

**REPORT BY
PROFESSOR TANYA BYRON**

**NEXT
GENERATION
LEARNING**

Becta leading
next generation
learning

THE

“OH, NOTHING MUCH” REPORT

The value of the after-school conversation

Learning doesn't have to stop at school: How parents can improve their child's learning through more effective communication

REPORT COMMISSIONED BY BECTA TO SUPPORT ITS
NEXT GENERATION LEARNING CAMPAIGN

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Chief Executive at Becta

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FOREWORD

STEPHEN CROWNE

Chief Executive at Becta*,
the government agency for technology in learning

Successful communication about the school day between parent and child actively raises attainment, something which has been proved in countless studies.



But what does this mean in reality when a typical conversation between parent and child could be summarised as:

Parent: “What did you do at school today?”

Child: “Oh, nothing much.”

This scene, which will resonate with families up and down the country, shows that successful parent – child communication is far harder than it sounds!

In order to investigate this issue in more detail, Becta has launched the ‘Oh, Nothing Much’ report, part of our **Next Generation Learning** campaign, which explores the communication challenges faced by parents looking to engage better with their child when it comes to school learning.

We have worked with Professor Tanya Byron, the well-respected Consultant Clinical Psychologist, who has offered her expert opinion and provided detailed analysis of our research, in order to identify key issues for parents, and address them by providing advice and practical tips to help meet these challenges.

The report also explores the beneficial role that technology can play in better parent-child communication.

Over the past 10 years, Becta has been working to highlight how the effective implementation of technology both in school and in the home can

make the learning process more rewarding and successful for learners and help engage parents in their child’s education through more efficient communication with schools.

There are hundreds of examples of technology working for schools, learners and parents across the country in this way - from parents accessing real time reports on their child’s progress, to schools keeping in touch via text messages, through to robots being built and programmed by pupils in maths and science classes to build essential skills.

What has become clear from our research for this report is that the vast majority of parents and teachers believe technology and good communication enhances learning - but not all are clear how. This report aims to arm you with knowledge so that you can start having conversations with your child’s school and learning more about what innovative technology solutions are open to you and your child.

We have already seen the enormous opportunities technology can offer to children’s education so we hope you find this report useful and it inspires you to take a step closer to the future of learning today with **Next Generation Learning**.

*British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

Roald Dahl A. Milne J.K. Rowling Beatrix Potter
 Wilson Philip Pullman



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SETTING THE SCENE

The common experience: parents in the dark about the school day

82% OF PARENTS ADMIT THEY DON'T KNOW AS MUCH ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S DAY AT SCHOOL AS THEY WANT TO

Despite innovative technologies being used in schools up and down the country to inspire and engage learners - initiatives like interactive whiteboards, robots used in class and radio stations set up in schools - the results of this study reveal that this isn't being translated to parents back at home.

All parents want their children to have an exciting and fulfilling time at school, balancing educational learning with the development of social skills and personal growth, so when faced with this closed 'oh, nothing much' response, how should parents feel and how should they respond?

Are children across the country really that disengaged with what they are learning each day? Should we be concerned they are keeping things from us and that this response might mask an underlying problem? Or is it just a typical youngster's response that we shouldn't worry about?

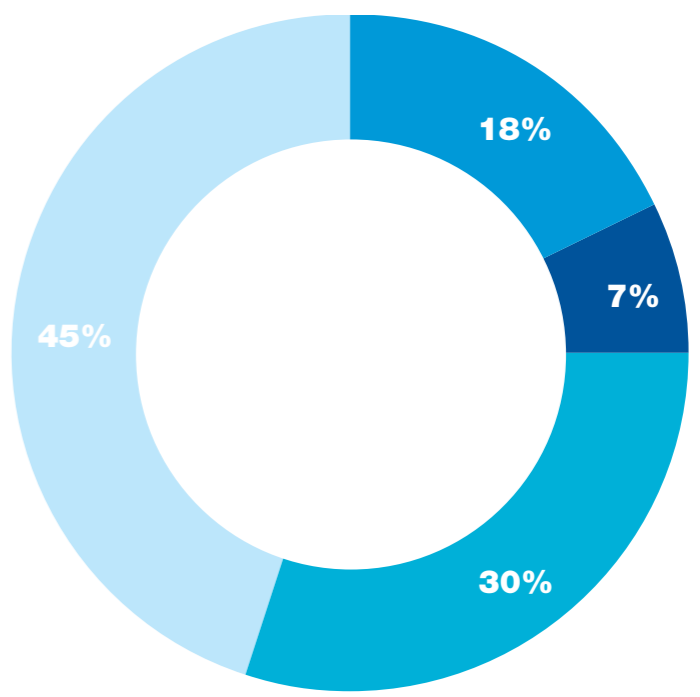
More importantly, what impact is this lack of communication having on attainment levels and learning in general?

In my research for this report, I've sought the opinions of both children and parents to examine the challenges and barriers families face when discussing school learning, looking at both the cognitive and the emotional effect the after-school conversation can have on both parent and child.

I personally believe passionately in the benefits technology provides to learners of all ages and ability. For this report I have looked specifically at the positive impact that technology can have on improving overall parent - child communication, looking at some innovative examples of how schools are helping to build engagement levels and raise overall attainment, whilst providing practical solutions for parents to implement at home.

Q. FROM YOUR AFTER-SCHOOL CONVERSATION WITH YOUR CHILD, HOW MUCH DO YOU FEEL YOU KNOW ABOUT THEIR DAY AT SCHOOL?

- 7%** I never hear anything about my child's day at school
- 30%** I don't know as much as I'd like about my child's day at school - they often just respond 'oh, nothing much'
- 45%** I know one or two things they get up to, but there's quite a lot of things they don't tell me as well
- 18%** I know pretty much what they do all day at school



Professor Tanya Byron is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist with almost 20 years experience of working in the NHS, specialising in child and adolescent mental health.

Tanya also writes extensively on parenting and child behavioural issues in the national media as well as presenting television programmes on child behaviour, science and current affairs.

Tanya has published four books on child behaviour and in March 2008 published her government review looking at the risks to children from exposure to potentially harmful or inappropriate material on the internet and in video games - see The Byron Review: Safer Children in a Digital World www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview.

Tanya now sits on Lord Stephen Carter's Digital Britain Board.



PROFESSOR TANYA BYRON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Parental or carer engagement is key to a child's educational success. But parents are struggling to get involved with their child's learning, with many finding it difficult to get information on what is happening after their children arrive at school.
- **82% of parents admit they don't know as much about their child's day at school as they would like.**
- A major factor is that after-school communication is breaking down between parent and child, with parents often being met with the dismissive response 'oh, nothing much' to the simple question 'What did you get up to at school today?'
- **Just 16% of children proactively share any information with their parents about their school day, 37% of children say they find it quite or very difficult to speak to their parents about their education. 43% of parents find it either difficult or very difficult to extract information from their child about their day at school.**
- These communication difficulties between parent and child have major implications. This includes hampering a child's achievement, creating stress in the parent-child relationship and creating tension between parent and school as the packed school itinerary gets 'lost in translation'.
- **31% of parents admit to feeling 'excluded' when their child won't tell them what they've done at school that day. 24% of children said they felt like their parents "were hassling" them for information about what they got up to at school and approaching half of children (44%) said they don't like sharing things with their parents; they like to keep their school day private.**
- As the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning, Becta has asked me to explore this issue further and offer simple, practical solutions to help parents improve communications with both children and schools using technology in addition to more traditional methods.
- **As 82% of parents want schools to keep them better informed of their progress at school, it is important to show people the successful ways many schools are embracing this already. Time-saving technology for online reporting, lesson-planning and homework (accessed by school websites and other online resources) make parents feel much more a part of their child's learning.**
- With better communication, parents are better equipped to work with schools to help their children achieve higher levels of attainment as they understand the school day and feel comfortable discussing education with both teachers and their children alike. Technology plays a part not only in the communications between parent-child-school but in the learning process itself both in and out of the classroom.
- **Becta is committed to helping teachers make the best use of their time. 80% say that technology has a positive impact on engagement in learning, and 60% say it helps them to support learners' diverse needs.**
- Most importantly, nearly 75% of seven to 14 year olds believe they understand ideas better as a result of using technology in school.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

OnePoll was commissioned by Becta to conduct a survey of **1,000 children** aged seven-14 years and **1,000 parents** of children in this age group to assess how they communicated about the school day. I also spoke directly to parents to get their first-hand experience of the challenges and barriers they face each evening when trying to engage their children in discussions about the school day.



"This research highlights fundamental issues that underpin the educational success of our children. Positive communication and interaction within and after-school enables children to build a sense of self-worth and positivity about learning and achieving. However many parents anxiously question their child at the end of the school day and this creates tension, conflict and a lack of essential communication.

By creating a collaborative, three-way dialogue between parents, schools and children; by harnessing the new and exciting technologies that enable seamless communication between school and home; and – most importantly – by engaging children in after-school communication that is fun, relaxed, open and well timed, we can all enable them to maximise their academic potential and enjoy their school and further education years."



4.1

COMMUNICATION CRISIS

JUST 16% OF CHILDREN PROACTIVELY SHARE INFORMATION WITH THEIR PARENTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL DAY. 82% OF PARENTS REVEAL THEY DON'T KNOW AS MUCH AS THEY WANT TO ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S DAY AT SCHOOL

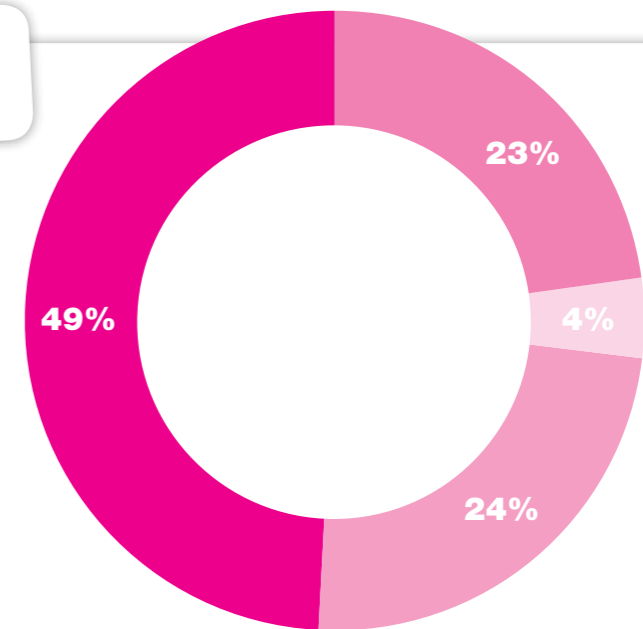
Research has highlighted there's a direct link between parental involvement and children's performance in school (Douglas, 2001); with some researchers proposing that parent-child interaction could arguably be the most important factor in child development, including academic achievement, behaviour and personality (Holzwarth,2003).

My own discussions with parents often highlighted that while children freely share information about their social lives and hobbies, when it comes to discussing school work, many parents were met with a stony silence.



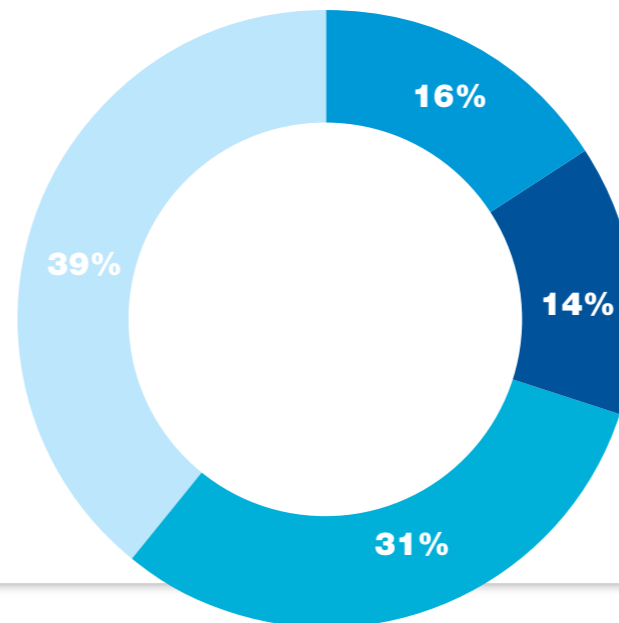
Q. HOW MUCH DO YOU TELL YOUR PARENTS ABOUT WHAT YOU DO AT SCHOOL?

- 4% I never tell them anything about my day
- 23% I don't tell them much about my day
- 49% I tell them some of what I've done
- 24% I tell them pretty much everything I've done that day



Q. HOW OFTEN DOES YOUR CHILD PROACTIVELY TELL YOU ABOUT THEIR DAY AT SCHOOL?

- 14% Rarely or never
- 31% Once or twice a month – they are not very forthcoming when it comes to talking about their day
- 39% A couple of times a week - I usually have to ask first
- 16% Everyday - they can't wait to tell me what they've been up to



The relationship between children, parents and school is a complex one and, for children, not one to always feel relaxed about. There are many factors within these relationships, some of which are about fun, e.g. playtimes, praise, good work; others about behaviour, e.g. working hard, sticking to rules, showing commitment; and others about achievement, e.g. work being graded, teaching groups being streamed, being assessed and monitored.

For children this can create a tension because they are aware of the expectations of both their parents and their teachers and this can create pressure, a want to rebel and a determination to withhold information.

For parents who are anxious about their child's wellbeing and development, their enquiries may become stressed, outcome-focussed and narrow.

Proactive communication comes from children that do not feel judged, that know they are allowed to make mistakes and who feel relaxed about the relationships around them. Spontaneous communication will only occur in relaxed and calm relationships.

4.2

PARENTAL ANXIETY

24% OF THE CHILDREN ASKED SAID THEY FELT LIKE THEIR PARENTS "WERE HASSLING" THEM FOR INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT THEY GOT UP TO AT SCHOOL

Parenting can bring its challenges which can raise anxieties for all from the 'minor' (a slip in achievement) to the more major worries. After all, not a day goes by without a report about a child being bullied at school, or falling in with the wrong crowd with often serious consequences.

When it comes to our children's education most parents want to know that their children are settled and happy at school and learning well. But if the child doesn't share information and the school doesn't have reporting facilities in place, sometimes this can cause parental anxieties to be projected onto children and communication between all is stressful and unproductive.

Results from our research reveal there is a huge difference between what concerned parents want to hear and what their children want to share.

Approaching half (44%) of children said they don't like sharing things with their parents; they like to keep their school day private.

Parents agree - 45% say that despite asking their kids to share information from their school day, there are lots of things their children don't share.

Frustrated and anxious parents who aren't getting the information they require then push their children to communicate even more vigorously, creating an area of conflict between parent and child.

In order to maximise our children's school experiences and educational attainment, it's not just how much and what we say to them but also how we say it.

Anxiety is called the fight or flight response – it is a primitive instinctive response to threat and stress. If children sense tension and anxiety around their performance and behaviour at school or if they are anxious about something that has occurred and fear reprimands, they will avoid any communication (flight) or become hostile and aggressive when questioned (fight).

Such responses often heighten parental anxiety and a vicious self-perpetuating cycle of stress and agitation is born. Furthermore, if a child then begins to develop negative beliefs about their school experiences, they will begin to do badly and behaviour will deteriorate – a self-fulfilling prophecy is born.

ALLEVIATING PARENTAL ANXIETY:

DID YOU KNOW?

- To keep parents updated on their child's progress, many schools use technologies such as the school website, emails, text messaging and online learning platforms, sharing information about attendance and behaviour issues, as well as information about their child's progress and achievements. Through these methods you can expect:
 - to stay up to date with your child's learning in the curriculum
 - to keep track of homework assignments
 - to view reports, attendance records and grades
 - to keep in touch with teachers, tutors and other school staff
- Teaching methods are changing rapidly and thousands of schools across the country are using cutting-edge technologies to inspire

and engage pupils. You may not know it but schools near you might be using:

- video conferencing with overseas schools to help children learning a foreign language
- video games to help engage children in maths or sports
- robots to capture children's imagination and improve their problem solving capabilities
- GPS to explore environmental issues in their local area

Research shows that many children find learning more enjoyable and effective when using technology so the more support and enthusiasm you can show your child in these areas, the more you will both benefit.

- As a parent or carer you want to make sure your child is safe when using digital technologies. Schools use a variety of measures to safeguard children when they're online including firewalls, parental controls and search settings but by familiarising yourself with these tools, you can help to protect and educate your kids too! If you want to know more there are loads of online resources which provide more information on staying safe online:

www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk
www.dcsf.gov.uk/parentknowhow
www.direct.gov.uk
www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents
www.parentscentre.gov.uk

"When my child doesn't communicate about what they've done or achieved at school I feel concerned about what is going on and that they don't want me to know about it." (A parent's response, Next Generation Learning survey, 2009)

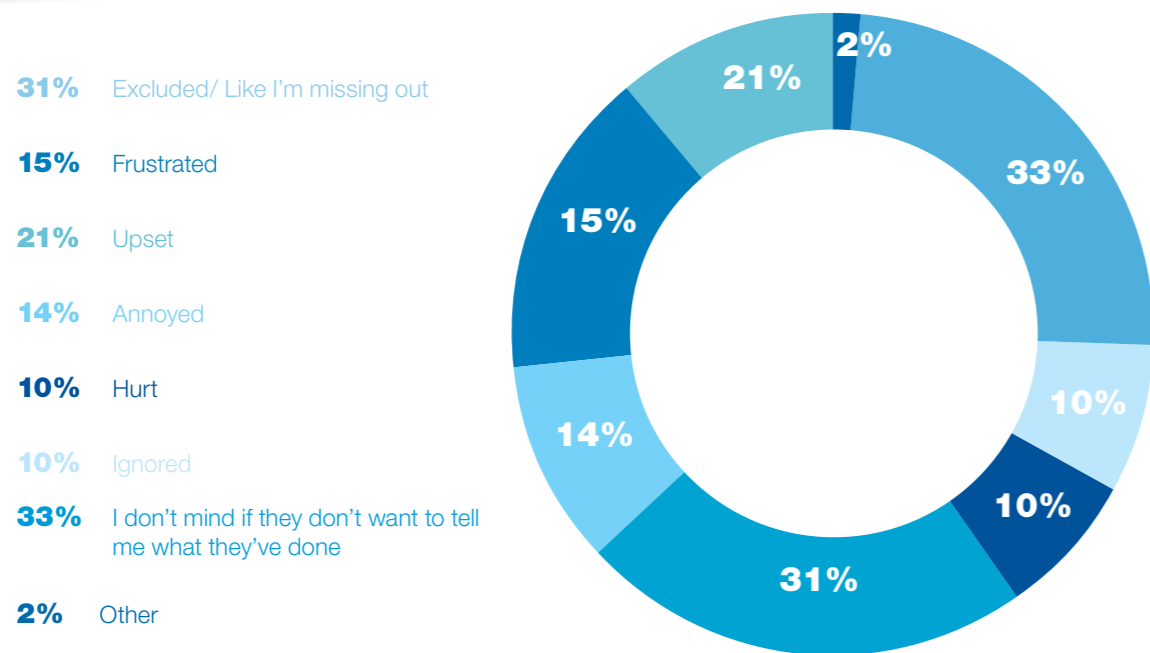


4.3

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT

31% OF PARENTS ADMIT TO FEELING 'EXCLUDED' WHEN THEIR CHILD WON'T TELL THEM WHAT THEY'VE DONE AT SCHOOL THAT DAY. FOR ONE IN FIVE (21%), THIS LEADS TO FEELING UPSET, 15% ADMIT TO FEELING FRUSTRATED

Q. WHEN YOUR CHILD DOES NOT COMMUNICATE ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED AT SCHOOL, HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL? *

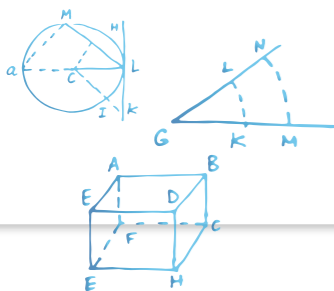


* multi-choice answers

However, a third of parents (33%) don't feel any emotional impact, claiming that it's up to the child to tell them what they've done. But if, as our research shows, children aren't sharing information about their day and parents do not even try to engage their child in conversation, then the school and home are completely disconnected which could impact on the child's overall performance at school.

We know from research that the more we engage with our child about their time at school, the better they will do. However this belief must not generate and fuel an anxiety that leads to parental communication and enquiry becoming an interrogation.

Every child is different and possesses their own unique communication style – so we must make our communications fit them rather than expect them to meet our communication needs and then show that we are upset if they don't. Problem solve this issue proactively – involve your child if you can – to work out how the communication would work best so everyone's needs are met. An upset parent will only reduce their child's urge to communicate with them.



4.4

DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS

51% OF CHILDREN FIND IT DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN TO THEIR PARENTS WHAT THEY HAVE DONE AT SCHOOL THAT DAY

43% OF PARENTS FIND IT EITHER DIFFICULT OR VERY DIFFICULT TO EXTRACT INFORMATION FROM THEIR CHILD ABOUT THEIR DAY AT SCHOOL

School is tiring – not only are our children learning but they are also developing their social and communication skills and having to navigate the complexities of group relationships.

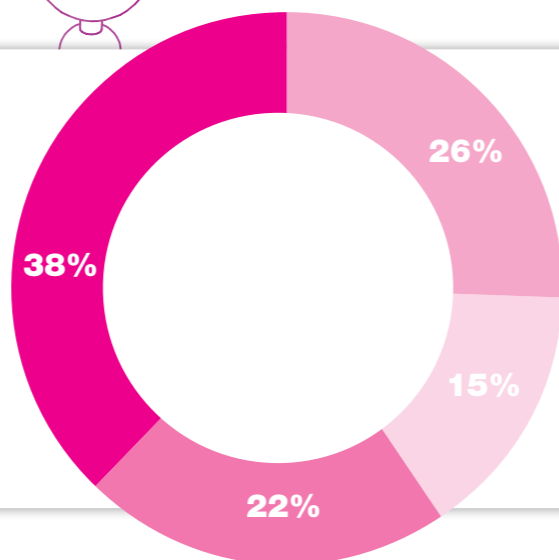
A child's reluctance to communicate is not necessarily because there is nothing to say, but due to a variety of factors including being tired, hungry, overwhelmed by the day. Sometimes they appear not to be able to communicate because they simply can't at that time – parental timing can be wrong, communication style too interrogative and so lacks sensitivity to the needs of the child.

However, informed parents are in a better place to understand these needs. Children need to empty their mind and digest their experiences before they are able to offer up communications about them.

Technology can put parents in a better place to understand the inspiring elements of the school day and be able to address these in order to share the experience with their child.

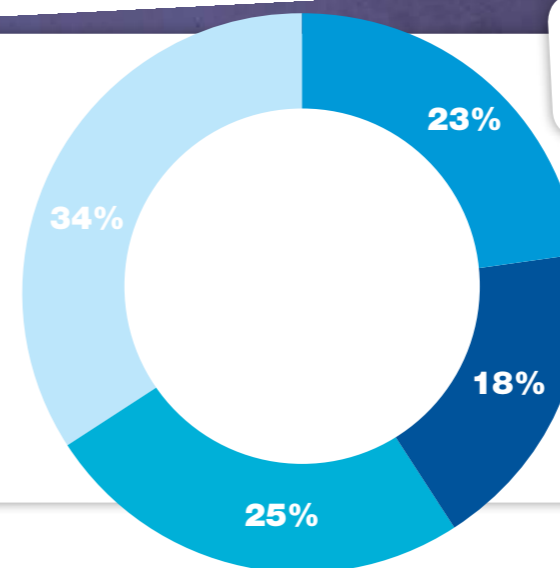
Q. HOW DIFFICULT DO YOU FIND IT IS TO TALK TO YOUR PARENTS ABOUT SCHOOL?

- 15% Very difficult
- 38% Not very difficult
- 22% Quite difficult
- 26% Not at all, I find it easy to talk to them



Q. HOW DIFFICULT IS IT FOR YOU TO EXTRACT INFORMATION FROM YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR SCHOOL DAY?

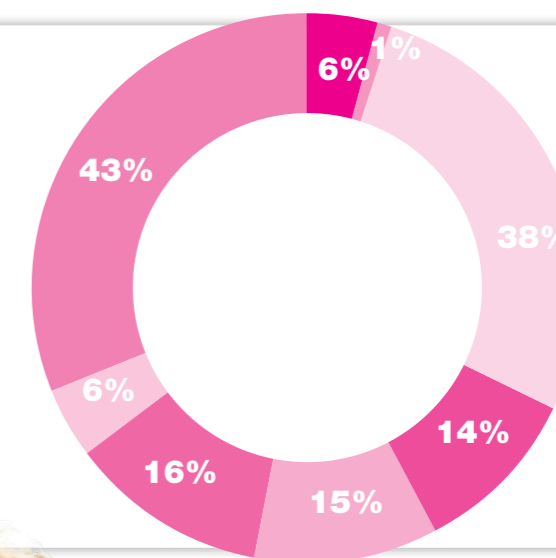
- 18% Very Difficult
- 25% Difficult
- 34% Quite Difficult
- 23% Easy



Q. HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU GET HOME FROM SCHOOL? *

- 43% Tired
- 38% Happy
- 14% Excited
- 15% Angry
- 16% Bored
- 6% Lonely
- 6% Frustrated
- 1% Other

* multi-choice answers



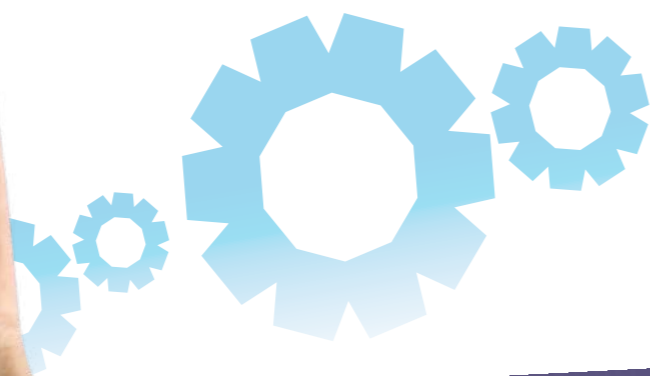
4.5

TALKING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

82% OF PARENTS WANT MORE INFORMATION FROM THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL

ONLY 9% OF PARENTS SAY THEY FEEL WELL INFORMED ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION

Technology now plays an integral part across the national curriculum, not just through Information Communication Technology (ICT) lessons but through the integration of technology in all subjects. Evidence demonstrating the value of technology for learning continues to grow. Around 80% of teachers agree that technology has an impact on engagement in learning, and around 60% reported that it enables them to better support learners' diverse needs (Smith et al., 2008)



Claire Harrison-Hoggarth, Senior Manager, Woodlawn School, Whitley Bay: "At Woodlawn we have ICT across the curriculum and it's embedded in the way we teach and learn within the school, and also in the way we communicate with parents. Through technology we aim to bring school and home much closer together."

According to research from Becta, almost 75% of seven to 11 year olds believe they understand ideas better as a result of using technology in school, and this is likely to mean improved GCSE grades and more children moving into higher education:

- schools that use technology well across the curriculum and wider school life have reduced absence rates and achieved a higher percentage of A*-C grades at GCSE.
- pupils studying Key Stage 2 Maths, Science and English in schools which make the best use of technology, improve at twice the rate of the national average.

So if the safe and controlled use of technology can have a positive impact on education in the classroom, then we need to look at how it can be extended into the home, to

help both parents and children become more engaged in learning. With an increasing number of families having access to technology and the internet at home, there are more opportunities for constructive online learning activities to take place outside the classroom, extending the learning process after children have left the school gates.

And if implemented in the right way, schools can use digital technologies such as email, text and the internet to give parents more regular access to information relating to their children's curriculum and development at school.

This will allow parents and schools to have a greater, more collaborative relationship, undoubtedly improving the communication challenges parents and children are facing when discussing the school day.

Stephen Crowne, Chief Executive, Becta: "Becta research indicates that ICT-mark accredited schools under the Becta charter are twice as likely to be rated as outstanding in the overall effectiveness category of Ofsted inspection reports."

Technology provides a key to open this dialogue between schools and parents. Online resources allow schools to share a huge variety of information about the school, the curriculum and an individual's progress which is readily and conveniently accessible to parents.

This would combat children's accusations that their parents "nag" them for information, but still allow parents to become actively involved and engaged in their child's education.

If your child's school is engaging with you through technology, you should be able to:

- keep track of your children's work, curriculum and homework assignments
- view their reports, attendance records and grades at any time of day that suits you
- keep in touch with teachers and other staff via email and text messaging

Becta's **Next Generation Learning** campaign urges parents to talk to their child's school to find out how technology is already being used and also to discuss ways it can help improve day-to-day communications between them and the school in the future.

www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk



TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS

How to improve after-school engagement with your child

Looking at these findings in detail, it is clear that communication can be fraught with difficulties and frustrations for both the parent and child.

Below are a range of strategies for parents to help improve communications with their child after school as well as anxiety management tips for parents who may be pushing their children too hard for information and in doing so reduce the chances of positive interaction and risk increasing their own anxieties about school.



TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD

- **Hone your child's conversation skills:** If you're not getting the answer you're looking for from your children, it could be that their conversation skills need some development. Helping children practice the art of conversation will serve them well in making and keeping friends. Show them that a good conversation begins with eye contact, appropriate body language, and a warm greeting.
 - **Avoid vague questions** For example, "How was school today?" will elicit very little conversation. For many children it is too broad and they need a more specific question to help them remember their day. Finding out more about your child's timetable directly from school will allow you to prompt discussions around specific events. This can be done easily through technology via the school website or online learning platforms, a shared facility which allows parents to see exactly what their child is getting up to each day.
 - **Avoid closed questions** that can be answered in one word: "yes" or "no." They shut conversation down rather than open it out.
- Sian, parent, Balsall Primary School, Coventry:** "The school website is a lifeline for parents; it gives them access to their children's learning and is the starting point for conversations with their teachers, and also with the children when they come home."
- **Make open-ended statements** "Tell me about the games you played at playtime today" or "Tell me the best bit of a story you heard at school today."
 - **Ask open questions:** either directly e.g. "That's a fantastic picture of a volcano, tell me what is going on?!" or indirectly, e.g. "I wonder what you had for lunch today." These open out conversation and encourage an exchange of experiences and ideas.
 - **Make paradoxical statements** to get your child to tell you something by telling them you don't think they can! "I bet you can't remember who you played with today!" or "Three funny things happened to me today – I bet you didn't get as many happen to you."

REMEMBER TO ENCOURAGE THEM

- **Praise** - make sure that you praise them for achievements – however small – even praise them for understanding when they have made a mistake or knowing that they could have tried harder.
- **Reinforce** what they are saying by nodding, smiling and making comments to show you are listening and enjoying what they are telling you.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

- **Model sharing about your day.** "I had a great day today..." It is important to share your interests, friends, challenges and joys with your children so that they see the communication modelled for them.
- **Share some of your day** to show your children the kind of information that you'd like to hear from them: "This is what I did today that I felt really good about. ..." "This is what I did today that was a little bit hard, but I did it anyway. ..." These statements naturally lead to questions that you can ask your kids: "What was one thing that you did today that was hard (or fun) for you?"

IT'S ALL ABOUT TIMING

- **Give your child time to unwind.** Think about your own after-work needs. Just like you, children need time to relax and recharge after a long day at school. Try not to jump in with questions about school the moment your child gets home. You might even want to wait until dinner; that just might be the amount of transition time they need.
- **Take time at the dinner table to talk about a good and bad thing that happened that day.** Knowing that family dinner time is a safe place to share joys and disappointments, is comforting. This can start from very young - if parents start modelling communication with their one-year-old on a daily basis, they are more likely to have a teenager who knows how to communicate openly about their day. Make it a game of thinking of a good and bad, happy and sad, or fun and challenging event that day. By encouraging your child to talk about a hard thing that happened that day, you can introduce emotional words to help self-expression such as, "You must have been disappointed when Sally didn't let you join the game." or "I bet you were frustrated when it was raining and you couldn't play football outside."
- **Take advantage of your child stalling at bedtime.** Sometimes, just after stories are read and the bedtime routine is over, children may relish a bit of staying up time and a relaxed chat about their day.

BODY LANGUAGE MATTERS

- **Eye contact.** Don't ask a question while your back is turned – make sure your child feels listened to by making eye contact.
- **Nodding** is a good way to signal that they are being listened to and also reinforces the flow of what they are saying.

- **Facial expressions.** Children will read body language very well and often will attend to what they see more than what is being said. Don't be in automatic mode and praise them without smiling or try and engage them without eye contact – the communication has to sound, look and feel genuine for it to be successful.
- **Listen, listen, and listen.** Once your child starts talking about their day, don't jump in and interrupt with constant questions - let them communicate in their own way and own pace. Pauses are fine and with praise, encouragement and visible interest from you, your child will gain confidence as they relate their day.

BE CREATIVE

- **Use their artwork or take-home papers to start conversations.** Research has shown that when children brought home objects and art projects, they spoke about their recent school activities significantly more than when they did not. Take advantage of these masterpieces, asking open ended questions and don't forget to listen. Showing interest in their work can increase their self-esteem as well as link school and home in a positive way.
- **Use books as conversation starters.** Choose a book about school and see what conversation unfolds.
- **Play a conversation game.** Children at this age have rich imaginations and love stories. Try turning school conversations into stories. Begin by saying, "Today, I went to school and sat down right next to _____." Let your child fill in the blank. "First, we opened up our reading folders and I looked inside and saw _____."

- **Use humour.** For example "Next, we hung up our coats and... went right to sleep!" At this your child will probably correct you with the accurate information. Continue until you get to the end of the day, or until you're satisfied that you've heard more than your child would normally volunteer.
- **Keep fun diaries.** Diaries are especially good for children of separated parents as diaries can keep everyone up-to-date with what has been happening. Create a diary to fit your child – drawing, rating the day using a range of smiley to sad faces or one in the hallway with columns on each page enough for each family member to write down the best thing / worst thing about their day to use for conversation at dinner. This can also be done using technology, you can both keep a blog in which you note down information about your day which can be shared between you.

MANAGING ANXIETY

- **Stay calm.** If you want your child to communicate issues that are worrying or upsetting them it is important that you give them space to do so and remain calm. Also don't charge into the school with all guns blazing (unless it is clearly very serious) because this will only embarrass your child and put them off telling you anything further. Sometimes – although hard – it is better to empower your children to work out their own coping strategies than to do it for them.
- **Get the facts straight.** From time to time you'll hear information that may concern or even alarm you about your child's day at school. Don't ponder the details - ask the teacher! It could be that you and your child's teacher are using different terminology, and your child is confused by your questions. On the other hand, if your child complains about being teased or picked on, repeats a complaint with regularity, or complains of frequent trips to the nurse, there may be a real problem. Calling the teacher or school counsellor is the best way to find out what's going on, and to get your child the support they need.





TECHNOLOGY MATTERS

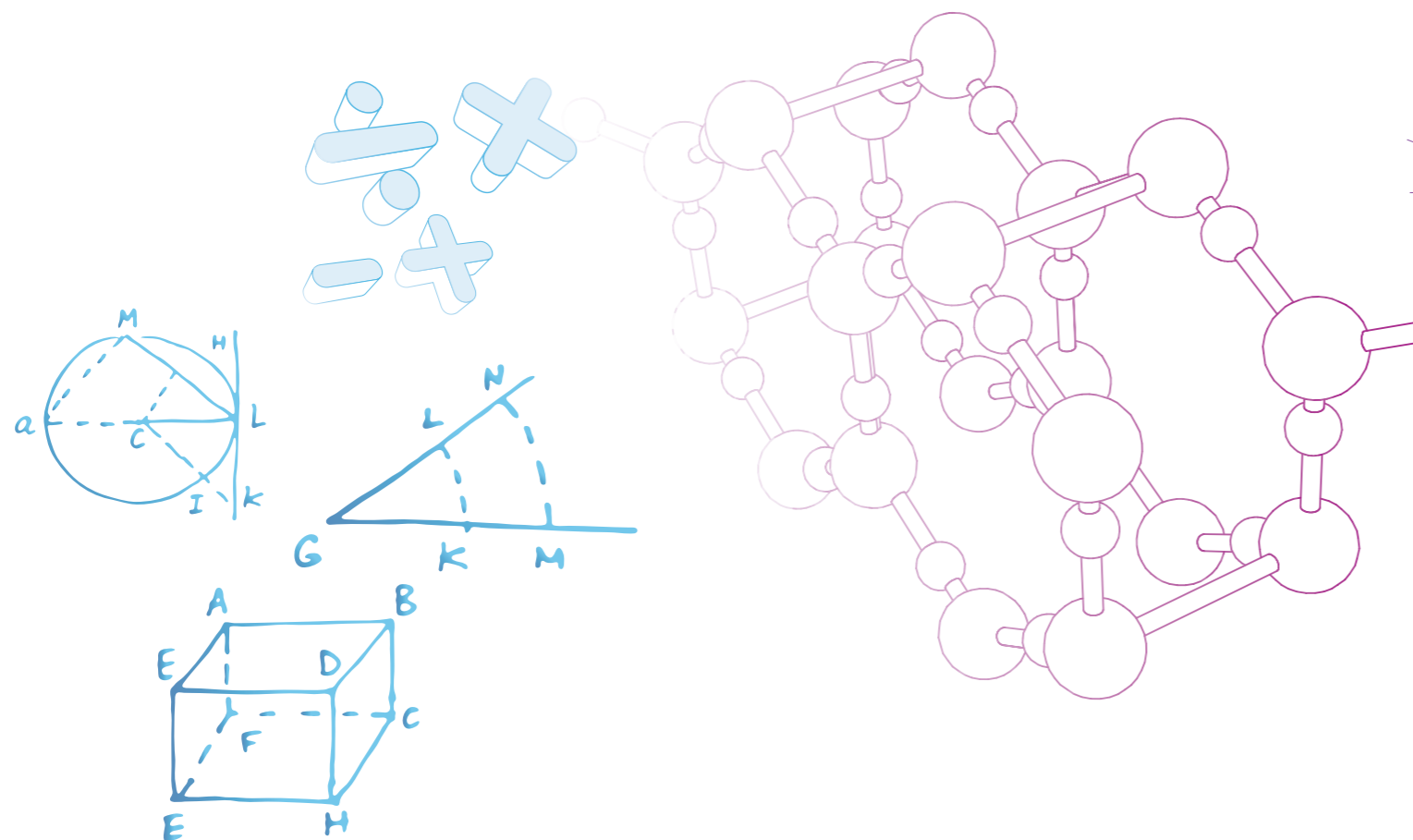
- **Children are growing up in a technological age** and are often more comfortable with technology than most adults. Using technology in school is a natural extension of what they do in their everyday lives and research shows it can offer enormous opportunities for your child's education.
- **Talk to your children about how they use technology.** Technology in schools is often motivational and fun, with schools using everything from podcasts to robots to help their pupils study. Find out about what technology your child's used to learn that's excited them that day.

Simon Pile, Head of ITC, Anson Primary School, London: "We've seen a real difference in the children since introducing Managed Learning Environment technology. The desire that they have to learn and the desire they have to share that learning with their parents has been really powerful."

- **Find out if your child's school shares reports and class updates online** and use these to discover where their strengths lie. Focus on subjects they love, and use any information on areas where they may be struggling to lessen any anxiety they may have in speaking about them. 80% of parents think it would be useful if their child's school was able to provide up-to-date and secure online information about their child's learning, so if your school doesn't have this facility, talk to them about it.

Andrew, Parent, Anson Primary School, London: "I can use the school's system to go online, learn where my daughter is having problems and identify them before I go into parent teacher meetings, which really makes my time with the teacher valuable."

- **Stay in touch.** Make use of new technology and stay in touch with your child's school by using text messaging or email. A close relationship with your child's school will help you to be engaged with your child, and new technology allows you to find out what's happening in the classroom even when your time is limited. 68% of parents would like their child's school to stay in touch with them via new technology, so find out how your child's school can best communicate with you.



WHY NOT FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HOW YOUR SCHOOL IS USING TECHNOLOGY AND ABOUT NEXT GENERATION LEARNING?

- technology is dramatically changing the way teachers teach and learners learn. **Next Generation Learning** prepares children for the changes technology brings to society and the workplace.

Not so long ago....

- the teacher delivered the facts writing on the board, then erasing it and assigned work from a text book or copied worksheets.
- pupils took it in turns to use a computer for 'writing up in neat' or playing a game as a reward.
- homework practised what was taught in class using a worksheet or exercise book which the teacher marked by hand.

Learning today typically involves...

- an interactive introduction from work in the 21st century – the teacher on an electronic whiteboard used for creating, storing and presenting interactive resources.
- pupils researching topics using the internet or educational software on the school network, and recording their work on laptops, digital cameras or MP3 players.
- completing homework via the school's 'learning platform' allowing them secure access to online discussions, learning materials and their class work – from anywhere.

Learning Platforms

A growing number of schools can now offer what is called a 'learning platform'. These learning platforms provide real benefits to pupils, such as allowing them to:

- access learning material outside the classroom
- submit homework and assignments for marking and assessments
- store work and notes in their own personal learning space
- take part in live discussions with other pupils and teachers
- use the information you access on your child's learning platform to prompt them on what they learnt that day. If you know their school timetable you can start talking about history, science or even gym: "I hear you learnt about the Victorians in history today?", "Tell me about Queen Victoria and the major events that happened during her reign."

Sophia, Parent, Balsall Primary School:

"My daughter is five, she sometimes forgets what she has got up to at school so it's really valuable for me to have a look at her timetable online, see the subjects she is involved in and use it as a prompt to open dialogue around her day."

CONCLUSIONS

Educational research consistently shows that parental engagement with children about their education and their learning experiences will lead to positive outcomes in terms of academic attainment and self esteem.

For most parents, their children's education is extremely important and a crucial aspect of their overall development, however 82% admit they don't know as much as they'd like.

Becta's research, has highlighted how a drive to engage with a child's education coupled with the ongoing concern that parents have about their child's school and their child's learning, can lead to problems for many parents. With 43% of parents highlighting that their children seem reluctant or unable to talk about their school day and 51% of children reporting that they are indeed reluctant or feel unable to do so, we are seeing a communication crisis. Parents literally feel left in the dark – this can in itself then further heighten anxiety.

Such a communication crisis becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as the more parents push for information the more children resist. It seems the solution has to lie in a change in behaviour in parents in order to maximise their child's after-school communications – changes that require well managed anxiety, creative communication styles and an ability to be patient and allow the child to communicate when they feel able with appropriate prompting.

As this report has shown, technology plays an important role in bridging the communication gap between parents, schools and children. Working on two levels, technology makes learning more inspirational, engaging and powerful whilst also enabling better engagement and learning beyond the classroom.

When it comes to the after-school conversation, the most successful parenting strategies are those that are calm, creative, non-confrontational and well timed. So often children are asked for information at times when they are tired, hungry or just need time to change gear. After-school communication must feel like a fun exchange for everybody, not just the spotlight on the school child. Modelling communication via sharing one's own day is a good opener. Using diaries is effective especially for split families where children can be encouraged to save up information for the parent they are seeing less often.

We found that children were more willing to share information about hobbies than about school – this is because a hobby is a choice and an area where the child feels more ownership. Clearly children can't choose to go to school but they can feel ownership of what they do there – don't impose yourself on their school experiences like an unwelcome guest – be prepared to be invited in. Firing a child's enthusiasm about school is the best way to

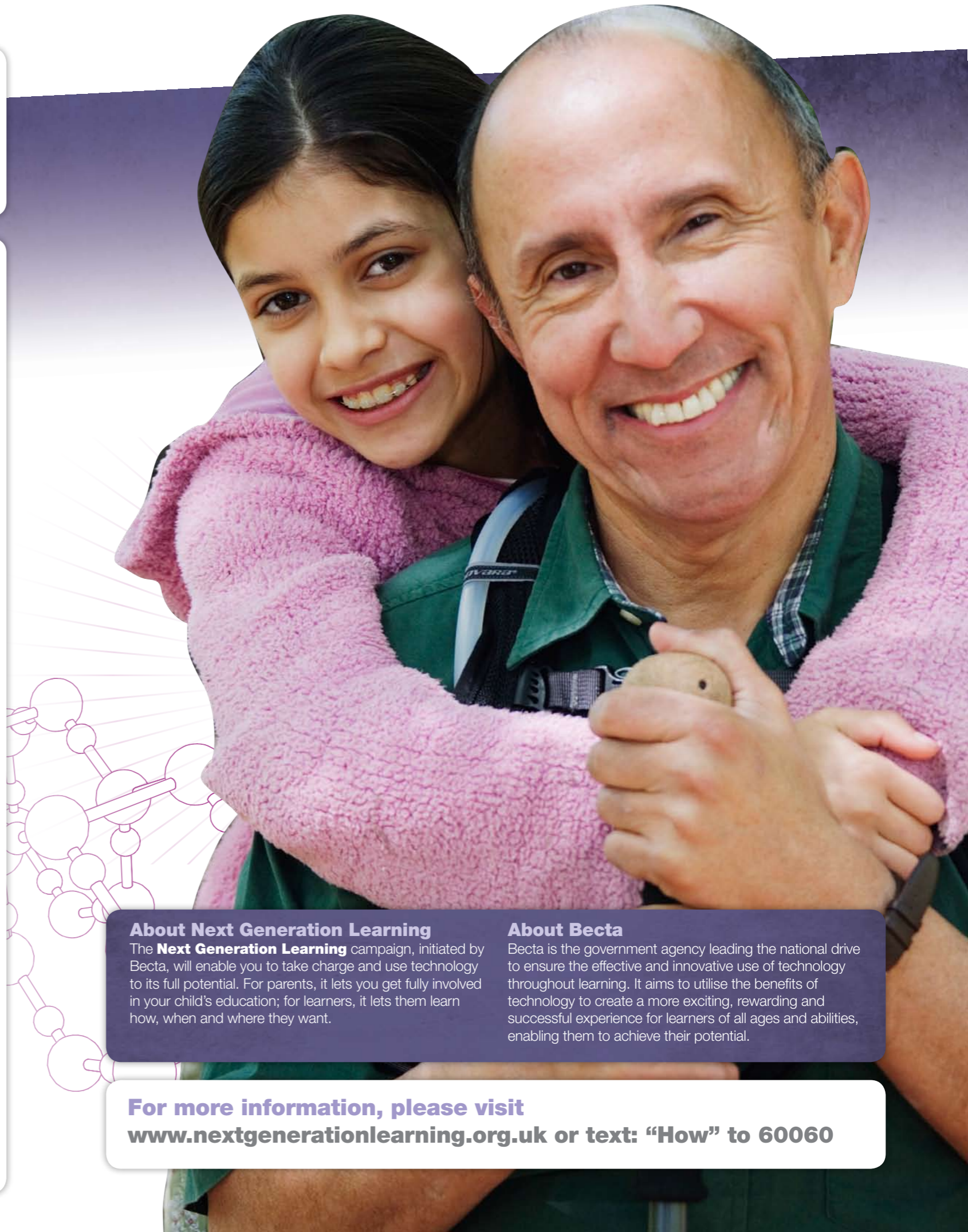
maximise their learning and enjoyment there. This leads to a strong self-esteem and a desire to share experiences and communicate spontaneously. Be patient as you change your behaviour – help your child recognise your enthusiasm for what they are doing coupled with a healthy respect for how and when they want to discuss it; in that way you will be hearing a lot more than you do now.

Undoubtedly schools play a huge part in this. In terms of child development and positive education outcomes, the key issue is for school and home to work in synergy in order to enable the child to maximise their potential. This means that schools must communicate with parents in terms of course work and the termly syllabus in order for parents to prompt conversations via books or outings that link into what is being done in the classroom. The child is at the heart of this communication but must also be a key player – the communication must be three way with the needs of the child placed firmly at the centre.

Further enablers in the school communication agenda are technologies. **Next Generation Learning** emphasises the exciting possibilities that technology brings in terms of communication and learning. Schools that proactively offer support and guidance for families to communicate with them via technology show greater parent satisfaction and model a holistic approach to the support of the learner. Technology also allows the dissemination of information in a timely fashion and so enables families to keep abreast of the child's curriculum, learning targets and outcomes and so plan family activities and outings to support what is being learnt in the classroom.

The **Next Generation Learning** agenda enables so many of the principles of good communication, a positive and shared involvement in the child's school-work and progress and an open, flexible dialogue between the child-parent-school triad.

In summary – a successful learner is a happy learner; a happy learner is one that feels capable and also supported and understood when necessary. For children this is best affected by calm, empowering and supportive communications between all those involved in their education and care, and a relaxed, warm and positive family setting where all the successes and disappointments of the day can be shared enthusiastically.



About Next Generation Learning

The **Next Generation Learning** campaign, initiated by Becta, will enable you to take charge and use technology to its full potential. For parents, it lets you get fully involved in your child's education; for learners, it lets them learn how, when and where they want.

About Becta

Becta is the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. It aims to utilise the benefits of technology to create a more exciting, rewarding and successful experience for learners of all ages and abilities, enabling them to achieve their potential.

For more information, please visit www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk or text: "How" to 60060

APPENDIX

Literature review

Research for many years has highlighted how the quality of family interactions (the family social capital) has important associations with children's and young people's academic motivation and achievement, including longer term educational and occupational attainments

(e.g. Coleman, 1991; Kellaghan et al., 1993; Ceci et al, 1997).

As children move through school, parental involvement and engagement remains key to their success with the quality of the parent-child relationship being increasingly significant. Interaction and communication are key, for example the way in which parents read to their children and discuss what is read affects children's reading ability

(Baker et al., 2001)

In addition, research has highlighted that the way parents communicate, the vocabulary they use and their attitude towards school and home work, influences educational outcomes in their children (Weizman & Snow, 2001). Not surprisingly, children of parents who provide appropriate help with their homework tend to fare better in school

(Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

The home environment and perceived parental expectations towards school and learning as well as parental aspirations for their child educationally all play a large role in child performance and attainment (e.g. Marchant et al., 2001; Jacobs & Bleeker, 2004). In adolescent children the quality of the parent-child relationship continues to be an effective factor in schooling outcomes. For example, in one study, adolescents who described a close and bonded relationship with their parents and rated their communication with them as good showed better results and physical well-being

(Pong et al., 2005).

At the secondary education level, high parental expectations continue to yield significant schooling benefits (Toney et al., 2003; Zahn, 2006). In one study of high school seniors, "parental expectations for achievement stand out as the most significant influences on [their] achievement growth, high school credits completed, and enrolment in extracurricular academic high school programs." (Catsambis, 2006). High parental educational expectations are also associated with maths and reading scores, interest in school, academic self-discipline, future planning, and motivation for school

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