

Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools: *Its relevance for Northern Ireland*



Parent
Friendly
Schools
Blueprint

Parentkind

Parentkind's
Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools

Welcome

This document sets the scene for Parentkind's *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* in the Northern Ireland context, including:

- Parentkind's role in Northern Ireland
- the evidence base that informs Parentkind's work in Northern Ireland
- how Parentkind's *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* aligns with the local educational policies and priorities

Tell me more

To find out more
about Parentkind
visit:
parentkind.org.uk



About us

Parentkind Northern Ireland

Parentkind was established in 1956 and has been actively working and listening to parents on the ground in Northern Ireland for the past 14 years.

Our mission is to support and champion tirelessly all the ways parents can participate in education and have their voices heard. Parentkind has been a true advocate in Northern Ireland not only for this but also in successfully navigating home-school relationships.

As the leading membership organisation for parent-teacher associations (PTAs), we have over 400 active committees in Northern Ireland raising an estimated £3.73 million per year for their schools. We support our PTAs to diversify from their more traditional fundraising activities to include working more proactively, encouraging parents to become more involved in school life and their children's education. For example, we have linked up funders during COVID which has enabled PTAs across Northern

Ireland to get grants for tablets, art packs and other learning resources and have helped schools to work with PTAs, despite the challenging times, by designing an engagement plan that fits within the school's one-year action plan that will morph seamlessly into the school development plan 2021/2022.

As well as helping PTAs, we have recognised the challenge for parents to have their voice articulated and included in policy design. We have provided a platform for parents in Northern Ireland in various ways, including setting up an All Party Group – Parental Participation in Education - mirroring the APPG in Westminster so parents will have their voices heard at a local and national level as well as Parent Panels, Round Table discussions with MLAs and our most recent Northern Ireland Parents' Parliament.

We will continue to advocate on parents' behalf on the things that matter to them most about their children's education.



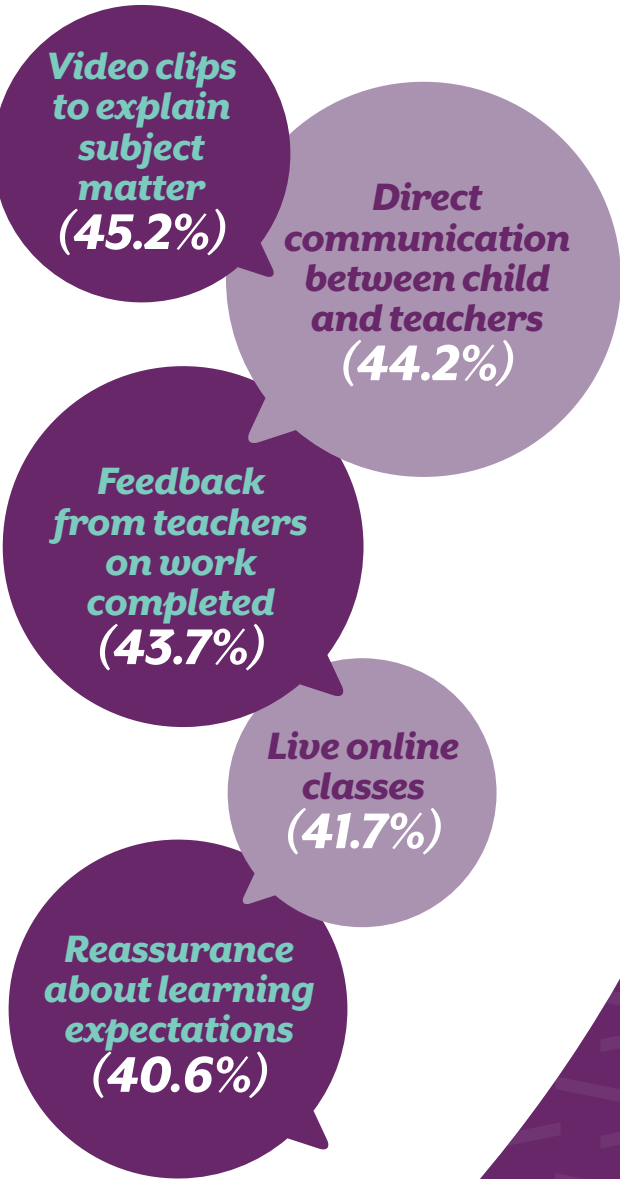
Our Evidence Base

Parentkind has been listening to parents in Northern Ireland, England and Wales over the last six years with our annual parent surveys as well as more recent regular parent polls during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our evidence in Northern Ireland was further cemented with our 2018 survey *Northern Ireland Parents' Views on School and Education* as well as more qualitative research in our Northern Ireland Parents' Parliaments.

In March 2020, Parentkind carried out a survey of 257,392 parents across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to examine what impact COVID19 was having on them - 1,795 were based in Northern Ireland.

In the aftermath of school closures for most pupils, the most common concern for parents in Northern Ireland was that their child would fall behind or miss out in their learning. While most (93%) said that schools had shared details of the arrangements for home learning and that they, as parents, were confident to some extent in supporting their child's learning (62%), it is apparent that clear communication between school and home is now particularly important, as is the role parents play in supporting learning.

Parents were also asked what support would be helpful for supporting home learning. Consistent with England and Wales, Northern Ireland parents' most frequent requests were for:



Parents in Northern Ireland were also more likely to want hard copy resources/worksheets (38.8%) rather than worksheets to print at home (26.6%). Further analysis of the survey comments also identified key themes that concerned parents in Northern Ireland.

Parents at primary and post-primary both identified the need for access to better resources and interactive live classes, communication from teachers and schools, and a desire for support and guidance for parents.

Primary parents were disappointed with current service provision and wanted more support for pupils with SEN. Post-primary parents highlighted the need for a structured, consistent approach to pupils' learning and support for children's wellbeing.

These recommendations have been resented to the Department of Education in partnership with the School of Psychology at Queen's University, Belfast.



Parents said, we did!

Over the last two years in Northern Ireland:

Parents told us that they wanted a greater level of engagement with those in authority in education. We set up the Northern Ireland Parents' Parliaments, supported by the Department of Education, CCEA and Queen's University, and we travelled the breadth of Northern Ireland to give parents the opportunity to engage directly with the policymakers.

Parents told us they wanted a voice in the political arena. We set up the All Party Group – Parental Participation in Education on the Northern Ireland Assembly and also one in Westminster – so parents' voices will be heard.

Parents told us they wanted to speak directly to MLAs. We organised video and physical sessions with the Minister of Education, members from the Education Committee and others. We gave parents the opportunity to ask the hard questions and hear first-hand from those making and designing the decisions.

Parents told us they didn't understand the curriculum; it was the top thing parents wanted to have a greater understanding of. We worked with CCEA who came and listened to parents; with their help CCEA has added a great parent section on their website – a one-stop shop for everything parents want to know about the curriculum, examinations and assessment.

Parents told us that they wanted bite-size videos to explain subject matter to support learning at home. Working with the Widening Participation Team at Stranmillis University College we are developing a series of these videos for parents. Together we are engaging students, practising teachers and parents to design and develop a library of resources. Bringing parents together with the students provides them with a rich opportunity to hear from and engage directly with parents who will one day be helping them support their pupils' education.

Parents told us that they most feared the impact school closures would have on their children's mental health. We are still shouting about this - in meetings, through podcasts and with everyone that will listen. We promise we will continue to make sure that policymakers know parents' fears about their child's psychological wellbeing.

To find out more
and read the
report, visit:

parentkind.org.uk/blueprint



Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools

Parents are children's first educators and they form a vital part of any child's learning, from early years through to the end of their formal school or college tuition and beyond. If schools and parents work together with a focus on the child's happiness and educational progress, the child will thrive.

However, we know that sometimes it is hard to build that bridge between school and home, especially with families that have traditionally not engaged with schools, so we have created our evidence-based *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools*.

Our *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* helps school leaders to maximise parents' interest in their children's learning to create successful home school partnerships, built on five key drivers, reinforced with three guiding principles and a shared common language.

These are the foundations for school leaders to establish or improve existing strategies backed up with training and practical approaches that all schools can put into practice and monitor.

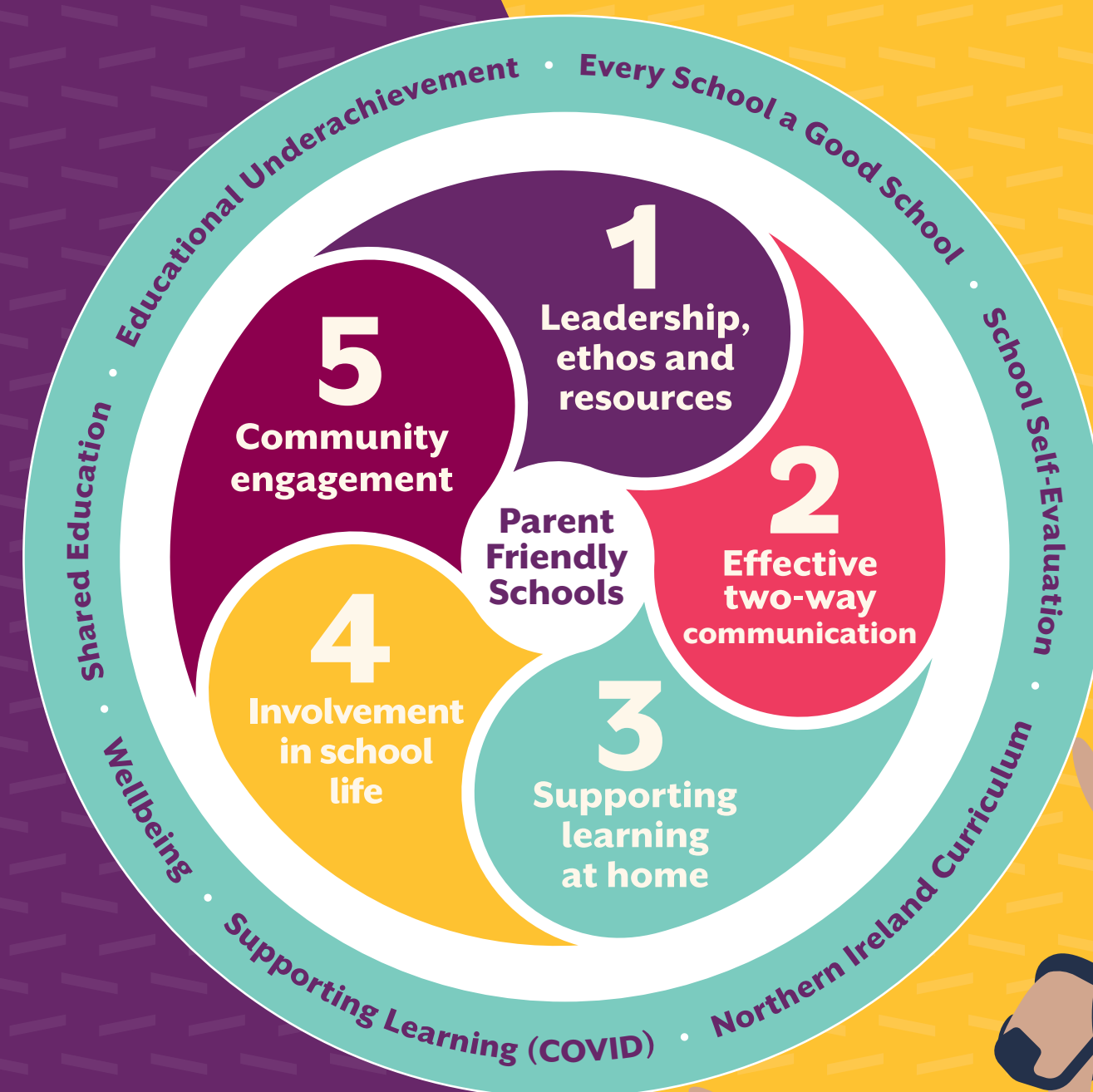
In the current Covid-19 pandemic context, research has identified that the Key Drivers that are particularly relevant are Effective Two-Way Communication and Supporting Learning at Home.

Five Key Drivers

The Educational Context (Policies and Principles)

Parentkind's *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* Five Key Drivers are closely aligned to core educational policies and priorities in Northern Ireland and to the principles of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

Developing effective relationships and encouraging parental participation can have significant benefits for schools and for pupil achievement and wellbeing. Some of these key synergies are outlined here.



For further information on the *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools*, visit:

parentkind.org.uk/blueprint

| Policy, Principle and Parental Participation | How the <i>Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools</i> can support this | Policy, Principle and Parental Participation | How the <i>Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools</i> can support this |
|---|---|---|--|
| <div><div>></div><div>Every School a Good School</div><div>The <i>Every School a Good School</i> policy (2009) aims to support schools and teachers to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning that some pupils may face. It is clear that parental participation can play a key role in this, and the policy seeks to encourage ‘increasing engagement between schools, parents and families, recognising the powerful influence they and local communities exercise on educational outcomes’.</div><div>The policy includes the key principle of ‘recognition that the improvement process is a collaborative one, requiring communication and co-operation within the school and between the school and its parents and the wider community that it serves’ and a school’s connection with its local community is included as one of the Indicators of Effective Performance.</div><div><div>Tell me more</div></div></div> | <div><div>The <i>Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools</i> emphasises the importance of effective school leadership and whole-school approaches to promote positive ethos and values. It provides a parental participation framework, supported by practical approaches and tools, by which schools can involve parents in decision-making and include them as a valuable resource whose contribution is valued.</div><div><div>Key Drivers</div><div><div>• Leadership, ethos and resources</div><div>• Effective two-way communication</div><div>• Community engagement</div></div></div><div><div>In Practice</div><div><div>• See Learning Leaders (Knocknagoney)</div></div><div><div>Knocknagoney</div><div><div>Tell me more</div></div></div></div></div> | <div><div>></div><div>Learning Leaders</div><div>The <i>Learning Leaders</i> Teacher Professional Learning Strategy recognises that ‘every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people’. <i>Learning Leaders</i> emphasises the importance of building learning communities and networks.</div><div>This collaborative approach includes developing productive relationships with parents, but also has the potential to tap into the range of expertise offered by parents and community organisations.</div><div><div>Tell me more</div><div>Tell me more</div></div><div><div><div><div></div></div><div><div></div></div><div><div></div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div></div></div></div> | <div><div>We recognise that every school context is unique - that it is not a case of ‘one size fits all’ – and that schools and teachers will identify their own priorities and approaches.</div><div>The <i>Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools</i> is not a prescriptive approach; it highlights opportunities for teachers and provides broad guiding principles by which schools can develop this aspect of their practice, suited to their own context.</div><div>The accompanying resources, including self-evaluation checklists, templates and ‘how to’ tips, can support schools and teachers in this. There will also be examples of practice where schools share their learning journey and what has worked for them.</div><div>Teachers may not have received specific parental engagement training as part of their Teacher Professional Learning (TPL). The Parentkind training programme offers introductory levels and masterclasses, as well as consultancy with experts in parental participation, that support identified areas of development and interest.</div><div><div>Key Drivers</div><div><div>• Leadership, ethos and resources</div><div>• Involvement in school life</div></div></div><div><div>In Practice</div><div>How a school developed and implemented collaborative training and activities that built the capacity of parents to support their own children in their learning and contribute to wider underachievement outcomes.</div><div><div>Eastside Learning and Knocknagoney Primary School</div><div><div>Tell me more</div></div></div></div></div> |
| <div><div>></div><div>School Self-Evaluation Framework</div><div>Effective communication, consultation and engagement with parents is a key aspect of self-evaluation and school development planning, encouraging commitment to the improvement process from the school community.</div><div><div>Tell me more</div></div></div> | <div><div>Parentkind’s Parental Participation audit tool is designed to support the self-evaluation process and identify areas of strength and potential development which can then be incorporated into schools’ development plans.</div><div>The three guiding principles emphasise the importance of explicit planning, reflection and evaluation, and adequate resourcing. The <i>Blueprint</i> also provides practical tips on developing consultation with parents.</div><div><div>Key Drivers</div><div><div>• Leadership, ethos and resources</div><div>• Effective two-way communication</div></div></div><div><div>In Practice</div><div><div>Knocknagoney</div><div><div>Tell me more</div></div></div></div></div> | | |



Policy, Principle and Parental Participation

> Northern Ireland Curriculum

The statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum aims to enable and empower all young people to achieve their potential – academically, socially and emotionally. The curriculum seeks to make learning real and relevant, and children are encouraged to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to learning that will equip them for their future life and work.

It's important that parents understand the aims and approaches of the curriculum. The curriculum also offers many opportunities to involve parents actively in their child's learning, for example through thematic and topic-based activities.

Tell me more

How the *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* can support this

Parents want to have a greater understanding of the curriculum. Parentkind worked with CCEA who have added a parent section on their website – providing information on the curriculum, examinations and assessment.

Tell me more

The *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* outlines how schools can proactively encourage parents to support their child's learning and create a positive home learning environment.

Key Drivers

- Parents supporting learning
- Involvement in school life
- Community engagement

In Practice

How a school helped a parent to understand more about her son's learning and improve her own maths skills.

Hazelwood Integrated College

Tell me more

How a school addressed cultural barriers to help a parent understand the curriculum and how children are taught in Northern Ireland.

Botanic Primary School, Belfast

Tell me more



Policy, Principle and Parental Participation

> Shared Education

One of the main aims of Shared Education is to build a strong and shared community by promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion. Open and transparent communication with parents is key to this, to ensure their support and buy in for shared education activities and for the development of relationships.

Active involvement of parents in shared education activities and events can help contribute to community cohesion and 'bridge the gap' between home and school.

Tell me more

Tell me more

How the *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* can support this

The Parental Participation Framework includes practical strategies to encourage parents to become actively involved in school life and to develop community engagement, so helping to strengthen relationships between schools and their communities.

Key Drivers

- Involvement in school life
- Community engagement

In Practice

How a school partnership promoted parental and community involvement in a Shared Education activity through their Montalto Project.

Ballynahinch Partnership:

Tell me more

- Assumption Grammar School
- St Colman's High School
- St Colmcille's High School
- The High School Ballynahinch



Policy, Principle and Parental Participation

How the *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* can support this

> Supporting Learning (COVID Response)

In the aftermath of school closures for most pupils in March 2020, parents were concerned that their child will fall behind or miss out in their learning. Clear communication between school and home is even more important than ever, as is the role that parents play in supporting learning.

The Education Authority has provided a hub for parents and carers with resources and useful links to support learning at home. This includes guidance on how schools and parents can work collaboratively to support children's learning.

[Tell me more](#)
[Tell me more](#)

The Department of Education also has a list of resources that you may find useful to assist your child with their learning during the period of school closures due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

[Tell me more](#)

Parentkind has provided links to free online resources to support learning.

Parentkind has supported EA in developing a Teacher Professional Learning module to support teachers in developing effective home-school partnerships.

Through our surveys and the Parents' Parliaments, parents told us they wanted bite-size videos – we are working with the Widening Participation Team at Stranmillis University College to develop these and we are bringing parents in as part of the co-design process.

Parentkind NI has also produced a video on how parents can support their own wellbeing during COVID.

[Tell me more](#)
[Tell me more](#)
[Tell me more](#)

Key Drivers

- Effective two-way communication
- Parents supporting learning

In Practice

How a school supported parents to deliver the curriculum during COVID lockdowns.

Gaelscoil na gCrann

[Tell me more](#)


Policy, Principle and Parental Participation

How the *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* can support this

> Wellbeing

Good mental health is integral to effective learning and the concept of wellbeing is central to the aim, objectives and ethos of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. However, more than 20% of young people are suffering "significant mental health problems" by their 18th birthday (DHSSPS, 2010). In response, an emotional health and wellbeing framework for children and young people in education is currently being developed collaboratively by the Departments of Education and Health, the Public Health Agency, Health and Social Care Board and the Education Authority.

[Tell me more](#)
[Tell me more](#)

Parents ultimately want their children to be happy and healthy, and are keenly interested in their child's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. When a school builds strong relationships with parents and the local community, it can work collaboratively to be responsive to a wide range of pupils' wellbeing needs.

The *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools* outlines principles and identifies practical strategies to build effective home-school partnerships to maximise benefits.

Key Drivers

- Effective two-way communication
- Involvement in school life
- Community engagement

In Practice

How a school supported the wellbeing of pupils, parents and grandparents, and staff as they returned to the school environment.

St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry

[Tell me more](#)


| Policy, Principle and Parental Participation | How the <i>Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools</i> can support this |
|--|---|
| <div>> Educational Underachievement</div> <p>Educational underachievement (as a result of social disadvantage) remains an issue in Northern Ireland. The Education Minister, Peter Weir announced in July 2020, the appointment of an Expert Panel to examine the issues and bring forward an Action Plan by 31 May 2021. Lack of parental support and low expectations have been identified as key factors which can hinder young people from fulfilling their potential at school. Research shows that engaging parents (particularly hard-to-reach parents) and raising parental aspirations can help improve pupil outcomes.</p> <p>Community outreach is key in engaging with hard-to-reach parents who may lack trust in more formal mechanisms.</p> <div><div>Tell me more</div><div>Tell me more</div></div> | <p>As part of the engagement process between September 2020 and January 2021, Parentkind Northern Ireland supported the work of the Expert Panel on educational underachievement by identifying representative parents across Northern Ireland to ensure the parent voice is considered in its work.</p> <p>Our “Parental Participation Framework” includes proven strategies around each of the five key drivers to get more parents engaged with school, but also, more importantly, to help parents to take a more active role.</p> <div>Key Drivers</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective two-way communication• Involvement in school life• Community engagement <div>In Practice</div> <p>How a school harnessed parental support to offer assistance to parents of any child who may require additional support.</p> <div><div>Millennium Integrated Primary School</div><div>Tell me more</div></div> |

| Policy, Principle and Parental Participation | How the <i>Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools</i> can support this |
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| <div>> Irish Medium</div> <p>There are specific challenges for Irish Medium schools and units, particularly in building relationships and supporting learning if the language of instruction and the language of the home are different. Parents are committed and enthusiastic about education through the medium of Irish, but may themselves lack sufficient linguistic skills or confidence to support their children directly and to contribute to an immersion context.</p> <p>The Review of Irish-Medium Education emphasised the importance of involving parents in consultation and decision-making, as key stakeholders in their child’s education.</p> <div><div>Tell me more</div></div> | <p>The <i>Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools</i> offers strategies for parental involvement that are applicable in Irish Medium contexts, for example offering support to parents regarding their own learning.</p> <div>Key Drivers</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective Two-Way Communication• Parents Supporting Learning <div>In Practice</div> <p>How an Irish Medium school supported parents to deliver the curriculum during COVID lockdowns.</p> <div><div>Gaelscoil na gCrann</div><div>Tell me more</div></div> |



Thank You

Over the years of creating the *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools*, we have consulted extensively with a huge number of education agencies and establishments, policy makers, principals and parents across Northern Ireland, to ensure that it remained relevant to schools in Northern Ireland.

They have helped us refine our *Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools*. We are enormously grateful for all their support.

What's next?

To move to the next phase, we need to continue working with experts experienced in delivering parental participation on the ground.

To do this, we have partnered with Stranmillis University College to work collaboratively with schools, parents and local partners, with the aim to create a robust and sustainable Parental Participation Framework for Northern Ireland, in line with our five Key Drivers. This will demonstrate the direct impact for parental participation for schools in Northern Ireland; for example, by improving academic achievement, improving behaviour, reducing absenteeism and raising aspirations.

The Parental Participation Framework for Northern Ireland will feature proven activities and supporting resources around each of the five key drivers, tailored as appropriate to Northern Ireland education system; to get more parents engaged within schools and also, more importantly, to help parents to take a more active role.

To find out more, please contact:

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