# Home-school communications

## CORE PURPOSE:
Research shows that parent/carers' engagement in students' learning at home is a significant factor contributing to students' achievement in school. In this scenario social media is used to encourage three-way communication about learning between teachers, students and parents/carers in order to begin to bridge the gap between home and school.

## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW:
The relationship between home and school was discussed at a recent staff meeting at the secondary school where I teach, and there was an agreed understanding among senior management team and teachers that parent/carers' engagement in students' learning at home is a significant factor contributing to students' achievement in school. We also recognised that there are barriers to parents'/carers' engagement with school learning and that digital technologies can enhance home-school communication. In response to a pupil and parent/carer survey about digital technology use and preferences, a few teachers and I agree to work with the headteacher to pilot the use of the following home-school communications during one topic of work with a view to developing the following methods across the school:

*Closed social networks* – using free online platforms teachers set up social networks that are private/by invitation only. Teachers and students invite parents/carers to join the network. The teachers and students upload photographs or videos of work they are doing on to the space and ask parents to comment. Students, teachers and parents start discussion threads about topics that are being learnt, with a focus on making links between the learning in school and world outside school. Teachers post homework; parents and students can ask questions. The teachers also posts information about the methods being used for teaching this particular topic. The teachers work with the community of students and parents/carers to establish shared goals and guidelines that ensure any comments given as feedback are focused and constructive.

*Project blogs* – these are set up to give a wider audience for the students' work. Students take turns to write blog entries about what they have learnt and to upload pieces of work/photographs that have been produced for an external audience. Parents/carers can read about and comment on the showcased work and then forward the link to friends and extended family. The teachers also set up a school YouTube channel where students share films about their learning. The video links are included in the blog.

The other teachers and I use the diversity of platforms and audiences as an opportunity to support students' digital literacy via conversations about the affordances of each platform and what is appropriate for the different audiences including issues around e-safety. We find that these technologies are particularly useful for some students with special educational needs, as they support different methods of communication and recognition, better contact with families and more personalised approaches. However, we are also aware that home access to the internet is limited for some families. Therefore, we set up after-school sessions which provide access to the school's computer suite in the evenings. In the future we also plan to link in a scheme in which each family is given a netbook.

## TREND/S
Young people are always connected and make heavy use of digital media, this is posing challenges to teachers and education systems who are yet to identify consistent and effective responses

What motivates students? There is an increasing understanding across education systems in Europe - and globally - of how technology and a focus on emotional well-being can be effective to motivate young people, and help them engage with important subjects like MST

Growing awareness that disaffection and low attainment in relation to MST subjects (Mathematics, Science and Technology) and in general are related to inequalities and social background

## POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

- Peer-assessment
- Sharing learning
- Being explicit about teaching methods used

## ENVIRONMENT

- Classroom
- Home
- Online environments
- The school computer suite in out of school hours

## PEOPLE & ROLES
- Teachers – setting up and starting the social network, holding initial training and support sessions to encourage students and parents/carers to use it, supporting the online community to understand the nature of focused and useful feedback, sharing teaching methods, homework, assessment criteria, communicating with the parents about how the topic can be supported by learning at home.
- Students – sharing learning, reflecting on learning, discussions about learning, learning from each other/parents/teachers.
- Parents/carers – attending initial training and support sessions, commenting on their children's work, joining discussions about topics of learning, communicating with the teacher about how they can support the learning at home, supporting the students to make links between what they are learning in school and life outside school.

## ACTIVITIES

- Initial training and support sessions
- Blogging
- Recording learning
- Online communication
- Creation of video for communication purposes
- Discussions about learning

## RESOURCES (INCL TECHNOLOGIES)

- Internet enabled laptops/computers/mobile phones
- Video and stills cameras