

# Partnership with Parents

Little Hill Primary School

## What the Judges Said

Excellent partnership work fully embedded across the school, we can see the impact of parent partnership. We liked that the entry told us what they did with parent feedback. Impressed with the direct access to services for parents.

## Context

Little Hill Primary School is a very well thought of community primary school situated in Wigston, Leicester. It caters for a housing estate as well as a good proportion of pupils from outside of catchment. It has approximately 420 pupils on role.

Our key principles for supporting pupils with additional needs are:

- a commitment to inclusivity and a celebration of diversity
- Putting the child and family at the heart of all our processes

Our school has an excellent reputation in Leicestershire for inclusivity and has been praised by many members of Leicestershire County Councils' children, family and education services for its outward looking attitude and the good relationships its fosters with parents and the community, as well as outside agencies.

Due to the level of expertise at our school, and our inclusive attitude, we have a high proportion of children with complex needs receiving personalised and bespoke provision. Currently we have 3% of pupils with Education, Health and Care plans, or in the process of completing them. We consistently go above and beyond what many mainstream primary schools offer and take our commitment to 'best endeavours' very seriously.

In our experience parents of pupils with high needs are very informed and good at discerning schools that are going to be able to provide the high quality education that their children need, and they have told us that our school stood out for them.

Our empathic and supportive attitude to parents of children with special, educational needs runs throughout all of our school staff. Our approach is always to involve families at every level, listen to their concerns and respect their knowledge and expertise.

Recognition for our work has come from NASEN, who asked the school to write an article for their magazine to highlight our outstanding and innovative practice in working in partnership with parents. We have also been recognised for the work we have been doing to support social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs in school. This year we were one of two schools asked to speak at the Leicestershire Primary Heads SEND conference to talk about the work we do to support inclusion and avoid exclusions. Last year we were funded to be involved in an inclusion project with our local authority, this has involved setting up an inclusion 'hub' classroom in our school and developing our partnership with parents work further. We will be showcasing this work to other schools at a forthcoming inclusion conference.

Our setting has also now been selected to have an inclusion unit for 10 children with SEMH needs with Education, Health and Care plans as part of the local authorities 'hub and spoke' education model. Again this was in recognition of the level of expertise at our school and our person and family centred approach.

Our parents are fully supportive in us making this entry and have contributed throughout to the evidence. They have also been quoted throughout the piece.

## **Entry**

At our school we have worked hard at developing positive partnerships with parents and we know that this is particularly crucial for parents of children with special educational needs. Our parental engagement goes above and beyond expectations and has enabled us to move from an 'open door' school to a parent partnership one with a genuine culture of school, family, and services working together. For us what makes our school parent partnerships stand out are:

1. Our passion for inclusion and our welcoming culture.
2. Giving our families access to additional support in school.
3. Good communication and involving parents and families in developing our school policies.
4. Developing innovative and supportive practices for all SEND areas and celebrating diversity.
5. Engaging with parents at all stages so that they always feel valued and listened to.
6. Embracing person and family centred practice when reviewing and planning support.

### **Our passion for inclusion and our welcoming culture.**

We pride ourselves on being a welcoming and supportive school with a passion for inclusion and a nurturing ethos. Our inclusive practices have become fully embedded over time and all of our staff are committed to this approach.

An example of our passion for inclusion can be seen in the way all staff and children have embraced signing across the school. We have trained over 20 members of teaching staff to a good level of Makaton, we run Makaton and BSL clubs and include Makaton signing routinely in all of our assemblies and in the classroom. We have a British Sign Language expert in school who gives further support in signing for staff and children. During our awareness raising events such as autism and Down's Syndrome awareness, staff and children have all learnt to sign to songs which they then performed to the school.

Genuine parental partnership happens when the school does everything in its power to overcome any barriers that there are to the child's successful inclusion. Our school always works with parents to ensure their child is included, for instance when we organise our school trips and residential each year we make sure that they are chosen with that cohorts' additional needs in mind. We select venues for instance that will be suitable for our pupils with cystic fibrosis.

Our inclusion hub classroom is an example of how we have provided a bespoke provision in response to listening to our families of pupils with more complex needs. We planned the programme with our parents to make the inclusion classroom a calm, natural environment (inspired for instance by Emilio Reggio and Elizabeth Jarman) The curriculum includes elements from forest schools, nurture provision and mindfulness practice. Interventions include Lego and play therapy, sensory circuits and tailored communication programmes.

It is in its second year of running successfully to provide alternative provision for a number of children who need a bridge between mainstream classrooms. It was developed out of our passion for getting inclusion right and our culture of research and innovation. The area has been highly praised, for instance by our authorities' autism and learning support teams. We researched the environment, curriculum and interventions we wanted to provide and consulted families, for instance during our person centred review process, this enabled us to provide a tailored provision. Pupils access learning and practice skills in more specialist, small group settings that they can then generalise back in the classroom.

Movement between the classroom and the hub is fluid. It was important to us to also improve the quality of life at home as well and to be able to include sessions based around areas parents have said that their children are struggling with at home. We include life skills as part of it and develop pupil's safety and awareness through for instance shopping and cooking, developing problem solving and independence. 'Love the hub what a fantastic job you've done it's amazing, different ways of learning, adaptable just wonderful. I just love the fact nothing is cut and dry it's all about the child as an individual.'

'I think the inclusion hub is fantastic and my daughter is really happy in the setting, she enjoys the different activities and things that they do. It works well because it is a small group that she can access well. She has made very good progress in this environment. Her teacher is brilliant, I couldn't imagine anybody else doing it so well, nothing is ever too much trouble and she communicates so well with parents and the children.'

'My child has cystic fibrosis and the school have been great and always ensured that myself, all the teachers and teaching assistants have meetings prior to transfer with the CF nurse. Provision for her medication has always been well organised. Cleaning staff are all briefed about my child's needs. The school have been fantastic and always gone that extra mile. They have talked to me before undertaking any activities and booking any school trips to make sure I can check they are suitable. If they haven't been suitable then alternative trips have been put on. I am really pleased with how well my child's needs are being met and have full confidence in the school in always contacting me before any decisions are made.'

'My daughter has autism and an education, health and care plan. The school from day one has offered such a high standard of support, encouragement and have gone above and beyond in their assistance to help with my daughter. I have been able to go in to school attend forums with fellow peers and professionals in a friendly, informative environment and have been given lots of information and tools which I could use for my daughter at home. The inclusion team went above and beyond with the inclusion hub provision in the afternoon for my daughter to attend and it has totally altered my daughter's behaviour. She is one hundred percent calmer, happier and she is no longer taking her frustrations out on me at home. Without the hub and all the help, I would be at my wits end. The school have always involved me around my daughter's provision and take the time out to listen to me, support me personally with the needs of myself and my daughter. Without all the help from this school, my daughter would not have come on the leaps and bounds that she has.'

### **Giving our families access to additional support in school.**

As a school we have very strong links with outside agencies and work with them in partnership alongside our parents.

We ensure that our parents are able to directly access agencies and voluntary organisations in the school itself. We have done this by providing a programme of parent and family forums and workshops. Our forums and additional support sessions give parents direct access to services, rather than just signposting them to these. Parents see that we work closely with other professionals to provide support around their child – whatever their support needs look like.

Parents tell us that our forums are welcoming and provide a safe and respectful environment where they feel validated and that their opinions matter. It was important to us that they attracted a range of parents and that parents initiated how they should be conducted and we found that concentrating on areas of need and providing both access to support services and opportunities for supportive group interactions worked well.

We organised forums focused on specific areas of need such as autism, dyslexia, mental health, ADHD, Sensory needs, non-verbal communication, etc. This also has enabled us to build up relationships with a wide group of SEND (and disadvantaged) pupils' parents.

Our forums also draw on expertise from our parent community. For example, at a family forum on wellbeing we invited in parents who we knew worked in fields related to mental health. Parents and carers of LAC and adopted pupils were also used as a source of invaluable expertise to support others. The format of the forums allows us to set up positive and supportive interactions between parents in different roles, school staff and agencies. This helped to skill up our parents and also developed a resource that benefited the school more widely.

We feel strongly that parents and school staff should receive training together and we have for instance just had joint training for 1 to 1 LSAs and pupil's parents on sensory difficulties.

'Forums are very insightful and supportive. It's really good speaking to other parents and knowing you are not alone'

'They are definitely helpful and supportive and the staff are very caring and always willing to help'

It's really good to talk to other parents going through similar issues'

'They are very informative on what is available'

'The help offered in school is brilliant and very supportive'

'This is a very positive group and very welcome'

'They are fantastic and really help me to focus and direct as to what services to access next'

'It is always nice to have professionals to talk to at the forums'

'It is very beneficial to meet other parents with SEND children and listen to other's experiences.'

'They are really helpful as you can talk openly about everything without the feeling of being judged.'

'We feel listened to and that our opinions as parents matter'

'The workshop was very engaging and well presented with interesting and informative presentations and knowledgeable professionals'

### **Involving parents and families in developing our school policies.**

We are committed to having our SEND parents have their say in shaping policies and practice.

Responding to the challenge of the new code of practice for us meant not just paying lip service to the idea of parents being involved. We wanted to have a representative range of SEND parents engaged with us in reviewing, for instance our information report to parents. We also use time in forums to involve our parents in strategic review. Our SEND information report to parents is a useful and widely read document. Rather than thinking of information to parents as a shopping list of question responses to the send statutory requirements we returned to the spirit of

the code and kept at the forefront our desire to make the information easily accessible and in clear, straightforward language. Our parents wanted guidelines for the areas that affected them. As an example our autism offer was produced by parents of children with autism or on the autism pathway, our local autistic society, our autism outreach officer, and some of our parents who work with children or adults with autism, all alongside relevant school staff.

Our co-produced school offers help reduce potential conflict and encourage joined-up thinking between home and school. Our dyslexia offer is clear about the stages of support and how and why we would identify or diagnosis dyslexia and has provided a useful framework for conversations with concerned parents. It enables us to focus on the specific needs of the child and how it impacts on learning – rather than just labelling them.

As part of our offers we have been able to also build up staff teams based on areas of need. Within the areas of autism, dyslexia, mental health and wellbeing, ADHD, as well as speech, language and communication needs we have skilled lead staff members (for instance some with post graduate qualifications and diplomas) and a further group of staff with additional qualifications in their areas. This means that parents have staff they can go to for support and advice beyond the school SENCo and family support roles.

### **Developing innovative and supportive practices for all SEND areas and celebrating diversity.**

All members of our community, and families of our pupils are made to feel welcome at our school. Parents are also widely involved in school life and invited in as a matter of course for class curriculum events, assemblies and shows etc.

Individual difference is celebrated at our school from our school values such as 'Daring to be different' to our 'Everyone's Welcome' culture. Diversity is seen as a positive feature in our school, and everyone is encouraged to appreciate the strengths and qualities in others. We are a rights respecting school and we have a strong culture of teaching children's rights, developing resilience and character and preparing children for life beyond school. We teach these values across all aspects of school, including in our assemblies and in our planned provision.

An example of our commitment to celebrating difference can be seen by the number of awareness raising events that the school puts on throughout the school year. Last year we celebrated dyslexia, autism and deaf awareness week. We supported and put on events for Down's syndrome awareness day, as well as cystic fibrosis and

juvenile idiopathic arthritis fundraising and awareness raising events. We have also put on a number of events during child mental health week.

We always involve parents in these events and they have included our successful wellbeing week where we organised family breakfasts and events through the day for each day of the week based on the 5 ways to wellbeing. Parents were involved in school in sessions for instance with their children on yoga, keep fit, mindfulness, peer massage and developing friendship and social skills. Many different local and national agencies linked to health and wellbeing were involved.

‘The school always puts on a lot of events for like this for parents and we really enjoyed the family breakfasts and the different activities’

‘The yoga sessions were great and a welcome opportunity to take part in something with my child’

‘It was good to take part in the mental health and wellbeing events and that the school are doing important work in this area’

‘From the minute we stepped foot through the doors of Little Hill Primary School, we knew it was the right place for our daughter. The inclusion is amazing. Every child is different and every child is welcome and loved and taught to their own specific learning styles with excellent intervention strategies.

As parents we work jointly with the school and the staff, all working towards the best education for our daughter.

It is extremely important to us that our daughter is educated in a mainstream environment and is surrounded by positive role models. As a visual learner being in an inclusive mainstream environment is the right place for her and to remain in her community and be surrounded by classmates both in and out of school is fabulous.

The doors are always open, the teachers, head, inclusion manager and 1-1’s have and will always make time and are always very knowledgeable and keen to learn more.

They access the resources required and attend courses to support.

It is fantastic to attend assemblies and see the whole school greet in Makaton sign



language and a member of staff who is trained in BSL translating the entire assembly.

We feel we won the lottery when we discovered Little Hill Primary school and know that our daughter will successfully spend her primary school days here in full.

Little Hill has the will do, want to and can do attitude that makes any parent of a child with SEN feel safe and secure knowing their child is having the best possible education in a safe, secure and inclusive environment.'

### **Engaging with parents at all stages so that they always feel valued and listened to.**

We start our engagement with parents early on and work closely with our feeder nursery providers and our early year's teams. Additional meetings are set up and visits to provision and/or to the home are organised. We take our time to get to know the families and all of the team involved around them. Many of our parents of high needs children have had experience of schools either putting barriers up around their needs or not preparing for them properly. We think holistically at our school and we plan carefully the provision and training required and never reduce children to just a list of needs that can or can't be met.

Parents are supported well through all stages of school and we ensure that we put in additional support at transition times. This could include working alongside parents to look at things that would help in transfer such as social stories and photo books. We work closely with parents and other agencies to ensure the classroom provision is right, for instance comparing the acoustics in different classrooms for a hearing impaired child.

All of our staff engage with SEND parents at every stage of the graduated response. All of our SEND policies and procedures and the documentation we use has been written with parent's views in mind rather than as documents to support staff. Our staff handbook for SEND also sets out how we can engage parents fully at each stage of the SEND process. Staff and parents produce pupil passports together identifying wider areas of need and thinking about likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses etc.

Parents all receive printed copies of our parent information book and for areas of need they receive our offers, e.g. on speech, language and communication needs. This enables them to see what we have committed to provide, what training we have invested in and who the support team around their child's need is.

Many of our pupils have home school books to help the daily engagement of parents. We also use secure social media sharing for high needs pupils that enables the school, family and professionals involved to all record areas of significance and progress and share these in a joined up approach.

'We specifically sought a school that was inclusive and supportive of children with additional needs and over the past few months Little Hill has exceeded our expectations in many ways. We have found that Little Hill include us and communicate with us as part of a team to support our children to develop and reach their full potential. Not only have the school provided support for our children during normal school hours they have taken it one step further to enable our children to attend 'After school' clubs and school trips which are an invaluable element of their education'

'My son has benefitted from having neuro-typical children as role models at Little Hill. He has had the opportunity to access a mainstream classroom, whilst still having his learning needs met. His 1 to 1 has a great understanding of him and ensures he is not over stimulated by high stress situations. He has regular exposure to other members of staff so he doesn't become dependent. Little Hill has embraced his behaviour therapy and welcomed in ABA professionals. The school have really embraced Makaton and made it fun to ensure lots of children are signing so it becomes the norm. The school offer lots of support to the family.

As parents we feel it is easy to access the teachers and there are educational sessions for families. We feel listened to. The school is also working hard to change the future generations attitudes to disability and difference and put on educational days for instance for autism and Down's syndrome. I feel that Theo is in a safe and nurturing environment. Little Hill is helping him to fulfil his potential whatever that may be. As a SEN parent I am very aware of other SEN children's experiences in school. I feel very fortunate that our experience for our son is so positive'

### **Embracing person and family centred practice when reviewing and planning support.**

We approach this with the core belief that all parents know how to support their child and want the best for them.

Getting the person centred review process right was important to us as a school and we researched thoroughly the practice from its inception to those authorities that introduced it early on. We start preparing for the reviews early so that pupils can present them and have video stories and display boards to show what they have achieved. We use personal learning journeys to capture all of the views of those involved in the review process and we use a wide range of resources to support person centred reviews, these include social stories, and explanations leaflets of the process for parents. We also use progression of involvement grids to ensure that pupils are moving through the stages of being fully involved in planning and leading the process themselves.

Good quality person centred reviews have led to much more focused action planning around the child and meant that we centre support around the outcomes that the family have outlined themselves. This process has ensured the quality of provision for pupils with high needs and enabled the development of social and communication skills, independence and life skills to be fully valued alongside academic success.

Listening carefully to parent views, including at reviews, has impacted on other areas of provision that parents have asked for. This includes more support for pupils at lunchtime with our 'Happy Lunchtimes' scheme and zoned play areas. We have also provided drop boxes around the school and in the classrooms where children can request to speak to an adult or to our full time emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA). Children who struggle on the playground at lunchtime also have the opportunity to attend our 'Time to Chill' clubs or access quieter places and activities.

'My daughter has William's syndrome, which means she needs a good deal of additional support. Our person centred review was brilliant. The way it was done, how all the people involved were there and the fact our daughter was involved throughout and little video clips were played. I always think that our concerns are listened too and we feel very much involved as parents around the planning around her needs. School SENCo is very approachable, nothing is ever too much trouble and she always listen to our concerns. We always get any information that we need. My daughter has made brilliant progress and it is all down to the school. We don't want her to leave.'

