

tool

kit

**PATHWAYS  
TO PARENTAL  
LEADERSHIP**





# PATHWAYS TO PARENTAL LEADERSHIP

## TOOLKIT

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#### About the Author

The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) was established by Sr Stanislaus Kennedy in 2001. It is an independent human rights organisation that advocates for the rights of migrants and their families and acts as a catalyst for public debate and policy change. The ICI is also an Independent Law Centre.

The work of the ICI is underpinned by the belief that immigration is a permanent and positive reality in Ireland and that individuals' human rights must be respected, protected and upheld.

We all have a stake in building a future which respects and celebrates diversity – a generous, sharing Ireland that encompasses many traditions and cultures and creates space for all its people.

**President Mary McAleese,**

24 February 2000

Cultural diversity is something to be enjoyed. It is not a problem.  
The problem is ignorance.  
It is ignorance that provides the fuel for fear, prejudice and hate.

**Terry Davis, former Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

(First Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, Madrid, 15-16 January 2008)



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

- ASTI: Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
- BOM: Board of Management
- DCU: Dublin City University
- DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
- DES: Department of Education and Skills
- EAL/ESL Teacher: Teacher of English as an additional language (EAL) or of English as a second language (ESL)
- EEA: European Economic Area
- ELSTA: English Language Support Teachers' Association
- EPIM: European Programme for Integration and Migration
- ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute
- HSE: Health Service Executive
- HSCL Co-ordinator: Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator
- ICI: Immigrant Council of Ireland
- INTO: Irish National Teachers' Organisation
- ITB: Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
- ITIA: Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association
- IVEA: Irish Vocational Educational Association
- JMB: Joint Managerial Body
- JRS: Jesuit Refugee Service
- NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- NEF: Network of European Foundations
- NEWB: National Education Welfare Board
- NPC: National Parents Council
- NQAI: National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- NYCI: National Youth Council of Ireland
- PA: Parents' Association
- PPL: Pathways to Parental Leadership
- PT Meetings: Parent-teacher meetings
- RIA: Reception and Integration Agency
- TCD: Trinity College Dublin
- TUI: Teachers' Union of Ireland
- UCD: University College Dublin
- VEC: Vocational Education Committee

## PREFACE

Research across Europe has highlighted the importance of education for the long-term integration of migrants and the essential role of parents in this.<sup>3</sup> It is in this context that the Pathways to Parental Leadership project came into being. The aim of this project by the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) is to support primary and post-primary schools in fostering migrant parents' involvement in their children's schools lives in order to increase educational outcomes, strengthen the voice of migrants in the community and promote local integration.

This project goes to the core of ICI's vision, which is one of a fair society that respects human rights and gives everyone the opportunity to fulfil their potential. This ICI initiative also fits in well with the Department of Education's Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-15, particularly the participation, engagement and effective communication components of the strategy. In the wider context, the project falls into line with Common Basic Principles on Integration adopted by the EU Council in 2004. The fifth principle asserts that, "efforts in education are essential in preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society" while the ninth Common Basic Principle highlights the importance of active participation in the following terms: "the participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local and regional levels, is a key to effective integration".

The ICI is an independent human rights organisation. It advocates for the rights of migrants and their families and acts as a catalyst for public debate and policy change. The organisation was set up by Sr Stanislaus Kennedy in 2001 and is a licensed Independent Law Centre. More specifically, the ICI is committed to listening to migrant voices and campaigning for those voices to be heard, in every aspect of life, as a means of furthering the integration process. The ICI is also committed to the promotion of diversity and religious tolerance in schools and advocates the introduction and/or strengthening of anti-racism policies and initiatives.

During the initial phase of this project, the ICI undertook research in schools as well as comparative research on international practices. This research informed the development of the draft toolkit. Other exciting components of this initiative included setting up and managing the Advisory and Transnational Committees to provide expertise. The piloting of the draft toolkit in participating schools provided the ICI with an opportunity to refine the final product to ensure that it meets the needs of schools and migrants and fulfils the overall aims of the project.

This toolkit is comprised of a wide range of suggestions. It is up to each school to decide which measures to try and to see what works best for them. Some of the suggestions could apply to all parents (established and migrant) and could benefit the entire school community. It should be noted that, in the case of Gaelscoileanna or Irish medium schools, where the text reads "English", this should be read as "Irish" where relevant.

The ICI would like to thank the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) and the Network of European Foundations (NEF), which kindly co-funded this project. Without their support, it would not have been possible to produce this valuable resource. The Advisory Committee and the Transnational Committee are also acknowledged for their time, knowledge and valuable insights.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Friedrich Heckmann, Education and Migration: strategies for integrating migrant children into European schools and societies, a synthesis of research findings for policy-makers, NESSE network of experts for the European Commission, 2008, <http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports>

The ICI would also like to thank the schools that participated in the research and ran pilots of the toolkit, and migrant parents who participated in the initial research. Lastly, all of the staff, interns and volunteers of the ICI are to be acknowledged for their hard work and support, especially ICI founder and board member Sr Stanislaus Kennedy.

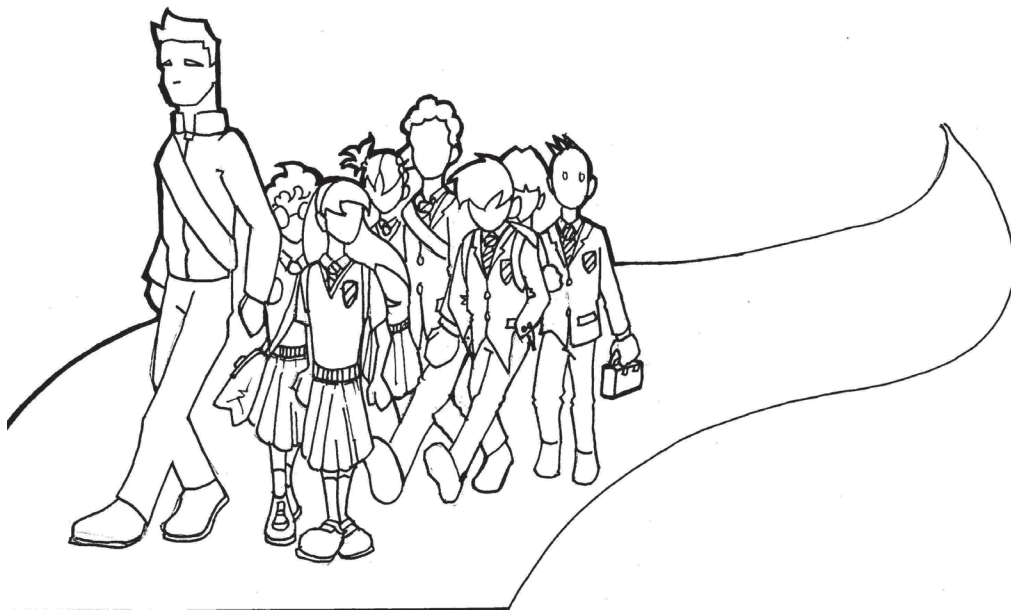


Denise Charlton, CEO  
Immigrant Council of Ireland  
August 2011

**The first part** of the toolkit focuses on creating a welcoming ethos in your school, where parents are part of the school community and join the school in welcoming others. It provides suggestions for facilitating parents' access to information on the school system.

**The second part** focuses on various levels of parental involvement. It starts with parental involvement at home and moves on to look at how schools can get parents through the school doors and involved in the school itself.

The toolkit concludes with a series of **Appendices**, which give more details on some of the integration services mentioned throughout the main work. There are also examples of best practice from schools across the globe and a table of contents for the DVD that comes with the toolkit.



# 1. THE WELCOMING PROCESS

This first part of the toolkit looks at how a school can display a welcoming attitude that reflects its commitment to diversity. **Section one** highlights the importance of welcoming attitudes in face-to-face communication. **Section two** provides suggestions for various materials and procedures to welcome migrant parents to the school. **Section three** covers those parents who join the school community after the school year has started.

## 1.1 WELCOMING ATTITUDES

Welcoming attitudes may be natural, spontaneous reactions that come from the heart. They may also be down to conscious decisions people make to be more professional, accommodating or friendly. Whatever the case, the following tips have been found helpful by participating schools. They could also be used to reinforce what you already believe in and practise.

### Practical Tips

- **Asking questions:** If you want to know where a migrant parent is from, it can be better to ask “What is your country of origin/heritage country?” or “Where are you originally from?” instead of “Where are you from?” The person might feel they are from Ireland if they have been here for many years.
- **Ask parents how they pronounce their name.** Check with them that you are pronouncing it reasonably well.
- At a meeting, **write down any important information** and let the parent bring it home.
- If time permits, **follow up a meeting** with a phone call or a note in their child’s school journal.
- **Keep track** of procedures or information that do not seem obvious or clear to parents and share these issues with your colleagues. Maybe an extra information sheet can be produced and sent out in the future, or a workshop or information session on those particular issues could be organised.
- **Use the “Hello” page.** The DVD contains files with “Hello” in 76 languages and “Thank you” in 185 languages. These can be used in posters or signs, in school correspondence, on the website etc. There are phonetic transcriptions on the list so you could also use them in conversation with parents.
- When meeting migrant parents whose first language is not English, keep a two-language pocket-size **dictionary or an electronic translator** at hand. You can give it to the parent if they are stuck for a word or phrase, or you can use it yourself. An electronic translator for the school office should be under €30.

### Tips when Speaking to Parents with Low English Proficiency

The ability to communicate with people with low English proficiency is a skill – some people do it better than others but, with practice, it can be developed over time. Some parents may have very good vocabulary and grammar, but they may have difficulty speaking English or understanding a particular accent. Equally, a parent who has good spoken English does not necessarily have good written English.

- **Speak slowly and clearly.** This is a skill that can take some practice. Avoid running words together. This applies to contractions as well, e.g. say ‘cannot’ instead of ‘can’t’. Use short and simple words (for example, instead of ‘huge’ use ‘very big’). Become aware of words that have several meanings, e.g. ‘difficult’ is usually more easily understood than ‘hard’.

- **Avoid jargon and acronyms** unless time is taken to explain them.
- **Emphasize and repeat key words.**
- **Avoid colloquialisms** and fillers such as 'like', 'well' and 'you know what I mean'. A non-native speaker may not know to ignore these words and get hung up on their meaning.
- Always use **proper English**, not pigeon (or 'baby') English.
- **Always say exactly what is meant.** Use 'yes' and 'no' as much as you can as these are universally understood, rather than 'exactly', 'right', 'definitely', 'of course' and so on.

Use 'Can you... please/thank you' instead of 'would you mind...','I was wondering if you could...'

Use 'is it' instead of 'would it be' or 'could it be (the case) that' etc.

- **Model or demonstrate** with hands or facial expressions. Show as many practical supports or written words as possible to support the spoken word, especially if a parent seems to be having difficulty understanding. In meetings or information evenings, use PowerPoint presentations, handouts etc.
- If a parent asks you to repeat something, **repeat it exactly as it was said** the first time. Repeat the whole phrase, not just the last few words. If they still don't understand, reflect on what you said and see if you used a metaphor or colloquialism that you could change.
- Tell the parent more than once that, if there is something they don't understand, you are more than willing to explain things again. Ask the parent if you are being clear and if they understand you. Look out for signs of confusion (frown, blank face etc).
- **Do not speak louder** if a parent has not understood what has been said. This is something many people instinctively do but it doesn't help and can seem patronizing and intimidating.
- **Refrain from interrupting too quickly**, even if it might be tempting to give information and advice, as a parent may lose their train of thought. Avoid the temptation of correcting unless the parent asks you to do so (some people do indeed like to be corrected).
- **Do not cover your mouth** as lip-reading can help with understanding.
- **Get used to not understanding everything** some parents say. Unless you really need specifics, try to get the gist.
- **'OK' may not mean 'understood'**. Parents may say OK as they may be ashamed to admit they have not grasped what you have said or they may not feel they can take any more of your time.
- **Consider when an interpreter might be needed.** If, despite your best efforts, you can't communicate with a parent, suggest that they bring a friend or tell them you can try to arrange an interpreter (if this is feasible). If you speak another language, see if the parent understands that before you consider an interpreter. For more on interpreters see page 34.

## Sensitive Topics

- **Terminology**<sup>4</sup> in the area of diversity is constantly changing but here are some suggestions that might be helpful:
  - ☑ **'Migrants'** and **'immigrants'** are simple and neutral. They are used interchangeably in reference to immigrants in Ireland.
  - ☑ **'Children of migrant background'** or **'children of migrant parents'** refer to children who were born and bred in Ireland. The terms **'migrant children'** or **'international students'** should only be used to refer to children who weren't born in Ireland. If such children migrated at a young age, they might understandably perceive themselves as 'totally Irish'. Therefore, it can be safer to refer to them as 'of migrant background' or 'of migrant parents'.
  - ☑ **'Polish-Irish', 'Nigerian-Irish', 'Chinese-Irish' etc** acknowledge people's multiple identities.
  - ☑ **'Black'** is not generally considered to be a derogatory term. Some people use it to mean 'of African origin', whereas others use it to mean 'non-white'.
  - ☑ **EAL students/pupils** is appropriate.
  - ✗ The term **'newcomer'** does not apply to children who were born and bred in Ireland or who moved here many years ago.
  - ✗ Avoid the term **'non nationals'** as it suggests the absence of a nationality. **'Foreign nationals'** has been used to refer only to people who are not EU citizens so it may be confusing to use it to refer to all migrants in Ireland. **'Non-Irish nationals'** may be a less problematic term. **'Third-country nationals'** is used by the EU to refer to non-EEA citizens, but it's probably best not referring to nationality outside of a legislative context.
  - ✗ The word **'coloured'** is now considered to be derogatory.
  - ✗ The term **'half-caste'** is also considered to be derogatory. The alternative **'of mixed background'** could be tried but only if the person is comfortable with this.
- **Special needs** – Migrant parents who have children with special needs may not be familiar with some of the terms. Therefore, it may be necessary to get a professional interpreter.
- **Racist bullying** – From the point of view of encouraging parental involvement, the key issue regarding racist bullying is that your school has a policy on it that is then communicated to parents. This will give them the peace of mind of knowing that the issue is being taken seriously.

When it comes to dealing with racism and racist bullying, the DVD contains a number of resources and a section on reporting racist incidents.

The following points can be borne in mind:

- **Identification** – It is often hard to know if an incident is racially motivated. The distinctive feature of a racist attack or insult is that a person is attacked not as an individual but as the representative of a group and often, in the eyes of the offender, on behalf of a group. In the case of racist bullying, a one-off incident may have precisely the same impact as a series of incidents because it can be experienced by the person on the receiving end as part of a general pattern of racist hostility.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Inspired by the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) booklet Useful Terminology for Service Providers. Note: The NCCRI ceased trading in 2008.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/racistbullying>

- **Know where you stand** – Research and the experiences of schools indicate the value in having an anti-racism policy that is distinct from a general policy on bullying. Review policies and procedures that are in place to deal with any discriminatory behaviour and make them known to all staff, parents and students. Steps to take should be clearly listed, as opposed to just implied or understood theoretically.
- **Prevention** – Acknowledge the diversity of the school population by displaying photos of all your students and parents or organising intercultural events (see page 27) etc. Create opportunities such as coffee mornings (see page 23 and DVD) for parents, staff and students to meet each other. The best way to tackle racism is by organising workshops to discuss and exchange experiences of diversity and racism. Invite speakers to address classes, explore the issue more closely and come to conclusions together about the negative impact racism and bullying can have on the school community. Encourage students to be more aware of racism and to not remain silent or passive about it. Remind them how racist behaviour will be dealt with. See DVD: Resources and Bibliography, Bullying and Racist Bullying for a list of organisations that run such workshops. Talks and workshops can be backed up by leaflets.
- **Response** – When dealing with racist and bullying incidents, school staff should consider:
  - (a) The needs, feelings and wishes of pupils who are attacked.
  - (b) The needs, feelings and wishes of their parents or carers.
  - (c) The children and young people principally responsible for the bullying.
  - (d) Any supporters they have.
  - (e) Any bystanders and witnesses.
- **Monitor** the school's actions in dealing with racism, keep track of incidents and how they are dealt with. Ensure that complaints about prejudice and racism are investigated and dealt with properly and sensitively.

### Food

- Schools with canteens could provide clearly identified halal and kosher options, which would be welcoming and reassuring for parents. Space could be made on enrolment forms for parents to indicate if their child does not eat certain foods. A question asking "Does your child have any allergies or are there any foods that your child does not eat?" would not only accommodate Muslim and Jewish families but also vegetarians. It would show more inclusiveness and families would not be made to feel unusual for not eating certain types of food.

## Send Out the Right Message

Research has highlighted the importance of making integration and inclusion one of the guiding principles of a school. They should be mentioned in the mission statement or school plan. A school can display its commitment to equality and diversity and its anti-racism policy:

- In the welcome pack.
- At school functions and events in the form of posters or a mention when outlining school policies or ethos.
- By incorporating it into the school logo or motto, which would then be visible on school correspondence.
- On posters in the school.

## School Support Staff

Phone communication is much more difficult than face-to-face communication due to interferences on the line and the absence of body language. Ringing the school for information can represent quite a challenge for parents whose first language is not English. In this situation, parents find it helpful when the person speaks clearly and slowly and is willing to repeat and re-phrase.

If unable to answer a query, take the parent's name and number rather than asking a parent to ring again as they may not muster the courage to ring back. If the call is transferred to someone else, the parent will have to repeat their query, which may add to any discomfort. Finally, be prepared to accommodate phone interpreters.

## 1.2 WELCOMING PROCEDURES AND MATERIALS

The following sections, Welcoming Materials and The Welcome Pack, will look at reflecting an attitude to diversity in various aspects of the school. The schools that assisted in the research for this project said that many of the suggestions below were very useful. As such, you may wish to consider them for your school. While they are not specifically related to migrant parents, they are the sort of procedures that migrant parents have found useful.

### Welcoming Procedures

These suggestions for different welcoming events are based on ones that various schools already provide. They are for all parents to facilitate as much interaction with the school and with each other as possible. To promote inclusion, these events are sometimes left open to any parent who wants to attend, even if they are not new to the school.

Here are a few other general points that arose from schools' events:

- Name tags for parents – The tag could state their name and the name of their child, e.g. Jo (Surname), Mark's mam; or John (Surname), Julie's dad. This enables school staff to identify their students' parents more easily and parents to identify their children's classmates' parents.
- Name tags for teachers can be very helpful too.
- Icebreakers can help to start things off, although probably only feasible when numbers are small or at adult-only events.
- Written supports (e.g. hand-outs, PowerPoint presentations, flipcharts etc) can be very helpful, especially when giving lists.
- Parents have commented that holding separate events for migrant and established parents is not helpful.

### **New Parents' Evening – an information evening for new families**

This is a whole-school event that schools hold, often in June before the start of the school year. It could be repeated in September for the benefit of parents who had not enrolled by June. The following is a list of different activities by schools in the running of such events:



- The principal's welcome speech, introducing the teaching staff and giving information on the curriculum, rules, policies, procedures, facilities, services and supports in the school.
- A list of the contents of welcome packs can be presented or distributed.
- School staff or the Parents' Association (PA) can ask parents (both established and migrant) of current or former students to speak of their positive experiences to highlight the ways and benefits of getting involved.
- A former student can speak about their positive experiences in the school and the importance of parental involvement for academic achievement.
- Parents have benefitted from evenings such as this being interpreted, if the language needs of new parents are known. If there are many parents for whom interpreters are required, the interpreters can be at the back of the room and have time allocated for interpreting. Otherwise, 'whisper interpreting' is simultaneous and does not require extra time. For more information on interpreters see page 34.
- If teachers stay around for refreshments afterwards, they may make a connection with parents. This may help parents feel less shy when approaching them in the future.
- The session can be an opportunity to inform parents about initiatives such as car pooling or walking school buses. During the refreshments afterwards, parents will have the chance to arrange car pools and walking buses amongst each other if they are interested. (More information on walking school buses is in the best practice section on page 40).
- Free reading materials can be laid out on a table.
- A stand could be set up to showcase volunteering options for parents and give them a chance to register their interest and/or availability.
- Some student work can be displayed around the room.
- Parents can sometimes feel pressurised to absorb everything in one session. It can be helpful to mention that there will be more welcome procedures at the start of the school year (e.g. the welcome pack).
- Some primary schools use the event as an opportunity to list a few of the things that parents can do with their children in the summer to prepare them for junior infants.



### Information sessions in other languages

A migrant parent who is well-informed about school procedures conducts information sessions in the relevant language. However, it is still beneficial for parents to attend the main session as this would give them a chance to meet other parents.

### Small group induction meetings

If there is time to meet parents at several small meetings or if the numbers of new parents are small, for instance in the case of parents who enrol their children after the start of the school year, induction meetings for small groups of parents can be beneficial. The meeting could be facilitated by the principal and/or HSCL co-ordinator. Small meetings provide a personal touch and an opportunity for parents to ask more questions.

They don't have to be long as they can supplement the main welcome meeting. Simply being in the school and meeting school staff will be interesting and beneficial for parents.

### **School tours**

Tours of the school often take place sometime during the first month of the school year. Each group visits a classroom briefly (making sure to not disturb the same classroom too often). The tour allows parents to see staff in their usual routine.

### **Information sessions for each class**

Information sessions for groups of parents whose children are going into the same class are held as an alternative to a tour. These meetings, which are sometimes held before the start of the school year, provide more detailed information on the curriculum. Ideally, the meeting would take place in the children's future classroom, with an introduction to the teacher if he/she is available.

### **Informal welcome event**

A casual meeting with tea and coffee can be a good way to facilitate networking among parents. To boost attendance, meetings are often promoted as having a particular purpose (for example, some staff will be there to meet parents, information will be given, student work will be presented, or a short film about the school or school projects will be shown). When events are presented as simply social or networking events, some parents can be shy or reluctant to attend.

### **Welcome ceremony for junior infants**

A welcome ceremony for junior infant children and their parents can be a nice gesture. It could also be used as an opportunity, depending on when it takes place, (e.g. October) to showcase some of the children's work. You could give the parents something to take home that their child has made. At some schools parents are called up by name to collect something symbolic (e.g. a lighted candle) from the teacher or principal. Information materials can also be distributed. The room can be decorated with flags, maps and pictures of the various countries represented in the school or with the children's artwork. As a nice touch, when the budget allows, schools have issued formal invitations to parents by post.

### **Individual enrolment support**

One-to-one enrolment support is a luxury measure and is dependent on a school's resources. It could be on a drop-in basis or by appointment. This does not have to become common practice as it may not always be realistic. However, some schools offer this service on a discretionary basis as required.

## Welcoming Materials

The following five sections list various ways in which schools have made themselves more welcoming to migrant parents. The aim is to present the school as an open and inclusive place. This can draw parents from the gate into the school and make them feel comfortable when they enter.

### **Bulletin board**

- The bulletin board is clear, attractive, inclusive and in a key place. If it is visible from the school gates or main entrance, it might draw parents into the school.
- Check and update it regularly and reprint illegible signs etc.
- It could include information in different languages or in the dominant minority language. This can increase migrant parents' sense of belonging and ownership. It also shows that the school is aware of diversity and is adaptable and open.

- Photos of previous school events are good eye-catchers. Children, especially in primary school, may feel pride at seeing photos of their parents on display, and vice versa.
- There could be an area on the board with information specific to migrant parents. If there is space left on the board, this area could also include a few words or phrases from one of the languages in the school (see below).
- If the school has a PA, a sign could advertise dates and venues of upcoming PA meetings. Include phrases such as “all parents are welcome” or “all parents are eligible to join”. Coffee mornings or other regular events for parents can also be advertised this way.

### Photos

While putting up photos of the children of migrant parents at the entrance to the school might seem tokenistic, photos of groups containing both migrant and established students could be on display to visitors to the school. The photos could be of award ceremonies, sporting teams, graduating classes etc – in other words, the types of photos schools already have that also reflect the diversity of the school population.

### Welcoming walls

The main entrance to the school can be a key place to promote diversity. It can give a positive first impression of the school as an open and friendly place that is welcoming to migrant parents and their children. The following simple projects could be undertaken by students (and/or parents) and placed at the main entrance and corridor walls near the reception and principal’s office area. They can be left there for several years.

- A world map could be marked with parents’ countries of origin. Include a map of Ireland so that all students can mark the places where their parents are from. Some students may not be as happy to do this as others as they may not identify with their parents’ countries of origin. The maps could bear a title such as *Our Families Come From...* or *Our Students’ Roots*. It could be informative to have pictures of people linked to particular continents but avoid stereotypical images.
- Welcome signs can be written in each language spoken in the school. The Hello page on the DVD can help with this. These signs should be updated if a new child joins the school whose heritage language is not on the list. Simply ask the parent for the words in their language.
- Flags could be made of all the countries represented in the student population. Ideally, the name of each country should be beside each flag. All students can partake in this activity: there could be an Ireland section, which could comprise the GAA colours of the counties where students’ parents are from, or something similar. This activity would probably be more interesting for primary school children.

If you greet a new parent and/or see them looking at the display, you could point out the information relevant to their country of origin as an ice-breaker.

### Multilingual signs on doors

A very welcoming gesture on the part of schools is to have multilingual signs on the doors of the rooms that parents use. The terms ‘Welcome’, ‘Principal’s Office’ and ‘Secretary’s Office’ are in six languages on the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) website [http://www.jrs.ie/resources/school/folder/12-useful\\_info](http://www.jrs.ie/resources/school/folder/12-useful_info) in the ‘Useful Vocabulary for Schools’ section. For other languages or other door signs (such as for the toilets or the parents’ room), ask parents to write down the words in their language or to check any internet translations. They will probably be happy to help and possibly flattered that an interest is being shown in their language.

### Language corner/language panel

As well as the permanent exhibitions detailed above, a temporary display could be set up near the entrance with three or four words or phrases of one particular language of the school. It should also include the English translations and the way they are pronounced. Phrases for translation could include: 'How are you?', 'My name is...'; 'Thank you', 'Yes', 'No', 'Excuse me', 'I don't know', 'You are beautiful', 'I like chocolate' and 'I hate spinach'. Post-primary schools could use phrases such as: 'I like rap music', 'I have a part-time job' etc. The language corner could be part of a notice board but it may have a greater impact and be more noticeable if it is somewhere on its own.

Creating the display could be a student project, which could involve the students having to liaise with parents of a certain language. It could also be a classroom activity for students. They could work together to decide on the phrases and produce the translations.

The language corner could be part of a Language of the Month system whereby a different language would be chosen each month. A parent who speaks or knows that language could go into each class for 15 minutes to share some basic words and phrases. Throughout that month pupils (and staff) could be encouraged to exchange 'hellos', 'good mornings' etc in that language. For primary schools, parents could come in to read stories to younger children in their own language. Systems like this have been successful in schools in the UK.

## The Welcome Pack

You may already send out information to the parents of new students. These welcome packs give you the opportunity to offer a lot of information in a variety of ways and languages. This section contains some ideas that you may wish to include in your welcome packs. The suggestions have been separated into two categories: materials that should be tailored to your specific school and community and materials that would be useful to a parent in any school in Ireland. Most of the suggestions listed will be useful to all parents but some will of particular use to migrant parents.

First are several suggestions from the experiences of schools and parents for putting together your welcome packs.

- The welcome pack does not replace personal contact. Where practical, it is more welcoming (and cheaper) if it is given personally (at a welcome evening or enrolment) rather than posted.
- It is helpful to parents if the information is also available on the school website.
- When including translated material, the English version of each document should always be included to avoid causing offence to parents with good English. It also enables parents with low English proficiency to learn the school terminology. This toolkit contains some references to translated material from JRS, NEWB, NCCA and others on the DVD (Resources and Bibliography, Translated Resources for Parents). There are also translation solutions on page 18.
- A list of content lets parents know what is available. They can request materials they may have misplaced, or not seen or received.
- If including pictures or photos, it is a good idea to include pictures of various minority ethnic groups, as these are not usually visible in school materials.
- Many of the materials specific to each school are also relevant to other schools in the same area. It might be useful to liaise with schools in your area and see if materials can be shared or if the production costs of further materials can be divided between schools.

### Materials specific to your school and community

The following is a list of materials that different schools include in their welcome packs.

- **A school booklet/leaflet.**
- **The code of discipline** or your school's policy on behaviour and discipline.
- **The school's ethos** or a statement of its commitment to integration, diversity and anti-racism.
- **The daily schedule** (start and finish times, breaks).
- **The school Calendar** (highlighting holidays, half days, events, class trips etc).
- **A map of the school** and explain the function of each area.
- **A map of the area** (even a black-and-white print-out from Googlemaps) that highlights relevant places, e.g. libraries and shops for books/uniforms.
- **A local guidebook**, if available for free.
- **Information on getting to school.** This could include information on the school bus, policies on free school transport or travel provisions, and an explanation of the car pool and walking school bus concepts (see page 40).
- **Details of local public transport to and from the school**, with directions to stations, timetables etc.
- **The curriculum**, including a broad break-down of the curriculum for each school year. This will give parents an overall view of the school system. It may be helpful if this is translated. See page 18 for translation solutions.
- **A list of local and community services.** It can be useful to include details of citizens' information centres, youth groups, migrant organisations, medical centres, post offices, libraries, Garda stations, local authorities, tenants' associations, banks, credit unions, social welfare etc. There is a list of useful resources for parents in the Resources section on the DVD.

Migrant parents have sometimes experienced difficulty in finding English-language classes so it might be helpful to add to this list all the EAL resources and providers in the local areas for the benefit of those parents with low English proficiency (e.g. VEC, Fáilte Ireland and Fáilte Isteach).

- **Information on initiatives** run by the school such as a Parents Plus Programme, Maths for Fun, Science for Fun, Story Bags etc (see [www.parentsplus.ie](http://www.parentsplus.ie), [www.storybags.com](http://www.storybags.com) and [www.mathsisfun.com](http://www.mathsisfun.com)).
- **A list of non-curricular/after-school/youth work activities.** Make sure to include contact details.
- **Activities for children or teenagers** in the local area, such as Community Games ([www.communitygames.ie](http://www.communitygames.ie)), Scouts (<http://www.scouts.ie>), Guides, sports clubs, youth clubs ([www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)) etc.
- **Details of homework club and/or grind club**, including details of cost.
- **An emergency contact list**, with numbers for certain important school staff, the main school number and police/ambulance/fire brigade – the numbers 999 and 112 may not yet be known to new migrant parents. Ideally, this list should be pocket size and, resources permitting, laminated (for pockets and bags). The INTO leaflet *Primary School Contact Details* might be useful in this regard.
- **Who's who in the school?** Include job descriptions, staff names and (if possible and staff agree) photos.
- **Details of the school uniform.** It is helpful to have a picture, as words from the domestic sphere, such as the names of clothes, may not be familiar to migrant parents whose home language is not English. If you use a picture, consider using a non-descript picture without a face or with a face that could be of any ethnic minority.

- **A book list and stationery requirements.**
- Suggest where to buy books, stationery and uniforms. Include details of any discounts currently available, if known. The option of turning to Community Welfare Officers may be unfamiliar to parents. Information is available on: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Publications/SW75/Pages/1WhatistheBacktoSchoolClothingandFootwearAllowance.aspx>
- **A breakdown of what parents need to pay, when they need to pay it** and what it covers. Explain the term 'voluntary contributions'. Providing parents with a timeframe for the payment of fees for activities such as field trips prepares them for when it comes round and gives them time to save the money.
- **The provisions** and resources the school has for special needs students.
- **Information on any projects or schemes in which the school is involved** (such as the Green Flag, Yellow Flag, entrepreneurial, community or fund-raising projects, twinning, competitions, exchange trips, DISC computerisation project etc).
- Secondary schools could provide information on **exams in non-curricular languages and transition year options** offered by the school.
- Information on **how parents can get involved in the school.** (See page 26 and the Volunteering Survey on the DVD.)
- **An information sheet** explaining some aspects of the Irish education system for those parents who may not be familiar with it. The DVD contains a checklist of certain items it might be beneficial to include. Such a sheet could be tailored to match the particular policies in your school.
- **A brief list of all the letters and notes** that the school sends out to parents during the year. Parents will then know what to expect and may be more likely to remember to check school bags and will identify correspondence more quickly.
- **An example of a school report**, using invented marks and comments. This is useful so parents know what to expect and will understand the real thing more easily. There is also a one-page NCCA leaflet Your Child's School Report, which is available in five languages. See: [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment/Parents/Primary/School\\_Reports/](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Parents/Primary/School_Reports/)
- **A generic talents' list.** This is a list of skilled parents in the school community who are willing to help migrant families in their own language (i.e. healthcare experts, legal professionals etc). This list can be added to over time as willing parents become known to the school.
- **Adult education courses.** It is useful to include a list of adult education courses provided in the school and in the community. Hopefully the organisers of local courses would advertise in the school anyway but, even if they do, it may not be early enough to be included in the welcome pack. See what is available in local libraries, local NGOs, migrant organisations, colleges of further education, community centres, faith-based organisations and so on. **Check the three evening class booklets published annually** or check online databases such as: [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie), [www.daycourses.com](http://www.daycourses.com); [www.nightcourses.com](http://www.nightcourses.com), [www.learning.ie/search.html](http://www.learning.ie/search.html), [www.fas.ie](http://www.fas.ie), [www.ivea.ie](http://www.ivea.ie), [www.nqai.ie](http://www.nqai.ie), [www.fetac.ie](http://www.fetac.ie), [www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie), [www.studentfinance.ie](http://www.studentfinance.ie), [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie), [www.educationireland.ie](http://www.educationireland.ie). You could also check the website of local VECs;



find the links on the IVEA site <http://www.ivea.ie/>. Another interesting website for courses, talks or workshops nationwide is [www.activelink.ie](http://www.activelink.ie). The longer the list is, the more chance parents will find something that appeals to them.

- Finally, a 'luxury measure': include **positive quotes** from parents on getting involved in the school. A healthy mix of migrant and established parents would be ideal but parents' names and nationalities should not be disclosed without consent. These are empowering messages for both parents and schools, as they emphasise the value of parents and schools working together. Such quotes could be added to any other leaflets.

### General materials useful for parents of any school in Ireland

See "Translated Resources for Parents" and "Other Useful Resources" on the DVD for a list of existing information published.

- **Information on the Irish school system:** <http://www.educationireland.ie/irish-education.html>
- **Detailed information on learning supports and special needs supports and provisions** (mentioning NEPS, NCSC, SNA, HSC etc). If you create a separate information sheet on this issue, it might be useful to get it translated for those parents who are directly concerned (see translation solutions on page 18). For a downloadable booklet on services for children with disabilities, see: <http://www.citizensinformation-board.ie/news/news20100604.html>
- **Information on third-level education and options** (especially for post-primary schools). Include advice on helping your child plan for life after school and CAO information. CAO information is available in 16 languages on ELSTA website: <http://www.elsta.ie/translated-documents.html>
- **Information on the roles of PAs and BOMs.** Include their different roles and responsibilities, contact details and meeting schedules. Also include any positive quotes from current or past members.
- **Information on medicine, injections, medical visits, health inspections etc in school.** See pages 22-24 of the INTO booklet *Your Child in the Primary School*, which is available on: <http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/TipsForParentsEnglish2009.pdf>
- **Nutrition guidelines** and your school's healthy eating policy. See pages 24-27 of the INTO booklet *Your Child in the Primary School* <http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/TipsForParentsEnglish2009.pdf> or [http://www.bishopshanahan.ie/lunch\\_ideas.html](http://www.bishopshanahan.ie/lunch_ideas.html)
- **Information on bullying**, especially the definition of the term 'bullying' as it does not exist in some languages or cultures. Parents will then know to look out for it and recognise it. For definitions, signs and strategies for prevention, see: <http://www.education.ie/robots/view.jsp?pcategory=10815&language=EN&category=33803> There are more links and resources on this subject on the DVD.
- **A checklist of what children should be able to do by the time they start school.**
- FÁS pages of **useful links on living and working in Ireland (prints on 2-3 pages) – available in 16 languages** on: <http://www.fas.ie/en/Useful+Links/Living+and+Working+in+Ireland.htm>
- You could include a print-out of information on a service that helps migrants gain employment, for example EPIC (Employment for People of Immigrant Communities) <http://www.bitc.ie/epic> or Pathways to Work [www.pathwaystowork.eu](http://www.pathwaystowork.eu)
- **10 Good Reasons to Read to Your Child** or something similar (for primary schools). See a list of 10 reasons here: <http://galway.mykidstime.ie/read/features/books/book-articles/1177-10goodreasons>

## 1.3 WELCOMING LATE ARRIVALS

Families who enrol during the school year will miss out on a lot of the welcoming procedures and materials. Parents appreciate when schools do any of the following:

- Have extra copies of welcome pack materials to give to parents.
- Give them more information materials than the school can afford to give all parents. See the 'Resources Table' on the DVD for materials available online for parents. Further information and links can be found on the DVD, in the section Resources and Bibliography, Translated Resources for Parents.
- Put parents in touch with a HSCL co-ordinator or migrant parent ambassador (page 38). Where schools do not have these roles, it would be good to offer new parents a mentor (page 36). Alternatively, identify and ask a parent who is active in the school, possibly a member of the PA, to assist the new family. These measures will be of use to any parent but particularly so for parents who are new to Ireland.
- Recommend citizens' information centres ([www.citizensinformationboard.ie](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie)) to parents who have recently arrived in Ireland. Raise their awareness of other local services, including those working with migrants. If possible, inform them of the location of the closest one and the days different languages are spoken (i.e. Chinese or Russian clinics, for example) if it has multilingual staff.



## 2. FACILITATING FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Once parents have been welcomed into the school and given the information they need, the next step is to encourage them to get involved in school life. Schools considered how they maximised parental involvement and the barriers that might prevent migrant parent involvement specifically. This chapter contains activities and suggestions that schools and parents found helpful in this regard. The first section of this chapter gives guidelines for parental involvement in education at home – in other words, helping with homework. The second section covers improving home-school communication, which is dominated by letters sent home in school bags.

The chapter then looks at parental presence in the school. This can be required by the school (i.e. PT meetings). Section three gives suggestions ways to get the most out of meetings and gives advice on how to convey information across the language barrier.

When it comes to voluntary presence in the school, there are two levels: attending and participating. Attending refers to social events that provide parents with an informal opportunity to visit the school and mix with staff and other parents (section four) whereas participating refers to events that require parents to volunteer. Section five gives a wide variety of options for these events and the ways parents can get involved in them. Schools found that enlisting volunteer parents can ease the school's workload, help create a positive atmosphere, and diversify and enhance the learning experience.

Section six briefly considers how a school can build relationships with the organisations that the suggested actions might bring it into contact with. Finally, section seven looks at how you can start looking for migrant parents to sit on your PA or go for election to the BOM and get involved in the decision-making process.

### 2.1 ENCOURAGING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE HOME

The following suggestions have been found to be helpful in not only promoting literacy and academic development but also identifying parents as active participants in their children's education.

- If the school has a **policy on homework involvement**, communicate it to parents as much as possible (through the welcome pack, welcome events, website, notice boards, newsletter etc).
- Organise special **information sessions for parents** (with hand-outs). These can be 'home-tutor' workshops on how to help a child with reading, how to start reading to pre-school children, helping children learn the alphabet and so on.
- **Go through an example of a school report with parents.**
- **Let parents know the curriculum** for the term or year ahead. If possible, it is best to do this in person at a group meeting so they can ask questions. Some schools arrange this at the start of the year. You also can include information on testing and the marking system.

## Some other ideas for projects involving parents in the home

- Encourage **school projects** that require the help of a parent, such as a family tree, or parents' memories of school or childhood.
- **Hold a class picnic** where parents and children can prepare food together.
- **Time capsules** are a great way to get parents and children to collect items representative of the times in which we live (sweet wrappings, bus tickets, flyers etc).
- **Memory boxes** are a similar idea to time capsules. However, they can focus on objects that may not be representative of our times but simply mean something to the student. It can be done at the end of the school year and can be limited to memories from that particular year. Parents are helpful here as they may be quicker to recall events that have taken place that year and may have kept a record of them.
- **Recycling projects** whereby children collect items at home and bring them into school.
- **Fund-raising projects** (the Volunteering Survey on the DVD includes a list of websites with tips for fund-raising projects).



## 2.2 IMPROVING HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

### Revise the Current Model of Home-School Communication

It cannot be assumed that parents of the same language or country of origin will interact with each other, but parents might pass messages from a school on to parents they know. Remind children to pass on messages and remind parents to check schoolbags for notes from the school. Some schools ask that letters be signed by parents, which can then be checked by staff. This helps to monitor who is/isn't getting notes.

### Alternatives to sending letters home

- **Text messages** can be sent to groups of parents using [www.textaparent.ie](http://www.textaparent.ie). It seems from schools' experiences that text messages are more effective, easier to organise and cheaper. As with all school communications, use full, correct English – text speak should be avoided.
- **School journals** can be used to send messages home, especially if parents sign it every day anyway.
- **E-mail**, where available.
- If the school has a **website**, it can be used to provide information. However, it should not be relied on as the sole means of communication.

- **Phone calls**, although more demanding of staff time, are an option for reaching parents who have proven unresponsive to messages in the past. Migrant parent ambassadors, for example, could be asked to contact parents, especially any with low English proficiency. However, the potential complication of reimbursing the migrant parent ambassador for phone calls made should be considered.

### Notes in parents' languages

- **There are ready-made resources available.** The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has templates available in 12 languages for a welcome letter, letters informing parents about half days and school closure, and letter templates for parents and school staff for organising meetings. These can be found at: [http://www.jrs.ie/resources/school/folder/11-letter\\_templates](http://www.jrs.ie/resources/school/folder/11-letter_templates)

Another resource is a British website (produced by Dingle Granby Toxteth EAZ in partnership with the City of Liverpool) that contains 14 letters in 32 languages, including English and several African languages. <http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/letters/>

- **Ask parents to translate letters and other messages.** First ensure that they are happy to do so. Then go through the letter with them to make sure there is no ambiguity and to agree on the formatting. Set a clear deadline if the document is important. If the information concerns an event or activity you are running, ask the translators to add that the event or activity will be run in English, otherwise people could get the impression that it will be run in the language of the document. It's best to use volunteers for short, simple documents as you don't want to take advantage of their time. Larger, more complex documents would need to be proof-read by another translator.

### Notes in English<sup>6</sup>

Here are some points to consider when sending out letters and notes to parents.

- Giving each letter/note a **title in bold**, which states its purpose clearly, i.e. 'half day', 'day off', 'school closed', 'school trip' etc. If the letter is quite long, it is good to start with a summary paragraph, possibly highlighted in bold or in a bigger font.
- Using **pictures** as much as possible (snow, clock, books, cup of coffee etc). You can find some on the internet, for example on: [http://www.clipartguide.com/search\\_terms/school\\_children.html](http://www.clipartguide.com/search_terms/school_children.html)

<http://schools.clipart.com>

[http://www.free-clipart-pictures.net/school\\_clipart.html](http://www.free-clipart-pictures.net/school_clipart.html)

[http://www.school-clip-art.com/school\\_clipart.shtml](http://www.school-clip-art.com/school_clipart.shtml)

If you are including pictures of people, try to use images reflecting diversity, especially as there are few of these in school materials.

- **Breaking up paragraphs** as much as possible and leave space between them.
- **Using short sentences.**
- **Avoiding or explain jargon and spell out acronyms.**
- **Using active verbs**, which are easier to understand and more engaging than passive verbs.

<sup>6</sup> These suggestions were inspired by <http://www.nala.ie/catalog/writing-and-design-tips> Being consistent with any words used. Watch out for words such as 'project', 'programme', 'scheme', 'provision' and 'plan', which can all refer to the same thing – just choose one and stick with it.

- **Using simple everyday language.** There is a basic chart with some pointers on the DVD.
- Adding a multilingual dimension to letters/notes with a **Thank You** written in a few languages at the end or in the background. You can take this from the Thank You page on the DVD.

### Invest in Your School Website

A user-friendly website is a great source of information for parents who may not yet be confident enough to come into the school. It could include any number of the following:

- A visible 'contact us' button, including an email address.
- Clear information on the school, e.g. the school calendar.
- A 'parent page' or any area specifically for parents, possibly including a forum.
- Who's who in the school. If your school has a high concentration of international families, a phonetic transcription beside Irish names has been found to be helpful, such as 'Aoife = Ee-fa' or 'Saibhdh = Sive to rhyme with Five' etc.
- Links to parental support organisations (NPC, Parentline etc).
- Links to organisations that deal with migrant issues.
- Guidelines and tips on supporting your child's learning.
- Contact details for the PA and for migrant parent ambassadors.
- Translations of certain documents.
- Welcome pack materials to print and download, especially 'Importance and Benefits of Parental Involvement'.
- A clear list of welcome pack contents so parents know what's available.
- An appeal for volunteers with a link attached to a phrase such as "Click here if you would you like to get involved in the school".
- EAL resources.

### Limitations of Communication

The suggestions above have helped parents know what's going on in schools and might make them more inclined to support their child. However, parents who stay at home and do not get actively involved in the school will miss out on:

- Checking notice boards and other information displayed around the school.
- Meeting other parents and school staff, including their children's teachers.
- Attending information evenings and other events throughout the year.

## 2.3 PARENT-TEACHER MEETINGS

Advice from our advisory committee and the contributing schools has informed these suggestions for assisting productive parent-teacher meetings with parents unfamiliar with the concept or with low English proficiency.



Before parent-teacher meetings

- Most parents will probably know when to expect a PT meeting from the school calendar and your welcome pack. The following points can be made when sending out notices announcing upcoming PT meetings:
  - a. The purpose of PT meetings and what will be discussed.
  - b. That PT meetings are standard procedure (to prevent unnecessary confusion).
  - c. That parents have the option of bringing a friend, neighbour or family member along to help.
  - d. That parents shouldn't bring their child.
- A text message sent out a day or two before the meeting might be appreciated by parents.
- A leaflet giving suggestions for questions parents can ask might help them to prepare for the meeting.
- Try to be flexible with times whenever possible, even though this can be difficult. Allow twice as much time if communicating through an interpreter.
- Be prepared for parents to come in with a friend, neighbour, mentor, migrant-parent ambassador or interpreter. However, children as interpreters should be avoided if possible. If a parent requests an interpreter, there are suggestions for finding one in the interpreting section on page 34.
- The reception areas could have displays showing diversity, an exhibition of student artwork or artwork with an intercultural dimension. You could even just have a multilingual welcome sign (see more on page 10).
- Clear signs to the waiting area and meeting area. As a luxury measure, a staff member, student or volunteer could accompany parents to the meeting area. If you have a waiting area, make sure it's equipped with chairs, magazines and maybe even children's books and toys for parents waiting with very young children.

## During PT meetings

- See the Welcoming Attitudes section on page 3. See also “Working with Interpreters – Guidelines on Speaking Through an Interpreter” on the DVD.
- Create a welcoming environment, with both parties seated.
- Have examples of the child’s work at hand.

## At the end of the meeting

- Give the parents a sheet with any information or words you may have jotted down during the meeting.
- If an issue arose that requires an extra meeting, make a note to follow-up with a phone call or note in the school journal. Don’t leave it up to the parent to get in touch.
- Encourage the parents to contact the school and to make appointments to meet staff whenever they have a concern. Ensure parents have the school’s contact details.
- Underline the importance of parental attendance at these meetings. Let them know that it shows their child they value their school performance and education. It also builds an ongoing relationship with the school.
- If you have any remaining copies, you can give parents some of the hand-outs from the welcome pack, including a volunteer option form.
- Time permitting, PT meetings can be used to raise awareness of the ways in which parents can get involved in the school.
- Provide an opportunity for parents to make an appointment for a private meeting with a teacher.

## 2.4 THE SCHOOL AS A SOCIAL OUTLET

### Benefits of Meeting Other Parents

When parents meet each other, they can:

- Feel a sense of belonging to a group or community and to the school.
- Feel supported and connected to the school community, as they get to know new people who may be their neighbours and/or parents of their children’s friends.
- Share parenting tips and practical advice.
- Increase their knowledge of events, of the area etc through word of mouth.
- Feel more inclined to confide and, therefore, receive support and advice on problems that other parents may face and may relate to.
- Learn about each other’s cultures, life perspectives and languages

The experiences of schools have found that a connected parent body will maximise interaction at school gates and create a friendly space within the school and a sense of ownership. Connectivity between parents can improve the school climate and strengthen families, thus increasing learning and well-being. The following suggestions have been inspired by the various ways schools encourage parents to attend social events:

- The tips suggested on page 7, especially the use of name tags and ice-breakers.
- Letting parents know if they can **bring a friend** – this need not be a parent from the school.
- **Advertising** events on the notice board and website at a minimum. It is worthwhile to stress both the fun and the learning elements of events, as some parents may not see the school as a fun place.
- Looking into a casual **crèche** for bigger events or avail of the mobile community crèche service operating nationwide (see full details on: **Catkins on the Move** <http://www.longfordwomenslink.org/services.php?id=5/>). There will be practical issues that may not make this realistic. However, those schools that have been able to provide a crèche service have found that it has paid off in terms of supporting parental presence.
- For primary schools, the school run is an opportunity to reach out to parents and to see those parents that have not been coming into the school. Teachers can go out to the school gates to invite parents in even for just a five- or ten-minute chat.

### Parents' Room

The experiences of migrant parents have indicated that parents can occasionally be intimidated by formal school structures. In response to this schools have found that a parents' room can provide an opportunity for parents to meet informally on the school grounds.

Although parents rooms are not common in most schools, those schools that do have them consider them to be a great venue for events and an invaluable resource for encouraging parental presence in the school. Parents needn't be given unrestricted access to the parents' room; they can drop in at certain times for specific purposes. Even if there is not the space for a dedicated parents' room, a classroom that is free at a particular time could be used or even a space off the school premises (the local library or community centre for example).

Advertise the existence of the room at meetings and events and in the newsletter, giving the times when the room is available to parents. In all the advertisements, make it clear that all parents are welcome. The following are things that some schools have provided in their parents rooms:

- Name, contact details, and possibly a photo, of the HSCL co-ordinator.
- A play corner with some toys for toddlers and young children.
- Books, magazines and newspapers donated by staff and parents. A small library service allows parents to borrow the books.
- Tea and coffee-making facilities, and sometimes a microwave or toaster.
- This is a definite luxury measure but, if you have the resources, a computer with broadband would be an excellent addition.

### Some Examples of Events that Parents Found Beneficial

The following are suggestions of events that would bring parents into the school. They would also enable school staff to communicate with parents about the curriculum, homework expectations and how parents can help.

- **Coffee mornings:** Hosting a regular, informal morning event is a wonderful way for parents to make connections within the school.

They can be organised or hosted by the PA, the HSCL co-ordinator (if the school has one) or any staff member who has the time or the particular interest. With time, you might find that coffee mornings do not require any organisation as parents will know the routine. It is important at the beginning, however, to appoint one person to welcome other parents and start conversations with people. Without such a person, walking into the room could be intimidating for parents who come for the first time.



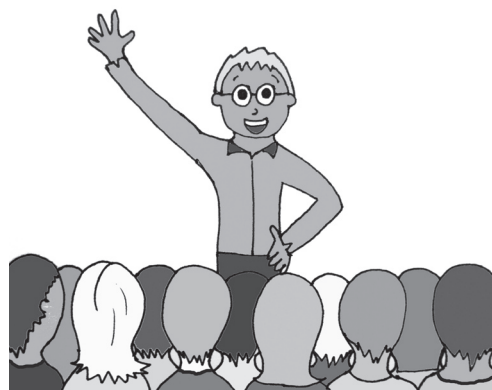
There is more information on setting up and advertising these events on the Coffee Mornings section of the DVD.

- **Breakfast mornings:** As with the coffee mornings, the school and/or parents can provide basic breakfast supplies. It would also be ideal if teachers could be present as it's a nice opportunity for parents to meet teachers in an informal setting.
- **Tea, juice and cakes** could be provided in classrooms at the end of term for students and parents.
- **A class picnic** could be held before the summer holidays.
- **Trips, walks and excursions** are standard for children but you could set up something similar, such as a walking club, for parents.
- **Open events** foster the mingling of parents, pupils and school staff. They help to create positive impressions and associations with the school and enable parents to see their children in a different context. In many cases, they provide learning opportunities and are simply good fun. Schools in Switzerland, for example, run successful open days. There are more details of the types of open events run by schools in Scotland and Germany on pages 39.

### Courses, Workshops and Talks for Parents

Courses might seem like a very aspirational suggestion for schools but they have been put on successfully. Migrant parent facilitators have relished the opportunity to use skills that they may not have had the opportunity to use in Ireland yet. They can be once-off events, such as talks, seminars or workshops, or a series of such events. They can help build partnerships with the individuals or organisations that provide them. Parents get an opportunity to meet each other and share their thoughts and knowledge on various areas.





### Organising courses

Courses could be organised by any member of staff or someone on the PA. The following would need to be considered: finding a venue, providing materials, providing refreshments, insurance, health and safety, and handling disappointment or frustration if there aren't enough places on a course.

### Who could facilitate a course?

For certain issues such as bullying, drugs or alcohol, parent facilitators would understandably have to be proficient or trained experts. You might find that talks on lighter topics could be done by people who have a passion or hobby, or background or experience in a particular field.

- The local community centre, college of further education or another school providing courses might be able to share contact details of the tutors they use.
- You could invite guest speakers from a particular field.
- Retired teachers/tutors may be happy to give a talk on their area of expertise.
- A parent (migrant or established) in your school, who has a particular background or skill, might like to give a talk.
- Consider perhaps asking your local volunteer centre or searching the Volunteering Ireland database ([www.volunteeringireland.ie](http://www.volunteeringireland.ie)) for volunteers in the community.
- Past pupils with particular skills or a hobby in which they are proficient or qualified might benefit from the experience of giving a talk on their area of expertise.
- Students of teacher education colleges might be willing to run a course, as they would get teaching practice and contact with school staff.
- Teachers or other members of school staff may be interested in giving a talk.
- Finally, when it comes to English-language tuition, you could refer parents to any local organisations that run classes free of charge, such as the local VEC, Fáilte Ireland (<http://www.failteireland.ie/>) or Fáilte Isteach (<http://www.failteisteach.ie/>). You may be able to get one of their tutors to teach classes in your school. This might make it easier for parents to attend and they will get a positive impression of the school.

### What courses to run

The bigger the variety and frequency of workshops or courses, the better. The following are just some possible topics:

- Arts and crafts (e.g. an art workshop where parents work together on a project).
- A book club.
- Computers and ECDL (the European Computer Driving Licence).

- Cookery, which could involve demonstrations or be a recipe book written or compiled by parents.
- Cultural competence, diversity and equality training.
- Dance, e.g. Irish dancing
- DIY workshops.
- English.
- Finding work, including writing CVs and cover letters, interview tips etc.
- First aid.
- Fitness classes.
- Flower arranging.
- Gardening.
- General rights issues. A seminar or talk could be called ‘Find out your rights’ and could cover employment rights and services, healthcare and citizenship.
- Irish culture/language/history/politics.
- The Irish education system.
- Parenting issues – for example, involvement in school life, drug and alcohol awareness, bullying, road safety, internet safety and bringing up bilingual children.<sup>7</sup>
- Personal development/building self-esteem.

### **Funding**

For some of these courses, it may be possible to apply for funding from local authorities (for English, computers, parenting or cookery for example), which would cover the teachers’ honorarium. It might also be an option to turn to local VECs through its Adult Education Officer (AEO). The rest of the costs may be covered by the school or by a small contribution from parents.

### **Advertising**

It’s good to advertise courses, sessions, workshops and talks in different languages to draw in bigger numbers. However, it is important to clarify that the event will be run in English to avoid confusion. If interpreters will be there, be sure to advertise this in as many languages as applicable. This phrase is on the DVD in nine languages.

If the school intends to organise courses, you could start advertising them even if the details have not yet been finalised. Parents will be made aware that the school runs courses and can be on the lookout for them. They will have time to consider any practical arrangements. This might also give you an opportunity to gauge enthusiasm.

<sup>7</sup> This could be run by Bilingual Forum Ireland, which provides workshops to schools free of charge (see [www.bilingualforumireland.com](http://www.bilingualforumireland.com)). Globe, the all-Ireland programme for immigrant parents, has developed the CultureWise Ireland toolkit (only available through training – see DVD: Resources and Bibliography, Bullying and Racist Bullying), which covers information on several of the topics above, such as parenting and bilingualism, in a format for course facilitators.

## 2.5 ENCOURAGING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL

### Ideas for a Recruitment Campaign

The following suggestions have been highlighted by the research and the experiences of schools as ones that have proved effective for raising awareness amongst parents about the ways in which they can get involved.

- **Advertisements** inviting parents to become involved on a regular basis. The benefits and various methods of parental involvement should be advertised as much as possible.

A slogan such as “One hour to help the school” highlights the small time commitment. Other useful phrases include: “You do not need to be fluent in English to get involved in your school” or “Every parent is important to us”.

- **Direct contact works best** as a recruitment method, as indicated by the research report that informed this toolkit. However, it is difficult to draw the line between encouraging and pushing. Be sensitive to this to avoid parents feeling put on the spot.
- Encouraging parents to discuss their ideas for involvement with teachers rather than just fitting in with procedures already in place.
- Encouraging parents to spread the word and **bring a friend**. They might be more likely to get involved if they can come with a friend.
- Offering **flexible** volunteering opportunities at different times of the day (whenever realistic). This might enable some parents to participate who wouldn't otherwise.
- An **up-to-date volunteer database** could keep track of who got involved, who expressed an interest and in what areas. Those parents can then be contacted directly when an opportunity arises.
- **Making a targeted approach** informed by areas of need, the volunteer database and personal contacts amongst parents. Schools could keep track of who has volunteered and who hasn't and possibly target those who haven't with a simple initial task. Bear in mind that parents who have not opted to volunteer in the original form in the welcome pack could be contacted again as their circumstances might have changed. Even if they have proved reluctant to get involved before, they may later accept.
- You could put together and distribute a **volunteering survey** to parents (the DVD contains an example of such a form→). Ask them to fill out their talents and special interests. List the many ways in which they can get involved in the school.

### Types of Volunteering Options

- Options can be once-off or continual, ongoing roles with names such as interpreter, mentor, migrant parent ambassador or any other positions that promote parents as partners within the school.
- Different levels of parental involvement are desirable at different ages. It is usually very desirable at primary level but post-primary students do not necessarily want their parents to be involved in the school and may feel self-conscious.
- The example of a volunteering survey on the DVD lists some of the many possible roles that volunteer parents could perform.

## Intercultural Fairs

There is a difference of opinion in schools in Ireland whether intercultural fairs are actually good for integration or if they are just token events that only serve to make differences more visible. Nonetheless, these events seem to be enjoyed by staff and parents and they provide good and varied opportunities for parental involvement. The opportunities for learning and mixing make them worthwhile and fun. They can open people to other parts of the world but they can also reinforce existing stereotypes. When considering intercultural fairs, remember the advantages and the disadvantages.

### Advantages

- They provide opportunities for staff, parents and students to learn about each other's cultures and about other parts of the world.
- They provide opportunities for mixing – parents can meet other parents, and parents and school staff get a chance to meet.
- They acknowledge various cultures and identities within the school and can provide an outlet for students of migrant background to feel proud of their heritage.

### Disadvantages

- They can make differences more visible – visibility can reinforce notions of otherness and difference. This means that parents and students of migrant backgrounds can feel singled out and people can have stronger stereotypes of certain groups.
- People might feel put upon to represent a heritage to which they feel no connection. Second-generation migrants may have very little connection with their parents' country of origin. Their connection with their 'roots' will change over time but it will always be complex.

### Points raised in considering intercultural fairs

- Always include Ireland (Irish dancing, food, crafts etc). Otherwise it really is a case of singling out migrants. It also provides an opportunity to acknowledge the diversity within Irish culture.
- Don't ask parents or students to wear traditional dress. Traditional or national dress should be optional as it can reinforce stereotypes.
- The images displayed at intercultural fairs are often clichéd images rather than portraying people's actual lives in Ireland. Even though it is good to know a bit about where people come from, it is awareness and understanding of migrants' lives in Ireland that will help integration.
- These events can be a good opportunity to showcase children's work or have them perform.

### Ideas for intercultural fairs

- **An interfaith event** could be part of an intercultural fair or it could be a separate event with a focus on religion (pictorial representations, religious items on display, stories, blessings and an explanation of first communion and confirmation). This fair could be a good opportunity to cover the aim and scope of the school's religious curriculum.

See <http://www.coistine.ie/resources/interfaithevent> for an example of a successful interfaith event.

- One idea with food fairs is that each country would have a stand, possibly with pictures, a flag, a map, information etc. You could opt to have all the food on one table, separating main courses, salads and desserts. You could also have a separate table for halal food. Make sure to separate and mark the sandwiches containing pork products.

- Another way to give an interesting focus to the day could be a **whole school international flower show** – this was held once by Battlefield Primary School in Glasgow. Each class chose a country and grew flowers originating from that country or a flower the colour of their chosen country's flag. On a day in June, all of these flowers were displayed and judged by a local florist. In addition to the flowers being on show, each class made a display table all about their chosen country. Following the judging, they had a gathering at the far end of their grounds for presentations and displays.
- The school can **choose a country to celebrate for a week**, with an exhibition on that country in the school. Parents could visit the classrooms to tell students about the country (in the form of workshops, drawing the flag, map, coins, food-sampling, song, a few words of the language, customs and festivals). Include Ireland when choosing countries.
- A **quiz** for students and parents attending an intercultural fair could be a fun way to get them to be more observant of each stand or of the displays around the room.
- See "Example of a School Calendar" on the DVD for ideas for specific days you could mark with an intercultural event.

## Other Events and Activities for your School

- Award ceremonies, e.g. staff member/student/parent of the year.
- Earth Day, ECO Day, Green flag or other eco-friendly activities for schools, e.g. the Scottish Ethco Challenge initiative, where a class composed a song using bottles and bits of bicycles as percussion instruments.
- A European language award – to recognise the multicultural ethos embraced by schools. For more information see: [http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/valuing\\_languages/european\\_award\\_for\\_languages.aspx](http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/valuing_languages/european_award_for_languages.aspx)
- Young entrepreneur awards.
- Exhibitions (of art work, photos, projects etc).
- An end-of-year picnic.
- An open day.
- A book fair or book week, when parents come into classrooms and read with the children.
- A Christmas fair and/or Christmas card sale.
- A Halloween party.
- Bazaars.
- Career days (with parents and external guests giving presentations and/or hosting stands about their jobs).
- School pride day.
- Parent appreciation day.



- A spellathon.
- A literacy project.
- Jumble sales/car-boot sales.
- A family movie night.
- A sponsored walk or run.
- An historical tour of the local area.
- A nature trail.
- Health and sports week.
- A fashion show.
- A table quiz, with parent-and-child teams.
- Plant a tree.
- Standard school events, such as plays, concerts, school dances, sporting events and Christmas carol services.

There are plenty more school events listed as **fund-raising options** on sites such as:

[http://www.schooldays.ie/articles/fundraising-ideas](http://www schooldays.ie/articles/fundraising-ideas)

<http://www.easy-fundraising-ideas.com/programs/school-fundraising-ideas/>

<http://www.fundraiserhelp.com/school-fundraising-ideas.htm>

<http://onefamily.ie/support-us/a-to-z-of-fundraisers-for-schools>

<http://www.fund-raising-ideas-center.com/>

## Managing and Acknowledging Volunteers

The Resources section of the DVD contains materials already available on managing volunteers from Volunteering Ireland and Volunteering Centres Ireland among others. They may be of interest to your PA or staff members directly involved with volunteers. Schools and our advisory committee also recommended considering the following when taking on volunteers:

- **Garda vetting:** The circular 0094/2006 (June 2006) – available at [http://www.staysafe.ie/circulars/CP\\_Procedures\\_0094\\_2006.doc](http://www.staysafe.ie/circulars/CP_Procedures_0094_2006.doc) – outlines the requirements for teaching and non-teaching staff. However, it does not mention volunteers in the school apart from the BOM.

All adults who are left alone with children should be Garda vetted. However, the general opinion is that no parent or volunteer should be left alone with children; there should always be a teacher or school staff member present.

See also child protection guidelines on the DES homepage: <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=17216&ecategory=29271&language=EN>

- **Health and safety**
- **Insurance**

### Thanking volunteers

The following is a list of things, informed by the resources on Volunteering Ireland's website<sup>8</sup>, to offer to volunteer parents as a token of appreciation. Gestures like these may help to boost volunteer numbers, as they will foster a stronger bond between volunteers and could make other people feel like 'joining the gang'.

- **A group meeting or coffee morning** in the school gives volunteers an opportunity to vent and share their experiences. These meetings could be held regularly to foster team spirit. Whoever has co-ordinated your volunteers could attend to listen and make note of any issues, concerns, ideas or questions.
- **A certificate**, which could be awarded at an event, would give volunteers a wider acknowledgement and acclaim.
- **Vouchers from local businesses.**
- **Phone calls or text messages** thanking them.
- **A mention in your newsletter.**
- **A group photo** given as a souvenir or exhibited in the school, if your volunteers are comfortable with this.
- **A social event** such as lunch in a nearby café, an exhibition, a day trip etc.
- **A comments box or post-involvement survey.** This would require time from school staff to process the feedback but it would show your volunteers that you value their suggestions.

## 2.6 BUILDING AND SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

Some of the ideas in the toolkit will bring schools into contact with other organisations in the community. This section provides suggestions on how to utilise these networking opportunities.

- Other organisations (e.g. local community-based services, civic groups, faith-based organisations, youth organisations and migrant organisations) can sometimes provide services that support the work of schools. However, parents are not always aware of the availability of these services in an area. Schools can help these organisations to raise their profile by informing parents and students of the work they do. Organisations can run information or promotion sessions in the school, place ads in the school or on the school website, or even sponsor events.
- Libraries, cultural centres and businesses can advertise school courses and events. They could also come into schools and help, consult or act as sponsors. They could even be potential employers for parents.
- Liaising with teacher education colleges through the DICE programme ([www.diceproject.org](http://www.diceproject.org)) allows schools to share experiences and best practices as well as get information and advice.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.volunteer.ie/involving-volunteers/>

## 2.7 FOSTERING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

The research considered migrant parents' inclusion in the school's decision-making process and how to encourage leaders who reflect the diversity of a school. This is the culmination of a parent's progress through the school system. Parents will probably want to have knowledge and confidence about the school before they get involved on the PA or BOM. On one hand, migrant parents can put themselves forward. On the other hand, a new board, when inviting community representatives, can consider inviting somebody from a migrant community.

### Raising Awareness

Migrant parents are more likely to put themselves forward when they have been involved in other ways. The school can help by making the process through which they can put themselves forward for election as clear as possible. If the school has an established and strong PA, they could launch an awareness campaign to inform parents about the structure, composition, role and responsibilities of the BOM and PA, and their members. Alternatively, you could use or refer parents to NPC materials and leaflets about PA and BOM structures and composition (see [www.npcp.ie](http://www.npcp.ie) and [www.npcpp.ie](http://www.npcpp.ie)), or/and the Department of Education's file entitled Boards of Management of National Schools – Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure. This is available on: <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10856&ecategory=11357&language=EN>

Asking a migrant parent who is on the PA to talk about their experiences at information sessions could inspire other migrant parents to put themselves forward. If a school has no migrant parents on its PA, it could invite migrant parents on the PA of another school to speak.

### Points schools stress to migrant parents to promote interest in PAs

- Making sure parents understand the role of the PA and how it can help students' education by, for example, advising the principal on school policy, organising events and building an effective partnership between home and school.
- Jobs are divided, workloads are manageable and the time commitment can be small.
- Being on the PA will allow parents to meet other parents.
- A parent may be able to represent groups or individuals at the PA. They may also gain valuable information that they can pass on to parents who are unfamiliar with the school system or who lack the confidence to get involved.
- The BOM may also benefit from some discussion or exploration of the diversity of the school community.



## Training Skills

Efforts can be made by the school staff or parents to train parents in relevant skills, or at least to highlight which skills are relevant. This could include the following: management, community development, team work, communication and project management.

Here are some suggestions you may wish to consider:

- Draw up a **list of relevant skills** and provide information, such as local courses that may help or other pointers, for developing these skills.
- **Distribute leaflets** or booklets, such as NPC materials.
- **Run parent workshops** or a course on leadership and various skills. These courses/workshops should be open to current and potential members of the PA and BOM.
- Set up an international committee, i.e. a group of migrant parents and any other parents or school staff who are interested in migrant issues. This committee could be a stepping stone to the PA. The committee would enable parents to acquire skills, knowledge and confidence that might encourage them to go forward for PA elected-representative posts. See more information on page 37.

It is one thing to have a PA or BOM that has a diverse mix of nationalities but the main thing is that members are active, functioning and effective in their roles. The PA or BOM could strive to give honest feedback to their members on their skills and contributions. They may consider bringing in an external specialist to observe and rate members' contributions. The NPC would be a good contact point, with resources such as Working Effectively as a Parent Association (<http://www.npc.ie/attachments/6784b73b-6212-4358-ba75-62376fe381f9.pdf>).

# APPENDICES

## Providing Interpreters in a School

- Setting Up an Interpreting Service in a School

- When it is and isn't Okay to Use Volunteer Interpreters

- Where to Find Professional Interpreters

## Guidelines on Special Integration Services

- Mentoring Programmes

- International Committee

- Migrant Parent Ambassadors

## Examples of Promising Practice

## DVD Materials

# PROVIDING INTERPRETERS IN A SCHOOL<sup>9</sup>

## Setting Up an Interpreting Service in a School

A language barrier may have an isolating effect on some parents. Therefore, offering interpreting services could help to involve them more in school life and ensure more meaningful home-school communication with them. Without interpreters, they may miss out on crucial information or support and you may be unable to help them despite your best intentions. By investing time in interpreting, you will make your school more inclusive, families more welcome and staff better equipped to give support.



It is advisable, whenever possible, that school staff avoid meeting with parents when a child will be interpreting. This puts pressure on the child and parents might not reveal information they don't want their child to know and vice versa.

### Who could set up an interpreting service?

If the school has an HSCL co-ordinator, they may be prepared to take on this role or your PA could get involved. Tasks could be divided to share the workload.

### Interpreting database

Keeping a database of interpreters would be helpful. Staff could use it to speed up the process of finding an interpreter. Local community organisations or service providers that use interpreters (whether on a voluntary or paid basis) might be willing to pass on contact details.

## When it is and isn't Okay to Use Volunteer Interpreters

Interpreting is a demanding and responsible task. However, schools may find parents who are willing to volunteer as interpreters from amongst their parent body. The advantages for such parents are that they can start developing a professional and marketable skill, become more aware of cultural differences and gain Irish volunteer work experience.

<sup>9</sup> This interpreting section was inspired by the North West Inner City Network (NWICN) toolkit Opening Doors; the Schools Cultural Mediation Project (SCMP), Dublin 7 project guidelines (website has expired); personal experiences of interpreters; and discussions with Mary Phelan (DCU).

### **Situations where it is fine to use volunteer interpreters**

- Coffee mornings.
- Information evenings or sessions.
- Welcome meetings.
- Informal events.
- Meetings to discuss subject choices or after-school activities.
- Parent-teacher meetings UNLESS the teacher has something sensitive to communicate to the parent about the child's performance, attendance or abilities.
- Help with enrolment UNLESS the child has requirements that must be discussed sensitively, for example if the child has special needs.
- Any meeting instigated by a parent for which they agree to work with a parent interpreter, as opposed to an external one. These meetings may still have sensitive content.
- Certain situations where a teacher needs to explain something to a parent, unrelated to behaviour, performance or attendance. For example, if a pupil has been forgetting their gear or books, it may be okay to use a parent interpreter.

Many discussions can be had on the topic of what is sensitive. It can be left up to your own discretion. When in doubt, use a professional or external interpreter.

### **When it is not okay to use volunteer interpreters**

Whenever the situation is sensitive, for example in situations of:

- Bullying.
- Special needs or learning difficulties.
- Child protection issues.
- Domestic violence.
- Conflict (whether it be between two parents, between a parent and a staff member, or between a student and a staff member).
- Any issues over performance, attendance, behaviour or adaptation difficulties of a child.
- Discussions about a child's health.

In cases, such as these schools should use a professional interpreter.

## Where to Find Professional Interpreters

- The ITIA (Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association, the only professional association in Ireland representing translators and interpreters) has a database of professional interpreters and translators who you can contact directly. They cover a wide range of language combinations and subject area specialisations and work on a freelance basis. Translators set their own rates.

You can find interpreters' and translators' contact details on the ITIA Register of Members (both professional, associate and corporate members) at:

[http://translatorsassociation.ie/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=20&Itemid=16](http://translatorsassociation.ie/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=20&Itemid=16)

The ITIA's online database (Translator Search) lets you search for the language you need:

[http://translatorsassociation.ie/component/option,com\\_wrapper/Itemid,64/](http://translatorsassociation.ie/component/option,com_wrapper/Itemid,64/)

- You can find a list of holders of a Graduate Certificate in Community Interpreting, complete with contact details on:  
<http://www.mie.ie/getdoc/cf695da0-533d-4f17-b4a6-e9001476fb09/Microsoft-Word---List-of-GCCI-graduates.aspx>
- You can also go through a private interpreting and translating company, but this will be more expensive, possibly around €45 for a job lasting up to an hour. You may also have to cover travel expenses. The interpreters sent by agencies are more likely to be qualified, experienced and unknown to the parent.

#### The DVD contains:

A leaflet for school staff that gives guidelines for working with interpreters.

A sheet with the phrase 'An interpreter will be there' in nine languages.

## GUIDELINES ON SPECIAL INTEGRATION SERVICES

### Mentoring Programmes

Mentoring programmes bring migrants and Irish, or well-established, residents together to spend time with and learn from each other. The aim is to create one-to-one, non-judgemental relationships in which an Irish-born person or established migrant voluntarily gives time to meet with a newcomer. They help them with any issues they may have, such as improving their English; accessing services; learning more about Irish society and culture, the local area and community life; practical support and advice; sharing an interest or hobby; or being a friendly face in the community.

It gives people a chance to interact on a personal basis and learn from each other as individuals. Mentees share their knowledge of a different culture and country, and their experiences of migration and living in Ireland. Interestingly, mentors can learn a lot about their own country too, as they see it from a different perspective. For both parties, it is about personal development, building self-confidence, exploring identities and reaching out to a new community.

For schools, a mentoring programme would be extremely beneficial in:

- **Bridging the gaps between clusters of parents** from different countries.
- **Helping children of migrant parents do better in school.** Parents who feel settled, confident and welcome in a community are in a much better position to support their child in school.

The advantage of running a mentoring programme in a school is that mentors and mentees already have something in common – they are both parents of children who are around the same age and are in the same school (and who may even know each other). They face the same issues as parents and can support each other in addressing them together.

You would need to appoint a person in your school to be responsible for the mentoring programme. Their responsibilities would include:

- Recruiting mentors and mentees.
- Matching them up.
- Giving them a brief induction talk, and ensuring they agree to confidentiality and certain boundaries.
- Support and supervision – being available for any feedback or issues that may occur and possibly even seeking out this feedback.

The usual time commitment for mentoring programmes is five hours a month or 1.25 hours a week for a period of a year or until the end of the school year. An informal mentoring programme would simply team up mentors and mentees, but would not impose any time commitment, leaving it up to mentors and mentees to meet up whenever they wish.

The problem with a casual set-up like this is that mentees may be shy or reluctant to contact their mentor and take up their time, so they might not meet up very often. Without a framework, it is easy to fall out of touch. However, casual set-ups can still give a migrant parent peace of mind in the knowledge that they can turn to someone who is willing to listen to them and meet them.

**Confidentiality** is an important element that should be stressed to both mentors and mentees. Everything said in the mentoring discussions is private.

You could recruit mentors and mentees through appeals in the newsletter and on the website, letters sent home, ads on notice boards and so forth. You could use the information in the first two paragraphs in this section, maybe starting with a question such as “Would you like to...?” followed by a list of bullet points. You could add one or two pictures of two people laughing together in a café or park. You could also publish regular updates in the newsletter and on the website etc on the number of mentors/mentees involved. Include a few positive quotes, which will help maintain interest in the programme. At a later stage, you could get a mentor and a mentee to say a few words to an audience of parents at an information session or welcome event in the school.

In 2009 and 2010, the ICI ran a mentoring programme in Dublin. It was then rolled out nationwide through partner organisations. See our Guide to Running a Mentoring Programme for more information, guidelines, roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees, boundaries and expectations, questions to discuss during the first session, action plans, application forms for mentors and mentees, debriefing and evaluation, a review form, positive quotes and outcomes. It is available at: [http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/images/stories/Mentoring\\_Programme\\_guide\\_-\\_pub.pdf](http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/images/stories/Mentoring_Programme_guide_-_pub.pdf)

## International Committee

This is a short, simple name, which leaves the group open to anyone in the school who may be interested in issues faced by migrant families. Names such as Migrant Parent Leadership Committee or International Parents’ Committee could suggest that only migrant parents could be members. The term Diversity Committee may also not be ideal, as it is too open: it includes categories such as disability or sexual orientation, rather than suggesting migrant issues only.

The International Committee could work with the PA – it could even be a stepping stone to the PA. It would deal specifically with migrants and migrant issues. It could appoint one or several “migrant parent ambassadors” (see description below) to specifically help new families integrate into the local and school community, especially those who arrive during the school year.

## Migrant Parent Ambassadors

A migrant parent ambassador could have any number of the following responsibilities:

- To liaise with migrant parents to:
  - » Inform them about the school system, school events, school closing days etc.
  - » Listen to their needs and concerns, possibly through home visits.
  - » Ensure that the needs and problems faced by migrant families are represented and successfully addressed by the school.
  - » Ensure that migrant families’ ideas or suggestions are heard by representing them at school meetings.
  - » Be with them at school meetings to ensure understanding and effective communication as an intercultural mediator.
- To engage with community groups whose remit is interculturalism.
- To support other migrant parent leaders.
- To develop or revise intercultural and anti-racism policies in the school and suggest drafts to the school BOM.
- To revisit enrolment and admission policies.
- To engage with **teacher education colleges** on topics of diversity and interculturalism as part of the DICE project ([www.diceproject.org](http://www.diceproject.org)), if there is room for this within the DICE framework or work already in place, as they would acquire expertise ‘on the ground’.
- Be a role model to migrant parents of the school and other schools.

The ultimate aim of all these measures, by supporting migrant parent involvement in education, is to improve the academic achievements and social and cultural integration of students of migrant backgrounds.

As this is an ongoing and demanding role, it would make sense to choose migrant parent ambassadors who put themselves forward. These parents may have already been helping other parents outside of any school framework. Therefore, taking on the title of migrant parent ambassador would not necessarily change their activity; it would only perhaps increase their profile and visibility amongst other communities. It might also imply that they should make the first step in contacting new families, rather than just being available to be contacted. The PA could possibly refer new families to the appropriate migrant parent ambassador. An appeal for volunteers could be made through the newsletter, notice boards, information meetings or school events.

# EXAMPLES OF PROMISING PRACTICE

These are just a few examples of initiatives that facilitate good home-school communication and parental involvement, which have been taken from a variety of countries. Some of the following examples were provided by members of the Pathways to Parental Leadership Transnational Committee.

## **Delegate Parents, France (*Parents délégués*)**

French schools usually have two 'delegate parents' per class. Their role is to mediate between the parents of that class, the teaching body and school management. They are members of the school council and represent parents at school council meetings. Delegate parents deal with any issues relating to school life, such as the integration of special needs students, the school canteen, child safety issues etc. They can also help to set up activities (such as reading workshops) and organise events or parties. They may also suggest changes in the organisation of school time. Any parent in the school can put themselves forward for election.

## **Learning Together Club, Battlefield Primary School, Glasgow**

One morning a week for one hour, all parents of children in their first year of primary school are invited to meet. The club represents a big commitment from the school as it involves two teachers. Parents can have a cup of tea and biscuits and there is a short session given by one of the teachers. This is followed by an activity such as sewing, card making or baking.

In terms of the teacher's session, the club covers all subjects and aspects of school life. They often have a literacy or numeracy focus but have covered science, art and various new school initiatives to enable the parents to be more aware of what the school is doing. The parents are asked for ideas on any areas they would like covered. The children of the parents attending are invited along for five or ten minutes at the end.

This group has been beneficial for parents to support their child's learning and for parents to network with each other and get to know the teachers better. Many parents who regularly attend continue to attend beyond their child's first year. (Battlefield website: <http://www.battlefield-pri.glasgow.sch.uk/>).

## **Open Classroom Afternoons, Battlefield Primary School, Glasgow**

Twice each school year, parents are invited to see their child in the class setting in an Open Classroom afternoon. Children can take their parents around the room to tell them about the items displayed on the walls and to show them their work. Most classes in the school invite their parents in for an end-of-term celebration. Some classes organise an Open Afternoon by themselves. One teacher's class focussed their event on the Egyptians and made the class into a museum. They invited their parents and parents of all 25 children came.

(Battlefield website: <http://www.battlefield-pri.glasgow.sch.uk/>)

**Mama learns German – even Papa programme, Germany (*Mama Lernt Deutsch – Papa Auch*)** – originated in Frankfurt and has been expanded nationally

The programme first began as a pilot in 1997 and there are currently about 100 courses in Frankfurt-am-Main. Through this programme, migrant parents of children in primary schools and kindergartens join their children in the classroom two mornings a week. Parents learn German alongside their children and gain a real insight into the culture. Language classes are held during the school day, freeing some parents from having to look into childcare.

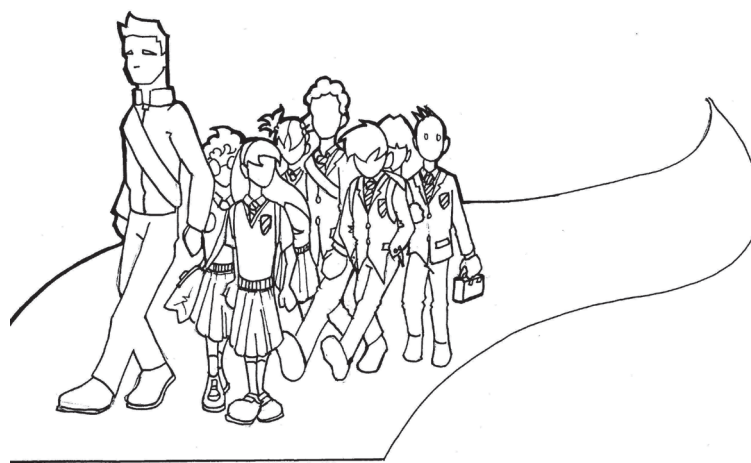


The classroom provides a forum for parents to connect, share stories, discuss challenges and solutions, and support or befriend each other. The programme has been adapted to secondary schools. Parents are equipped with the language skills to support their children in school and children improve their language skills.

([http://citiesofmigration.ca/good\\_idea/school-for-mama-and-me/](http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/school-for-mama-and-me/))

### **Walking School Bus, Auckland (New Zealand), Seattle (USA), Waterloo (Canada) and Victoria (Australia)**

A walking school bus is a group of children who walk to and from school together, supervised by neighbourhood parents. Like a real bus, it has set times and children wait at certain stops, which have been decided in advance. It is run by volunteers who act as the 'drivers' or 'co-ordinators'. It was established in 1999 in the Auckland region of New Zealand, where more than 5,000 students use a walking school bus every day. Research has shown that walking school buses help parents to develop a relationship with the school and the community.



The benefits of a walking school bus include:

- It saves parents time and money.
- It is better for the environment.
- It allows parents to socialize, and find out things that can help them adjust better to their child's school environment.
- It allows children to get to know other children in the school better.
- It helps fight child obesity.
- It helps children get to school safely.
- It increases children's confidence, independence and knowledge of road safety.
- It allows parents to observe their children interacting with other children.
- It reduces the amount of traffic outside the school gates and, therefore, reduces stress and frustration.
- It creates community cohesion, home-school connection, social integration and a sense of investment in and around the school.

([http://citiesofmigration.ca/good\\_idea/the-wonders-of-walking-walking-school-bus-programme/](http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/the-wonders-of-walking-walking-school-bus-programme/))

### **Parental Boards, Nytorpsskolan school, Sweden**

Nytorpsskolan, a Swedish school where most students are of a migrant background, established a Parental Board. The board is mostly made up of parents and has formal responsibility for decisions concerning Swedish

as a second language, mother tongue teaching, creating a good working environment for pupils, forms of co-operation between home and school, and other topics. The board does not take decisions about the school's personnel or finances.

Parents have been able to influence what is happening and it works well with the council of pupils, which is also active. Some parents feel that their participation has allowed them to gain more respect from their children, since they have better knowledge about the school and can have an impact on it.

This is an URBACT project: <http://www.urbact.org>

See also: [http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/doc1\\_1214\\_371021031.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/doc1_1214_371021031.pdf)

The following initiatives are from various schools in Dublin

### **Learning centres for heritage languages**

Arabic language and culture classes are held in the school once a week. They are open to students of any primary and post-primary school in Dublin. The cost per class is €2 per student or €3 for a family of two siblings. This money covers photocopying, heating, lighting and insurance. Any money left over is given to the teachers.

As well as culture, history and geography, classes focus on reading and writing, so children of a migrant background have an opportunity to improve their understanding of their parents' languages. At the beginning and end of each course, each student is assessed. A prize is given to the student who has achieved the greatest upwards differential in their results.

### **Yearly classroom meeting for parents of junior infants**

Parents of junior infants are invited into the school at the start of each year to meet with the children's teachers. The teachers explain the curriculum to parents and advise parents how they can help their child in the evening, especially with regards to teaching the alphabet.

### **Social events in the parents' room**

- **A book club for parents** is run by the HSCL co-ordinator. It meets once a month in the parents' room, which is a prefab on the school grounds.
- **A mother and toddler group** meets one morning per week with the HSCL co-ordinator.
- **Qu'ran instruction** for Muslim parents (not attended by school staff) is an initiative for parents who may feel isolated. It gives them a scheduled space and time to meet within the school.

### Examples of two PA initiatives

- **Personal pupil accident insurance**

As the process of getting insurance for a child who has had an accident in school can be difficult (with the onus on the school to prove neglect), the PA got parents in the school to purchase private insurance from a well-known insurance company. Several insurance companies do this and cater for many schools. The cost is €4.90 per student (this is an online discount; the normal price would be €7) and provides insurance cover 24/7 for the whole year, regardless of where the child is (not only on the school grounds). There is an even cheaper insurance option that only covers the school grounds and school-related activities. This is helpful for both schools and parents and counteracts an adversarial system.

- **Books for Break Time**

The PA asked parents in the school to donate books, which the PA then brought into the school yard in boxes at break times for children to read or look at. This kept some children busy who may otherwise have felt nervous about break times or self-conscious about being alone in the yard. The fact that they were donated and not school library books meant that it didn't matter so much if they went missing or were subject to the rain.

# DVD MATERIALS

- **Information checklist**  
A basic checklist to use when putting together information for parents unfamiliar with the Irish education system.
- **Volunteering survey**  
An example of a Volunteer Survey that may be of help when organising your own volunteer recruitment drive.
- **Working with interpreters**  
Guidelines on speaking through an interpreter.  
An information sheet for school staff.
- **Multilingual interpreter sign**  
The phrase “An Interpreter will be there” in nine languages, which can be included on ads and notices.
- **Hello page**  
The word “Hello” in 76 languages, which can be used for correspondence and face-to-face communication.
- **Thank You page**  
The words “Thank You” in 186 languages, which can be used in correspondence.
- **Steps for reporting racist incidents**  
A guideline of steps to take if you are the victim of or a witness to a racist incident.
- **Example of a school calendar**  
This also contains some suggestions for days to mark with events.
- **Coffee mornings**  
Some general information on running coffee mornings, with translated material for advertising.
- **Pointers for using simpler language**  
This basic chart may be of help when looking for simpler alternatives to certain words and phrases.
- **Resources and bibliography**  
This contains resources for parents, translated resources, resources for school staff, and resources on bullying and volunteering.

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**See also those resources listed under Translated Resources for Parents on the DVD.**

# NOTES



