



Help your children to learn

## **FORMAL MEETINGS WITH TEACHERS**

For both primary and secondary parents

department for  
**education and skills**

Resources for  
parents by parents

Research shows that your interest and involvement in your child's learning and education is more important than anything else in helping your child fulfil their potential. As parents, you are the people who go with your child on their learning journey, from the day they are born to the time they become an adult.

You, as the parent, carer or guardian know your child best. These leaflets give ideas and suggestions for you to choose from – you will know which ones suit you, your child and the school. All of the ideas in the leaflet have been developed by parents and can be used with, or adapted for, both primary and secondary age children and young people.

There are many sorts of schools in England – the ideas and suggestions made in these leaflets do not necessarily reflect DfES policy or school policy and should be viewed simply as support for parents in helping their children to learn. Your school may not have seen this leaflet before and it may be helpful to tell them that you are going to use it. All schools have a home school agreement and by signing this agreement you will be acknowledging your partnership with the school to help educate your child. Working in partnership with the school will help your child become a successful learner and a rounded person.

# Making the most of formal meetings with teachers

As well as regular parents' evenings and consultations, you might sometimes have a formal meeting with your child's teacher. This booklet will help you prepare for a formal meeting. It looks at:

- why you might have a meeting
- different issues that might be discussed at a meeting
- how to get the most out of a meeting – working in partnership with the school to help your child reach his or her full potential.

If your child is at primary school you probably see his or her teacher regularly, and you might have an informal chat about your child at the beginning or end of the school day. Building good relationships with teachers in this way will support your child's progress and wellbeing at school, and you may be able to sort out any concerns or problems without the need for a formal meeting. Sometimes, however, either you or the teacher may want to have a formal meeting to discuss a specific issue or concern.

If your child is at secondary school there may not be many opportunities for you to meet informally with teachers. If you or a teacher has a concern or problem you will need to arrange to discuss it, either on the phone or in a formal meeting.

Another booklet in this series, *Making the most of parents' evenings*, looks at parents' evenings.

## Why might you need a formal meeting?

Your child's teacher may phone you or ask to meet you if they feel that the school cannot deal with an issue effectively without involving you. Similarly, you may phone or ask to see your child's teacher to discuss something you are worried or concerned about.



Often meeting informally will allow parents, children and teachers to deal with any issue, big or small, better because they are working together. Teachers may be able to meet you at short notice when there is an urgent issue such as bullying or racial harassment.



Here are some examples of issues that might trigger a formal meeting with a teacher.



Question you might be asking yourself	Issue	Example
Is my child having problems with behaviour at school?	Behaviour	Bullying, racial harassment, disruption, aggression
Is my child's attendance poor or erratic?	Attendance	Truancy, non-attendance, hospitalisation, serious illness
Is my child underachieving at school? Do I feel my child is unusually gifted or talented?	Performance	Underachievement, exceptional performance
Does my child have special needs at school?	Special needs	Physical, sensory, emotional, behavioural and language difficulties; learning needs; learning styles
Is my child starting primary or secondary school, moving schools, or starting a new stage?	Transitions	Starting primary school, secondary school transfer, starting GCSEs, moving schools, choices at 16 and 18

We will look at each of these in turn on the next few pages, showing how you can plan for a meeting and make sure it helps your child.

Remember, if you have a concern, don't hesitate to contact the school. Schools are very willing to see parents and will aim to put your mind at ease and deal with your concern. There is more on working in partnership with schools on page 22.



## What issues might trigger a formal meeting?

There are a number of issues that might mean a formal meeting with teachers is necessary. Over the next few pages we will look at some of them:

- behaviour
- attendance
- performance
- special needs
- transitions.

### **Behaviour**

If your child is being affected by any behaviour issues, it is important to meet with the school as soon as possible so that you can agree the best way forward. Many behaviour problems can be sorted out quite quickly if they are caught early.

If there is a serious problem, perhaps with the possibility of exclusion, you will need to meet with your child's teacher immediately.

You might start with a phone call from your child's teacher or you might be asked to go in for a formal meeting. If you are worried about your child's behaviour, you can phone the school office and ask to speak to the form teacher or Head of Year in secondary school.

Some meetings might be emotionally charged – for example, if your child is being bullied or racially harassed – and it will be very important to stay calm and focus on finding constructive solutions with the school.

Here are some other ideas that can help in a meeting.

- Make some notes to take with you if it will help you remember what you want to say and how you want to say it.
- Take a member of your family or a friend with you if you think it will help you.
- Present your case calmly, providing any information you think the school needs to get the whole picture.
- Be prepared to listen and try not to be defensive – even if you don't like what you are hearing.
- Ask for specific examples of the behaviour.
- Make a few notes at the meeting if it will help you remember who said what.
- Don't leave the meeting until you feel you have agreed a way forward for your child.





Practical steps for sorting out behaviour problems might include:

- agreeing to the child sitting apart from friends
- moving the child to another class
- conflict resolution or anger management classes for the child
- finding a mentor for the child
- a personal development scheme either in or out of the school for the child.



At home after the meeting, you and your child will need to talk about what was discussed. Together you can agree what you are both going to do to address any problems and move forwards.

Behavioural problems do not just go away. You, your child and the school may need to work hard together to make things better.

## Attendance

If your child's attendance is not very good, the teacher might ask to meet you to talk about ways you can help your child improve attendance. If your child is missing a lot of school because of illness, the teacher will want to work with you to make sure your child doesn't miss out educationally.

Try not to feel defensive if the teacher asks you to go in for a meeting about attendance. The school is only acting in your child's best interests. If children do not attend school regularly, they may not be able to keep up with school work. Teachers pack so much into a busy school day, even missing one day can make it difficult for children to keep up. They may have to spend some of their free time at school catching up, for example, at lunchtime. And it's not only the academic work: missing out on the social side of school life – especially at primary school – can affect how children learn to make and keep friendships, a vital part of growing up.



## Performance

You will be invited to regular meetings with teachers to discuss your child's progress – at parents' evenings and perhaps after a school report. These kinds of meetings are covered in two other booklets in this series, *Making the most of parents' evenings* and *Making the most of school reports*.

You or the school might decide to ask for a formal meeting if your child is **underperforming** or showing **exceptional performance**. In either case, you will need to talk with teachers about how your child's needs can best be met.



## Underperformance

Underperformance may be due to any number of reasons. A child may find it particularly hard to understand a subject, or they may get bored or lose motivation easily. Sometimes performance is affected by changes in a child's life, such as a bereavement or moving home. Teachers are often the first to be aware of changes in a child's performance, for example, through late handing in of homework, poor quality work, or poor test results.

If you are going to a meeting to discuss your child's performance, you might want to have a look at your child's previous reports and test results, making a note of any possible problem areas. You can then talk about these with your child before the meeting and try to work out together what is going wrong.

Some people find it useful to prepare for a meeting by filling in a chart like the ones on pages 10 and 11. The first one is for a primary school pupil and the second one is for an A level student. To complete the chart:

- the **child** fills in the column on the right **before** the meeting
- the **teacher** fills in the middle column **during** the meeting
- you and the child** discuss the completed chart at home **after** the meeting.



An alternative is for the teacher and the child to rate each issue out of 10 and then to discuss the differences and similarities in their ratings.



## Primary school – Year 6



	Literacy	
	Teacher	Pupil
Story writing	Writes good stories but needs to plan more carefully so that they don't tail off. Also needs to write more quickly – won't have time to complete a story in national tests unless he speeds up.	I like writing stories and I think my stories are quite good. Sometimes I have to rush the ending because I don't have time to finish them properly.
Comprehension	Below average assessed results – struggles with comprehension – needs to listen more carefully, read the questions properly, and take time over answers.	I usually understand it OK but sometimes I get the answer wrong.
Spelling	Average – good at using spelling strategies but still gets basic key words like 'where' and 'were' wrong.	I try to use the spelling rules but lots of words don't fit the rules and I can't remember how to spell them sometimes.
Punctuation	Above average – excellent use of punctuation – can use a full range appropriately.	I don't have any problems with punctuation.
Attitude	Generally keen to learn and enthusiastic but sometimes rushes work. Takes part well in group discussions and works well in a pair or group. Always asks if not sure about something.	Literacy is my favourite subject and I think I get a lot out of literacy. I like working with a partner.



## Secondary school – Year 13



Issue	Biology	
	Teacher	Pupil
Aptitude for the subject i.e. Good understanding of it	Struggles with this subject. 35% in last test	I think I am good at Biology but I did badly in my last test
Attitude: Positive, determined and hard-working	Not reflected in work or class discussions	My attitude is OK, I think, but I don't speak in class much
Evidence of extra reading or use of Internet to gain better understanding	Work reflects use of basic information discussed in class	Don't use the Internet much or the Library
Hands in coursework and practical work on time	Very rarely. Needs reminding	Sometimes late because of having so many assignments
Work of consistent high quality	Inconsistent quality. See grades	Didn't do well
Asks questions when unsure or having problems	No. Rarely asks questions in class	No
Gets on well with others in class	Yes	Yes

This kind of discussion should enable you and your child to agree with teachers what needs to be done to improve your child's performance. Ideas for improvement will vary, depending on the age of the child. Here are some examples:

- for a child at primary school, extra daily reading and spelling with an adult
- for a child at secondary school, working with their friends
- attendance at extra classes
- parent-child agreement about the number of hours spent watching television or playing computer games.



After the meeting, the Year 13 pupil, her teacher and her parents agreed that this is what they would do to try to improve her performance in Biology.





### Example of an action list drawn up after the meeting

1. Start studying with Year 13 Peer tutor in Biology. Has worked well with other students.
2. Parent invited to visit school a month after meeting to review progress.
3. Better use of Internet to help with coursework. Teacher has provided some tips.
4. Draw up plan of dates to hand in homework and coursework and pin them up on bedroom wall.
5. Negotiate fewer TV hours during the week.

### Exceptional performance

If your child is unusually gifted or talented, you will need to meet with teachers to discuss how the school can best meet your child's needs. You will need to find out how teachers plan to keep your child interested and motivated, rather than bored and/or alienated from other children.

Before the meeting, think about what you want to get out of it. Try to work out the questions you want to ask and make a note of them if it will help you. For example:

- what does the teacher think about your child's performance
  - does it seem exceptional either across the board or in particular areas?

- does the school have a policy on meeting the needs of gifted and talented children?
- is there a distinct teaching and learning programme for gifted and talented children?
- does the school have information about out of hours study support networks with other gifted and talented children?
- how will your child's needs be met during lessons and through homework?
- what will happen to ensure that your child's progress is sustained when s/he moves on to another teacher, year group or school?

You might want to take some examples of things your child has done that suggest he or she may be unusually gifted or talented.

There is a wide range of organisations and resources to support gifted and talented children. You can find out more from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) website at [www.nagcbrtain.org.uk](http://www.nagcbrtain.org.uk) or the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth at [www.warwick.ac.uk/gifted](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/gifted). The school can suggest ways in which you can support your child and will have details of local clubs and societies.



## Children with special needs

You will need to work closely with teachers to get the specialist help your child needs if he or she has special educational needs (SEN). All schools have a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (or SENCO for short) who is responsible for co-ordinating the provision for children's special needs. You should be frank and open with the school about your child's special educational needs to get the best provision as quickly as possible.



Special needs might include:

- physical or sensory difficulties
- emotional or behavioural difficulties
- language or speech difficulties
- learning difficulties
- problems with social interaction

or a combination of these.

Again, it is important to prepare for formal meetings. To help you do this, you might want to look at two publications:

- the *SEN Toolkit* – gives practical advice on the statutory duties of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to make provision for children's special needs
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) A guide for parents and carers.*

You can get these publications from the DfES website [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk) or your LEA.

Think about the questions you want to ask and make a note of them if it will help you. For example:

- what support systems does the school have for your child?
- what advice can the school give you on your child's particular difficulties?
- what support strategies can you share with the school to ensure consistency for your child between the home and school environments?
- how will your child's needs be met during lessons and through homework?
- what will happen to ensure that your child's progress is sustained when s/he moves on to another teacher, year group or school?

As a parent of a child with special needs, you will need to be patient and determined. It may take time to decide on the exact nature of your child's needs and to get the resources and help he or she needs.

Try to work with the school to overcome any problems. Remember that although teachers may have more experience of working with children with different special needs, you understand your child best. If you want to find out more



there is a wide range of national and local organisations that support children with SEN and disability and their parents.

## Transitions

There are a number of key moments in a child's school career when you might need to meet formally with teachers. This booklet looks at:

- starting primary school
- moving from primary to secondary school.

### Starting primary school

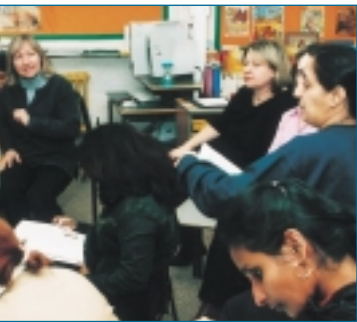
Starting school is an important life change for a child. You can help to give your child a good start by talking openly with teachers if you or your child have any worries or concerns.

At this stage, your concerns may be more to do with emotional and social issues than with academic work. For example, you may be unsure about:

- whether your child will settle in and make friends
- other children's behaviour and possible bullying
- the safety of your child at school.

If you are meeting with your child's new teachers, think about the questions you want to ask and make a note of them if it will help you. For example:

- how many teachers and other adults will be working with your child?
- how can you as a parent become involved in the school?
- is there an emphasis on creativity and fun activities?
- how will the school keep your child safe?
- how much homework will there be and how difficult will it be?



Find out as much as you want to about the school. For example, you might be interested in academic results, involvement with the wider community, or after school clubs. You might want to ask to see some of the work the pupils of the school have done. To find out more, you can look at the school's website, ask for information at the local library, and talk to other parents.

You can also find out about the school's academic track record by looking at the school's Ofsted reports on the Ofsted website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). You can get general information about what is expected of teachers and what is expected of your child on many websites, including the DfES website [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk) and the BBC website [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).



You and your child will be invited to visit the school, probably more than once. When you have been on the visits and seen where he or she will be going, you can both start looking forward with confidence to the start of school. You might want to help get ready by completing a simple table like this one.



What I need to do	When I need to do it	How it will help
Pack school bag	Evening before	Saves time in the morning – ensures child will not miss any activities.
Check whether PE kit is needed	Evening before	Saves time in the morning – ensures child will not miss PE.
Check homework is being done	Evening before	Child keeps up to date with school work. I can see child's strengths and weaknesses.
Mark important school events on family calendar eg parents' evening	As soon as dates are known	Avoids double booking and possibly missing important events or appointments.
Remember to ask child how things are going at school	Every day	Shows child I am interested. Keeps me up to date with school work. May alert me to changes in child's performance or behaviour.

## Starting secondary school

The transition from primary to secondary school is a big change for children. The secondary school might be much bigger than their primary school, and they may find the scale of the buildings and numbers of people daunting. Secondary school staff will expect a greater quantity and higher quality of school work and homework. Peer pressure will become even more important, and bullying can be a serious worry for some children.

You can help your child face these challenges by preparing in a number of ways.

- Research the new school on the Internet and look at Ofsted reports.
- Visit the school with your child and talk to the teachers. Discuss with your child their likes and dislikes and any concerns they may have.
- Talk with other parents whose children attend the school.

Before your child starts at the school, you will probably have a meeting with a teacher. Think about the questions you want to ask and make a note of them if it will help you. For example:

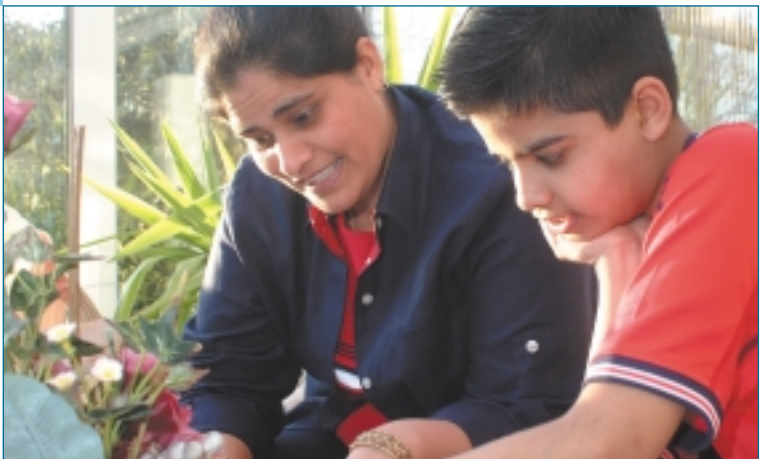
- What kind of pastoral care system does the school have to look after children? Will your child have a tutor?
- Does the school use senior peers as counsellors or mentors?





- Is there a good balance between academic, sporting and extracurricular activities?
- Does the school have a homework monitoring system and is there a homework diary or contact book?
- Does the school welcome parents' involvement?
- What is the track record of achievement? How well are pupils in the school achieving?
- Is the school an 'improving school'? Have results improved over the last few years?

Be prepared to ask lots of questions (there's no need to feel embarrassed) and to spend time after a visit discussing the new school with your child.



## Making the most of meetings

Everyone at a formal meeting will hope for a positive outcome which allows the child, teacher and parents to move forward in agreement. One way of making this more likely is to try to build a good relationship with teachers, based on the understanding that you are all working in the best interests of the child. This is called **partnership working**.

Remember that a formal meeting is a positive chance to help your child do well at school. If your own experiences of school were not good, try not to let your memories of school life affect how you feel about your child's school.

If you are unhappy after your meeting with the school, remember that from all schools should have a complaints procedure. Ask for a copy.

Find out more at [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk). Look under School Life or Your Rights. You will also find links to other organisations that may be able to help you.





## Here are some of the keys to successful partnership working



<b>Do your homework!</b>	Prepare what you want to say before you meet. Find out any information you need to help you in the meeting.
<b>Appreciate each other</b>	Both you and the teacher need to appreciate each other's vital role in the child's life.
<b>Listen</b>	Be prepared to listen. Don't jump to conclusions – try to be flexible.
<b>Get emotional support</b>	If meetings are difficult, bring another adult such as a family member or friend along to give you support and help bring a different perspective to the situation.
<b>Identify the core issues</b>	Identify the key issues that you want to discuss and make sure you cover them.
<b>Be positive</b>	Always look for positive ways of solving problems. Focus on what is best for your child. Don't criticise the school in front of your child – it will undermine both the school and your child.
<b>Set up a support network</b>	Set up a support network to help your child. This could involve members of your immediate and extended family, friends, teachers, specialist help, homework clubs and, of course, you.



Help your children to learn  
**Resources for parents**

Reference HYCL



Help your children to learn  
**Making the most of  
time with your child**

Reference HYCL/4



Help your children to learn  
**Making the most of  
parents' evenings**

Reference HYCL/1



Help your children to learn  
**How is your child doing  
at school?**

Reference HYCL/5



Help your children to learn  
**Getting the most  
from school reports**

Reference HYCL/3

Other leaflets in the series  
are also available.

If you would like to share your experiences, or you have any queries or require further information, please visit our website  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/parents](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/parents)

The information in this leaflet was written by 'Strikers' a parent support group. Further copies of this leaflet, and others in the 'Help your children to learn' series, can be obtained from Prolog: 0845 60 222 60 quoting reference HYCL/2 for this leaflet and the references shown above for others in this series.