Texting Parents

This project involved text messages being sent to parents using school communications systems, such as Schoolcomms. Texts informed parents about dates of upcoming tests, whether homework was submitted on time, and what their children were learning at school.

Bristol University and Harvard University
Independent Evaluator
Queen’s University Belfast

Pupils: 15697
Schools: 34
Grant: £532,620

Themes:
P Parental engagement
O Organising your school

Cross curriculum
Key Stage 3

EEF Summary

We funded this project because existing evidence suggests that engaging parents in their children’s education can have a positive impact on pupil outcomes. A study in the United States found evidence that texting information to parents about children’s attendance and homework submission records was successful in increasing their attainment.

This evaluation found a small positive impact on mathematics attainment and on decreasing absenteeism. While this result was small, the cost of sending texts parents is very low (a maximum of around £6 per pupil per year averaged over three years) making the intervention highly cost-effective.

Several studies of previous interventions that aimed to increase the involvement of parents in their children’s education have not found an impact on attainment, including more intensive and costly projects. The evidence in the Teaching and Learning Toolkit also suggests that changing parents’ behaviour is challenging - especially for parents of older students, such as those who took part in this project. The cost effectiveness of the approach and the easy availability of the technology to schools mean that communicating with parents through text messaging is an approach that school leaders should consider.
Research Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome/Group</th>
<th>Impact - the size of the difference between Texting Parents pupils and other pupils</th>
<th>Security - how confident are we in this result?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>+1 Months' Progress</td>
<td>☑ ☑ ☑ ☑ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>+1 Months' Progress</td>
<td>☑ ☑ ☑ ☑ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>0 Months' Progress</td>
<td>☑ ☑ ☑ ☑ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
<td>-0.05 (Effect size)</td>
<td>☑ ☑ ☑ ☑ ☑</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Were the schools in the trial similar to my school?

29 schools took part in the trial, 21 of which were rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. 26% of pupils were eligible for pupil premium and 20% had English as an additional language.

Could I implement this in my school?

Many schools already have software that allows them to communicate directly with parents using text messages. This project used research assistants to co-ordinate the collection of content for and to organise the sending of messages.

Delivered by **School Leaders**  
Participant group **Whole School**  
Intervention length **1 Year**

How much will it cost?

The average cost of Texting parents was around £5680, or £6 per pupil per year when averaged over three years. This includes the cost of a licence for Schoolcomms. Many schools will have existing communications software, which will reduce costs.

Cost per pupil **£6**  
Training time per staff member **0.0 Days**

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Key Stage</th>
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<td>34</td>
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<td>Key Stage 3</td>
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Start date  
End date  
Type of trial

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Evaluation Conclusions

1. Children who had the intervention experienced about one month of additional progress in maths compared to other children. This positive result is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

2. Children who had the intervention had reduced absenteeism compared to other children. This positive result is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

3. Children who had the intervention appeared to experience about one month of additional progress in English compared to other children. However, analysis suggests that this finding might have been affected by bias introduced by missing data, so we cannot reliably draw this conclusion. There is no evidence to suggest that the intervention had an impact on science attainment.

4. Schools embraced the programme and liked its immediacy and low cost. Many respondents felt that the presence of a dedicated coordinator would be valuable to monitor the accuracy and frequency of texts. Schools should consider whether they would be able to provide this additional resource.

5. The vast majority of parents were accepting of the programme, including the content, frequency, and timing of texts.