

4 Engaging with students' parents and guardians

Activity 6: Making parents feel valued and welcome

Think about the scenario of a shy parent who has had limited education but who is very keen for all five of his children to be more literate and numerate than he is. His wife is timid and has a hearing problem. They are a united family unit and their children always attend school. They all have a positive attitude towards learning, except for the youngest child who does not appear to listen in class and can be disruptive.

- How would you as an individual – but more importantly as a school leader – engage with these parents so that they feel part of the school community?
- What are the challenges you need to address and how would you find out how far these parents feel that they are welcome in school?

Note down your thoughts in your Learning Diary.

Discussion

It is clear that parents take their own experience of their schooling into their adult lives; this can impact on how much priority they give to their children's education and the relationship that they themselves have with the school. It is not uncommon for parents to feel in awe of teachers and that they might find it difficult to challenge or question.

The fact that these parents are both interested in their children's education is a big advantage that you would want to make the most of. You can make sure that you speak to them if they come to school and there may be advantages in making a home visit to meet with them on their own ground. You probably want to talk with them about their youngest child to agree how best to approach their disruptive behaviour, exploring with them what may be at the root of this (possibly a hearing impairment). As these parents have had limited schooling themselves, your communications are likely to be verbal rather than written, but you may also consider how best to communicate with the mother: if she lip reads, you need to make sure you face her when you speak.

In more general terms, you can invite these parents (through their children) to open days, tours of the school, performances, forums, etc., being sure to greet them when they arrive as guests – the more they feel your individual interest and attention, the more welcome and valued they will feel.