

Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools



Parent
Friendly
Schools
Blueprint

Parentkind

A message from our CEO John Jolly

Parentkind's **Blueprint** for Parent-Friendly Schools

Welcome



Thank you

Over the years of creating the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools, we have collaborated with a huge number of education agencies and establishments, policy makers, head teachers and parents. They have helped us refine our Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools. We are enormously grateful for all their support.

“Thank you for sharing with us your Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools. We strongly support the contents of the blueprint in all five areas and the development of a comprehensive model of parental participation to help schools become truly parent-friendly.”

SEAN HARFORD,
NATIONAL DIRECTOR, OFSTED

“Together we can make parent-friendly schools a reality right across the UK.”

Thank you for your interest in our Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools.

Our vision is for an education world where parents are both fully engaged and seen as essential partners in their children's education.

Our aim in developing the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools is to give school leaders and partners a powerful easy-to-use tool to facilitate long lasting improvements in parental participation and support robust evaluations. It is designed to be shaped and adapted by those who use it to ensure it is relevant and easy for all schools to use.

It is the culmination of five years' work, which has included:

- Extensive research and review of the evidence.
- Consultation with over a hundred organisations including school leaders, key education stakeholders and government agencies involved in education.
- Piloting in 21 schools across Doncaster.

There is a well-evidenced link between parental participation in their child's education and academic attainment. Increasingly policy makers view parental participation as crucial, as we continue to address educational inequality.

We want our Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools adopted nationally by policy makers, education agencies and partners. We hope to be able to announce progress on this in 2021.

John Jolly
Chief Executive
Parentkind

Tell me more

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

What we do...

Parents - first educators

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 families that have traditionally not engaged with schools so we have created our evidence-based Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools.



Relationships between parents and schools



There are a number of existing, and in some cases, growing barriers to parents and schools working well together, with the need to address them becoming more pressing.

Parents want the best for their children but often don't know where to turn or what they can do to make a difference. For the past five years, parents have consistently told us the main reasons that prevent them from getting involved are:

- "I don't have time"**
- "I am not sure what skills / knowledge I would be able to offer"**
- "I have not been asked"**
- "I find the idea of getting involved intimidating"**

Parents in Northern Ireland, England and Wales tell us that they want to play an active role in their children's education and make meaningful contributions to school life that they, as well as schools, value.

Our parent and PTA research regularly shows there is an appetite from parents to have more say in decision-making. Despite three quarters of parents wanting to have a say on a range of issues at school level, only a fifth of parents with children in local authority maintained schools strongly agree that their school listens to them. In standalone academy schools, this drops to fewer than one in ten.

It has been less clear how schools and teachers feel about greater parental engagement. With that in mind, we widened our research to see how school leaders and teachers view parental engagement.

Our research suggests that many school leaders feel engaging with parents is hard work and doesn't always pay off, especially on occasions when only a minority of parents get involved. However, they believe that strong links between school and home do have a beneficial impact on school life.

The top six benefits are:

- 1 Builds trust and improves relationships between parents and teachers
- 2 Improves academic achievement
- 3 Improves behaviour
- 4 Develops a shared school ethos and culture
- 5 Reduces absenteeism
- 6 Raises aspirations

Other positive outcomes of schools and parents working together and listening to each other are; it helps to jointly support cultural understanding, increases parent financial contributions, improves staff retention and increases access to out of school activities, business and employers.

Schools often have a view about what and who is a hard to reach family, based on assumptions rather than evidence – it is a deficit model. We want schools to work from the premise that all parents can engage, you just need to create different opportunities for that participation.

2020 was an unprecedented year with Covid-19 meaning that many parents were parachuted into supporting learning at home without any preparation. Between March and July, we gathered parent views on the impact of school closures and their concerns. Our results highlighted the many challenges for schools and parents of combining home learning and family life, but in many cases, it brought them closer together.

At the start, one in five parents felt very confident to support their child's learning. Six weeks into lockdown, parent's confidence grew by a third. More than half (53%) feel more engaged in their child's learning now compared to before lockdown, with only 10% less engaged, and 37% indicating no change.

Many parents reported on the improved communication between home and school and their relationship with teachers. Over 90% of parents felt that their school had communicated very well or well during school closures.

Parents were generally satisfied with the home learning support given by their child's school. 43% were very satisfied and 39% quite satisfied, indicating a level of 82% of satisfied parents. Nevertheless, the 16% of parents who were not satisfied will need further clarity and/or resources.

Now is the ideal time for school leaders to harness the collective energies demonstrated during lockdown, as parents and the wider community are more likely now to identify with the school and see it as a key resource. It has never been more important to invest time, capitalise on this good will, and carry it forward. A school is so much more than facilities and buildings and, with its staff and expertise and links with local families, it can be a major agent for social cohesion.

Tell me more

To find out more about our research, visit:
parentkind.org.uk/research

Evidence of what works

Decades of research clearly indicates that having parents who actively show interest in, and support for, their children’s learning and education is associated with better educational outcomes, even when socio-economic and other background factors are taken into consideration (e.g. Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2012, Feinstein & Symons, 1999; Sammons et al, 2007). However, this area remains complex for policy makers and schools to address effectively for a number of reasons.

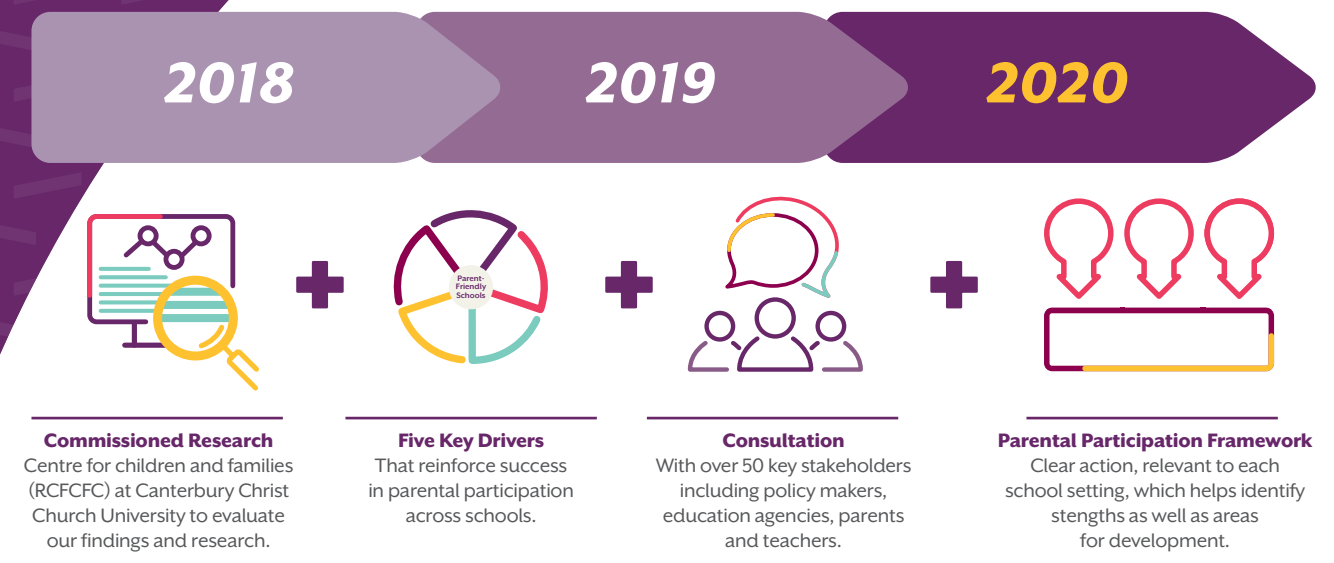
The majority of parents report that they would like to be more involved and this finding is fairly consistent (e.g. Parentkind, 2016, 2018; Grant, 2011). Supporting and building relationships with parents takes commitment, knowledge, skills, resources and time and the approaches taken need to fit a diverse range of needs at a time when teachers and schools are under increasing financial and resource strain. Better, more tailored choices for parental participation work is needed more than ever by schools working under such conditions. For example, a one size fits all approach to parental participation runs the risk of not being effective for those children who have most to gain (Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock, 2016).

An acknowledgement is needed of the inequalities amongst parents, not just children. Parents do not all come equally equipped and resourced to support children’s education and individual and structural inequalities exist amongst different parent groups, particularly ethnic minority parents (Crozier, 2010) and immigrant families that impact on relationships with their children’s schools (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015). Neither do all parents always welcome closer contact and advice from schools for a whole host of reasons (National College, 2010; Prior, 2018).

Teachers and other education staff can see parental participation work as challenging (D’Haem and Griswold, 2017), as they lack confidence and training in working with parents (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2001), hold stereotyped views of ‘uninvolved’ parents (Hornby, 2000) or simply feel under too many other more immediate pressures to give time and consideration to parental participation (Ellis, 2017). Along with other issues and increasing financial, staffing and restructuring pressures on schools, this is the reality within which parental participation work needs to fit.

Despite the challenges around parental participation, it is time to properly share the innovative and successful work schools and parents have done and continue to do together, especially throughout the pandemic. With this in mind, the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools seeks to be sustainable and effective and this can only happen through continuing the good work between schools and parents, highlighting the value attached to the work and, most fundamentally, the benefits to be gained.

Supporting evidence can be found in Parentkind’s commissioned research report with the Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities Canterbury Christ Church University, which served as a starting point for further consultation and development, in the parental participation framework.



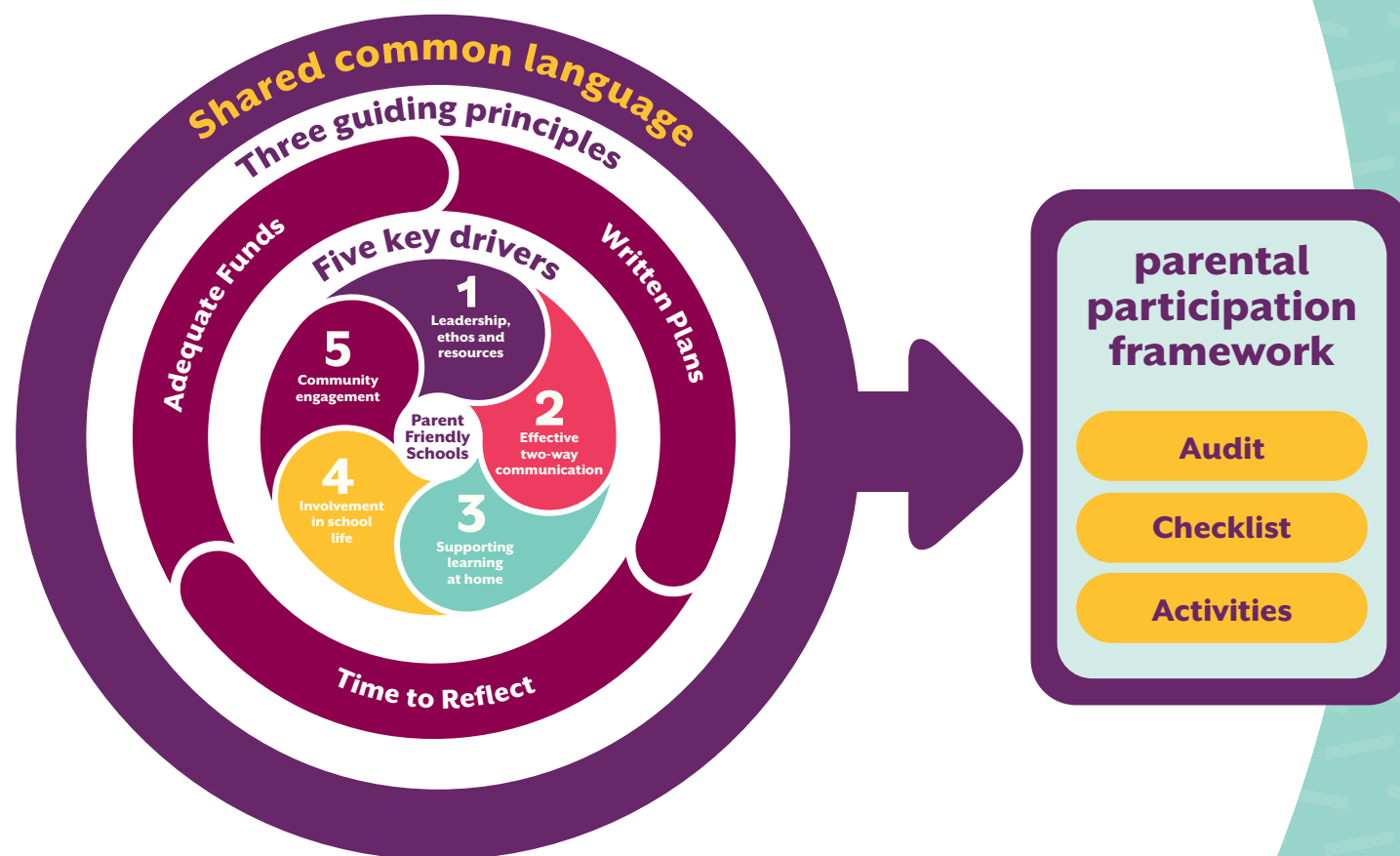
To find out more and read the report, visit:
parentkind.org.uk/blueprint

Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools



Our Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools is not a prescriptive plan. It is designed to recognise how parental participation looks in different schools and settings may take very different forms across the breadth and depth of schools and their parent communities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools formalises parental participation with a clear, easy to use parental participation framework for action reinforced with three guiding principles and a shared common language. These are the foundations for school leaders to establish or improve existing strategies, leaving school leaders free to adapt to different elements to fit their own settings.



To make it as straightforward as possible we have backed up with practical approaches that all schools can put into practice and monitor as well as accompanying step-by-step guides, toolkits, templates and training.

Most teaching staff haven't received specific parental engagement training as part of their continued professional development. Our parental participation training offers introductory levels and masterclasses as well as consultancy with our experts that supports a school leader's area of development and interest.

Five Key Drivers

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:



While our five key drivers are presented separately for clarity, most overlap or are closely linked to each other, so should not be seen as being totally separate elements. Some drivers are likely to underpin others, for example, strong leadership and effective two-way communications are likely to be necessary for all parental participation work.

A helpful way to think about the drivers, is that three and four (home learning and parental involvement) are what parents are doing, and how they are participating, while drivers one, two and five are enablers to make this happen.

Further information can be found on pages 18 and 19.



Three guiding principles

Through our research, we identified three common ingredients in successful parent-friendly schools:

Written Plans

Turning hopes and promises for parental participation into actions with a detailed plan. Implementation is everything when it comes to making improvements.

Time to Reflect

Evaluating actions taken by observing and self-assessment. Giving a balanced understanding of strengths and weaknesses, highlighting progress and showing next steps.

Adequate Funds

A fair budget will help implement effective and equitable parental participation planned activities and continually improve outreach to parents.



Shared common language

Terminology has consistently been a barrier to successful collaboration between parents, schools and other agencies.

There are many instances where the terms ‘parental involvement’ and ‘parental engagement’ are used almost interchangeably. Yet, according to Goodall and Montgomery (2014), there is an important distinction: ‘parental involvement’ is where the school is ‘in control of the relationships and the flow of information; information is given to parents but not sought from them. Parents may be involved in activities, but those activities are instigated and controlled by the school. For the most part, these activities will take place in and around the school.’

Working together with partners, we developed a common language which ensures everyone who uses the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools has a shared understanding of terminology that will reduce misunderstandings and improve communication. The main terms can be found below:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| > Community | All those who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just families with children in the schools. Community does not mean only the neighbourhoods where children’s homes and schools are located, but also neighbourhoods that influence learning and development |
| > Home Learning Environment | The behaviours, attitudes, aspirations and other factors which relate to parental participation |
| > Homework | Not just work done alone in a quiet place, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking school work to real life |
| Learning at Home | Encouraging listening, reacting, and praising, guiding, mentoring and discussing – not teaching school subjects. This is learning that can happen in the home, outdoors or in the community |
| > Parent | People with parental responsibilities e.g. carers, stepfamilies |
| > Parental Engagement | Parents actively supporting their child’s learning |
| > Parental Involvement | Parents taking part in school life and community |
| > Parental Participation | A combination of involvement and engagement. A study from the University of Warwick (Harris and Goodall, 2007) indicates that raising achievement is dependent on both involvement and engagement |
| > Volunteer | Anyone who supports school programmes and activities in any way, at any place, and at any time – not just during the school day at the school building; including those who are audience members for student events, sports, activities and performances |

Parental Participation Framework

Our Parental Participation Framework features a proven checklist around each of the five key drivers to get more parents engaged within the school, but also, more importantly, to help parents to take a more active role.

These checklists map across to practical approaches for schools to use, from examples of best practice to 'quick wins' that have proved successful and can be applied in any school setting or type without substantially increasing teacher workload. It can run alongside any strategies already in place to improve parental participation.

Our audit tool helps school leaders reflect on the work they are already doing to engage with parents. By taking each key driver in turn, school leaders are able to self-assess their progress and have a clear understanding of what they need to do. This provides clear starting points for schools that are not yet getting parents actively involved in the life of the school. They will also be able

to see opportunities to extend and further develop their work moving forward. This clear structure enables senior leaders to pin point where they are on their journey and exactly what they need to do to reach their goals.





Five Key Drivers



Overleaf is a summary of each of the five key drivers, how they work and simple ideas to implement.



Driver One:

Leadership Ethos and Resources

Leadership at a school determines how effectively actions will be taken to improve parental participation as well as being key to creating the conditions in which parent participation can thrive. In general, head teachers or members of the senior leadership team are, and should be in charge of parental engagement in their schools.

However, it takes a whole school approach, including the attitude and behaviour of teachers, administrators and governors to bring parents into the fold as a valuable resource. Parents are as important as teachers and administrators.

The impact of a positive ethos and values are felt throughout the school community, especially when they reflect parents as partners in education and their contribution, on whatever level is respected, recognised and celebrated.

All the time, parents are making decisions about what happens in their children's lives, and the same needs to be true when it comes to what happens in their child's school life. Involving parents in decision-making brings in different perspectives and points of view, which in turn can help the shift towards home school partnerships;

shared views and shared goals. This involves understanding and prioritising the families that the schools serves, celebrating diversity and recognising that all families are different groups in the community, for example, EAL, SEND, disadvantaged children including pupil premium, non-resident parents and hard to reach families, those parents with English not as a first language or those who may have had a negative experience of school themselves. The list of why parents do not engage is very long and diverse. It is important to identify who are the families served and then identify their barriers to participation.



Even a school's physical environment; the school building and grounds, can shape how welcome parents feel.

To find out more read our joint guidance with ASCL & NAHT, visit:
parentkind.org.uk/For-Schools/Resources

Here are a few simple ideas to help to address barriers and inequalities that deter parents from taking a more active role in school life.

Specify a parental engagement team

Provide focus for implementing a more parent-friendly approach and have a recognisable point of contact for parents. However, working with parents is not just the responsibility of one member of staff working alone.



Create a code of conduct

Establish clear boundaries and expectations for parents, including everything from how to communicate with the school to social media policies to behavioural requirements on the premises.



Establish a Parent Council

Provide a forum that supports consultation and shared decision making. It is important to gather parental input so that they are invested in the school and don't feel patronised or imposed upon. Such a forum creates a clear and meaningful role for parents in decision-making. Parent councils are a challenge for schools serving low socio-economic communities, so consider what approach works best to try and capture all parents.





Driver Two:

Effective Two-Way Communication

Building a relationship of trust between school and community, parents and teachers is vital, especially if there are likely to be some potentially challenging conversations further down the line. If schools can allay anxieties and parents feel able to open up about important factors that may affect children’s learning and behaviour in school, then both sides can focus their conversations on working together to support the child.

Schools need to think about family circumstances such as shift work patterns, carer responsibilities and provide the right information in the right way to meet the needs of all parents e.g. EAL, SEND, disadvantaged e.g. pupil premium, non-resident parents and hard to reach families including those parents with English not as a first language. Some like to be kept up to date with everything that goes on and will check Twitter and Facebook pages; others just want essential information that is most relevant to their child. Some will want information in a written form, which can be translated into their own language; others might need a spoken message or want to know where to go for further information.

One channel will not work for every parent

Schools that are serious about building a genuine dialogue will communicate regularly, not just twice a term, and make sure there is a good flow of information going two-ways, by seeking out feedback at every opportunity. All parents need to know they can contribute in different ways and that their views will be listened to and trust that necessary action will be taken.



Here are a few simple ideas to help increase two-way communication:

Ask parents

Send surveys and feedback forms to parents to periodically take a snapshot of their views on issues, such as how they would like to be communicated with, their ideas for changes they would like to see and whether their concerns or praise has changed. Listen and talk to parents about what changes have been made as a result.



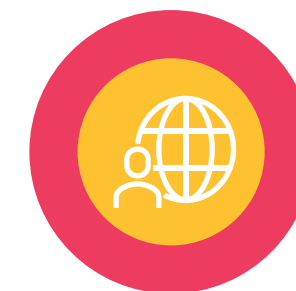
Increase use of technology

Many schools are keen to phase out paper correspondence (apart from those without access to a computer). Secondary schools are markedly better at limiting the paper trail compared to primary. Some schools have introduced school communications tools for direct email messages. Such platforms also enable parents to take part, who may otherwise struggle due to language barriers or limited reading skills.



Translate into different languages

Translating information and letters into various languages will make a big difference. Everyone having a shared understanding makes embedding parental participation as straightforward as possible.





Driver Three:

Supporting Learning at Home

Parents want to support their child, and where teachers can tap into this motivation and highlight things for parents to do, it can supercharge a child's education and raise levels of achievement. When parents share a positive attitude towards learning and school, they create a home learning environment that has a positive impact on children's attainment and that complements the work of schools.

Schools need to carefully co-ordinate learning activities at home, so they work in tandem with the approaches and activities that children experience at school. Parents need to understand their importance in their child's education and feel confident, resourced and skilled to take an active lead in helping their child with school subjects at home. Schools can be pro-active in helping parents understand the impact they can have on their child's learning and support those parents who lack confidence or academic skills.

Schools that work well in this area are highly skilled at providing appropriate learning materials and support for parents.



Our Covid-19 research with parents provides further insight into what support and resources parents have found most useful and what they are receiving for further ideas to support learning at home.

Tell me more
To find out more about our research, visit:
parentkind.org.uk/research

Here are some simple ways to support learning at home:

Co-produce learning resources.

Work with parents to produce materials together, perhaps translating favourite storybooks into community languages, recording stories or developing numeracy materials around a cookery or DIY theme.



Offer support to parents regarding their own learning

Assess the needs and talk to parents about what would help them to support learning. Communicate carefully to avoid stigmatising, blaming or discouraging parents.



Make it real

Providing curriculum rationale and information ensures that parents see the relevance of their participation by linking them with the real world - bringing them real-life problems and challenges to work on.





Driver Four:

Involvement in School Life

Parental involvement in schools relates to the extent to which parents play a role in volunteering in school life. Getting parents involved builds trust and lays the foundations for positive longer-term collaborations.

Successful schools will make good use of the parents' skills and offer both informal and formal ways for parents to be involved with and make meaningful contributions to school life. Simple informal activities can provide parents with a gentle introduction to the school life in general, in a relaxed and less formal environment. Activities that are more informal include those not overtly focused on education or academic outcomes, like fun social events at the school or working parties helping with the maintenance of school buildings.

Formal structures include Parent-Teacher Associations and being a parent governor, as well as making use of parents' interests and expertise in, for example, encouraging them to volunteer to read in the classroom or support extra-curricular activities.

Volunteering activities should reflect the diversity of the community ensuring every parent is encouraged and able to become involved. Some schools make a point of monitoring and identifying under-represented parent groups – perhaps single fathers who do not live with their children and trying to find events that will be of particular interest to them. Volunteering is most evident in primary schools.



Parentkind represents over **13,000 PTAs** across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. As a PTA member, you can link up with our wider network to share views, ideas, successes and knowledge.

Tell me more

To find out more about our wider network, visit: parentkind.org.uk/For-PTAs

Here are some ideas for encouraging involvement in school life:

Match time & talent to need

Tap into the repository of talents and skills e.g. creativity/ photography/sports/dance by providing parents with a list of desired skills across the school.



Offer varied volunteering opportunities

For example, supporting children with reading or maths, setting up a library or reading groups, setting on ad-hoc projects like garden work, maintenance etc. or provide careers advice/ support.



Set up a Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

A PTA (or other types of parent association) is a great way to bring parents, teachers and your local community together to raise funds and to support the school. Setting up a PTA is a more straightforward process than you might think - first generate interest; decide what you want your association to achieve and formalise the group around that; then start your fundraising and other school community activities.





Driver Five: *Community Engagement*

It is important for schools engage with the wider parent communities outside the school gates.

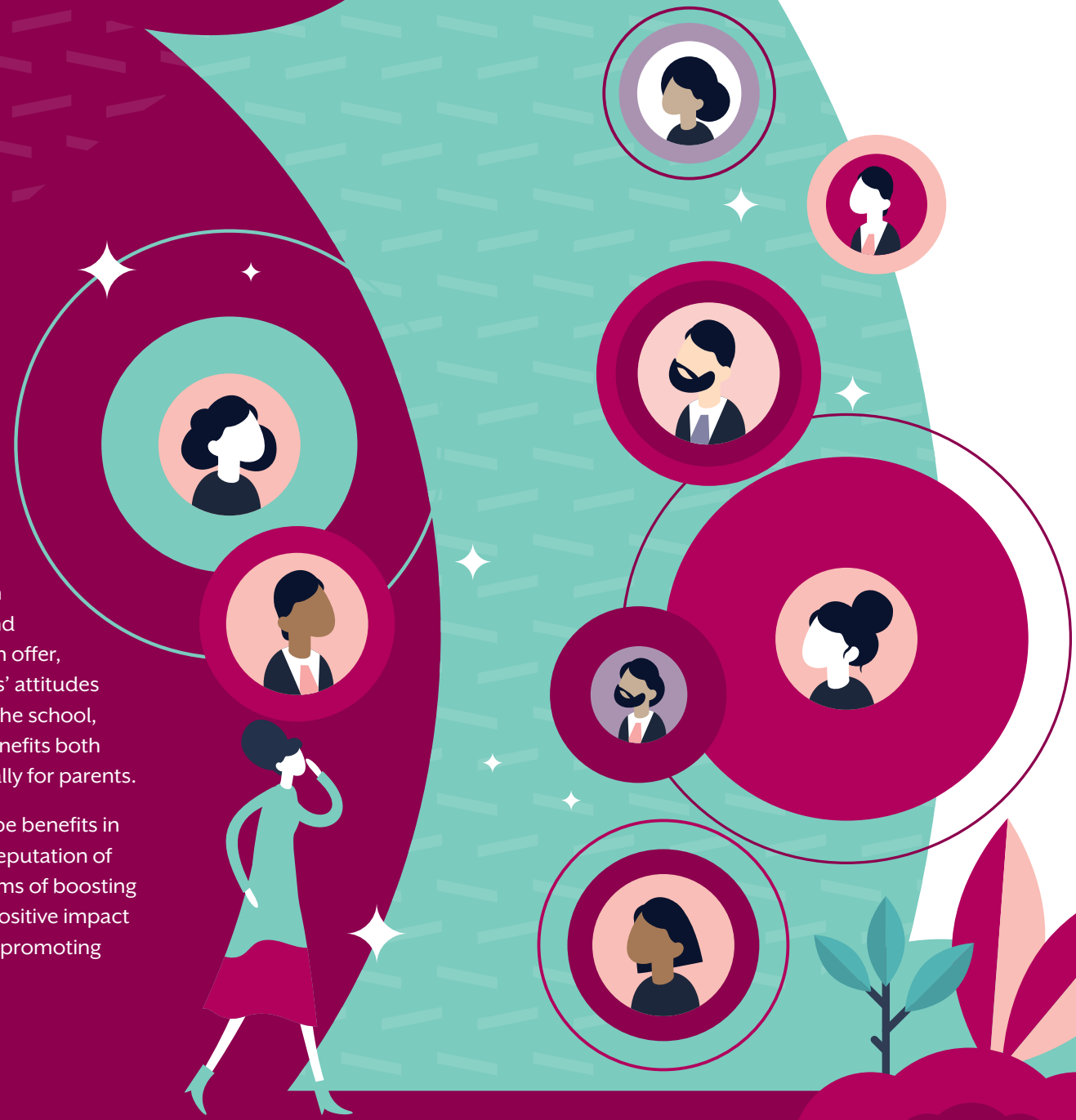
Parent communities are made up of many cultures that can enrich the school but this diversity can also present barriers and inequalities to participation. Parents may struggle to engage within school for various reasons, perhaps because of different faith beliefs or a feeling that the school is not relevant to them. In addition, parent communities can face many challenges such as unemployment, racism, language barriers, county lines, violence and financial insecurity.

Schools can work with their local communities to draw on specialist knowledge, skills and resources in mutually beneficial ways and to respond to a wide range of parents' and children's educational, social, health and wellbeing needs. The better the outreach to the local community, the more likely a school is to attract those parent communities

that have traditionally not engaged and organisations to work with them and support their families.

Where schools have a strong relationship with the local community and openly value what it can offer, it can transform parents' attitudes and relationships with the school, providing important benefits both educationally and socially for parents.

There are also likely to be benefits in raising the profile and reputation of the school locally in terms of boosting admissions, making a positive impact on the community and promoting social cohesion.



Here are some ideas of how to engage parents in the wider community:

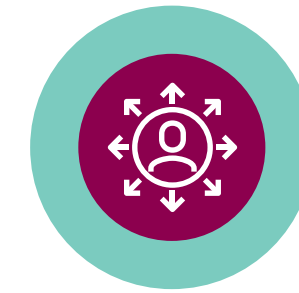
Extend the range of activities

For example, schools might provide parenting classes, language tuition, afterschool clubs, childcare and foodbanks for their families.



Active community outreach

For example, reaching out to community groups and leaders that can help reach those parents in specific groups.



Valued community hub

Be an asset to the wider community by hiring out buildings, sports facilities, staff and expertise.



What's next?

We have developed strong foundations with the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools, and there is huge potential to maximise its use and support schools through the challenging few months, as we respond to, and recover from the impact of COVID-19. This marks the next phase for the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools, and offers a real opportunity for us to continue working with experts in parental participation.

The overall aim of developing the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools is to provide school leaders, policy makers and other stakeholders with a useful tool to facilitate discussion around, work in, and evaluation of, parental participation activities. Therefore, it is important that the elements of the Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools are taken forward and shaped by those who are likely to use it – to ensure it has a practical benefit.

We want to bring together an entire network that is intentional about its approach to solving a parental participation together - growing parental participation at scale from education institutions to grass root levels. Ultimately, helping as many schools (of all types including MATs) as possible to become more parent-friendly.

Working collaboratively with others in parental participation and school support will allow us to continue programmes in school settings as well as develop resources and tools to achieve a nationwide system change.

Join Us

To find out more about how you could get involved with our Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools, please contact:

Kerry-Jane Packman, Executive Director of Programmes, Membership and Charitable Services

kerry-jane.packman@parentkind.org.uk

Jayne Thompson, Head of Northern Ireland

jayne.thompson@parentkind.org.uk

Tracey Handley, Head of Wales

tracey.handley@parentkind.org.uk



About Parentkind

As well as being the leading membership organisation for Parent Teacher Associations for over 60 years across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are advocates for parent voice. Our role is to ensure that all parents can participate in education and have their voices heard so that education across the nations can benefit all children in all schools and society as a whole. This means we have a wealth of experience with schools of all sizes and types and the communities they serve.

We are the bridge between homes and schools

- *We marry research with first-rate practice that has been proven to work.*
- *We make sure that the voice of parents is heard in education.*
- *We represent parent views and interests in discussions with education authorities, agencies, central government and all other interested parties and bodies.*
- *We work with partners and stakeholders, researchers, teachers, parents, administrators, community partners and others, on parental participation.*
- *We identify and promote examples of high quality parent-school partnerships and provide resources to support parent participation in education at school and at home.*

f parentkind

🐦 @parentkind

vimeo parentkind



Parentkind