

Three Blackpool schools become the first primaries to be awarded GOLD in the new Parental Engagement Quality Standard

St Nicholas Primary, St Bernadette Primary and Hawes Side Primary, Blackpool have been recognised and celebrated for their outstanding work with parents. The three schools applied for the award as a network and their success demonstrate how working together to share ideas and strategies, further develops practice and really makes a difference to outcomes for children.

Sean O'Hare Head teacher at St Bernadette School said: 'Parents have to be at the heart of everything we do. We have to share and agree mutually the values and aspirations that we have for their children. Only then will we break through any barriers to attainment and achievement. New technologies with on line classrooms provide an active or virtual window into a child's learning with opportunities to participate, encourage, promote and inform. The arrival of low cost netbooks means that it is now possible for every child to have use of a netbook between home and school. School can further facilitate by ensuring 100% access through enablement and funding.'

In achieving the Gold award, St Bernadettes were recognised for their work in genuinely engaging parents in the life of the school and wide ranging opportunities to impact on learning. Parental engagement is a feature of the school's success in supporting and enabling children to achieve to their very best.

Top tips from St Bernadettes:

- Give parents their own forum on the online classroom
- Create an information bar for 'reminders' of school events including assemblies and workshops and tips for supporting your child's learning

What is the school proud of?

The Senior Family Support Worker (SFSW) created three years ago, initiated by the school

as a pilot with the Local Authority. The SFSW develops the networks within the Authority to support children and their families in ensuring that the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda are constantly and consistently being addressed. The role of the SFSW has been significant in enabling us to reach out to parents who have traditionally not been able to engage with the school and the impact on these children has been significant and sustained.

Andy Mellor Head teacher at St Nicholas Primary said: 'Most Primary schools realize that they can no longer meet the Standards and Social agendas alone, and that true parental engagement is the only way to proceed through the glass ceiling. However, real progress is made through focused and planned engagement rather than ad hoc involvement, and values parents as the critical factor in the learning process. These initiatives and many others are vital to engaging with parents as many live a distance from the school. However, with the school's vision for parental engagement, and Blackpool Local Authority's vision for wireless connectivity we have huge potential for further potential for parental engagement.'

In achieving the Gold Award, St Nicholas Primary shared an approach to homework that has enabled parents and children to enjoy learning together – the impact on achievement is significant.

'We have known for some time that conventional homework has switched off learners and parents and has been seen as a chore. After several complaints about homework, we trialed new ways to promote learning in the home. These were met with universal approval from parents and are now embedded within our system practice. Learning logs allow pupils to look at areas for study and work with their parents to research, record and learn creatively.



The result is a stunning collaboration between parents, learners and the school which have seen standards rise and engagement grow enormously.

We are also looking at ways to personalise our curriculum in Year 1 to meet the needs of all pupils. This has involved working with parents to use our online classroom. From here, parents are engaged in target setting to share where their children need to go on their personal learning journey. Through the use of ICT, parents are now actively engaged with their children's learning and were so engaged that they came to school dressed as pirates to take part in pirate boat making! The standard, quantity and quality of writing created by Year 1, motivated by parental engagement is stunning! These children know that writing is important and learning is important because parents and teachers are one voice in supporting their development.'

Top Tips from St Nicholas:

- Consult with parents about everything that will impact upon them directly. The more you consult the more you are in a position to meet and be in tune with parental concerns, and are then in a position to meet these concerns. Use technology to help you ... develop an email distribution list. It is quick, efficient and suits parental lifestyles as they respond when they check their emails
- Think carefully about your work with parents and then be ruthless and decide which is involvement with parents and which is true engagement. True engagement should be embedded and give parents a real role in helping to guide the future direction of the school

What is the school proud of?

The most satisfying part of this work is the knowledge that the school are working with parents to effect change that impacts on the children and their life chances. Staff have had a great deal of fun in getting to know parents better and helping them to help their children to achieve.

'Many parents have us that they would like to come back to school given the way that children now learn so we have a real opportunity to impact at this particular time. We acknowledged that many parents had poor experiences when they were at school and this work does turn around these perceptions.'

Michael Sheperd Head teacher at Hawes Side Primary said: 'Parental engagement is the key driver in children's learning. We need to ensure that learning isn't seen as something that only happens in school, but extends to home and beyond. When Standards have reached a plateau – we need to look at how we move beyond a formulaic approach to make learning sustainable and move from shallow, short term experiences to a deeper, life long habit.

Parents play a crucial role in this. If we are to prepare children for an uncertain future with infinite possibilities we need to work closely with families and the wider community to develop a shared learning journey that equips them for life.'

In achieving the Gold Award, Hawes Side have explored numerous ways to utilize new technologies to support parents in helping their children learn. Children in the school write blogs that help their parents (and other pupils) understand what they are learning and pupils achievement are celebrated through a range of different technologies. The school has committed to find new and innovative ways to engage parents and share and celebrate learning.

Top Tips from Hawes Side Primary:

- Set up reading mornings (ERIC – everyone reading in class) we have these every Tuesday morning and parents are invited to school to read with the children – this quickly engages parents in their child's learning, shows positive reading role models and ensures all children read with an adult each week
- Home School Group (HSG) – set up a forum where parents can come along and help shape school thinking, our recent agendas



Pupils of Cherry Orchard present at the Education Show

have included homework policy, Home School Agreements, phones in school, learning logs.

What are the school most proud of?

Our use of Blogs. We were highly commended by the SSAT at the SSAT National Conference last year.

Learning logs – these have revolutionised homework! A more creative approach to out of school learning which engages parents fully with children and their families sharing in the curiosity and excitement of researching and learning together. The logs can be accessed and developed on line and work is celebrated in school with parents being an active part of the child's learning journey.

Has your school had success in engaging parents?

Parental Engagement Quality Standard (PEQS) has been designed and developed with over 200 schools, and produced as a direct response to demand from schools requesting support in auditing their current practice with parents and rewarding their progress in this work.

The network of Blackpool schools were instrumental in developing The Parental Engagement Toolkit to draw on case studies collected from schools across the country. The tool enables primaries to audit their existing work with parents, and set their future direction in working to engage all parents with their child's learning. This includes working towards the online reporting requirements for all primaries by 2012. Parental engagement is a powerful lever for raising student achievement, and many schools are developing strategies to build stronger links with parents.

Read more about what parental engagement can do for your school, how to apply for a PEQS award and the support available at:

www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk/eca or email engagingparents@ssatrust.org.uk

In March, six Year 6 children from Cherry Orchard Primary School in Birmingham went to the National Exhibition Centre to present our famous Cherry Orchard Children's Charter at The Education Show. Our school had been asked by NCSL and NET to create a Children's Charter for Learning, which would inform people about how we learn best and what we enjoy learning. We had worked really hard to write our charter, gathering the views of all the children in the school.

We created a PowerPoint presentation of our final ideas and even composed some music using ICT to accompany it. We were really proud to be given the opportunity to talk about our final presentation with people outside of our own school. The six children who attended the show were Tony Adams, Humaa Asif, Har-Jeeve Singh Takhar, Kiran Kaur Madier, Jada Dowdie and Danny Sian. We presented our Charter to members of the public who stopped off at the SSAT stand and we also helped with giving out forms for primary and secondary school teachers to fill in.

We had comments like "excellent show well put together considering it was written by primary school children" and we were also told that we were excellent ambassadors for our school.

The SSAT staff were very impressed with the number of forms we managed to get the visitors to fill in! We were very persuasive!

At the end of our presentation job we got to look around other stalls and got some freebies we really enjoyed going there even though we had to work. Everyone's day was brilliant and we loved representing our school. We made our teachers proud, our headteacher proud and most of all our school proud. At the end of the day we all had a smile on our faces because we were extremely proud of our selves.

Year 6 Representatives from Cherry Orchard Primary School, Birmingham.

