



Stay and Play:  
involving  
parents in  
school



At **Whingate Primary School in Leeds** the school prospectus gives an encouraging message to all parents from the outset:

*Whilst your children are the ones who actually come to school, we feel that the school is as much yours as theirs. We are grateful for the support and encouragement you give to every child and to the school. There will be frequent opportunities for you to be involved with your child's learning and with the life of the school in general.*

Whingate is a large primary school located in an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. Most of the pupils attending the school are white British, and about 20 per cent are from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds. Whingate takes an increasing number of pupils who have recently arrived in the country from Eastern Europe.

The headteacher and assistant headteacher developed an extensive action plan to help raise children's achievement across the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2. Parental involvement and engagement in children's learning were seen as central. With this

in mind, the school decided to focus on parents of children entering Reception, in the first instance.

### Welcoming families into Reception

Reception teachers now visit feeder nurseries and invite new parents into school. All parents who are new to the school are encouraged to come and look around, and begin to make connections and relationships with staff.

**Stay and Play sessions and workshops** are held each week for Reception parents. Every Monday morning, parents (or grandparents and other carers) are invited to 'Stay and Play' with their children in the classroom. They play for half an hour, from 9.00 to 9.30. Areas of learning are set out and 'WALT cards' (We are learning to... cards) are placed in each area of provision. These explain the learning intention and the steps needed to achieve it. This promotes shared activity between parents, children and staff, who are available to provide encouragement and explanation. Parents are also involved in group reading, playing games and contributing to profiles.

After half an hour, the parents can stay on if they wish to and participate in workshops run jointly by the learning mentor and assistant headteacher. (Parents say the attendance of the latter makes them feel that the senior managers give a high priority to their needs.)

These workshop sessions cover a wide range of topics – from reading, communication and language to healthy living and yoga lessons – and run from 9.30 to 10.30 every Monday. The workshops are run informally, refreshments are provided and everyone has a chance for a general chat. A flexible approach means that parental interests can be followed up in future sessions.

“ We really get to know our parents. They are just people like us. They know what they can do to help their children at home. ”



### The workshop sessions have included:

- how children learn through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- showing parents EYFS profiles and encouraging them to contribute observations
- a presentation about how the school teaches and develops early reading skills
- making resources and playing games to support teaching in the classroom
- evaluating a DVD and leaflet produced by the DfES – as a result of this, parents decided to make their own information leaflet entitled 'A Parents' guide to surviving Reception at Whingate' for future parents.

Some parents also attended a volunteer course run by Education Leeds and were awarded certificates.

All children in the Reception classes now also have **individual home-school diaries** to help extend the dialogue between home and school.

### Extending and sustaining the workshops

Having been 'captured' in nursery and Reception, parents have high expectations of what the school will do to promote their continuing involvement. Pupils of parents who have accessed Stay and Play are now in Year 1 and the school is running Stay and Learn sessions for their parents. Resources needed for Letters and Sounds are being made, and when parents feel comfortable with all the games and material, they will work in the classroom supporting children directly. Workshops will then be organised after school each week to discuss issues and next steps.



### Impact

Children's achievement is steadily improving and parents' feedback shows that they feel more able to support their children at home. The school's 2007 Key Stage 1 results were the best since 2002. This improvement has been acknowledged by both the local authority and a recent Ofsted inspection. This may not all be down to parental involvement, but the staff doubt that the results would be as good without parental input. Both staff and parents feel that the efforts made to work in partnership with parents has changed the nature of the school.

*“The staff all work together in a way that you feel you can speak to anyone.”*

### Future plans include:

- running some sessions on calculation for parents throughout the primary school
- developing a Share Family Learning Programme <http://continyou.org.uk>
- running a course for parents about children's writing
- developing more specific support for parents of children learning English as an additional language.

*“The way the school works with parents in Reception to help us help our children is fantastic.”*