

## Practices for Positive Primary Partnerships

### Effective Home - School Communication



#### *The aim of this pamphlet*

Children benefit most when there is good and positive communication between the home and the school. During the primary school years, children undergo huge growth and development, and it is therefore not unusual for them to periodically encounter difficulties that they may need assistance with. Similarly, parents may have concerns in relation to their child or their child's education that they may wish to raise with the child's teacher.

This pamphlet has been put together by parents, using input provided by parents and teachers at Greenvale Primary. It refers to strategies that parents have successfully used when dealing with issues that arise from time to time. A similar document has also been prepared for teachers. The aim of both documents is to emphasise that concerns are best resolved when communication between both parties is open, respectful and aimed at the best possible outcome for the child. In this way the child may be best assisted to reach his or her full potential as an individual.

#### *Some strategies*

As parents, it is natural and not uncommon to become emotionally involved in matters concerning our children. The emotion may escalate if parents feel unheard or misunderstood. Sometimes excessive emotion such as anger may heighten the "problem" and prevent us from resolving an issue promptly and satisfactorily. It also places undue stress on the child.

Here are some ideas that may be worth considering when approaching your child's teacher or the school with a problem:

- Seek clarification from your child about the issue. Keep an open mind, as you may not have all the facts. For example:
  - Find out from your child if the teacher has already spoken with your child and others involved.
  - Find out if the issue has been resolved. Your child may simply need to share the experience with you.
  - Find out if your child is happy with the outcome.
  - Consider the matter as a learning opportunity for your child and how best you and the school can work to assist your child
  - If you have concerns, discuss these with another significant adult, asking them if your concerns are valid.
- If necessary, make an appointment with your child's classroom teacher (refer to front page). Do remember that your child's teacher is the first point of contact for all your child's issues. Attempting to resolve the issue with senior staff at this point may undermine the role of your child's teacher. Only defer to a Mini School Leader or Principal Class Officer if the matter cannot be successfully resolved at the classroom level. It is important for all concerned, especially your child, that good rapport is maintained between you and your child's teacher. Be mindful of how you share information with your child about your conversations with his or her teacher.
- Approach the meeting in a manner that suggests joint parent-teacher collaboration on the matter. Present your concerns as clearly as possible and be prepared to hear what the teacher has to say as it is possible for children to present differently at school to how they present at home. You may also wish to share some "home" information with the teacher if you think this may be beneficial for your child and the teacher's understanding of your child.
- It is important to remember to keep your child's best interest as the focus of the discussion, so try not to take disagreements on certain points personally. Instead, you may wish to ask the teacher how he or she arrived at this viewpoint about your child – both of you may learn something new about your child! Remember that even though you may both not agree completely on certain points, you can still come up with an outcome that is best for your child.
- If you have thought of some reasonable strategies to resolve the issue(s) and some good outcomes for your child as a result of raising your concerns, share these with the teacher. It is sometimes easier to work on and build up from existing ideas than to start from scratch.

There may be occasions when parents are challenged to acknowledge that their child may indeed have done the wrong thing. If this is the case it helps to view the situation as one of life's many lessons for your child. Assist your child to

- learn from the experience and move on. In this way the home and school are working together to support the child.
- A follow up with the teacher after the issue has been resolved is a good idea. This allows both parties to feed back on how your child is progressing and also helps to strengthen the partnership between you and your child's teacher.

### Bullying:

- If it involves 'bullying', ask yourself these basic questions:
- Is the behaviour a one-off incident or has it been repeated several times by the same child or group? If it is a one-off incident, there is probably no need to take action.
- Was this a result of a game situation and as such, not specifically bullying?
- Was your child partly responsible and therefore, has he/she taken action to resolve the matter?
- Was the incident violent or was someone seriously hurt? If not, consider discussing useful strategies with your child to avoid the situation or to resolve it.
- Is this part of a developmental stage your child is entering? For example, late in grade 4 through to early grade 6, many girls experience hurtful teasing and being isolated socially as the girls approach puberty. This is a real problem but one that most girls experience at this stage. Discuss this with the teacher or minischool leader and work cooperatively with the school to assist your child to cope.

### To summarise, consider the following steps:

- Be proactive and consult the teacher (Don't wait until a problem escalates)
- Think through the issue and consider ways to reduce the emotions that you, your child and the teachers may be feeling as excessive emotion may heighten the 'problem' and prevent a prompt and satisfactory resolution
- Clarify what the situation really is
- Clarify what is expected or wanted by both you as the parent and the school
- Agree on a plan or process – eg Investigation only, notification only, a range of strategies to be implemented for a set period of time etc.
- Follow up after the process to touch base with the teacher to check on progress and the need for any adjustment.

You are welcome to contact the Principal if you would like to borrow the following references for more information on positive communication:

1. Parentzone – Being a Parent *Easy Guide No. 1*
2. Parenting Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

