandings and gives parents a chance to respond and ask questions. 75% of all communication is non-verbal

Written Communication

- Letters/newsletters should be clear with minimal text. Lay out is important; charts, bullet points, boxed text and highlighting in bold for emphasis may all help the parent get the meaning more readily
- Consider making your font size bigger
- Different coloured paper could be used to identify different types of letter and reply needed may be useful; Pink paper for sign and return, white for information only, a visual representation to denote purpose of letter such as First Communion, Confirmation or Church event
- Visual representation of calendar for the year helps minimise the amount of text needed
- When writing letters or notes ensure the name of the person to contact is highlighted
- Put copies of written communication on the school website and reminders on social media if that is being used
- Try to ensure parents receive letters and newsletters even if the pupil is absent
- Consider the 'reply by' time. Has adequate time been allowed to respond?
- Some parents may need to enlist the help of someone from outside the family to help them read or understand the information



School and educational terminology may be difficult to understand e.g. SENCO

Be aware that some parents may bring their younger children to the meeting

Use of ICT

texts, emails, social media, icons, emoticons or other visual cues:



- Survey parents to find out which ICT distribution methods work best for them
- Social media may be good for reminders provided parents use it
- Ensure school websites and apps are highly visual with key messages in bold
- With parental permission, the use of photographs and displays of pupils' work may encourage parents to visit a website more regularly
- Use videos and moving image media to show case school events using social media or school website/apps
- Consider investing in voice messaging via text or mobile phone apps rather than texts in writing only

Text alerts can be positive and convey notices of achievements. Icons to denote this will encourage parents to engage with school texts

What TESS Can Do

For Schools

- We can assist with parent teacher meetings throughout the year. This can help clarify information for parents, identify areas of need and signpost the family to other support providers
- We are available to provide cultural awareness information sessions with a Traveller focus for your staff
- We can help explain school procedures to parents and pupils
- We can encourage schools to use a variety of media to showcase
- We work alongside other agencies supporting Traveller families, disseminate appropriate information and ensuring best outcomes for children, families and schools.

For Parents

- We can assist with transfer arrangements
- As we work with families we may be aware of issues individual family circumstances. We can help signpost them to appropriate services including those available through school e.g. counselling services
- Where necessary, we will assist families in the completion of paperwork associated with school e.g. transfer to Post Primary School, free school meals etc.
- We can accompany parents to school meetings if they feel they need some extra support



Quotes from Traveller Parents



"School don't give me any letters cause I can't read. It's embarrassing for me and embarrassing for my child"

"I am annoyed that my child gets in trouble for not doing her homework but I can't help her. The teacher says she can do it by herself"

"Please phone me because I can't read the letters"

"My child goes behind my back to the neighbours to get them to read the letters"

"My child wouldn't give me the P7 transfer form as she says I cry and get angry when I can't read it"

"Now they are in big school I don't know anything about school"

"When I get the school bulletin and see dates I ring the school and ask what's happening on those dates/times"

"Schools shouldn't send letters out too early about things, I always lose them or forget"



Traveller Education Support Service

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www.eani.org.uk/tess