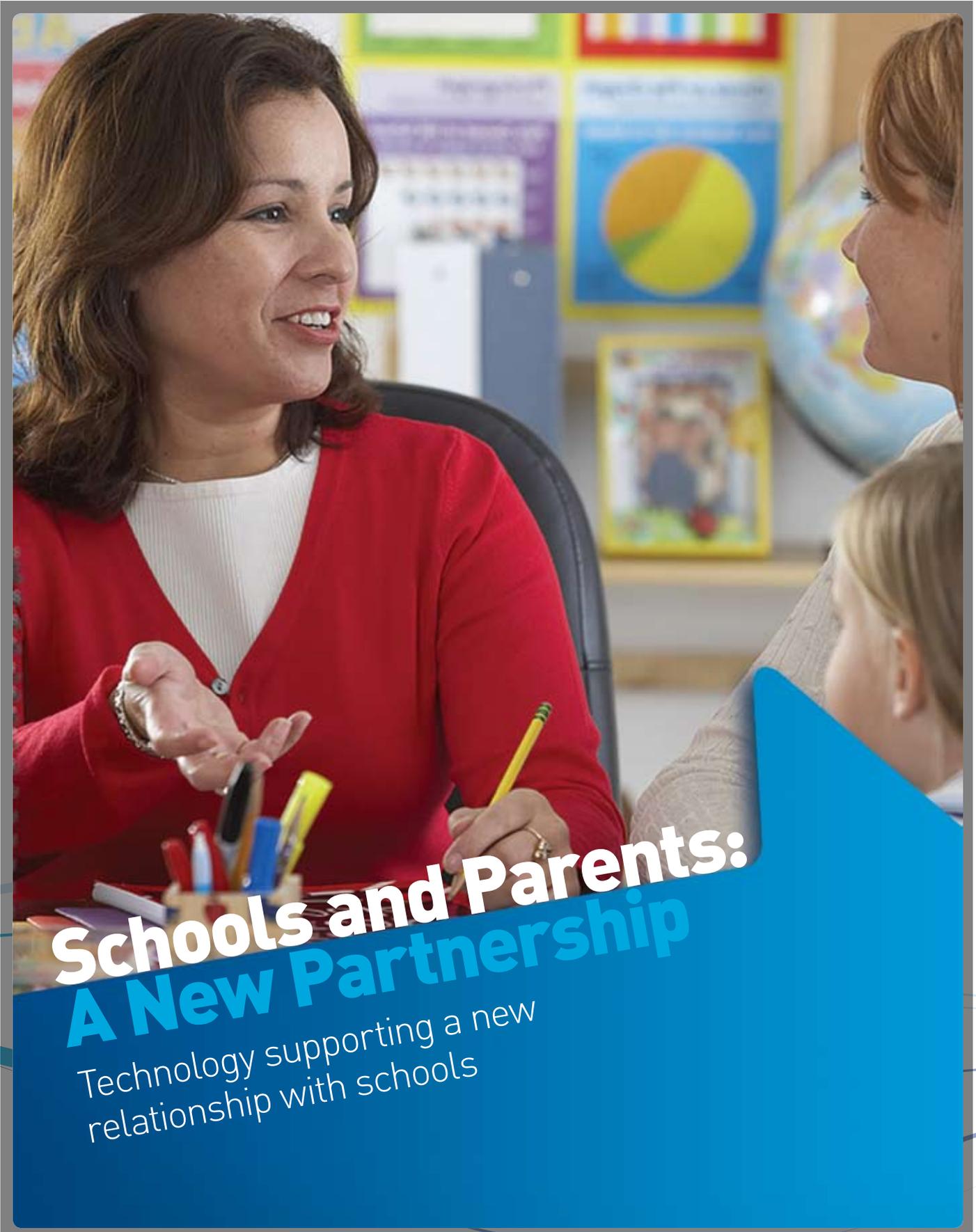


November 2009

Becta leading
next generation
learning



Schools and Parents: A New Partnership

Technology supporting a new
relationship with schools

“Good parental engagement is fundamental to children’s learning and closely linked to increased attainment. One of the more effective ways for parents to engage in their child’s learning is to maintain good communication with a school, learning more about their child’s progress whilst also helping to identify any development or performance issues early on.”



But what does this ‘good communication’ mean in practice?

As a former teacher, I understand that good communication isn't as easy as it sounds. From class teachers, to support staff, headteachers to those in pastoral roles, staff will experience many different approaches – from demanding parents who are constantly looking for reassurance or updates on their child's progress, to those who barely engage at all with their child's school – with each bringing their own unique set of challenges.

But, as a parent, I also know that you don't get an instruction manual on how to best engage with your child's teachers and school, in order to help and support them best. Our research shows that many parents are crying out for sound advice on how to do this, as well as simple – and quick – ways to get information and feedback from schools.

Of late, there's been much discussion about the importance of the parent's role in children's education. But what level of support can a teacher reasonably expect and how active a role should a parent play in their child's education? When does parental engagement (or lack of) become detrimental to a teacher's ability to do their job effectively? And how concerned should schools be about those parents they never hear from?

The **Schools and Parents: A New Partnership**¹, launched as part of Becta's Next Generation Learning campaign, looks at these issues in more detail, uncovering the common challenges faced by both parents and teachers when it comes to successfully communicating.

It also explores the role technology can play in helping to bridge the gap between parents and schools, facilitating easier and more flexible communication.

In this report and on our website www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk we shed some light on this topic, providing simple and practical advice which enables parents to talk to their child's school about the options available to them.

We hope you find it interesting and informative so it can enable you to take one step closer to Next Generation Learning.

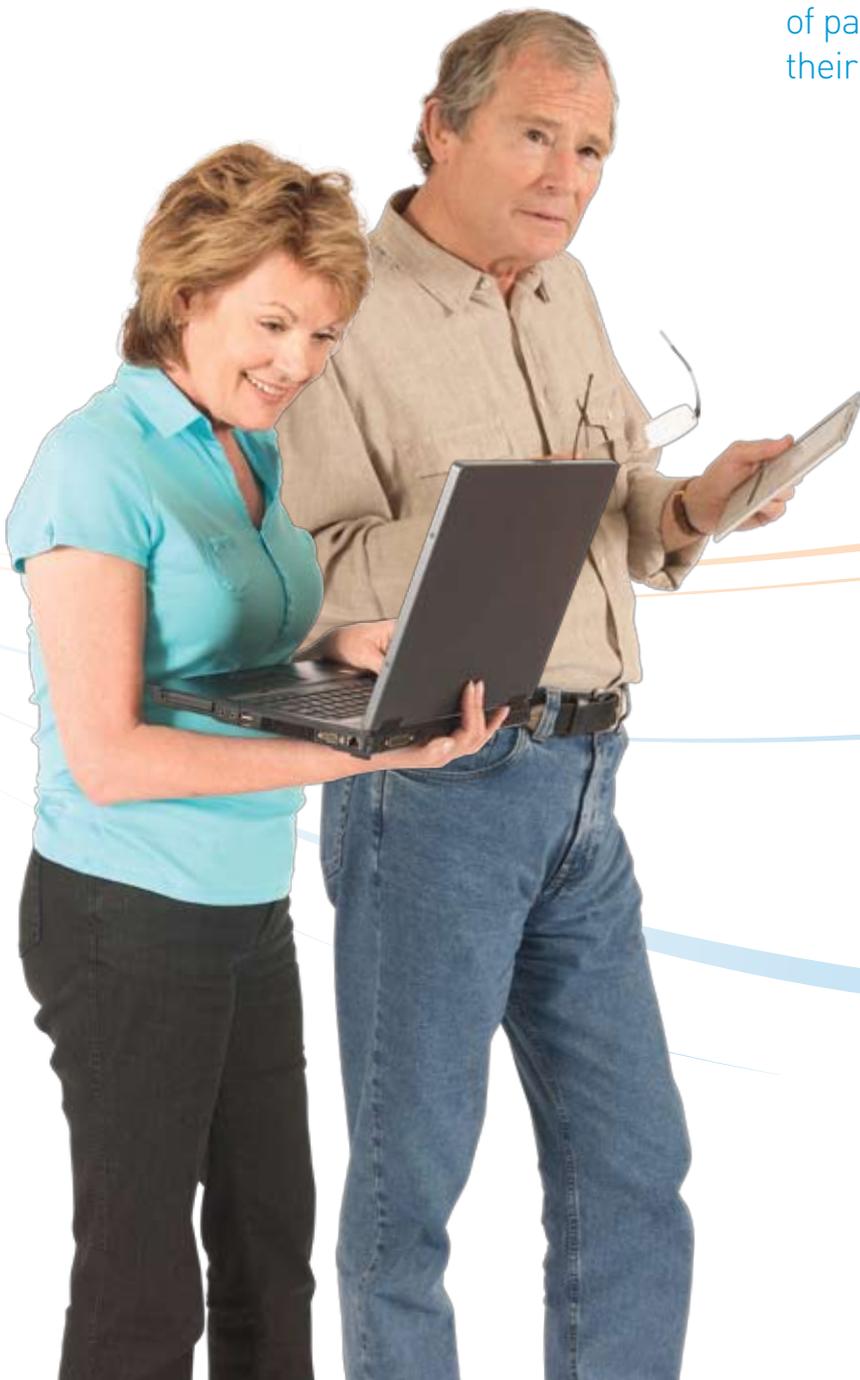


Niel McLean,
Executive Director,
Becta, the government agency
for technology in education

1. Research conducted by OnePoll: online survey of 2,000 parents and 1,000 teachers of primary and secondary school children.

Key findings and analysis

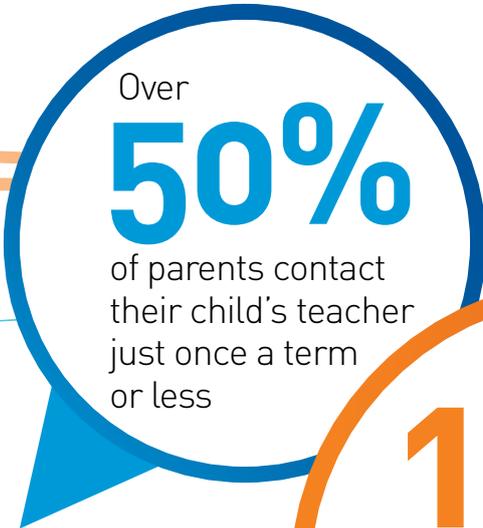
Despite the number of communication channels available – from parents' evenings to emails, after-school meetings to online reporting and learning platforms – Becta's research shows that the majority of parents are not in frequent contact with their child's school...



- Over half of parents contact their child's teacher just once a term or less.
- Of the parents who rarely get in touch with their child's teacher, more than one in five (22%) say they don't see any benefit in regular parent-school contact and 22% say they don't want to add to the teacher's workload.
- More than one in five (22%) school staff feel they do not have enough contact with parents at present.

And whilst many teachers say they're happy with the level of contact they currently have with parents, a significant proportion would like it to be more, with over a third (37%) preferring to have weekly contact at the very least.

However, there is a clear demand from schools for the right balance, as nearly one in 10 (9%) teachers say the level of contact they have with parents is 'too much'. By setting up good communication channels and informing parents, schools can ensure that the majority of teachers' time is not taken up by just a few, demanding parents.

A blue circular callout bubble with a white background and a blue border. It contains the text 'Over 50% of parents contact their child's teacher just once a term or less'. The bubble has a tail pointing towards the bottom left.

Over
50%
of parents contact
their child's teacher
just once a term
or less

An orange circular callout bubble with a white background and an orange border. It contains the text '1 in 5 parents say they don't see any benefit in regular parent-school contact'. The bubble has a tail pointing towards the bottom left.

1 in 5
parents say they
don't see any benefit
in regular parent-
school contact

TAKING A BACK SEAT: THE 'INVISIBLE' PARENTS

CONFIDENCE ISSUES

59%

of parents admit to being in contact with their child's school just once a term or less

Although it has been proved in numerous studies that parental involvement is key to a child's educational success, it seems that many parents aren't aware of just how positive a role they can play.

Of the parents who admitted they rarely made contact with their child's school, more than one in five (22%) said they did not see how being in regular contact with their child's school had any benefit for their child. The majority (67%) of school staff questioned said that these parents simply do not realise how important their support is to their child's development.

42%

of teaching staff say 'invisible' parents lack the confidence to approach them to discuss their child

There are other reasons some parents stay in the background – whilst many parents feel positive following conversations with their child's teacher, a significant proportion reveal they think they are dismissed by the teacher as a 'worrier' (11%) or that they're 'imposing on the teacher's time' (11%) whenever they get in touch.

School staff are aware that this can be an issue: of the parents they don't have regular contact with, 42% of teaching staff said they feel these parents lack the confidence to approach them to discuss their child and 43% even admit that parents might find them 'difficult to approach sometimes'.



TOO BUSY TO HELP?

3 out of **5**

teachers believe the reason some parents are not in regular contact with them is because they think their job stops at the school gate

This is reflected by some parents who say they rarely get in touch with their child's school because they 'believe teachers... not me' should be in charge of their education.

Why? It appears school staff think time is the key factor in some parents' disengagement – the majority (54%) said they thought parents were just 'too busy' to engage with the school and their child's teachers. However, just 8% of parents say the reason they don't get in touch regularly is because they 'struggle to find time', suggesting that there are other factors behind their lack of engagement.

'PUSHY' PARENTS

36%

of teachers say they often come across parents who need 'constant reassurance'

More than one in 10 (11%) said they feel dismissed as an 'overly demanding' parent and 11% say they are made to feel they are imposing on the teacher's time when they try to make contact.

Just over a third (34%) of teachers admit they often come across parents who 'try and influence decisions' about their child, such as which class they go into or where they sit in a classroom and admit that half (50%) of parents that they have the most contact with are those who make themselves available to speak to the teacher at the end of the school day.

WHAT PARENTS AND SCHOOL STAFF ARE TELLING US...

The majority of school staff (54%) say that the relationship they have with pupils' parents is mixed, varying greatly from parent to parent. Staff are also keen for schools to provide tools which can help them have more informed and effective discussions with parents. This and the survey's other findings highlights a need for better communication channels between parents and schools that generates open and honest discussions which help a child progress, whilst also managing the impact on the teacher's workload to ensure the most efficient use of time.

Opening **better** communication channels

The vast majority – 89% – of parents say technology helps them get involved in their child's education, or it could play a more powerful role if they better understood how to use it.

- Over a third (37%) of teachers would welcome practical advice given to parents on how they can communicate more effectively and over a third (39%) said it would be helpful to show parents who are already contacting them how they might do that in a different way that is more beneficial to parents and schools.
- And parents would welcome help too – 37% say they'd like advice on how to improve relations with their child's teacher.



WHAT IS NEXT GENERATION LEARNING?

The Next Generation Learning campaign, initiated by Becta, will enable you to take charge and use technology to its full potential. For schools, it shares examples of best practice and provides useful guidance and tips; for parents, it lets you get fully involved in your child's education at school and at home; for learners, it lets them learn how, when and where they want.

You can find out more by visiting:



www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk



Technology matters

Our research indicates parents view technology as a really useful tool to help them communicate better with their child's teacher.

Many (49%) parents said technology was a huge help, making it easier for them to get involved in their child's education, keep updated and help to support their child's school and teachers. In addition, a further 40% say they think technology could help in some ways, however they don't fully understand the ways they can use it.

But, despite all schools having electronic communication tools, 46% of parents say their child's school doesn't communicate with them electronically at all at present, suggesting these resources are not being utilised fully.



HOW TECHNOLOGY HELPS

Schools can use a wide range of media and communications technology to keep parents informed about a child's achievements, progress, behaviour and attendance. This forms part of what is referred to as **online reporting**. Increasingly, teachers, parents and children can also log in to the school's website with a password to access a range of different resources, typically pupil information, learning resources, collaboration tools and school information. This is often referred to as using a **learning platform**.²

89%

of parents say technology can help keep them in contact with their child's school

42%

feel that a secure space on the school website where they could get information about their child would help communication 'a lot'

44%

of school staff felt email could help them better communicate with parents

2. A learning platform is a collection of tools and services available over a network such as a school website or intranet.

Practical advice and guidance



HOW CAN TECHNOLOGY IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS?

With such a variety of communication tools, it is important that schools provide the proper support and training to ensure that what is communicated is timely and meaningful rather than just 'getting in touch' or sharing data. The partnership between parents and schools means that parents have access to information and advice from a variety of sources which helps them support the development and well-being of their child. By keeping parents informed on their child's progress, communication can be more focused, having more impact and positively benefiting the child.



“Parental engagement is a powerful lever for raising achievement in schools. Where parents and schools work together to improve learning, the gains in achievement are significant.”

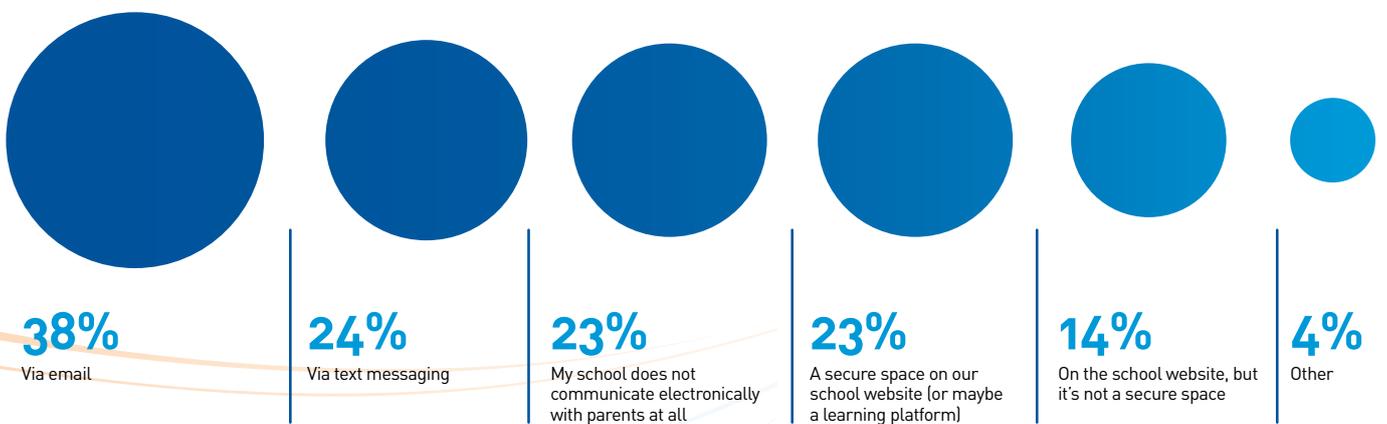
Becta's Niel McLean, a former teacher and parent of two children, offers his advice on how technology can be used to help facilitate regular contact between school and parent:

For schools:

- Consult parents on how they'd like to be kept informed on progress – some parents really value face-to-face contact, whereas others appreciate the convenience of tools such as text alerts or online reporting as a quick way to get a snapshot of their child's progress.

- The school website is one of the most impactful communication tools at your disposal, giving parents access to regular updates on school life and showing that learning is about more than just test results. From timetables, to school trips, sharing photos and learning tools, the website can both support parents and immerse them in school life, meaning they come to more formal meetings better informed.
- Email is popular among parents as a quick way to get information – 50% say an email address where they can get a prompt response would help communication 'a lot' and 42% say regular email updates from the school would help them get more involved. However, it is important schools agree realistic expectations on the use of email with parents and that the technology and systems are in place to help teachers manage emails effectively.

We asked teachers what sorts of technologies their schools were already employing to help improve communication channels between themselves and parents.



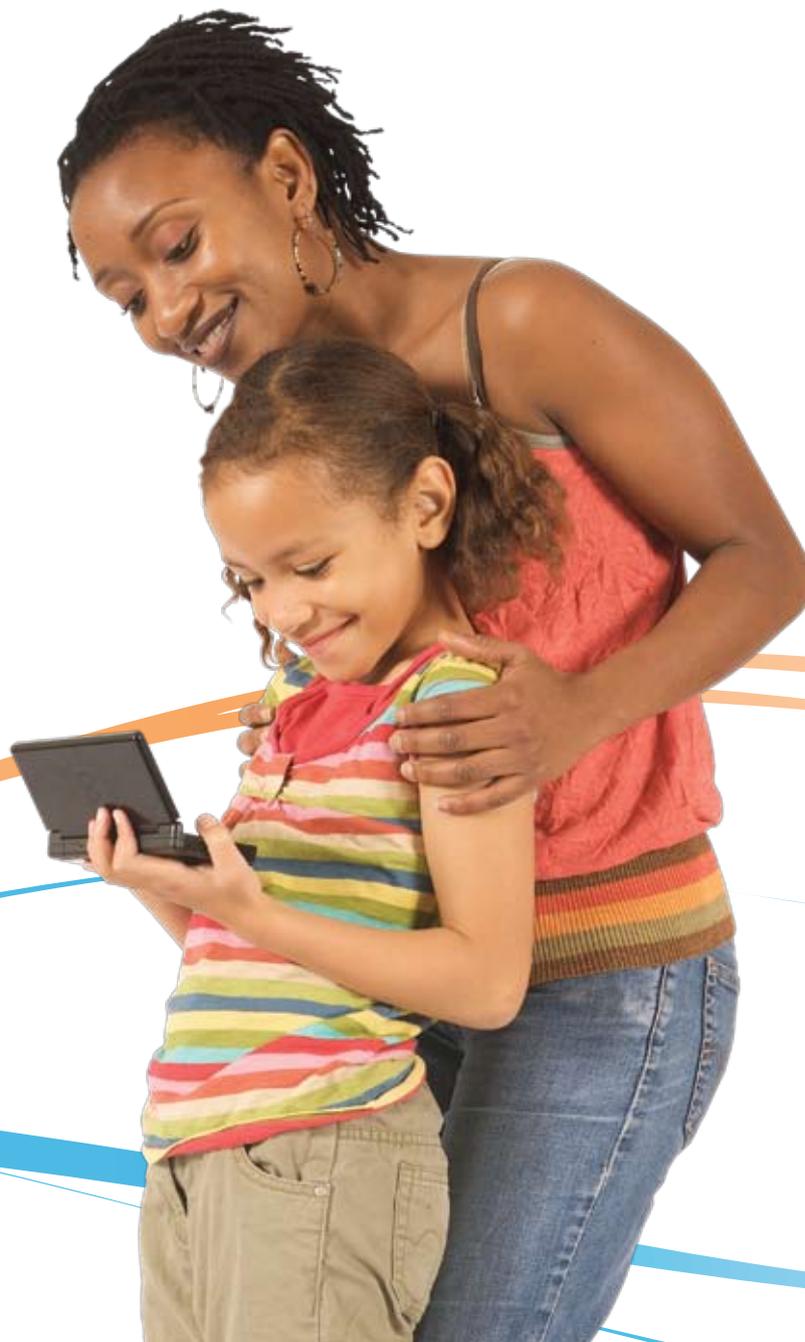
Professor Alma Harris in the report [Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement Do Parents Know They Matter?](#), 2007

For parents:

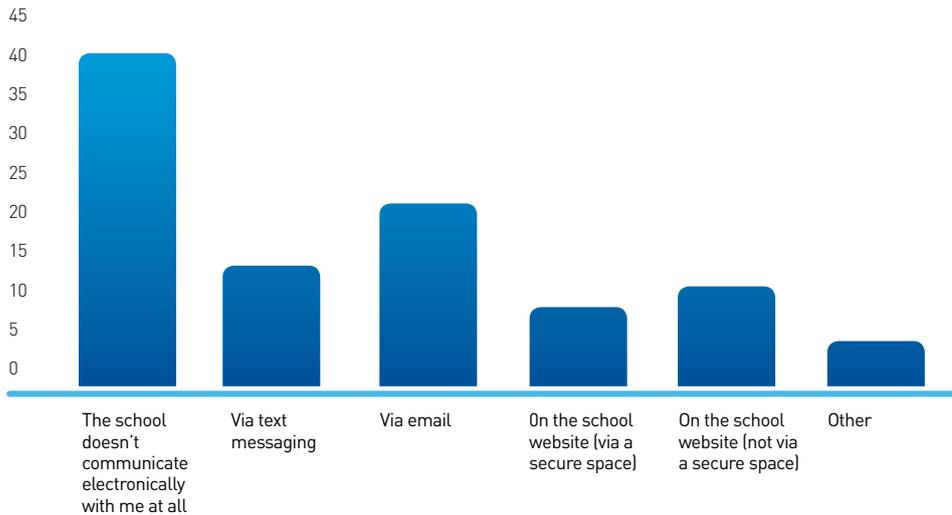
- Your involvement with your child's education is proven to have a positive impact on their attainment. Talk to your child's school and find out what technologies they are currently using to communicate with parents – you might find there are new ways of getting updates which you didn't know were available, for example text or email.
- Be sensitive to your teacher's workload and consider the most time-efficient ways to communicate. For example, rather than sending lots of emails asking for different updates, why not first check the school's website or online reporting facility to see if the information you're looking for is already available.
- talk to your children – a recent report from Becta showed that 82% of parents admit they don't know as much about their child's day at school as they want to, however this is one of the best ways to keep informed and updated. To learn more about how to get the most out of your after-school conversations, visit:



www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/ohnothingmuch



We asked parents what sorts of technology they thought might help them communicate more effectively – and easily – with their child’s school:



DID YOU KNOW?

80% of households with children aged 5–17 years old have internet access at home. For those that don't, many will be supported through the Home Access programme which aims to provide access to computing facilities at home for over 270,000 families in the next 18 months. For more information, please visit:



www.becta.org.uk/homeaccess

“We use technology to keep an open dialogue with parents – from online reporting, learning platforms or emails, we’re able to give parents regular updates on how their child is doing.”

Anne Garner, Headteacher,
Church Aston Infants in
Newport, Shropshire

“I feel by being kept up to date I have a better understanding of what my daughter is doing at school so feel I can help out a bit more than I used to. It’s also nice being able to do stuff together.”

Parent, Monkseaton High School in Tyne and Wear

Keeping updated the simple way: online reporting

Many schools across the country are already improving their partnerships with parents by using technology and the internet to make information available online for parents to access.

This enables parents to:

- keep track of children's work, curriculum and homework assignments
- view their reports, attendance records and grades at any time of day that suits them
- keep in touch with schools and other staff on a regular basis
- have ongoing communication with the school about school life and ways in which they can help their child learn.

 [www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/
parentsaspartners](http://www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/parentsaspartners)



DID YOU KNOW?

All schools are expected to use technology to improve parental engagement with parents. By September 2010, all secondary schools – and by 2012, all primary schools – are expected to offer parents secure online access to information about their child's learning.

“The school website for us is an absolute lifeline as it gives us access to the learning platform where we can access information about our child whenever we want. I have also found as well as feeling satisfied I know what’s going on with my child at school, it also starts conversations off with their teacher.”

“We believe strongly that collaboration with parents will encourage discussion at home and thus reinforce the day’s lesson to the child. Online reporting is a great way to give parents regular updates. Our parents feel more informed and in control when it comes to their child’s education and as a result, the children are more enthusiastic about learning.”

Terry Moon, ICT co-ordinator at Fosseway Special School in Bristol

Parent, Balsall Common Primary School in Coventry

“Our vision for the school is to replace the traditional end of term report and provide up to date information on children that can be accessed securely at any time by parents.”

Christian Hilton, Headteacher at Shipston-on-Stour Primary School in Warwickshire



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About Becta

Becta is the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. It aims to utilise the benefits of technology to create a more exciting, rewarding and successful experience for learners of all ages and abilities, enabling them to achieve their potential.

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