

Case Studies

During the course of developing this Toolkit, a variety of good practice case studies were kindly submitted by local organisations, services and projects.

[Adult and Community Learning](#) – Engaging parents in **educational** activities.

[Aiming High](#) – **Involving** parents of disabled children in the commissioning process.

[BIGMOUTH](#) – **Consulting** with teenage parents about services.

[CAF/Contact Point Team](#) – **Working in partnership** with parents to inform parents.

[Chatterbooks Reading Group](#) – Engaging parents in their **child's learning**

[Child's Play](#) – **Consulting** with Grandparents to develop new services.

[Engagement Plus](#) – **Developing mechanisms** to extend and maintain engagement.

[Family Focus](#) – **Consulting** with parents and **involving** them in decision making.

[First Steps Psychological Services](#) – **Engagement** via a Parent Steering Group.

[Hope and Burslem Children's Centre](#) – Using a **range of engagement methods**.

[Landywood Primary School](#) – Providing **information** via new technologies.

[Parent Champions](#) – **Empowering** parents to engage with other parents.

[Parent Engagement Partnership](#) – **Involving** parents in the development of services.

[Phase 2 Children Centres](#) – Engaging, **empowering** and **devolving** budgets.

[Staffordshire Children's Centre](#) – **Involving** parents in decision making.

[Staffordshire Children's Trust](#) – Using a **range of engagement methods**.

[SUN \(Staffordshire Umbrella Network\)](#) – **Engagement** network.

[Walton Hall Community Special School](#) – **Engaging** parents in the life of the school.

Adult and Community Learning

Family Learning is delivered through the Adult and Community Learning Service (ACL) within Staffordshire County Council. Family Learning programmes aim to encourage family members to learn together. Our programmes give parents and carers the opportunity to find out how things are taught in their own child's school, as well as a chance to share ideas with other parents and develop their own skills.

Family Learning is offered through ACL by contracting work to colleges, schools, libraries, museums and Children's Centres. This ensures that we are using the most appropriate colleagues to promote good partnership work across the County which enhances the service we offer to our families whilst promoting best practice. ACL also offers Family Learning provision to schools through an application process; this extends the reach of our offer and allows us to engage with targeted families. We also have Family Learning Impact Funding contracts with partners, allowing us to work with hard to reach families who ordinarily do not engage in learning. Adults are engaged by offering intergenerational activities that are of benefit to both parent and child.

Family Learning involves learning activities where children and parents can learn together. By offering Family Learning, we are encouraging families to take part in and enjoy education. Family Learning engages parents to increase their skills and knowledge.

Staffordshire's Adult and Community Learning Service supports families who have previously faced barriers to learning and tend very often to lack confidence when helping their own children learn. Family Learning throughout the County continues to develop with an ever-evolving bank of programmes meeting the needs of various groups and in consequence, widening participation.

Impact

Our bespoke programmes encourage parents to support their children's learning by understanding how the role of the parents, the home environment and everyday interactions play an important part in the development of children's learning. Our programmes are funded through the LSC and it is paramount that there are opportunities for parents to learn and develop.

Evaluative feedback indicates that parents feel that they communicate better with their children, which in turn, helps parents support their children's education, as well as identifying their own progression routes.

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Aiming High

Aiming High for Disabled Children in Staffordshire aims to improve services for disabled children and their families. Aiming High carried out a consultation with parents and carers from across Staffordshire to gain their views on services for disabled children and families. A consultation was also carried out with disabled children and young people. The feedback from these consultations was used to inform and develop the commissioning intentions for Staffordshire.

Draft service specifications were written for each of these areas and parents and carers were consulted on these before they were finalised. This ensured the views of parents and carers were fully integrated into the final specifications.

We then embarked on a tender process. We were keen to ensure parents and carers were fully involved in evaluating the tenders, as they will be the people using the services.

Tenders were evaluated by a panel made up of practitioners and parents. The practitioners (who are specialists in each of the above fields) formed the panels along with parents and carers and a young adult who had been a service user. Parents and carers and the young adult scored alongside practitioners and their views provided a reality check and an excellent insight when evaluating which services should be awarded contracts. One parent said 'how good it feels to be part of the panels and to be able to make a contribution on behalf of parents and carers, knowing my views are being taken seriously and valued by all concerned'

Impact

Parents and carers have been involved in the development, design and decisions about future services to be funded. They have the real-life information needed when making decisions about future services. It is hoped that through the involvement of parents and carers from the start this will lead to the future success of the services.

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BIGMOUTH

In November 2008, Respect Yourself ran a consultation event for teenage parents from across the county. Young parents were consulted using criteria identified in *Teenage Parents: Next Steps (TPU, 2006)* about their experiences of services provided for them.

26 young parents attended and were supported by creative consultants to voice their views. Childcare, lunch, pampering activities and free transport were provided.

The findings from the day were written up in a detailed report (available on request). Young parents' forums have now been formed to work on the recommendations from the consultation day. The forums are usually run at Children's Centres so that parents can learn more about the services available to them, and children can enjoy the play facilities.

Impact

To date, this has resulted in young parents meeting with midwives to influence the development of a new service for teenage parents. They are also meeting with council officials to look at setting up specialist housing for teenage parents. Groups are also looking at a means of providing clearer information to parents around benefits and support services.

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CAF / Contact Point Team

A 'Message to Parent and Carers' leaflet and game has been produced and designed in partnership with Voluntary Action Stoke-on-Trent (VAST). The aim of the leaflet and game is to give parents a clear understanding about the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Process.

The Parent Engagement Partnership (PEP) group, which is a City wide forum of parents, have been involved in this project from the beginning.

A draft document was given to the group as a starting point, so that they could comment and express their views. The comments and views were used to develop the leaflet content including wording, pictures, colour, size, etc. We met on regular occasions to continue with the development and design, and once completed, the game was then cascaded to parent groups with parents from the PEP becoming facilitators.

The aim is in the future, to have parent mentors for CAF, to enable the positive message to be translated from parents to parents that *"CAF is a tool for practitioners to use in partnership with parents to offer early, coordinated support for children"*

Impact

Working in partnership with parents is a key element of the Common Assessment Framework process, and this is a positive way of engaging parents to work in partnership with agencies to meet the needs of their child.

Messages to the community about CAF are better coming from parents rather than professionals and, by working with parents in this way, it will improve outcomes for children and young people.

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Chatterbooks Reading Group

Library Service staff work with local schools, children and parents to deliver reading programmes (two hours a week for five weeks).

The children are selected by the teachers - they may be children who are gifted and talented, or children who need extra support with reading.

The outcomes for children are:

- To have fun with reading
- To develop their love of reading
- To develop their learning and language skills

The outcomes for schools and libraries are:

- To involve parents and carers in sharing reading and learning with their children

The outcomes for parents are:

- To share learning and reading with their children
- To feel comfortable doing this

Each session has a different theme (e.g. dinosaurs, poetry, climate change) and includes activities such as stories to listen to, story discussion, craft activities and games. The parents are encouraged to attend the second hour and participate in the activities with their children. At the end of their session, children choose a book to take home and read. Library staff encourage parents to choose the books with their child.

Impact

Parents enjoy the opportunity to learn together with their children and have fun.

Parents learn about the authors and titles of books their children enjoy. This enables them to help their children to make better use of the library and assists them with choosing books as presents.

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Child's Play

Child's Play was initiated following a local consultation which identified a large cohort of Grandparents who informally care for their grandchildren whilst their parents are working. Grandparents were consulted about the type of service they would like and also times, days etc. They gave verbal and written responses at school gates, the library, community centre and health centre, identifying that they would like play and stay activities.

The resultant Child's Play was then advertised on the Children's Centre timetable which features in the Primary School website and publicity material was displayed. The new Children's Centre at Norton Canes provided a suitable venue within walking distance for most Grandparents attending.

During the 6 week pilot, 5 Grandmothers and 1 Grandfather attended with grandchildren aged from 10 months to 2 years. During the half term holiday, school age children also attended upon request by Grandparents who were caring for them during that week

Activities included arts & craft, simplistic cooking and story telling and Grandparents were consulted and encouraged to identify alternative activities they would like to do. Assisted funding created opportunities for trips and activities where cost was seen as a potential barrier.

Grandparents have also benefitted from membership of the Toy Library operating from the Children's Centre. The Toy Library consulted with the Grandparent group to find out what sort of toys they thought were needed.

Impact

Grandparents express a sense of ownership of the group and feel more 'accepted' than when attending a generic Play & Stay (although some participate in both groups). They felt it placed a value upon the parenting they undertake for their grandchildren, and welcomed the opportunity to develop new friendships and receive peer support countering the experience of isolation that parenting of young children can bring.

Consultation after a pilot period informed us that one Grandparent cares for her grandchild who has very young parents. The group has helped her to form friendships with carers in similar situations and also increased her confidence in caring for her grandchild. The support provided has enabled the parent to access training and help in seeking employment.

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Engagement Plus

Engagement Plus is a process of maximising chances to make productive contact with families.

If, as a Parenting Practitioner/Parenting Programme Facilitator, you have attempted to make a phone call to a family three times, at different times of the day, and on different days, you have not managed to make contact, you can then decide to maximise the chances of making productive contact with the family, by considering the following steps.

Step 1 - Use all the information you have.

Step 2 - Check contact details are up-to-date and accurate by communicating with other agencies.

Step 3 - Consider using other possible routes of contact – e.g. text, phone call, home visit, note or letter.

Step 4 - Once contact is made, consider decreasing as many barriers as possible.

Consult with parents to consider alternative, new or creative ways to engage parents.

Impact

As a result of the Engagement Plus process, more practitioners have been able to engage with families that have otherwise not been reached.

It helps build a culture of engagement for the organisation, taking a persistent, ongoing and creative approach.

Obviously more engagement with families is better outcomes for Children and Young People.

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Family Focus

Our service always takes account of the views of the parents and carers we serve and they are involved in decision making about the service.

We regularly seek feedback from the service users with our evaluation process. We always respond to any feedback, positive or negative and act accordingly.

We use a variety of ways to get the parents and carers involved in our services.

Our service users are regularly updated on what we do via newsletters and posters.

We consult parents when any changes have to be made.

We also meet the needs of all carers and parents and embrace diversity.

Impact

Engaging parents has a healthy impact on the community and builds better community relationships. Parents become better role models for their families, raising aspirations and expectations. Children then have easier transitions into schools and nurseries.

Many parents and carers continue to engage with our services after their children have moved into education, becoming volunteers, taking part in all the training we provide along the way and then entering into paid employment or changing careers into the professions.

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First Steps Psychological Services

We run a Parent Steering Group that meets every 6 weeks.

All parents and carers we work with or who use the service are given information about this group, and are entitled to join.

The group are consulted about events and policies that First Steps does, for example:

- They designed the children's garden at our main base
- They were consulted on the strategy '*Taking Part and Joining In*' that Children & Young People's Division of North Staffordshire Combined NHS Trust wrote
- They write newsletters for First Steps Psychological Services
- They attend First Steps "Away Days"
- They were consulted on the name for the newly opened First Steps base at Festival Park
- They chair all meetings.

Impact

- All parents and carers who go through our service are aware that they have the opportunity to continue to be involved once they have finished their interventions. This creates faith in the service and allows them to feel valued and important
- The children and families enjoy the benefits of the Parent Steering Groups' work (e.g. the garden is enjoyed almost daily.)
- Staff at First Steps feel confident in their workplace, knowing that service users are being consulted and are approving measures put in place

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Hope & Burslem Children's Centre

Parent Forum: Parents are consulted on a number of areas such as activities within the centre, trips and new projects. They also bring feedback from other parents to the group/Children's Centre.

Partnership Board: The Partnership board has 5 organisational representatives and 10 parents. They are consulted about the management of the Children's Centre.

Connect: A group of parents who have their own constitution, bank account, chair, secretary and treasurer. This group looks at attracting funding to run activities/projects for the community.

Yaweno: A group of parents who consult other parents, run and organise activities within the community, look at research projects and identify gaps for the Children's Centre.

Reach: A support group for parents run by parents. Parents also get involved in the newsletters and activities calendars.

Volunteer Training: A structured training course run by the Children's Centre with support from parents. It provides an insight for parents who are considering volunteering within any organisation, helps them to understand confidentiality and codes of conduct policies and procedures, and allows them to complete their CRB check.

Volunteers: The Children's Centre has a number of parent/carer volunteers and have recruited a number of staff who have at some point been part of the groups/board.

Interviews

Once parents have their CRB check and have undertaken the volunteer training, they also sit as members on our interview panels for all staff.

Impact

- Parents have increased confidence & sense of ownership over the Children's Centre.
- Good take up rates.
- Positive feedback.
- Increased skill and confidence of parents.

Contact Details

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Landywood Primary School

As well as the usual system of newsletters and messages home, we have bought into a text messaging service, which uses the contact information from our SIMS system. This enables us to set up different groups, for example class, year group, clubs, staff, governors and teams. We use the text messaging to help with administrative tasks, such as reporting absences or chasing dinner money arrears, but we also use it in a number of other ways, mainly positive.

We text parents with reminders about swimming lessons, parents' evenings and other events. We send texts to parents whose children have been praised in assembly or who have done especially good work, and we can tell parents how children on residential visits are getting on.

We have used the system to advertise for lunchtime supervisor vacancies and even to find the owner of a lost kitten! The system was also invaluable for keeping parents informed about school being open during the recent snowy weather.

We took a conscious decision to use the system positively, and because of the limited number of characters you can use, we are thoughtful about composition – we don't use text-speak but the style is often informal. Parents don't see the system as officious or formal.

Impact

The system is extremely popular with the families. It has improved their perception of the level of communication with school. The results of parental surveys show that they are much happier about communication since we took the system on.

The relationships between parents and school has improved, and we feel that the texting system has been a big factor.

In our recent Ofsted inspection, the texting system was commented on very favourably by a number of parents, and highlighted as an example of good links with parents. There has also been an improvement in the behaviour of some children because they know that we can send a text to their parents instantly.

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Parent Champions

Parent Champions is a project that engages parents in reaching other parents. It is a 14 week programme that gives parents training and skills to go into the community to be advocates for services.

During each session, the Parent Champions are asked to reflect on whether they thought the content was useful and relevant. This regular feedback shapes future Parent Champion courses. The Parent Champions have also been given the opportunity to attend other sessions the CVS run to further their knowledge.

Parent Champions are invited to post-course meetings to help shape what happens next and their suggestions/ideas are sought.

Their future aspirations are considered and supported and we intend to ask Adult and Community Learning to attend future forums.

In Summary, the Parent Champions have been engaged in all stages of this project. Parent Champions is a project that will evolve and develop, and the feedback gained will help shape the next course.

Impact

The Parent Champions project is very much in its infancy, so it is very early to really judge impact. However, it is clear that the course is working well to empower parents. This programme is all about parents reaching other parents and is a steep learning curve for all involved.

Undoubtedly, inviting Parent Champions to meetings to discuss post-course support/actions ensures we value their thoughts and views and are not simply deciding things for them. Engaging them in every step of the course has kept interest levels high and ensured motivation has not been lost. It has also ensured we are shaping the project around parents for parents.

The course and project will continue to develop with the aim of meeting the key objective:- engagement of more families with services and activities.

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Parent Engagement Partnership

The Parent Engagement Partnership (PEP) is a city-wide group of parents, made up of representatives of other parent groups/parent forums across the City. The PEP has become the recognised group for providing parent's points of view to the Children and Young People's Trust in Stoke-on-Trent.

The PEP meets monthly to discuss relevant issues and feed comments/ideas back to Children and Young People's Trust partners.

Members of the PEP have also been trained as Mystery Shoppers and have carried out reviews of services such as the Family Information Service and Children's Centre Information Champions.

The PEP provides and supports other parent representatives on Implementing Change Groups (ICG) which are the strategic decision making groups for the City.

Parents and carers are nominated to become a member of the PEP by their own group and they then attend monthly PEP meetings. Throughout their time with the PEP, parents and carers are offered training, support and opportunities for development.

Impact

As an engagement service, parents and carers (as well as children and young people) are integral to our work. Without them we would not be able to achieve our outcomes

Impact on our members:

PEP members have become engaged in a range of other activities as a result of their involvement.

Impact on our community:

Parent groups and forums in the City are now much more involved in consultations. The parent voice is heard at strategic level, which influences development of services.

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Phase 2 Children Centres

The Phase 2 Children Centres are designed to reach into the heart of the communities they serve by being located on familiar sites such as schools. There is a community development approach to the delivery of local services.

Each Children's Centre hosts a sub group committee which is made up of practitioners and parents who help to shape the services offered within the Children's Centre. Public opinion is sought through suggestion boxes located in the main reception areas.

In our outreach venues we have devolved budgets to accommodate the needs and aspirations of parents. This has brought about interesting results whereby empowered parents have actively sought resources to enhance the service provision to their rural communities.

Working alongside our parents, we stage fun days and themed sessions to both raise awareness of the services on offer, and also to bring communities together - which stimulates involvement and increases participation particularly with the more hard to reach groups. We have utilised our mobile Children's Centre as an information point targeting hard to reach groups, in particular travelling families, and the local women's prison. On both occasions the vehicle acted as a valuable disclosure vehicle.

Impact

Parents have an active role in the design of the services on offer. They have a role in the designation of funding to support their needs and access to services. We have been able to signpost parents onto relevant parenting and speech and language courses, which may lead to long term training courses and increase their employability.

Because the nature of the Children Centre is about community development, it is important to recognise the value of parents being able to meet and discuss in an informal nurturing environment, where there is not an expectation placed on them being there. This natural process brings people together, builds confidence and may lead to better outcomes with regards to community cohesion, and harmonisation.

In terms of the Phase 2 Children Centres in my area, the buildings are well used, indicating that parents are comfortable with the arrangements and take an ownership of their own environment.

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Staffordshire Children's Centre

Stafford Children's Centre exists under the governance of a Management Board, made up of staff from the Centre, our partners and parents. The parents play an extremely important role both in this Management Board and its subgroups.

The role of the Management Board is to set the strategic direction of the Centre, ensure implementation of the strategy and Service Level Agreements and monitor and evaluate services. Therefore the role of parents in this process is vital.

Within the sub groups, parents also have a role in decision making relating to the various areas of work within the Centre - namely: Children's learning and Play, Finance, Personal, Health and Safety, Marketing and Publicity, and Services for Parents/Carers.

Parents' roles within these groups have been really important with regard to us hearing the parent's voice and having their input into the development of the service and policy and procedure.

A development from these activities is that parents are now involved in the recruitment and selection process. Parents have been given a seat on interviewing panels or have taken part in assessing the potential candidates' skills through practical assessments. One parent even did a little bit of role play in order for us to assess candidates who would be home visiting.

Impact

All parents using the Centre for day care, education or family and parenting support are offered the opportunity to be part of the Management Board or the Sub Groups.

Being part of these activities has given them an insight into the bigger picture of the organisation and where we fit into the Governments' plans for children and their families. This is beneficial because the parents can then help us to steer the strategic plan in a way which best suits their needs.

Parents feel that they have a sense of ownership being part of these groups. They are able to have input into policy and procedure and help in decision making.

Parents involved in the groups have a sense of pride in the Centre and its accomplishments and help us in spreading the work of the Centre within their community.

Contact Details

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Staffordshire Children's Trust

Staffordshire is a large authority and has eight district councils and a county council. We have therefore established eight Parent Service Forums (PSFs), one in each of Staffordshire's districts. The PSFs are 'virtual teams' of all the agencies who work with parents in that district.

Four times a '**Your View Counts**' leaflet is sent out to parents via the PSF's. The content of the leaflet is informed by the current issues of debate by the Children's Trust. The results are fed into the Children's Trust meetings. We also analyse the voice by district and this is tabled at the eight District Trust Board meetings.

In addition to the leaflet and the ongoing voice and feedback from PSF's, we also have a **data base of parents** who are willing to be contacted by the Children's Trust around engagement opportunities. We have a mechanism whereby **parents can log ideas or views** for the Trust and we analyse these regularly for themes. Once a year we hold a **large consultation** with parents to inform the JSNA and the Children and Young People's Plan content. We have also developed a Children's Trust set of **standards around parental engagement** and have devised a **Toolkit** to help Children's Trust partners improve their engagement practice, we have an **engagement calendar** so we know who is engaging with parents when and what they have found out, and last but not least we are in the process of setting up a **parent advisory board** to the Trust (which will have fluid membership, depending on the parents interest on the agenda items being discussed).

Impact

- Children's Trust partners are aware of what parents needs are.
- Parents views get to the 'top table' and influence decisions.
- Parents feel that they are valued and that their views make a difference.
- Parents engage better with services.
- Decisions are founded on what people want, not what managers think people want.
- There is a continuous dialogue with parents.
- Parents are empowered.
- Improved service – both at the design stage and in the delivery of services.
- More opportunities for volunteering.
- Closer relationship between managers and parents.
- Transparency and confidence of services.
- ...And of course all this impacts on outcomes for young people!

Contact Details

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SUN (Staffordshire Umbrella Network)

SUN is a network group aimed at:

- parents and carers of children with special needs/disabilities;
- representatives of parent or carer support groups
- representatives of voluntary groups and organisations
- parent liaison officers in schools and other interested school staff
- parent support workers and statutory agencies, such as health, education and social care.

It provides an opportunity for parents and practitioners to:

- get together and share information and support
- look at areas of good practice
- look at what parents want or need
- provide parents with a voice
- inform parents and carers of services that are already available
- identify gaps in service
- provide a forum for consultation
- help parents and practitioners keep abreast of what is happening
- provide agencies with a better understanding of the requirements of children with additional needs and their families
- help to improve and expand communication links
- try to meet parents' information needs.

Impact

Parents were able to refer to differences they have seen since the setting up of the network. This includes;

- more involved - sharing information, support & good practice
- providing parents with a voice and making a difference
- meeting needs of families.
- increased confidence

Contact Details

Name: Marie Wood

Position: Parent Partnership Officer

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Walton Hall Community Special School

The school has an open door policy for parents and carers. This means that parents and carers can come into school or contact school anytime they feel necessary. The ethos comes from the head teacher and Governors and is an integral part of the school.

We run regular parents meetings on the last Friday of the month to coincide with the special presentation assembly. During these meetings we have outside speakers. Parents are asked to select areas they would like covered by the speaker. The speaker from Youth Services resulted in the creation of Walton Hall Youth Club run by parents.

Parents are able to volunteer in the school after completing the necessary CRB clearance. We also run regular parents and carers relaxation days which promote positive home school relationships. These days came about after discussion with parents. We are due to hold a ground improvement day in March where the parents and carers can work together to improve the school and work alongside school staff and other families.

The school also runs events such as family discos, plays and concerts; all these events enhance positive relationships with parents and carers. We also held an open day where current and prospective parents could join lessons for the day. This event was very successful and well attended.

Every term the parents and carers receive a Newsletter that keeps them informed as to what is happening at school. This knowledge of what is happening or of general school life enhances good parents, carers and school relationships.

Impact

Positive working relationships greatly benefit everyone, from staff, parents, carers and the children themselves. At Walton Hall, where the pupils are bussed into school, this is especially important - parents could feel isolated and disengaged from their children's learning. Without this involvement, problems and concerns could be left and parents would become dissatisfied and unhappy.

Parents being given access to school staff ensures all problems are dealt with promptly. Also their involvement in the development of further plans and changes ensures the service offered is relevant and wanted by parents. There are always groups of parents and carers who choose not to access what we offer. We endeavour to seek their involvement/engagement in school life. For some parents and carers, their own personal poor experiences create barriers, and events held *outside* of school may be the key to greater engagement. I would say Walton Hall has achieved the success it has due to the positive relationships it forms with its parents and carers.

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