

Section 6: Partnership with Parents

‘What is always necessary ... is the establishment of a partnership between parents and other educators. For this to be effective, there must be mutual understanding and respect, a continuing dialogue and sharing of expertise and information.’ (DES 1990:13)

Parents have many varying needs and differ in their attitude towards schools.

Schools have to work hard to develop relationships and collaborative approaches. Six main strands have been identified as being important in developing a collaborative partnership approach.

1 Supporting Parents by

- ensuring a welcoming atmosphere and environment
- giving time to listen to parents’ concerns
- acting sensitively towards the needs of parents, valuing their comments and contributions
- being as non-judgemental as possible.

2 Listening to Parents by

- giving opportunities for parental feedback
- acknowledging that parents are ‘experts’ regarding their own children and can provide much information about what their children enjoy doing and are good at outside the narrow context of school life.
- involving them through the use of home–school diaries which provide opportunities for parents to contribute their views on their children’s learning.

3 Developing a dialogue with Parents by

- providing informal opportunities for discussion with parents at the beginning or the end of the day
- responding to information gained through home–school diaries.

4 Informing Parents by

- keeping them updated about teaching methods through a variety of approaches including workshops and open days
- using displays
- producing regular newsletters
- by providing written information on a wide range of topics, e.g. behaviour management, helping your child with reading, etc.
- holding ‘New Parents’ meetings.

5 Involving Parents in the Life and Work of the School day by

- finding out about and making use of parental expertise and interests
- holding open days
- inviting parents to concerts, assemblies
- establishing close relationships with PTA, School Board and Friends of the School groups.

Teaching and Learning

6 Involving Parents in their own Children's Learning by

- providing activities and books for parents and children to share which complement what is being learned in school
- inviting groups of parents into the classroom to observe what and how children are learning
- providing parent friendly information giving ideas and approaches for supporting their children's learning.

Soft Start or Busy Start has been successfully introduced in many schools and can encompass elements of all six strands highlighted above.

Soft Start is a period of time at the beginning of the day (or at the end which can be called Soft Finish) where the children are free to use any of the areas or activities available in the classroom. This provides opportunities for the children to practise, consolidate, collaborate, negotiate, try out and investigate, and makes for a relaxed but purposeful start or finish to the day.

For teachers it provides an opportunity to observe and interact with children in their chosen contexts.

When one or two Soft Start/Finish sessions per week are opened up to parents it can provide an informal, relaxed atmosphere in which the children can show what they have been doing and work with the adults sharing activities. The teacher has time to interact with parents.

Before involving parents in Soft Start it has been found beneficial to try it first with the children only.

As with any new initiative it is important to give parents information about Soft Start so they know what to expect.

Please see Stepping Stones Family Participation Pack for further information.