

Governors play a critical role in parental engagement

Acting CEO of Parentkind, Michelle Doyle Wildman, tells us how one of the most established education charities in the UK has evolved to better support parents in education, while highlighting the instrumental role of school governors in driving this agenda forward.

When it comes to how well children do at school, parents really do matter. The evidence of this is clear from research (PTA UK Evidence Review: Involving and Engaging Parents in Education, www.parentkind.org.uk/EvidenceReview) and from what we have all seen in practice. And the simple message is that when parents and teachers work in partnership to support learning, it can have a very powerful effect on children. Yet despite this, even in 2018, there are still many barriers to this happening.

In our efforts to better understand the views of parents, Parentkind regularly carries out surveys to gauge how mums and dads are involved in their child's learning and find out what schools are doing to establish their active participation as the norm. What we have found is that many parents and teachers say they don't have the time, confidence or skills to work well together. Some schools don't have any parental engagement plans in place at all and others prefer to keep contact with parents tightly controlled.

Meanwhile, we already see parents raising money for their child's schools through our network of PTA members. We also know that millions of parents help their children with reading and with homework, with exams, university and career choices. Yet, we are very confident that parents would be able to do even more with the right support and information plus the inspiration of seeing what others can do.

Encouragingly, well over 80% of parents have told us they support their child's school. But whether that's with homework, assessment, resourcing, communication or conversion to an academy, many parents want more of a say in what happens within the school gates. And, despite being the principle stakeholder in our education system (and tax payers!), it appears that schools still have some way to go in proving how they value, inform, consult and demonstrate their accountability to parents.

Parentkind wants to help parents understand how important their role is, to sweep away any barriers and to create a climate in which they have the confidence to make a difference. But in many instances, parents are unaware or unsure of the positive difference they themselves can make. For others, their work, family set-up or lifestyle means that getting involved in the traditional group or school-based activities, just doesn't work.

An effective governor community may recognise this and acknowledge the value of establishing consultative bodies, such as parent councils, in every school. They may see the importance of opening up dialogue with families so that parent voices are heard and acted upon in their efforts to influence decisions around school improvement. And governors have a key role to play here. By leading from the top, committing to a parental engagement strategy by, for example, appointing a 'parent engagement champion' or establishing methods for parents to participate and have their say, governors would be setting the example.

It is through this proactive approach that the biggest strides will be made, and Parentkind will whole-heartedly continue to advocate that parents should be part of the development of any school. Whether this is in the shape of school governors and trustees themselves or via consultative parent bodies or even through other mechanisms such as responding to surveys or feeding back their views to teachers and heads, however appropriate, it all counts.

As well as inspiring a wider range of parents to be active in our schools and their child's education, we will also be working with schools to create the conditions in which this can succeed. We offer training and resources for governors, head teachers, senior leaders and other staff so they can take a whole school approach to parental engagement and really get to know their school community. We hope that many will seek to join our new network of parent-friendly schools; schools that embrace great communications and consultation with all the families they are there to serve, harnessing the power of parents to support learning or allowing parents to play an active part in improving the school as individuals or as a formal group.

In short, Parentkind wants more parents to get involved and engaged in their child's education, and in more ways. We hope to realise our potential as a powerful force of good in education in the UK that brings together homes and schools and will support and champion this ambition for the good of all children and society as a whole.

Parentkind Training

Parentkind delivers training courses in collaboration with Parent Councils UK, covering a range of topics including a whole-school approach to parental engagement; setting up a Parent Council in your school; and addressing the barriers to parental participation. For full details, visit www.parentkind.org.uk/For-Schools/Training , or see below for a list of *upcoming Parentkind training courses near you:*

<i>17th October 2018</i>	<i>Marriott Hotel, Leeds</i>	<i>Developing a Parent Council at your school</i> <i>To book visit:</i> www.parentkind.org.uk/ParentCouncilsTraining
<i>18th October 2018</i>	<i>Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Birmingham</i>	<i>A Whole School Approach to Parental Engagement</i> <i>To book visit:</i> www.parentkind.org.uk/WholeSchoolTraining
<i>22nd November 2018</i>	<i>Marriott Hotel, Leicester</i>	<i>Developing a Parent Council at your school</i> <i>To book visit:</i> www.parentkind.org.uk/ParentCouncilsTraining

About Parentkind

Parentkind is a charity which supports, enables and champions all the ways parents can participate in their child's school life and education. It is the largest membership organisation supporting parent teacher associations and is the home for other school parent groups including parent councils.

Our vision is that the active participation of parents is considered an essential ingredient in the success of our children's education by society, schools and parents themselves.

Our mission:

Parentkind will tirelessly support and champion all the ways parents can participate in education and have their voices heard. We want to be a powerful force of good in education in the UK that strives to bring homes and schools together for the good of all children and society as a whole.

Our over-arching ambition:

We want more parents to get involved and engaged in their child's education, and in more ways – both at home and at school.

We will achieve this vision, mission and ambition by:

- Engaging with individual parents
- Supporting our PTA members
- Helping schools be parent-friendly
- Working with partners
- Championing parents' role in education and school life.

Parentkind will work to:

- Encourage, enable and inspire parents to get more involved in education – at home and school
- Support parents directly so that they value learning and can encourage and help their children be the best they can be
- Get parents volunteering in the classroom, raising money for schools, to be governors / trustees, to be active in school parent groups and share their views and feedback
- Demonstrate to parents (and help them recognise) how important their role is, sweeping away barriers and creating a climate where parents have the confidence to make a difference
- Create the conditions in our schools for positive parental participation to thrive.

Further information visit: www.parentkind.org.uk

How to Build Effective home-school partnerships: Parentkind publication in partnership with ASCL and NAHT: www.parentkind.org.uk/EffectivePartnerships

{Parentkind was formerly known as PTA UK but changed its name earlier in 2018. We would urge all governors, and not just parent governors, to consider ways in which the parent body can be more involved within the education processes of our schools and academies – we have always recognised parents as one of the stakeholder groups within the educational system, but do we really do enough to harness their involvement. Ed}