

# AN EEF SCHOOL CASE STUDY: COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

## The Blue School, Wells

### School context:



The Blue School is a large comprehensive school for 11–18 year olds on the outskirts of Wells, in Somerset. The school serves 1,500 pupils from the city and nearby towns and villages. Approximately 15% of students on role are eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

### 1 What problem were you looking to solve?

During a recent training day, our staff collectively identified an opportunity to improve our engagement with students' parents and carers. Specifically, we wanted to increase the breadth of support we could offer to parents and carers in looking after our pupils outside of the classroom.

We conducted a review of how we were working with parents and carers, using the advice from the EEF's 'Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning' guidance report. In particular, recommendation 1 – 'Critically Review how you work with parents' – helped us to shape the form of our analysis.

### 2 What were the anticipated barriers/challenges?

We needed to find out more about what kind of support would be of use to the families of our students. In accordance with the EEF's guidance, we reached out to parents we were not currently working with amongst our school's community, to learn from them directly the areas with which they would appreciate our support. Our parents welcomed the opportunity to signpost subjects they felt unsure of. For example, one father of a Year 10 student told us that he felt guilty that he did not know how to effectively support his child through their GCSEs.

### 3 What did you do?

On the basis of this feedback, we put together a schedule of parent information evenings bespoke to the needs of our school community. We worked to develop strong links with a range of experts who shared our desire to be proactive and preventative in providing support to our students' families. As a result, we were able to offer workshops supported by our local social services, the police, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and other early help providers. Topics included emotion coaching, resilience, and social media and drugs awareness.

All parents were invited to these workshops to avoid stigmatising or discouraging those who would benefit the most. In order to raise awareness of the workshops amongst these families, form tutors identified parents from each of their groups to contact directly about the event, encouraging them to attend. Tutors were provided with a clear script, stating their reason for phoning and providing more information about the event, so that they felt confident in conducting these communications sensitively.

### 4 How do you monitor/evaluate that the intervention is working?

We ensure that we gather feedback from parents at each of these evenings. In more "normal" circumstances, we would issue a paper questionnaire to parents during the evening and then collect it before they depart. For recent online events, we have sent a link to an electronic questionnaire which uses a Google Form to collect feedback. So far, the reception has been positive and we are building momentum each time we hold a new event.

In order to maintain access to these sessions, we now ensure that we vary the timings and offer the workshops online as well as in person; for example using Zoom online sessions for top-up maths and English courses. This has helped us to both ensure that sessions are easily accessible and constantly monitor attendance rates at these events, which we use to evaluate their ongoing success and relevance to parents and carers.

### Additional:

#### Suggested reading:

- *Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning* guidance report: [eef.li/supporting-parents/](https://eef.li/supporting-parents/)
- *Communicating Effectively with Families: Guide for Schools:* [eef.li/covid-cefg/](https://eef.li/covid-cefg/)
- *Other Covid-19 resources for parents:* [eef.li/school-closures/](https://eef.li/school-closures/)
- *The EEF Guide to Supporting School Planning – A Tiered Approach to 2021* [eef.li/school-planning/](https://eef.li/school-planning/)



### Reflection questions

- How effective are your ongoing communications with families and how do you know?
- How targeted and specialised are your ongoing communications and how can you best utilise funding to enhance them further? e.g. effective technology to support remote communications.