

FROM THE
PUBLISHERS OF
**teach
PRIMARY**

Spring/Summer 2017

Primary **PTA**

Trusted advice for parents & teachers

HOMEWORK:
IS SCHOOL
GETTING IT
RIGHT?

PARENT POWER

RAISE YOUR VOICE
FOR BETTER EDUCATION

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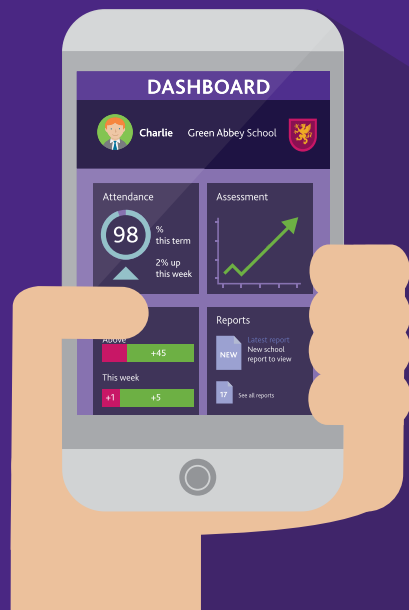
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Welcome...



... to issue two of *Primary PTA*, in which once again we've gathered together parents, carers and teachers – not to mention some of the UK's most renowned experts in teaching and learning – to share advice, ideas and inspiration about all aspects of your child's education.

Nearly every primary school in the UK has some form of parent teacher association – and while they can look very different from each other, all of them are dedicated to making school a better place, for everyone.

One obvious way they do this is through fundraising; and you'll find plenty of suggestions here to help you maximise your events income (and spend it wisely!). But there's more...

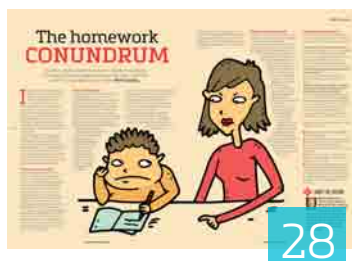
Research shows that few factors have a greater influence on children's success at school than the level of involvement parents and carers have in their education. PTAs are in a brilliant position to support this – bringing families and schools closer together and keeping everyone on the same page. That's why we've also included features that look at elements of teaching and learning that we know really matter to you – from homework (p.34) and assessment (p.45), to reading (p.24) and the influence of technology (p. 50). And on page 6, PTA UK's Emma Williams explains just how powerful and positive the parent voice can be, when schools are really listening.

Ultimately, parents, carers and teachers all want the same thing – for every child to achieve their full potential at school, and for their experience of education to be as interesting, enjoyable and fulfilling as possible. At Primary PTA we fully believe that this can happen, as long as everyone is working together; and we're thrilled to be a part of it. If something amazing is happening at your school, why not get in touch and tell us about it?

Helen Mulley, editor
helen.mulley@theteachco.com



FEATURED...



MEET THE EXPERTS...



Emma Williams is executive director of PTA UK.



Dr Nicola Davies is a psychologist and freelance writer with a passion for education.



Kenny Pieper is an English teacher, and author.



Mark Creasy is a parent, teacher and author.



Lesley Smeardon is PTA UK's membership services manager.



Sue Cowley is an author and teacher.



Paul Wright is a teacher and head of computer science and ICT department in Coventry.



Caroline Hurst is education manager at Childnet.



Juno Hollyhock is executive director at Learning Through Landscapes.



Tes Macpherson is the founder of PTAsocial.com.



Elaine Skates is a mum, school governor and CEO of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom.



Maggie Sims is the head of cookery at the Children's Food Trust.

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Editor:

Helen Mulley, editor@teachsecondary.co.uk, 01206 505111

Group advertising manager:

Richard Stebbing, richard@teachprimary.co.uk, 01206 505957

Account manager:

Hayley Rackham, hayley@teachprimary.co.uk, 01206 505957

Art editor: Rick Allen

Designers: Chris Ashworth, Hannah Kemp

Photography: CliQQ Photography cliqq.co.uk.

Accounts: 01206 505995

Design & reprographics:

Ace Pre-Press 01206 508608

Subscriptions department:

Zoe Charge, zoe.charge@aceville.co.uk, 01206 505922

Subscription enquiries:

0844 576 7861

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BE HEARD!

As parents and carers, you have important things to say about your children's education, says **Emma Williams** – but how can you be sure school is listening?

Research shows that if a parent or carer is involved in their child's education at school, that child will do better behaviourally, emotionally and academically.

Although this may seem obvious to some, others take the view that teaching and learning should all take place in the classroom and should be led by the education community alone. But studies have shown that if parents support children by reading with them at home or by participating in activities at school they are instilling an interest and an enthusiasm which encourages greater learning from the child, helps the school itself perform better and underpins a strong local

community. Indeed, many successful schools recognise the importance of parents and proactively collaborate with them, going beyond the more established practices of fundraising and social events.

They involve them in conversations – for example, about school policies; how to spend money made through voluntary contributions; and on issues relating to the curriculum. Parents have a vital role to play in education and should be encouraged to participate in one way or another. Everyone has something to offer and everyone's view is important.

When the parent voice is properly heard, when parents get involved and work collaboratively with the school, everyone benefits. So, what are the best ways for us,

as parents, to help make this happen?

Parent teacher associations (PTAs) are the bread and butter of most school fundraising efforts. Without them many would not be able to enjoy the 'extras' such as fun educational resources for the classroom, subsidised school outings or sports kit, among the many other things that PTAs offer.

It's not all about the money...

Yet beyond the fundraising efforts, PTAs play a crucial role in helping to build the school community, and can become a means by which parents and teachers communicate and collaborate. For example, many are reaching out to parents, gathering views about their



Your voice matters: what the research says

In November 2016, PTA UK carried out a survey among parents nationwide which looked at a range of issues including the parent's relationship with their child's school and their willingness to support it to influence their child's education. Key findings showed:

■ More than eight out of 10 (84%) parents want to be consulted by the school about their child's education but nearly half (46%) are unsure if their feedback is properly taken into account by schools.

■ 56% of parents believe that PTAs are mainly focused on fundraising, however 39% also think that PTAs are a mechanism for parents to express their views.

PTA UK has long-championed the importance of parental participation in children's learning and school life, while promoting the positive impact this has on academic attainment and educational outcomes. In relation to parental engagement, the survey found:

■ Most (91%) parents have been involved in helping their child with homework while over three quarters (76%) have attended a parent consultation.

■ While four in 10 state lack of time as the single most important reason for not participating in other ways at school (e.g. on a parent association / forum etc.), well over a quarter (29%) report never having been asked to participate in the first instance.

■ Nearly half (49%) would consider being active in a parent council or other parent group despite never having done this in the past.

The research also found that 40% of unemployed parents are less likely to get involved in parent groups because they are unsure of the skills and knowledge they can contribute while only a quarter of employed parents (26%) saw this as a barrier, but stated lack of time as the main reason for not getting involved.

Overall, 23% of parents have been involved in their school parent group while only 12% of parents have been a school governor/trustee. Measures to increase mothers taking up these key decision making positions may be needed, as relatively more fathers become governors.

school experiences, and have incorporated a 'parent voice' element to their work by setting up sub-committees especially to develop better home/school conversations. These sub-committees discuss and share their opinions on a range of issues from behaviour, discipline and curriculum and assessment to conversion to academy status, homework, uniform, wraparound care, volunteering, school trips and so much more. Input is sought from the wider parent community either formally through questionnaires and surveys or at meetings, or informally through more ad hoc feedback, sometimes discussed in the playground or on social media used by class groups.

By giving parents a voice via an existing PTA, issues can be debated and outcomes reported back to the head teacher and governors at regular intervals. The progress or action taken can therefore be evaluated to support improvements in the school over time.

Set up a parent council, forum or action group

Some schools like to keep the community and fundraising efforts of their PTA separate from a more formal structure which specifically seeks the views of parents on a wide range of education issues possibly affecting them locally or nationally. These include:

Parent councils: These are established within a school and consist of class or year group representatives. They tend to meet regularly to discuss issues which have been referred either from class parents' meetings or from governors, and often link to the student council where this exists. The discussions and

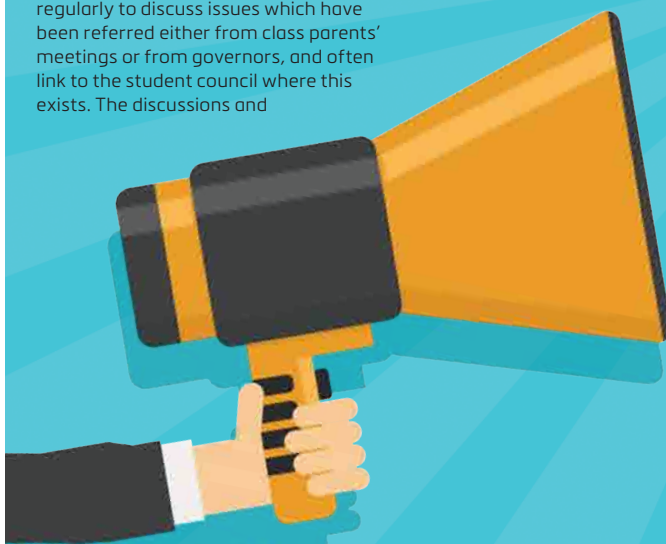
decisions made in these meetings should influence and inform policy making in the school.

Parent forums: These differ from Parent Councils as they do not involve elected representation from individual classes or teaching groups, but informally invite all parents and carers from across the school to attend meetings, most likely on a termly basis, to raise issues relating to school developments and policies. It is often the case that small task-groups are established at these meetings to work on a specific issue with a remit to report back.

Parent action groups: These are also established in some schools where individuals are brought together to work on a specific issue generally as a one-off event. For example, parents may be brought together to work on an environmental project in the school grounds or maybe to establish a walking bus for local children to help manage a parking problem. Issues can vary and be wide-ranging, but such groups can have great impact quickly, depending on the kind of project or issue.

Partnership is key

Progressive schools listen to the families of the children they teach. By taking parents' and carers' views on board, a school becomes stronger. Those that recognise how parents can contribute to school improvement will invite them to share



ideas about how things could be done differently or better to suit the families they serve. Indeed, many school policies have a direct impact on parents, such as those for homework, behaviour and uniform; if parents are consulted and their views are taken into account they are more likely to be supportive of the school and to see positive results.

For further information and advice on setting up a PTA or parent group visit pta.org.uk

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Emma Williams is executive director of PTA UK, the leading Parent Teacher Association membership organisation and registered charity, representing the biggest network of parent associations in schools across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The organisation's vision is for every school to have the benefit of a successful and supportive PTA to enhance the educational

experience and future opportunities for all children. PTA UK also advocates for parents to fully participate in education matters, both locally and nationally.

Log onto pta.org.uk to find out how to get involved in your child's education or for information on how to become a member of PTA UK. You can also download a Parent Voice Guide to help set up a parent group in your school from the website: tinyurl.com/parentvoiceguide

Collaboration in action!

Case study 1

TECH AND TEAMWORK

Governors at **Burdett-Coutts & Townsend CE Primary School in Westminster**, London, have successfully run a project to gather the views of parents by using Ofsted's online Parent View survey.

The school recognised that to work effectively and bring about positive change they needed to have an ongoing dialogue with all partners and stakeholders at school, including parents. In the past they had sought views via paper surveys but they decided to switch to technology to help gather information more efficiently.

Using iPads funded from money raised by school trustees and its parent association, Year 6 pupils were given the task of guiding parents through an online questionnaire at one of three parent view sessions. 60 responses were recorded, and those who completed the survey were the lucky recipients of a sticker!

This is a great example of the whole school community working together: teachers, governors, parents and pupils to identify areas for improvement or to make suggestions on how to engage or support families.



Case study 2

FROM FAILING TO FLYING

Stanton Bridge Primary School, based in a deprived community in Coventry, is a shining example of how working with families can drive improvement, as through a proactive collaboration between teachers and parents they made the move from being on the brink of Special Measures to being one of the best schools in the country.

When head teacher, Sofina Islam, arrived at the school she faced a challenge to turn Stanton Bridge around. Meetings were held with parents where concerns were aired and discussed and this became the turning point in what was to become a journey of achievement.

Mrs Islam actively engaged parents to identify the key challenges and areas that needed addressing, discussing the problems with them, agreeing what needed to be done and encouraging them to be part of a team to improve the school. Her ambition was to engage parents to an extent that they were able to put their own stamp on what she believed to be not only their children's school, but a school for the community as a whole.

By empowering parents, giving them a voice and ownership, individuals became confident in their abilities to help while not only improving the environment for the children but also supporting them as individuals, to learn new skills.

Stanton Bridge has since won awards and enjoys an 'outstanding' accreditation from Ofsted. It is an excellent example of how parents, teachers and the wider community can share their views and work together to achieve major results, and ultimately the best for the children in the community.



"NO PROBLEM"

When the head of one small primary school asked the PTFA for £15,000 to buy a minibus, he really wasn't expecting **Russell Blenkinsop's** response...

St Mary's Primary School in Forest Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne is a great school - although quite small, with only 190 pupils. The Friend's of St Mary's PTFA was re-established in 2012 and is now a small charity set up to support the school. The aim is to provide additional funding to the school budget for items that will enhance the education experience of the pupils and make learning fun.

I became involved with the PTFA being elected into the role of co-chair in September 2014. In December that year, with the help of PTA UK, we became a registered charity and this opened up all sorts of avenues and funding opportunities.

£15000 target

We have an excellent relationship with our headteacher and always aim to raise the additional funds for projects of the school's choice. So, in September 2015 at our first

general meeting of the school year, we were keen to hear what he might have in mind.

Travel expenses were spiralling out of control with an estimated cost of £4000 a year just to take the children swimming once a week - and this excluded all the field trips as well as sporting activities in which the school would participate. If school had its own minibus, the head argued, then it would ease pressure on the annual budget considerably; and open up more enrichment opportunities for the children, too.

Discussions took place as to whether a lease or a purchase was the best option. It was decided we would purchase a minibus, as to lease would put unnecessary pressure on the PTFA in future years to maintain the high costs of a lease and prevent us from focusing on any future projects.

The conversation went something like this:

"How much is it going to be?" I asked.

"About £15,000 inc VAT," said the head



"No problem," was the reply. "We'll have it for you by the end of the school year."

The head shook his head and laughed, genuinely not believing me for one minute. And really, I couldn't blame him. But he was reckoning without the strength of our little school community!

Getting started

This project was embraced by everyone within the school and the assistance we got from our parents was fantastic. We received a huge amount of support from families at our fundraising events and some even took it upon themselves to do sponsored events as individuals and donate the funds they raised to the cause of the minibus.

We started off our year with a brilliant Halloween disco where all the PTFA were



“The sense of pride throughout the whole team at what we had achieved was amazing”

in fancy dress. The event was very much appreciated by the staff and children, resulting in a great night being had by all as well as raising an impressive amount of money.

We then moved onto our Christmas fair, which offered all sorts of festive stalls for the children to visit as well as the opportunity to have their faces painted etc. Our biggest success that day other - than the chance to visit Santa Claus - was a super 'cracker' game, which the children could not get enough of as they tried to win the Gold, Silver and Bronze prizes.

Sponsor support

Things were really taking on momentum now, and we had approached local businesses to sponsor events and donate prizes either for raffles or auctions at our events, with promises of promoting their businesses through our school and social media.

Three local businesses really embraced the idea and were only too happy to help. The first was our local branch of Hays Travel in Killingworth, who had a charity Christmas market bus trip which raised over £500 for us on that day. Raffles were made incredibly enticing, with high value prizes - such as ferry trips to Amsterdam, caravan holidays to Haven holiday parks, and



numerous £100 vouchers - encouraging excellent ticket sales.

Another local business more than happy to help a worthwhile cause was Forest Hall Chiropractic Clinic, who donated a cheque of £500 as well as prizes to be used at our fundraising events.

Excel North East, a local double glazing firm, also came on board and became the sponsor of the Friends of St Mary's PTFA - donating a whopping £5,000 for the privilege.

In return for the support we received, as promised we promoted each of the businesses in a number of ways using social media; one of our posts on Facebook reached over 3500 people.

Fun and games

As well as all this going on, we were conscious that in the past we had not done a lot for parents to enjoy themselves, so we decided to step our events up a level. In March 2016 we held our own 'James Bond' themed casino night. We all were dressed for the part in a black tie theme; people arrived in dinner suits and ball gowns and a good time was had by all.

Our fundraising was going extremely well, and although our main focus is always to raise funds for the school, we are keen to make sure the children have plenty of fun, too. With this in mind, during the Easter period we had another disco as well as an egg hunt. A full sized chocolate treat was purchased for every pupil and hidden within the grounds of the school yard; then each year group had a turn at hunting. The caring attitude from the children was amazing to see as they all helped one another to find an egg of their own.

We had the traditional summer fair, too,

of course, where we bring in external rides as well as the usual tombola and other fun games and stalls. The activity the children enjoy the most is definitely when the teachers go in the stocks and wet sponges are thrown at them. It really does show who's popular...

Mission accomplished

On Tuesday 5th July 2016, eight months after the initial conversation took place, the PTFA arrived at school and handed over the school's first ever minibus. It was just over three years old, but as good as new. The sense of pride throughout the whole team at what we had achieved was amazing.

In the school summer holidays, to give the parents a break (and an excuse for a night out), we had another themed night; we went for a 'beach party' this time with everyone in summer wear - and a few taking fancy dress to the extreme! We had fundraising party games, cocktails and a BBQ, as well as the standard raffle.

In total, we had an income of over £18,000 in 2015/16, which has been the most successful year ever in the history of our PTFA. The camaraderie is absolutely fantastic and although I am in the position of chair, we are one big team. Each member brings something different to the table, but ultimately our goals and objectives are all for the benefit of the children.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Russell Blenkinsop is chair of The Friend's of St Mary's PTFA, in Forest Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne.



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Dr Nicola Davies explains how parents and school can work together to nurture mental wellbeing in young children – and why it matters

There is more to the primary school years than learning lessons and making friends. It is also a time when young children start to gain a level of independence that can lead to various life challenges, which may impact mental wellbeing. Not doing well in a test, coming last in a race, and failing to get an invitation to a birthday party are just some of the events that can be major disappointments to little people. In addition, many of them are spending much more time on the internet, with the risk of exposure to inappropriate material and isolated from the real world.

But, guess what? These types of life stress are a natural and expected stage of growing up, and can be beneficial to development – if handled appropriately. So, as much as some parents might want to solve these problems on behalf of their offspring, it can be better to hold back and instead offer support and guidance as children learn how to be resilient and make good choices when dealing with personal setbacks. This will be more beneficial to their mental well-being in the long-term.

13

What is mental wellbeing?

Mental wellbeing is a key component to living a healthy and fulfilling childhood. It is the positive mental state whereby a child possesses healthy levels of self-esteem and self-acceptance, a sense of autonomy, the ability to discern right from wrong, and the confidence to manage setbacks and failures.

In an interview with the NHS, Sarah Stewart-Brown, Professor of Public Health at the University of Warwick, said, “No one can give well-being to you. It’s you who has to take action.” In other words, there is a proactivity factor when it comes to preserving one’s wellbeing, and this is where parents can be a vital source of influence for children – providing a safe environment for them to be proactive in learning about their emotions and how to deal with them.

A HEALTHY
MIND



Claire Hugo, mother of 10-year old Daniel, shares: "Daniel was about to enter the next grade, where the school would give students the chance to join a special advanced class. When I told my son that he had qualified, he was ecstatic, and then he said, 'But let me think about this first, okay? I want to do this when I'm ready.' He was only nine years old and I was so surprised at how maturely he handled the pressure. So, I trusted him to reach a decision on his own terms. He decided to take the class, but it was his decision and he didn't feel like we forced him into it."

When children trust in their own capacity to overcome difficulties, this will impact other facets of their life. Socially, they will be able to empathise with and be happy for peers, participate in playtime and other activities, and at times, enjoy solitude; emotionally, they won't allow feelings to overwhelm them and will be eager to enjoy life; and intellectually, they will be able to cope with stress and cognitive challenges and remain fully attentive in the classroom.

When do parents need to step in?

When children are unable to cope with the stress of a setback, the situation could lead

to behavioural issues and negative patterns of thinking. Parents need to be able to recognise the signs that their child is not living up to their full happiness potential. Some of the indicators could be when a child is having frequent emotional outbursts, appearing uninterested, speaking ill of peers who excel, or abruptly ending a relationship with a friend.

So, while we want to take a step back and allow our children the opportunity to manage their own stresses, there will be times we need to step in – often, in situations where knew knowledge is needed by the child in order to help them understand the situation.

Louise Chambers, mother to seven year old Jenny, offers an example of where intervention was needed: "Most afternoons of Jenny's early primary years were spent with a best friend who was two years older than she was. After a while, Jenny seemed extremely withdrawn, and eventually stopped seeing the best friend. I asked her about it and she just said, 'She doesn't like me anymore'. She was so distraught. Later, I learned that her best friend wanted to play with older kids. I explained to Jenny that her friend was just growing up, which was normal, and that she was capable of making new friends. Fortunately,

her school environment was very supportive and she quickly found other children to connect with."

Championing mental wellbeing

Children's mental wellbeing is everyone's concern – parents, guardians, teachers, and school administrators need to work together to promote it. Parents and school personnel can discuss setting up policies, protocols, and activities that help create a school climate that nurtures mental well-being, for example:

• Counselling skills training

Although schools typically have in-house counsellors, parents and teachers can also benefit from learning basic counselling



NHS RECOMMENDS: 5 WAYS FOR PARENTS TO PROMOTE MENTAL WELLBEING IN THEIR CHILDREN

1 STAY CONNECTED
Let children connect with siblings, grandparents, relatives, peers, teachers, guardians, and neighbours to expand and deepen relationships.

2 STAY ACTIVE
Children need to expend physical energy. Let your child join non-competitive,

creative, and holistic activities such as community-based walks, yoga for kids, or family cycling activities.

3 KEEP LEARNING
Encourage children to remain interested in acquiring new knowledge and skills that expand their mind, enabling them to mentally

cope with potentially complex experiences.

4 PRACTISE GIVING
Children can practise compassion through volunteer opportunities, or simply being reminded about basic courtesies like smiling and saying 'thank you' or 'I'm sorry' when appropriate.

5 STAY MINDFUL
Train children to become more aware of their present feelings and thoughts. This teaches them to remain calm, collect themselves, and respond to ongoing challenges more mindfully.

Source: nhs.uk



outburst. Using mindfulness helped him relax that tension, allowing him to calm down before addressing the problem."

• Kindness and empathy activities

Volunteering fosters a sense of community and builds a positive school environment. It gives children an opportunity to make new friends and be recognised. Some schools adopt kindness initiatives where children write positive letters to peers and teachers once a week. Some classrooms also have kindness buckets where a piece of paper is placed whenever a child performs an act of kindness. When the bucket is filled, the entire class is rewarded.

Children will have both good and bad experiences, and parents cannot expect always to be there to help their children through the difficult ones. Young people need to learn how to discern their options, weigh the pros and cons, make decisions on their own, and to do so with confidence. Potentially, they will make mistakes, but that is also part of the learning process that strengthens mental wellbeing. For parents wanting to do more, working closely with schools to help their children develop resiliency is a significant way of contributing to children's mental wellbeing.

skills. One mother, Kristin Gaid, shares her experience regarding her five year old son who was overly competitive and often became frustrated and angry. She had to learn to counsel her son through active listening and to monitor the tone of her own voice to keep the conversation positive: "It was very challenging to help him deal with strong feelings. I thought, 'How can I impose discipline with love or encourage without nagging?' Eventually, I managed to focus on the thing that mattered most – how I interacted with my son during his trying times."

Parents and teachers can also serve as counselling role models by conducting counselling training sessions – possibly as part of drama lessons. Counselling skills can help children build empathy for peers, learn to process emotions with another person in a healthy way, and encourage them to confidently make decisions related to mental well-being.

• Mindfulness

Mindfulness, a relaxation technique that builds awareness of the present moment, is fast becoming a mental wellbeing practice in schools. It involves relaxing the body, doing breathing exercises, and observing one's mind and body. It can help children to feel calm, self-regulate emotions and thoughts, and build positive moods and self-acceptance. Seren Trump shares of her son (seven), who was physically lashing out when frustrated: "You could see his body tense before an



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nicola Davies is a psychologist and freelance writer with a passion for education. You

can follow her on Twitter (@healthpsychuk) or sign up to her free blog: healthpsychologyconsultancy.wordpress.com

WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

In addition to changes in behaviour, be on the lookout for evidence of possible negative thought patterns:

+ EMOTIONAL REASONING

When a child starts thinking that how they feel reflects reality (for example, "I feel unlikeable; therefore, I must be unlikeable").

+ CATASTROPHISING

When a child expects the worst to happen in a difficult situation (e.g. "There is nothing I can do to make this better").

+ BLACK-AND-WHITE THINKING

When a child has an all-or-nothing view of themselves, others, or situations (e.g. "Everyone always picks on me").

+ MENTAL FILTER

When a child rarely listens to the positive and focuses only on the negative (e.g. "I only got 9 out of 10").

+ UNREASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

When a child pushes themselves to achieve or conform to an unrealistic model ("I want to look like Natalie or be as clever as Jade").

SPENDING POWER

A steady stream of donations from parents who are simply doing their shopping may sound too good to be true – but it's an option open to your school, says **Magdalen Wind-Mozley**

16 **A**ny PTA or Friends association of a school spends much of its time fundraising. There are many tried and tested methods: the Christmas fairs, and summer fêtes, the own clothes days, the discos, the clothing collections, the cèilidhs, the colouring competitions and (that ultimate feat of extortion) cake sales. And each comes with its own challenges; from organisation, finding volunteers, making sure you have the appropriate licenses, finding venues and arguments about spelling/presence or not of circumflexes, to judging criteria, whether anyone uses the word 'mufti' anymore, and even just managing to agree on a suitable date.

So, imagine if there were a way to raise funds which just involved parents sitting at home – or indeed, anywhere with WiFi – buying stuff on the internet. Stuff they were going to purchase anyway. What if people could raise funds for the school, at no cost to themselves, every time they, say, renewed their car insurance?

After all, when you hold a cake sale, parents are asked to buy the cake ingredients, to bake the cakes, to come along and help sell the cakes and, just to put the icing and a big cherry on top of the whole thing, buy the cakes too. It's a great way to raise money, but does ask quite a bit of families.

With charity online shopping platforms, no one has to decorate 36 cupcakes with the school logo, no one has to set up a tent in lashing rain and gale-force winds, and no one needs to go in the stocks (there is always a downside). Instead, with one click, a donation is made by a retailer to the PTA, and it costs the shopper nothing.

Easy does it

Friends of St Nicolas were introduced to the platform we use, easyfundraising, by friends (in both uses of the word) at another school, who were singing its praises. It seemed almost too good, and indeed easy, to be true. The Friends set up an account; it was a simple process

to register. Then parents were asked to sign up too.

At first, some people didn't really think it would apply to them. They hardly ever shopped online. Except perhaps – well, Amazon can be really convenient (the company offers a 1.5% donation per purchase). Oh, and online groceries shopping: Tesco and Sainsbury's are both signed up to easyfundraising.

In addition when you (as a parent) register with easyfundraising it prompts you to enter dates when, for example, your car insurance is due for renewal. This can be an excellent fundraiser for the school. Parents may also find it means they shop around a little, and see what quotes are available from providers they might not previously have considered; just recently this led to a £30 donation for the Friends and an almost £30 saving for a parent. Win win.

It all adds up

Clearly, the more parents you can get signed up, the more you'll raise. Our Friends has an active Facebook page (very handy for parents faced with a child adamant that tomorrow is dress up in purple day; a memo they're sure they never actually received). We use this to publicise our traditional events, and it's an ideal platform to demonstrate the effectiveness of retail based fundraising, too. Parents can do a little bit of low key virtue signalling and simultaneously encourage others to get involved – and of course, once an account has been set up, members of the wider community, and even friends and relatives

“With charity online shopping platforms, no one has to decorate 36 cupcakes with the school logo...”

around the world, can take part as well.

Parents can get quite evangelical; as one says: "Nowadays if a company doesn't donate I will seriously think twice about buying from them. Seems irrational? Not at all. I firmly believe all companies should contribute to the community that supports their business. Each donation may be small, but they all add up and make a difference. Whether it's 5p from Amazon or £108 from a holiday company (our largest single easyfundraising donation so far), I'm happy - because my children benefit - and the company is happy, because it's guaranteed business. Everyone gains."

Anyone involved in charity fundraising knows how true the adage "take care of the pennies, and the pounds will take care of themselves" can be. Your school Christmas Fayre, where nothing on sale costs more than pocket money amounts, can easily raise thousands. Coffee mornings, where

the most expensive thing on offer is a whole lemon drizzle cake, raise hundreds. With easyfundraising the money may come in little bits; but all those 5ps soon pile up, especially with the occasional £30 from insurance companies, plus regular weekly Sainsbury's deliveries, thrown in.

Money for nothing

How much have we raised? Well, we are a small school, but we are about to reach the £1500 mark. That is the equivalent of five very successful coffee mornings; with not just cakes and scones but bric-a-brac, and a tombola, too. That is £1500 for doing nothing other than an extra click on a website while internet shopping.

£1500 that has contributed towards books for our school library.

£1500 that has funded science workshops.

£1500 that has helped us subscribe to

online resources such as Mathletics. £1500 that has helped improved the school environment. £1500 that we would not have otherwise had.

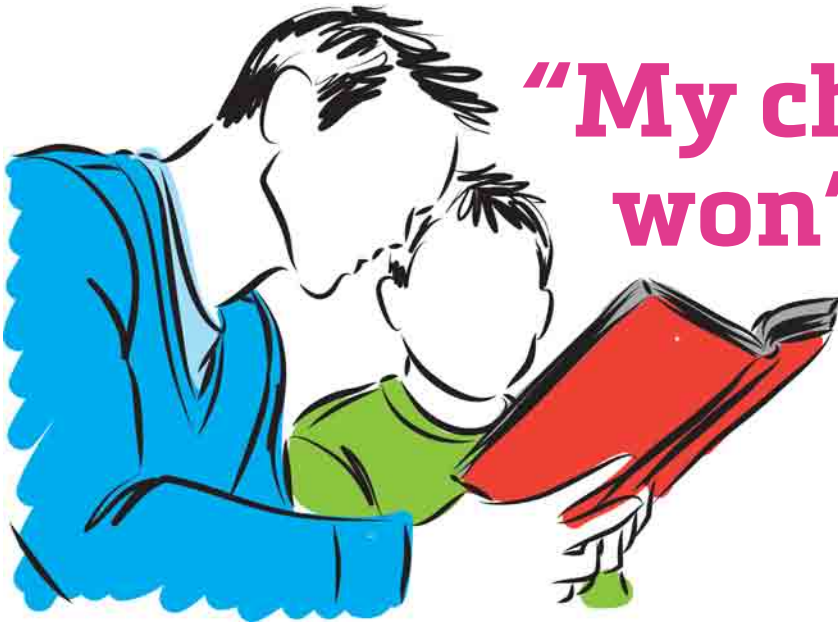
Online fundraising has been a real boon for our Friends, and our school. Clearly we will continue with the quiz nights and the raffles; the bunting flag competitions and the Easter egg hunts. But all the time, in the background, people are quietly, easily, and at no cost to themselves, looking after those pennies for us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Magdalen Wind-Mozley is a parent, and supporter of the PTA, at St Nicolas School, Newbury





“My child just won’t read!”

If it looks like your offspring would rather do anything other than pick up a book, **Kenny Pieper** has some advice that could change things...

18

There was a point very early in my teaching career when a parent asked me this question: ‘How can I get my kid to read?’ Not ‘read more,’ but merely read. That this was some 15 years ago might suggest that the challenges of social media and expanding access to technology have not changed the landscape very much. I would imagine that I, as a spotty youth, might have found it difficult to pull myself away from Subbuteo – but there are ways to overcome the lure of whatever distraction is in vogue. And while, eighteen years into my career as an English teacher, there are still some kids who resist, I think I’ve learned a few things along the way.

The central premise of my book, *How to Teach Reading for Pleasure – A Passport to Everywhere* is that reading is habit which needs to be nurtured, supported and developed. Without the support of parents – books at home are a privilege for some, to others, a part of furniture – this a difficult thing to achieve.

However, what I’ve found to be the most powerful inspiration for kids to read is to see adults doing so. And that means you, parents. Oh, I know you probably read already, but do you read what they’re reading? Do you speak to them about their books, about your own reading? Do you read the same books, at the same time? We need to convince kids that reading is something of value, which we do every day. Being told that it is important doesn’t cut it for some. We need to show them what a reading life looks like.

A physical experience

So, this weekend, go together to your local bookshop or library. We are lucky to be living in something of a golden era for children’s fiction; shelves are heaving with new, beautifully designed and written books. Together, choose something the whole family can read. Read together, with the telly off for half an hour – fifteen minutes even; amazing things may happen. Discuss the characters and the

plot. Make predictions together and encourage your child to ask questions or even set challenges for you. The most important thing is to start a dialogue, which may become a routine, which may become a habit. And good readers succeed in school, there’s no doubt about that.

Owning books is a marvellous thing: watching a bookshelf fill up was one of my great pleasures as a child, and knowing that I’d read those stories, too – that I’d developed my own special relationship with Bilbo Baggins or The Famous Five or Tom Sawyer – made it all the more special. Don’t underestimate the aesthetic pleasure we get from books and the protective ownership we have of them. Why not purchase a subscription to a magazine of your child’s choice, something that can be theirs and theirs alone? When the first issue drops through the letterbox with your child’s name on it, you’ll be amazed at the impact it has. No, they may not become readers overnight but the ‘collection’ they have, the way the magazines pile up on the shelf, the way they will keep them in order, is part of what makes a reader.

Speak to the school

As an English teacher, it is very much part of my job to encourage reading as well as to teach your kids how to read well. The

“We need to convince kids that reading is something of value, which we do every day”

latter is probably more importantly than the former but why, after developing a hugely important life skill, wouldn't we see reading for pleasure as a really important outcome? At parents evenings or school open evenings, it is important for you to have that conversation with your child's teacher. They may well be crying out for some support in getting your child to read, so the relationship you form with them could be vital.

I have created a bookmark for reluctant readers to use, allowing them to track progress – they set weekly targets for numbers of pages read, and get their bookmark signed by a parent every week. There is also a space for parents to comment on progress and this begins to develop a three-way dialogue. The importance of this is the habit you begin to nurture and that the child begins to develop a reading history. The more they read, the more they will read. It is the hook on which to hang all future reading.

Share their thoughts

How else can you become involved in your child's reading? Well, why not try blogging? It's free, and easy to set up and manage. It could be a joint effort with the teacher, a class blog which everyone uses. But, more importantly, it should become a place for children to 'publish' thoughts on reading, book recommendations, book discussions. It helps to create a culture where a reading community is a positive community and you, the parent, can get involved too. Blogging can create a genuine audience for a child's writing and, if you can reply to their posts, you may well begin to develop some fascinating literacy opportunities. Your child may feel more comfortable talking about books online – of course, you can use privacy settings – but at least you'll be able to gauge understanding and progress. And it connects to their love of technology. Hey, it's *modern*.

Of course, if you're more comfortable with the old-fashioned pencil and paper then why not start a reading journal with your child? You can begin with some simple questions about the title and early chapters of the book then, as they begin to answer those in detail, you can probe

with more challenging ones. It becomes an ongoing conversation – weekly? – which, again, allows you to develop a reading culture at home.

However you manage it, the key is that reading should become a thing you all do – and the habit begins to catch. Think of the changes in our children's experiences later if they grow up to be readers for life. It's hugely important that we don't leave it to chance; ultimately, the reading habit may be one of the most important gifts we give them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kenny Pieper has been teaching English for 15 years and still loves every minute of it. He is the author of *How to teach reading for pleasure* (Independent Thinking Press, £12.99)

“Think of the changes in our children's experiences later if they grow up to be readers for life”



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THE BIG BOOK LIST

Looking for a great read to recommend to your little one? Our pick of the best children's titles around has something for everyone...



21

Sometimes, all it takes to turn a reluctant reader into an enthusiastic bookworm is simply finding the right book. For one child, it might be an adventure tale that takes her somewhere she's never been before; for another, a reference tome about exotic insects, or ancient Egypt. Fantastic photography and gorgeous illustrations can fire young imaginations and spark curiosity; sometimes, it's a particular character or location that sets children

on their own journey of literary discovery. Ensuring the perfect level of challenge is important, too; research shows that, whilst younger children often enjoy tackling stories that require a little effort in terms of decoding and comprehension, as they get older they have a tendency to stay in their 'comfort zone', choosing books that are familiar and easy – with the unhappy result that they lose enthusiasm for reading generally, as they are no longer excited by what they find.

There's an awful lot of luck involved in matching children with books that will genuinely inspire them, of course – but given the mind-boggling number of new titles that are published every year these days, a little guidance can go a long way. That's why we've spoken to reviewers, teachers and parents in order to put together this collection of outstanding examples for learners of all abilities in reception, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 2. Happy reading!

Brilliant books for RECEPTION READERS



Good Knight, Bad Knight (templar, paperback, £6.99)

With his permanently tousled hair, skull-emblazoned tunic, and inability to do anything that is asked of him at school without making a complete hash of it, Bad Knight is the kind of hapless 'hero' with whom children of all ages (and degrees of compliance) can instantly identify – and when his oh-so-perfect cousin, Good Knight, turns up with his impeccably bouffant blonde curls and nauseatingly winning ways, the stage is set for all kinds of delicious mayhem. Genuinely, laugh out loud funny for little ones and adults alike, this book is full of empathy for those easily labelled kids who struggle to meet adults' often unrealistic expectations.

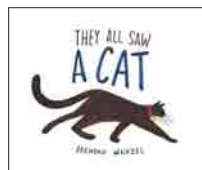
Great for...
discussing behaviour



Oi Frog! (Hodder Children's Books, paperback, £6.99)

Frogs should sit on logs; whether they like it or not. Why? Clearly, because cats sit on mats, gophers on sofas, gorillas on pillars, and dogs... well, you don't want to know! This hugely enjoyable piece of rhyming fun from master storyteller (and super school visitor; maybe one to suggest to the head?) Kes Gray is an absolute delight to read aloud with your child, and has the bonus of offering plenty of opportunities for language play and discussion, too. Jim Field's bright, clean and stylish illustrations are instantly appealing, and work brilliantly with the text – and the good news is, if your child likes this book, there's now a sequel, 'Oi Dog!' to enjoy, too.

Great for...
rhyming fun



They all saw a cat (Chronicle Books, hardback, £10.99)

Teaching young children about empathy can be difficult. Sharing books that play with the idea of seeing the world from someone else's perspective can certainly help, and this is a brilliant and beautiful example. The story is told in very few words: a cat takes a walk, passing a range of different creatures along the way. The cleverness lies in the illustrations – because the appearance of the feline changes dramatically with every turn of the page, according to each observer. Whilst the child sees a cute, fluffy pet, for example, the mouse's vision is dominated by fearsome fangs and claws, and malevolent eyes. Really great stuff.

Great for...
developing empathy



There's a Bear on my Chair (Nosy Crow, hardback, £9.99)

This smart, funny book plays on a feeling that most children will recognise: the very specific sense of impotent frustration that is felt when someone else is sitting on a chair you know, but cannot exactly prove, is 'yours'. With sassy wordplay, classy typography and endearing, enduring illustration Ross Collins captures the increasing irritation of the mouse who is convinced his place has been usurped with affectionate accuracy – and the little rodent's righteous indignation is even more hilarious as it becomes clear that the polar bear with whom he is so outraged is utterly oblivious of his existence, let alone his claim on the seat in question.

Great for...
building wordpower



Great for...
expressing creativity

Let's Play (Chronicle Kids, hardback, £9.99)

In this brilliantly interactive title, a little yellow dot takes readers on a crazy, fun adventure as they trace its twisting, swirling journey across the pages and beyond them, encouraged to clap, cheer,

shout and jump along the way. Touchscreen-savvy youngsters, used to swiping and sweeping with their fingers to control what they are seeing, will be entranced at just how much they can make happen in the absence of electronics – and when the

intrepid dot finds itself having to pick its way through a scary spread of ink blots, might be surprised at just how powerful an effect can be created with just a few scrawls of black and an invitation to use the imagination.

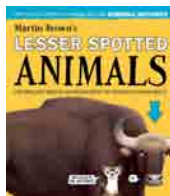
Brilliant books for KS1 READERS



Isadora Moon Goes to School (OUP, paperback, £5.99)

Isadora Moon's mum is a fairy; her father, a vampire. As a result, Isadora herself is neither one thing nor the other... but entirely, happily, herself. It's only when the time comes for her to start formal education that this begins to be a problem: should she go to fairy school, or would she be better served learning alongside fellow vampires? After trying both, it's clear that she's a perfect fit for neither – but could the world of human children, with all their glorious, messy variety, hold the solution? In Isadora, Harriet Muncaster has created an original and endearing character who effortlessly challenges the notion that little people belong in boxes.

Great for...
independent individuals



Lesser Spotted Animals (David Fickling Books, hardback, £12.99)

Fans of the Horrible Histories series will instantly recognise the style of illustration here – but in this case, the hugely talented Martin Brown is responsible for the words and research, as well as the accurate, yet irreverent, pictures. Packed with intriguing, yet easily digestible, chunks of information about each featured creature, alongside snappy fact files full of satisfying stats and quirky observations, this is a real treat for anyone who is interested in the natural world – especially if they reckon they already know pretty much all there is to know about zebras, lions, elephants and sharks.

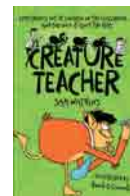
Great for...
nature obsessives



The First Case (Gecko Press, paperback, £7.99)

In this whimsical yet pragmatic tale, sensitively translated from the original Swedish by Julia Marshall, Detective Gordon – a wise and experienced toad with a sound understanding of the importance of cake in the daily life of any investigator – has the task of solving the tricky case of a squirrel's stolen nuts, with the help of his new assistant, Buffy the baby mouse. Told with gentle, perceptive humour, and gorgeously illustrated by Gitte Spee, this is a distinctive and captivating chapter story that newly independent readers will love to discover for themselves; as well as a perfect book for sharing and reading aloud.

Great for...
advanced learners



Creature Teacher (Oxford University Press, paperback, £5.99)

It's the first day at a new school for both of them, but by lunchtime Jake has already decided that Mr Hyde is the best teacher in the world. He's clever and funny, and unlike Mr Sharp, doesn't make children clean the toilets with their toothbrushes if they get into trouble. In fact, he's practically perfect... until he gets upset. Because when this particular teacher is emotional, he transforms into a burping, bouncing, purple paint eating creature who is naughtier than any pupil could possibly be. Can Jake and his friends prevent the head finding out about Mr Hyde's secret while they try and turn him back into a human being?

Great for...
Wimpy Kid enthusiasts



The Unlikely Adventures of Mabel Jones (Puffin, paperback, £6.99)

Will Mabbitt's is a distinctly fresh and original voice for the under tens, and one that is bound to appeal to boys and girls across a wide range of reading abilities;

which is a rare and very welcome quality amongst books aimed at this often tricky age group. There's subtle wit threaded in amongst the obligatory slapstick and gore; and the narrative explores some serious emotional dilemmas as it bounces from one

hilarious scene to the next. Ross Collins' illustrations are a joy; but this is writing that paints a vivid picture using words alone and creates characters that practically leap from the pages of their own accord.

Great for...
young adventurers

Brilliant books for KS2 READERS



Hilo – the boy who crashed to earth (Penguin, paperback, £7.99)

DJ is a very, very ordinary boy; at least, that's how he sees himself. Hilo, on the other hand, falls out of the sky one day wearing only silver underpants, shoots lasers from his hands, and is, it eventually turns out, being chased by a monster set on destroying the planet... Presented in graphic novel form, this is a truly exceptional piece of storytelling, with fantastic artwork and superb dialogue. It's frequently funny, but there are also profoundly touching moments, as DJ struggles to overcome his loneliness, find a sense of self, and reconnect with his lost soulmate. As Hilo himself would say: outstanding!

Great for...
reluctant readers



Wolf Hollow (Corgi Children's, paperback, £6.99)

Mature readers will be charmed by Lauren Wolf's perceptive, honest and questioning narrator, who is determined to explain as clearly and truthfully as possible exactly what happened when her previously uneventful life in sleepy Wolf Hollow, Pennsylvania was turned upside down by the arrival of cruel and strangely cold Betty Glengarry in town. Set in the long shadow of the early years of World War II, this is a tale of prejudice and trust; and whilst there are brutal edges to the plot that some youngsters might find shocking, it is still an ultimately uplifting read, with hope for humanity at its heart

Great for...
sensitive thinkers



Electrigirl (OUP, paperback, £6.99)

Following a bizarre accident, Holly Sparkes is eventually forced to concede that she has been transformed into what her brother Joe gleefully describes as a 'human Electro-Magnetic Pulse'. Gradually, she learns to control her new superpowers – and when her best friend mysteriously disappears, she's able to use them to foil a sinister plot hatched by a technological genius. Original, clever and smartly written, this is a book that will appeal to a broad range of readers, especially as after every few chapters the first person narrative drops out and the story switches to fast-forward with the inclusion of graphic novel frames while Electrigirl does her stuff.

Great for...
superhero fans



The Many Worlds of Albie Bright (Nosy Crow, paperback, £6.99)

Albert Stephen Bright is the son of two scientists (and named for two more). And so, when his mother dies, it's perhaps not surprising that his dad should try and explain it in terms of quantum physics. Less predictable is what happens when Albie takes this information, adds it to what he knows about Schrödinger's famous theoretical feline and the radioactive properties of a rotting banana – and constructs a machine that enables him to explore parallel universes in search of one where his mum is still alive. This is an accessible, inclusive delight of an adventure, with a bittersweet centre – that will take readers as far as their curiosity dares them to go.

Great for...
science lovers



Railhead (OUP, hardback, £9.99)

This thrilling adventure from the apparently limitless imagination of Philip Reeve steers away from the dystopian, post-apocalyptic visions that have so dominated the fiction scene for children and

young adults in recent years; offering instead a heady slice of high-tech space action set in The Network Empire, a largely peaceful and prosperous society where a series of railway lines criss-cross the galaxy, linking dozens of planets using

hyperspace portals called K-gates. The writing is masterful; the characters fantastic; and the ending, perfection. There is room for a sequel – but as a standalone novel this is simply exceptional.

Great for...
thrill seekers

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A professional ATTITUDE

This issue's anonymous PTA contributor has a few words to say about preconceptions...

I always had an image of what sort of parent joined the PTA.

She was a middle class, 'stay at home' mother, who clearly had her ducks in the neatest of rows. Shiny hair, nice clothes, calm and smiley. You know the woman I'm picturing, right? And I had this crazy idea that the PTA was all about connections, a way of 'buying' your children's way into sports teams or main parts in the nativity.

But I was wrong. So wrong.

PTAs are for everyone – mums and dads, with paid employment or without – and they're fun. It's a rewarding challenge, finding the best ways for parents and teachers to make improvements that are for the benefit of everyone, not just the children. Yes, fundraising is an important aspect of what the PTA does. But for me, the biggest part is the fun. Putting on discos, film clubs, the annual Christmas fair, battling with the British weather to have summer picnics; lifelong memories are made on those days.

Something from everyone

I'm a firefighter so I'm juggling all the time; with shift work and two young children, there are definitely no ducks in a row here. I'm generally overdue a haircut, and my clothes have stains I dare not identify. I'm the parent usually seen running in late, all too often a

little shouty and probably minus the PE kit and dinner money. 'Bake sale' offerings are nearly always shop bought en route and I live in fear – genuine, cold sweat fear – of fancy dress days. I don't fit my preconceived idea of the PTA, then; but still, I fit.

My shifts work on a four on, four off rotation – but that's the joy of the PTA; because we work as a team, we can give each other flexibility. There are loads of skills that my partner and I have from our jobs that transfer over to PTA activities, not to mention all those colleagues we constantly tap up to supply raffle prizes or buy balloon race tickets.

Between me and my partner (who also works shifts) we make every PTA meeting we can, usually with our preschooler in tow (said daughter well provided with snacks and Peppa Pig, which distracts with varying degrees of success). I help at every event I'm not working. When I can't be there in person I make posters or advertise on social media. Having a few dads on the PTA is really positive. It definitely brings variety to the activities we plan and a broader skill set to pull favours from. We're very lucky as a team to have carpenters, painters, singers, shop owners, landlords, bakers and some fabulous, savvy shoppers. All important links in the chain.

A chance to learn

My skills really don't lie in organisation; I can barely keep up with what I have going on in my own life, let alone elsewhere. But I can bring new ideas to meetings that I think the kids will enjoy and I'm consistently the goofy helper. Come Halloween I'll don a full costume; I'm a rosy-cheeked elf at Christmas; and at every disco I take to the stage, ensuring each child knows and is able to perform the dance moves to Agadoo and the Macarena – imparting important life skills. Luckily my children haven't reached the point that they find me painfully embarrassing. Yet.

The PTA team is really open to new members and new ideas. I'm looking forward to setting up a 'mud run' for pupils to compete in later this year, it's a privileged position to be able to share things I enjoy.

The ethos of my son's school is that everyone matters, everyone has skills and everyone has a place. The PTA is no different. It's helped me learn and grow.

I know that as parents, we are busy. There are multiple demands on our time; all the time. But I've gained so much from going back to school – professionally and personally – and that, I think, is a really important message to get out there.



The homework CONUNDRUM

When it comes to setting tasks for children to complete at home, schools struggle to please everyone – could it be time for a new approach, wonders **Mark Creasy**...

In my book *Unhomework: How to get the most out of homework, without really setting it* I describe the issue of homework thus:

"I think it's fair to say that homework for parents is a 'Goldilocks' issue, that is, to some it's too much, others never enough and the rest it's just right (as a recent survey at my school testifies!) Although I know this ignores those parents who don't even know it is being set, or that their children complete it – or those whose children 'did it at school' – yeah right!"

Unfortunately, some four years later I would say little has changed. I have now worked in eight schools, in both primary and secondary settings; state and independent sectors, and have been a dad for the past 12 years. During this time I have seen that my daughter's homework has increased from weekly spellings, to the 'joys' of secondary school's seemingly endless list of subject specific tasks.

What can parents do?

Clearly the majority of parents aren't teachers, so may find the demands of homework something more akin to torture – especially if they had negative experiences of education themselves (although, there are some who relish the homework and can't wait to do it themselves). Our hectic lives mean finding space in the schedule to be able to support homework can be a major challenge, amongst all of the competing demands for our time that we have.

In surveys parents confirm that getting their child to complete homework can be a challenge. They express the issue of a nightly battle, one which they feel they cannot win and many retreat, saving their 'ammunition' for areas of conflict they feel they can succeed with.

Why is it like this?

Unfortunately, most children's homework tends to follow the 'ten minute rule', whereby children are given ten minutes per night, per year group (or grade), as cited by Professor Harris Cooper in his research between 1987 and 2003. This is despite Michael Gove, then Education Secretary, announcing in March 2012 that there would now be "... no government guidelines about how much homework a child should do each night and that this instead should fall to individual headteachers..."

So, why does it persist this way? There are increasing examples of schools abandoning homework altogether, from Essex to Scotland; in fact, Spanish parents organised a strike to complain about it and, as is frequently cited in the media, Scandinavian and South Asian

schools don't have homework at all (although the latter do tend to have at least two hours of 'prep' at school, believing that teachers are best placed to support additional learning, not parents – many children then return home to undertake further exercises in learning, or music practice).

I think the simple answer is, too often schools have the cart before the horse. They have a policy created – often based on what's always been there and what is seen as 'best', rather than on research – by



teachers who frequently enjoyed school themselves and completed homework with few struggles. However, as Admiral Grace Hopper said, "The most dangerous phrase in the English language is 'we've always done it this way'"

What do we really want?

In primary schools, take one startling fact: *Research shows homework has barely (if) any positive impact on learning!*

The work of John Hattie, analysing over 800 education studies to be able to look at the effect sizes of interventions within education, shows the best have a positive effect of 0.40 and above.

Homework has an effect size of 0.29, but when split into primary and secondary this drops to just 0.15 for the former. Alfie Kohn goes even further, stating that no study has ever been reliable on homework as the research is never conducted in the home and so can't be effectively validated, and certainly not correlated with academic performance.

And herein, I believe lies the real problem – returning again to the bind of the school policy.

Many teachers set homework which is too generic, bland and designed to tick the 'I've set homework because I'm expected to' box. And why? Because they believe it's what parents want – which they tend to, because it's what they expect!

Changing the status quo

Based on conversations I regularly have with parents, I've put together a short list of 'homework FAQs', along with my responses:

1) What does 'good' homework look like?

It should be individual to your child, designed to stretch and challenge them if related to what they've already learned, or serve as a way to see what they know prior to commencing a topic – which is then designed around the differences of the class.

2) How closely should parents be involved with homework?

Barely at all, just show an interest and ensure it's of best quality for the child's ability.

3) How could parents respond to schools if they are not happy with any aspect of homework provision as it stands?

Firstly, check what is being said by the child is true – it may not always be! Then speak to the teacher; gossiping in the playground helps no-one and undermines the school. You never know, there may be a good reason why things are being done – or not done – a certain way. If you are still unsatisfied, speak to someone more senior.

However, I have some further advice – my 'Golden 5' if you will:

- Listen to your child read for at least 15 minutes every night.
- Practise spellings daily – too many people take pride in saying 'I'm no good at spelling'.
- Practise times tables – forwards, backwards, divisions, as well as other mental maths daily.
- Expect no more homework from your child's school than that – it will be no more than half an hour a day.
- Think of all the 'unhomework' they can do with you: cooking, shopping, looking after pets, watching the news, chatting, etc. Children love to learn when it's related to the reality about them, so try never to miss an opportunity to support them in doing just that!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mark is a parent and teacher with a passion to achieve the best results for all children, not by ticking boxes or simply doing

things because they've always been done that way. He is the author of *Unhomework: How to get the most out of homework, without really setting it* (Independent Thinking Press, £12.99)



THINK BIGGER

30 Want to enliven your committee, bag new recruits, engage the local community and swell the coffers? It's all within your grasp, argues **Anna Blewett**

If there is a man or woman alive who has yet to experience the phenomenon of *deja vu*, one suspects they're not part of a parent teacher association. After all, you've only to staff the Christmas raffle or summer tombola a few times to get a strong dose, to see the same kids, parents, and even prizes return term after term. Busting out of your school's sphere of influence, and derailing the standard run of fetes, fairs and discos, takes energy and inspiration but for committees that think big the rewards can be transformative.

Beyond the catchment

If your parents – and committee members for that matter – are becoming a little jaded by the endless raids on their limited resources, there are inspiring examples of how a whole new audience can be tapped, filling coffers and giving morale a boost in the process. Last summer Wilshire Dacre Academy in Hitchin achieved its long-held desire to refurbish the school clock tower after the PTA, properly known as 'POWA' or 'partners of Wilshire Dacre', raised £8,000

by designing and selling 'I [heart] Hitchin' jute bags. Priced £5 each, the shopping bags raised £3,450 from townspeople in the first two weeks they were on sale. In Yorkshire, meanwhile, the PTA of Sharow CofE School raised an impressive £10,000 through a 'promises auction', cash that has contributed towards the creation of a parents' car park.

For some committees, rebooting parents' relationship with the school and engaging the local community is as big a motivation as cold hard cash. Kristy and Andy Nicholls became involved with creating an annual fun run when their son enrolled at Frisby CE Primary School in Leicestershire. "That year we attended three local runs and it was then that realisation hit that we, as a school PTA, could do this," recalls Kristy. "The Frisby Fun Run itself started in April 2011. For us it was never just about raising valuable funds for the school PTA; this run represented more than that. It provided an opportunity for everyone to get active; from young to old, something which both Andy and I feel passionate about."

They're not alone; the run has become part of a series of races in the local area and



benefits from pooled publicity and support. "From the start the event had a community feel to it," says Kristy. "It was marshalled by governors, parents, even the headteacher, and supported by many local primary schools. We personally took on the event in April 2012 when we realised we were probably well suited to it. I was involved as a teacher in primary school cross country and my husband was a runner with Stilton Striders; we used our links to attract entries from further afield."

Getting bums off seats

Now a much-anticipated annual fixture, the Frisby Fun Run attracts between 250 and 350 runners of all ages, and roughly the same number of spectators. Participants pay an entry fee to run the one-mile course through streams, bogs, and across muddy fields (which really does, Andy assures us, constitute 'fun'). "I believe the amount raised was roughly the same or slightly more than the annual fete, but less hassle to organise," says Andy of the most recent run. "Preparation before the event involved less people and there were always a few parents, governors and teachers, as well as friends from running clubs, who would help on the day, which was when it was needed. We have roughly 100 children at the school but the fun run attracts people from all over the county who would never have come to a fete."

"About 15 to 20 helpers are needed on the day to set out the course, start the race, record the results, sell refreshments, marshal, and hand out medals at the finish. Processing the entries takes time, especially in the final couple of weeks before the race. Having a stable team over the last three years has helped though. The first two years were fairly stressful for the organisers with everything having to be done at the last minute. Since then, we've been able to plan, co-ordinate with the other races in the series and handover to a new team in an organised manner who we'll continue to support."

Despite the school's size it's able to raise up to £1,000 from the run, depending on sponsorship. "The event is a star fundraiser but it's also something that can, and arguably should, be farmed off to a couple of people who have an interest in it but don't want to be day-to-day PTA helpers," admits Andy. "At least three PTA chairs/vice-chairs have organised this race and all of them stopped being on the PTA at the end of that year!"

Going for broke

The work:profit ratio needn't be quite so taxing; if your committee has its very own Del Boy you'll know that if it's profit you're after, sometimes you have to speculate to accumulate. That's just what a PTA in Llantwit Major in West Wales did, gambling £2,500 of hard-won funds in a bid to double

its money. In 2015 two single-form entry primaries in the town were amalgamated to create the brand new Ysgol Y Ddraig, an event that the merging PTAs were keen to celebrate. "We wanted to do something big to bring us all together and encourage the community in," says Rachel Hillier, chair of one of merging committees. "I had been holding onto some information about booking a circus for a long time. We didn't have the space at the school where I was but the new site had a big field. So the first contact I had with the new head was an email to say 'Welcome' and 'Can we have a circus?'"

And so it was that in April last year Rachel and her committee put down a £500 deposit to bring Circus Zyair and its big top accommodating more than 600 paying guests to the school field. "With about two weeks to go we still had 300 tickets to sell and I was starting to panic a bit, but when all the circus actually arrived and the big top went up we had people queuing outside the school office," says Rachel. "The trucks had rolled in at midnight and I'd arranged for a combination lock to be put on the school gate but somehow the message didn't get through. I got a call in the middle of the night and had to make the decision to let them break in. They took the gate off the hinges, and the next day the police got a call from a local resident to say there were gypsies on the field!"

"On the day there was driving rain but by then the tickets were long sold and it went really really well. We sold candy floss and had a local brewer selling drinks from a stall. It took about eight of us to run the bar, collect tickets and make sure everyone got in and out safely but from our point of view the organisation wasn't huge. No more than a Christmas fair or summer fete. It was a case of just being brave enough to commit ourselves to pay £2,500 for a circus and say to ourselves 'We are going to get enough people to pay for it and make some money.' We made about £2,500 profit, a bit of which we spent on getting someone in to teach the kids circus skills, which they loved!"

The circus will return to Llantwit Major, but not before Rachel's PTA has explored new avenues. "For us, two PTAs coming together means lots of ideas so we've decided to do one big unusual event each year. We're doing a duck race this year."



TAKING THE PLUNGE? DON'T FORGET TO...

...READ THE SMALL PRINT

"Two days before the circus was due to arrive I thought I better just check the terms and conditions, which said we had to provide our own chairs," says Rachel Hillier. "I had one sleepless night panicking and trying to source 700 chairs before the circus let me know it was an outdated clause."

...ATTEND TO THE LESS GLAMOROUS DETAILS

"We had a scare one year when the insurance provided to us was to be withdrawn when the local organisation providing it lost funding," says Andy Nicholls. "This would have added both admin and maybe £200 cost to the event."

...WORK SOCIAL MEDIA

POWA managed to get Brit Award winner and local hero James Bay to pose with one of its I [heart] Hitchin bags, and made great use of the shot on Twitter.

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"If it's profit you're after, sometimes you have to speculate to accumulate..."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anna Blewett is a freelance journalist who also does her darndest to raise the profile of her PTA's PatchUpOurPool campaign. Restraining orders from Twitter's celebrity swimmers are surely in the post.



Divide – and **CONQUER**

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Could a fresh approach to events organisation help avoid 'PTA burnout'? **Martha Osgood** has been giving it a try...



By the time my youngest leaves primary school, I'll have been swimming about in the PTA stock pool for 15 years. That's 15 summer fetes, 15 Christmas Bazaars, 120 cake sales, and at least 300 raffle tickets. Given those numbers, coupled with an extreme aversion to top-down committees, it's not surprising that my willingness to sign up for additional PTA commitments wanes more than it waxes.

I struggle with the seemingly endless merry-go-round of excited new parents and jaded worn out chairpeople. Each year there is a desperate plea for new members, each year the committee announces that this year looks like the year that the committee might fold. Those who are valiant persist, re-join, keep going, and buy way more than their fair share of raffle tickets. Others, like me, stare at our feet as we dart past the recruitment team at the school gate and mumble something about work, last year, and other committees.



“Chairpeople come and go, they are justifiably too distracted by their endless ‘to do’ list actually to realise there might be a way out...”



One night only

Last year, while once again wrestling with guilt after the annual cry for help from the outgoing committee, a friend and I made our own commitment. We decided that once a year, we would put together our own crack-team of like minded individuals to host an event. Rather than commit to monthly meetings and a year's worth of events, in-fighting, and parental politics, we would promise every year to take on one event from start to finish and throw our all at raising as much money as possible in one night. That way, we figured, we were more likely to maintain our commitment year on year, plus we would have the added enjoyment of planning a brilliant evening with good friends.

Our first event was tried and trusted: a chilli and quiz night. Four of us wrote the quiz over a period of about two weeks. One meeting to decide what the rounds would be, and who would write them and the rest was done by dropbox. Six other friends were recruited, each to make a chilli (meat or vegetarian) and a green salad for 8-10 people. We cooked the baked potatoes for 60 in the school ovens while heating the chillis and setting up the hall. Did I say we? Aforementioned friend who is a catering whizz cooked the potatoes – apparently it's harder to poison people with spuds than rice. On the night we jazzed up the school hall bistro style and plonked a pot of chilli, a big salad, potatoes, butter and a few baguettes on each table. Other parents and friends were more than willing to help clear the plates and clean up at the end of the evening.

Tickets were sold at £10 a head, and on

the night there was a selection of wine and beer on offer for which guests could make a donation. In all we raised around £700.

For a small village school with just over 100 pupils this represents around 10% of the average annual total for the committee. You can do the maths, if all 60 or so families each took part in one event, most of the money could be raised without the need for a large, over-stretched, and often painfully political committee.

More for less

This devolved model has gained a little traction; another parent (a wine writer) regularly hosts what he calls 'Call My Wine Bluff'. Parents and villagers pay £20 to enjoy the libatious and loquacious panel game. Participating in the event involves drinking a glass of wine while listening to three panel members describe the origins and cost of said beverage. A light tapas style dinner is provided and teams work together to drink the wine and guess who is telling the truth, who is lying, and how much the wine really costs. Unsurprisingly it always sells out.

I think the model needs to go further; at the moment we get a 'thanks so much for organising that', but nobody really wants to hear what we're saying. Chairpeople come and go, they are justifiably too distracted by their endless 'to do' list actually to realise there might be a way out. By the time they are desperate enough to consider an alternative, less demanding model, a new and enthusiastic chair has been elected and is too busy navigating the bake sale calendar and summer fete stall plans to consider taking the time to stop and revisit the overall structure. We simply keep doing it this way

because that's the way it's always been done and people burn out too quickly to innovate.

I am not naive to the nit and grit of registered charities; somebody has to be the treasurer, and somebody needs to report back at the AGM, but maybe if other tasks were taken away (the begging, enlisting, minute taking, delegating, negotiating, and peacemaking) these jobs might seem less daunting and people may commit for longer stints. Committees may become populated by streamlined marathon runners instead of chaotic relay teams.

As for us, we haven't yet agreed on this year's event - there's been talk of calling it Mother's Ruin, but the details are still a little fuzzy. We do know that to guarantee healthy profits at an evening event you need cheap and easy to serve food, booze, and something to keep brains and minds busy. We would also like to give some of the profits to a more deserving cause because we know that 'peak charity' is often reached at a local level before wider issues get a look in... but that's a whole different article.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Martha Oxgood lives in rural Oxfordshire with her husband, three children, four cats, and one dejected dog!

Safety FIRST

Whether you are putting on a fireworks display or a coffee morning, you'll need a risk assessment, says **Lesley Smeardon** - but there's no reason why that should be a burden...

Accidents happen; it's a fact of life. But when you are part of a school PTA holding regular events and activities, you need to be proactive in your efforts to make sure staff, volunteers and visitors are able to enjoy themselves safely. So, assessing the risks and taking steps to reduce the chances of anything going wrong, will give you the confidence and reassurance that you've done your best to make your event run as smoothly as possible.

The prospect of having to come up with an 'official' risk assessment can be a daunting one, but it's an essential part of events planning - and it doesn't have to be a complex process. In fact, the simpler and clearer it is, the better! These top tips, which draw on information from the Health and Safety Executive, could save you time and stress (not to mention help avoid an accident), when you're putting together your next fundraiser:

Step 1: Identify possible hazards

The first thing to do is to make a full assessment of the likely dangers that could harm any volunteers or visitors at the event you are planning. This should cover everything from the set-up, through to the event itself and throughout the clear-up afterwards.

Trailing cables and wet floors, overcrowding and overflowing rubbish, are some examples of the kinds of risks which need to be considered, but as the list is endless, you will need to be systematic and rigorous in your consideration of what could pose a problem.

If you're holding the event at your own school you may feel more aware of likely hazards, but don't be complacent; try to be as thorough as possible. If the event is being held off-site, get to know the venue and list all possible problems. It might be worth looking at the risk assessment already held



by the school or venue and maybe meet the health and safety lead or the facilities manager to make sure everything has been covered and considered.

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how

Once you've noted each possible danger, you need to identify which groups of people might be affected, for example: PTA committee members; pupils, school staff; or the general public. In each case, define the problem – if you've got a bouncy castle, a risk may be that a child might fall off; or a visitor might slip on a wet floor where drinks are being sold. Work through the hazards and consider all aspects of your event and the activities being held.

Step 3: Evaluate the risks

Having identified the dangers and those likely to be affected, it's then the job of the PTA committee together to decide whether the risk is low, medium or high and to determine what to do about it. Work out whether the hazard can be removed completely and decide if the existing precautions are enough to minimise it or whether more needs to be done. Remember, by law, you have to do everything reasonably practicable to protect people from harm when you are putting on an event.

Step 4: Record your findings and take action

Once you've carried out the above steps, make sure the information is properly recorded and shared with committee members. A simple table will help you see everything at a glance and is an easy way of adding detail to each element. Working together, begin to outline the safety measures

needed to eliminate or reduce the chances of harm being caused. Remember, the information within the assessment doesn't need to be complicated. If there is a chance of too many children being on the bouncy castle, the safety measure could be to limit the number of children allowed on at the same time and to have two adult supervisors there to oversee the activity throughout. Identifying the hazard, agreeing the safety measure to minimise or eliminate the risk and most importantly, implementing the safety measure will underpin the value of the whole assessment.

Step 5: Review and update

It's worth keeping all assessments on file so that they can be referred to at future events. Remember that even if you are holding the same event as last year, you need to review

your risk assessment and update it to take into account any possible changes or differences. It will also allow any new PTA committee members to be fully apprised of the hazards and safety measures that need to be implemented and will provide you with the opportunity to incorporate learnings from past events.

Finally...

PTAs around the country put on events regularly. These assessments should be part of your planning discussions, but they don't need to be complicated. They should simply provide reassurance that you've considered all possible hazards and help you to put in measures to eliminate them or reduce them to low-risk. In other words, a risk assessment is there to give you confidence, and help your event run smoothly and safely.

EXTRA SUPPORT

PTA UK members can download a risk assessment template to adapt to their event and can log in to the Advice Hub for further information and support at www.pta.org.uk. Membership will give you access to a range of exclusive resources and information to support your PTA efforts and fundraising events. Contact the membership team on 0300 123 5460 or visit pta.org.uk/PTAs/Member-benefits to find out more.

Join the PTA UK Facebook page to share tips and information with others active in PTAs around the country and to share views on carrying out risk assessments.

Other useful contacts:

Health and Safety Executive
www.hse.gov.uk/ 0800 345 0055
Five Steps to Risk Assessment
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lesley Smeardon is PTA UK's membership services manager

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As this year's tests approach, education expert **Sue Cowley** explains how they work, what they mean - and the best way to approach them

What are 'SATS'?

Almost everyone refers to the end of key stage tests as 'SATS', although technically speaking the tests are 'National Curriculum assessments'. The term SATs came about when the tests were first introduced in 1991. At that point the intention was to introduce Standard Assessment Tasks. Over the years teachers and parents used the acronym SATs and the name stuck. The tests are done in English and maths, during May, at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Previously there were also SATs at the end of Key Stage 3 (in Year 9) but these were scrapped in 2008. Towards the end of the summer term, parents will be told whether their child has met the 'expected level' or not in the tests. The expected level is set at 100 on a scaled score. In KS2 tests 120 is the highest score and 80 the lowest; in KS1 tests 115 is the highest score and 85 the lowest.

What happens in the run up to SATs?

Schools take different approaches to the tests. Some give the children lots of practice tests and run booster sessions or holiday revision schemes. They might

narrow the curriculum to give the children more time on maths and English and set lots of homework for the children to complete. Other schools barely make any fuss at all about the tests. They carry on as normal, with a broad curriculum. Perhaps the only time the children do any mock tests is in the week before SATs, to give them an idea of what to expect.

Where a school is in a 'category' (an Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement' or 'Special Measures') it may be that they feel under pressure to push the children. If your child's behaviour begins to change in Year 2 or Year 6, and they start to become anxious, you should speak to the school. SATs are a test of the school, and not of your child. Even if the school is under pressure they should not be passing this on. In 2016 parents of Year 2 children held a 'national strike', where they kept their children off school for a day to protest against excessive testing.

What will SATs tests be like for my child?

KS1: The teacher runs the tests in the classroom, during May. Some of the tests





Top tips for successful SATs

Do:

- ✓ Ensure that your child gets plenty of sleep in the run up to SATs.
- ✓ Reassure your child that their results do not count for anything and that it will not be a disaster if they haven't done well.
- ✓ Approach your child's school if you have any concerns and arrange a meeting with the head teacher.
- ✓ Explain to your child that, if they don't meet the 'expected level', all that this means is that they might need some additional support.

Don't:

- ✗ Spend lots of time 'revising' in the weekend before the tests – these are not the kind of tests where last minute revision will help.
- ✗ Let your child start to believe that they will either 'pass' or 'fail' the tests.
- ✗ Allow your child to feel that they might let their school or teacher down if they do not do well.
- ✗ Compare your child's results with other parents – you might be tempted if your child has done well, but this is not helpful for the child or for their classmates.

may be done in small groups; others as a whole class. The children may not even be aware that they are taking them. The tests are not strictly timed like they are in KS2. They consist of:

■ **Two reading tests:** Paper 1 is 30 minutes and Paper 2 is 40 minutes. The children read a booklet of non-fiction and fiction texts and answer some questions on them.

■ **Two SPaG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) tests:** a spelling test of 15 minutes and a grammar and punctuation test of 20 minutes.

■ **Two maths tests:** Paper 1 lasts for 20 minutes and tests the children's arithmetic. Paper 2 lasts for 35 minutes and tests the children's mathematical reasoning skills.

The teacher uses the results of the tests to inform the teacher assessment. They will give each child a scaled score and parents will be told whether or not the child has met the 'expected level' of 100. During KS1, children will also take a 'phonics screening check' towards the end of Year 1.

KS2: The tests are run in all schools at the same time, over four days in May (in 2017 the tests run from 8 – 11 May). These tests are much more like real exams than those in KS1, and are run under strict test conditions. The children take six papers:

■ **Paper 1** is a reading test that lasts for 60 minutes. The children are given a booklet with fiction, non-fiction and poetry texts in it and questions to answer on the texts.

■ **Paper 2** is a grammar, punctuation and vocabulary test that lasts for 45 minutes. The questions become gradually more challenging as the child goes through them.

■ **Paper 3** is a spelling test that lasts for 15 minutes. The teacher reads out sentences to the class and the children write the correct spelling to go in the gap.

■ **Paper 4** is an arithmetic test that lasts for 30 minutes.

■ **Papers 5 and 6** are mathematical reasoning tests that last for 40 minutes each, and involve maths problems given in context.

The tests are marked externally and the results are returned in July. The teacher will also do a separate teacher assessment for your child at the end of the year.

Why do the children take SATs?

SATs were never designed to be a test of the children. They were developed to be a test of teachers and schools, as part of a package of accountability measures. The idea was that SATs would help to map a child's progress through their schooling by giving a check at the end of each key

“Probably the most important advice of all is not to make your child feel under pressure...”



stage. The results would then help Ofsted and parents see whether the school was 'adding value' and helping children to make progress, or not. Schools are ranked in league tables according to the results children get in the tests.

What do the results of SATs mean for children?

Although in reality, the results mean little or nothing for the children, parents should understand how schools may use the results. The child's scaled score is passed on to the secondary school. This score may then be used to map the child's expected academic trajectory during Key Stages 3 and 4 (and sometimes even 5). Interestingly, even though the SATs are done only in English and maths, the scores are often used to predict expected outcomes in all curriculum subjects.

Does my child have to do SATs?

Parents can speak to the head teacher to request that their child does not sit SATs, but it is at the head teacher's discretion whether or not they comply with this request. Where parents feel strongly about SATs, they might choose to absent their child for the week of the KS2 tests, or they might even take their child off roll. (In 2014, when my son was in Year 6, I took my children out of school for six months to avoid SATs, and to educate them 'on the road'. This year, my younger child is in Year 6 and we are planning to boycott the tests again by taking the week off school.)

Theoretically, there is a one-week period after the tests in which the school could still get your child to sit them. However, if the parent states that the child has been online during their absence, or has had contact with their peers who have sat the tests, the head teacher would not be allowed to make the child sit them. It is trickier for parents of children in KS1 to avoid the tests, because they can happen at any point in May. If you do not want your child to take SATs, the best first step is to arrange a meeting with the head teacher to talk over your concerns.

Why do I sometimes hear negative talk about SATs?

Many teachers and parents feel that SATs have had a negative effect on what happens in primary schools. The curriculum seems to have narrowed from the way it was a decade or two ago, and schools feel under pressure to 'get results'. Some teachers feel that schools are 'gaming' the tests by taking measures to ensure that their children's results are as high as they

"SATs were never designed to be a test of the children. They were developed to be a test of teachers and schools..."



can possibly be. Reports of malpractice in test administration have increased. Teachers feel that the last year of each key stage should really be a time of celebration and enjoyment.

How can I support my child with SATs?

Probably the most important advice of all is not to make your child feel under pressure to 'do well' at SATs. Although it is natural for children to want to be successful, feeling under pressure to do well in a test at this age is likely to have a negative impact on their wellbeing and attainment. Where the school sets homework, support your child in completing it, and if, for example, your child is struggling with times tables, you could help them to practise these. One of the most important things to do is to encourage your child to read regularly at home. Studies have shown that those children who read regularly for pleasure are more likely to be successful at school.

How can I find out more?

The Rising Stars website has created some free parents' guides explaining more about the tests: www.risingstars-uk.com/Subjects/Parents.

Deputy head teacher Michael Tidd has made some useful videos for parents about SATs: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC2yhtEtk4o

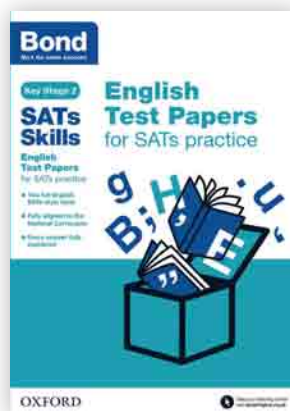
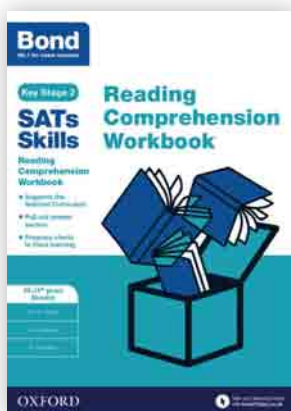
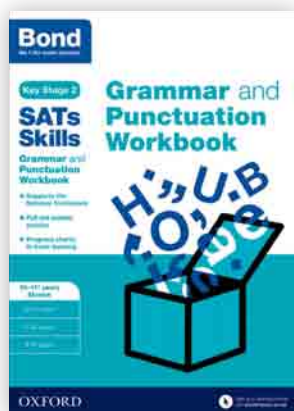
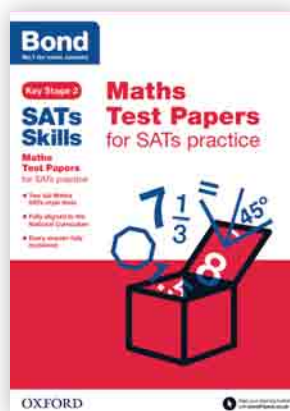
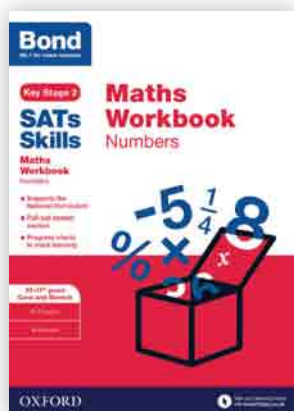
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sue Cowley is an author and teacher. Her latest book *Road School* is about her road schooling adventures with her children. See www.roadschool diary.co.uk for more.

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No parent proclaims to know it all when it comes to internet safety. With an ever changing tech landscape we can all find ourselves playing catch up every so often. However, as a PTA member, you are in the advantageous position of being able to influence the parent body of your school to help their children be safe online, and direct them to the right places to seek help if they need it. It's important that parents feel empowered, and supported by the school, as they do this; enabling their children to make the most of the many, wonderful things the internet has to offer, whilst safeguarding them against the many risks that young people can face online – sometimes even on a daily basis.

teachwire.net/primary



“It’s necessary that both parents and schools are working together to support young people effectively”

It’s vital to be informed about parental controls and how to activate them on children’s devices. All of the UK’s home internet providers offer free parental controls to help reduce the chances of children stumbling across inappropriate content. Furthermore there are additional parental controls that can be activated on each device a child uses, whether that’s to help manage in-app purchases or location services.

Parental controls and filters are great tools, unfortunately however they can never be 100% effective. It’s crucial that children have the right tools to be able to deal with this situation if children do stumble across something inappropriate. Is there someone they can tell? Do they know how to report content online? Do they know how to block unwanted contact from strangers? Schools need to strive to create a culture that focuses on online resilience, and to make sure children are able to evaluate online content and contact and make good decisions whenever and wherever they are using technology.

With emerging risks and new requirements, it’s more important than ever for all PTAs and schools to make online

A home-school partnership

So, how can you inspire the parents at your school to do something about making a change when it comes to keeping children safe online?

Parents and PTAs can play an active role in helping children to navigate the online world safely. It’s necessary that both parents and schools are working together to support young people effectively. If positive conversations around technology and the internet are happening at home, this needs to continue in school; and vice versa. Communication is key, and just as parents might not know everything when it comes to keeping children safe online, teachers might not, either. It’s important to work together to find solutions, including talking to other parents and teachers in the school community and beyond it.

All parents and carers need to know that they can turn to the school if they’re concerned about an internet safety issue

their child might be experiencing. Schools have a duty of care for every single child on their roll, and if an internet safety issue arises, such as cyberbullying, even if it happens out of school hours, it’s essential that the school is informed and takes necessary measures to help and support you and your child.

Research shows that internet safety provision in education is most successful when a whole school approach is adopted. Internet safety needs to be embedded in a school curriculum – from the early years onwards, and students and parents should feel supported by the whole school if an internet safety issue should arise. The PTA can play a vital role in facilitating this.

Parental controls

With new internet enabled devices being released all the time, parents may be concerned with the vast array of platforms via which their child can access the internet.

The golden rules

When it comes to online safety, remember:

- **Be interested** – ask your child’s school about their online safety policies; how are these communicated to pupils, how is internet safety taught and how often?
- **Keep it positive** – young people are more likely to listen and take on board internet safety messages if they are being encouraged to use technology in a positive way.
- **Keep it open** – keep dialogue open and make sure children know they can always talk to someone if they’re concerned about anything online.

safety a priority. Even though the positive opportunities offered by technology can be harnessed to create a generation of empowered digital citizens, there are always new internet safety issues emerging which change the school's landscape. In the last year, key policy documents have been released which can advise schools about internet safety provision.

Official guidance

Childnet's 'Cyberbullying Guidance' is updated guidance which helps schools to effectively prevent and respond to cyberbullying. It is a document that is empowering for schools, as it draws upon some great examples from other schools about what they are doing in this area. Some are using peer to peer models to effectively combat cyberbullying and others are focusing on the parent-school relationship, making sure that parents are well informed and there is a positive ethos around the internet and technology in school. PTAs can play a key role in creating

this positive ethos by encouraging parents to communicate with the school about their concerns and also ensuring that the school communicates to parents about it in a clear and accessible way.

Another key new development to be aware of is 'Keeping Children Safe in Education', statutory guidance for schools in England and Wales that was updated in September 2016. It states that schools are now required to have 'appropriate levels' of filtering and monitoring among other key changes. Also, with the growing threat of online extremism and radicalisation, the Prevent duty was revised last year; this is a policy for schools to ensure children are protected from online extremism and other types of harmful content.

Schools are aware of these policies and it's helpful if PTAs also know where to find these documents, too. Encourage other parents to ask questions for their own understanding, and become aware of how these policies are integrated within the school curriculum.

Invest to protect

It can hugely benefit schools to invest in e-safety and the PTA is often able to help raise funds for this. At the UK Safer Internet Centre, we offer a range of services for schools where we can provide speakers to come and talk to your pupils, parents and staff. Childnet also has a Digital Leaders Programme which empowers pupil led e-safety within the school through an online platform where the students work through modules with their team of Digital Leaders.

Encouraging a close partnership with schools and parents is a key component in ensuring a whole school commitment to, and ownership, of online safety. The PTA can mobilise and strengthen this partnership through empowering parents within the school to keep their children safe online.

Visit www.saferinternet.org.uk/parents and www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers for more advice.

Safer Internet Day

Safer Internet Day happens in February each year, and offers the perfect opportunity to highlight these important conversations at school and at home. For 2018, it will take place on Tuesday, February 6th, and it's never too early to start thinking about it; so do encourage your school to use the free education packs that are available to plan activities for pupils and parents. Visit www.saferinternetday.org.uk to find out more.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Caroline Hurst is education manager at Childnet, one of three charity partners in the UK Safer Internet Centre.

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SCREEN TIME

Mobile internet devices can open a wonderful world of fun and learning for children, says **Jeremy Drayton** – but parents really need to be the gatekeepers



Back in November 2015, my wife and I were racking our brains as to what to buy our two older children for Christmas, when she came up with the suggestion of a tablet. Now this got me worried, especially as the youngsters in question were, at the time, aged just four and two and a half – which in my mind was way too early.

'What are we doing?' I thought, anxiously. I'd read the numerous articles warning us of the dangers of screen addiction and the unwanted side effects – sleep deprivation, obesity, bad manners... the list went on.

However, my wife assured me that the tablets would only be used to keep the children quiet when we were travelling or on longer car journeys, so we took the plunge. To my relief, my fears weren't realised and we found it easy to limit the gadgets' use simply by setting boundaries and taking them away when we felt the time was right.

We kept to the original plan, only letting our children use the tablets while travelling, and for the rest of the time they were essentially forgotten about.

The education issue

Then, last September my eldest daughter started in reception at our local infant school. A few days later, she proudly returned home with a card which included a password and PIN for her online maths homework app. I realised that from now on technology would play a major role in her life – but I didn't want it to take over.

Technology now makes a huge contribution to our children's

education, and rightly so in my opinion. Gone are the days when we had to trawl through the encyclopedia Britannica for out of date information for our school assignments; the advent of the Google age has changed all that. Children have the power of the internet at their fingertips and as long as it's used responsibly with proper guidance, the sky's the limit.

I've spoken with lots of parents of children the same age as my daughter about screen time and most of them don't worry about their youngsters spending too long on phones or tablets because they simply take them away when they feel time's up – which is the same approach that we've taken.

Meeting resistance

However, the problem comes when I talk to parents of children who are a few years older, or teenagers. Invariably they're tearing their hair out because their kids' faces are buried in their devices most of the time and if they try and take them away are met with great hostility. This is incredibly stressful for parents and children alike.

So somewhere between the age of five and 11 something happens which we don't see coming; full immersion into the digital age and, if left unchecked, digital dependency and at worst, addiction. Don't get me wrong, I'm an advocate of technology and the way it can enhance our lives for the better especially in terms of educational applications, but I really didn't want our family to be ruled by it.

So I started researching ways that we could make the way we use devices as a family a positive experience that would enable us to get the most out of them while still maintaining a balance. And what I discovered crystallised into a short list of



simple, but powerful thing for us, as the adults, to remember:

■ As a parent you need to set a good example; if you're distracted most of the day by social media then you can expect your kids to be the same. Try and limit the amount of time you check your devices in front of your children, and if possible leave it until after they've gone to bed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jeremy Drayton is a father of three, and co-founder of the parental control app screenlimit.net.

■ Keep devices, TVs and consoles out of the bedroom. It's hard to keep an eye on how much time your children are spending in front of a screen and what they're doing if they're locked away in their own space.

Make sure that device time is spent in a communal area of your home and have a box that devices are put into when it's time to go to sleep.

■ Don't allow devices to be used at meal times. Eating in front of the TV or texting and surfing the internet at the dinner table means that you're not communicating as a family. Meal times are the best time to find out about who's been doing what.

■ Try to get involved with - or at least show an interest in - what your youngsters are doing online.

Research has shown that children get much more out of screen time if they're doing it with their parents, who can explain things on screen as they happen.

■ Make your children earn screen time for completing tasks like tidying their room or brushing their teeth; technology itself can help here, with apps like ScreenLimit (www.screenlimit.net), which has an excellent rewards system that you can set up. You can also set daily time limits and manage all your devices remotely from your phone.

■ Set time aside for family activities like playing a board game, going for a walk/bike ride, or baking a cake together.

■ Switch off devices an hour before bedtime. Research has been documented linking the blue light emitted by devices disrupting the production of the sleep inducing hormone melatonin.

Above all, we need to set boundaries, and get into the routine of setting them early. It's much easier to introduce screen time rules to a 5-year-old so that it becomes the norm, than to leave it until they're a teenager and set in their ways - just ask any parent of one.

“Children have the power of the internet at their fingertips and as long as it's used responsibly with proper guidance, the sky's the limit”





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Funding the 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM

PTAs are increasingly being asked to pay for fancy tech – but how can parents be sure it's really leading to better teaching and learning? **Paul Wright** considers the issues...

With the UK's biggest annual educational technology show (BETT) just finished at the end of January there may be a number of schools now looking at recent shiny purchases – quite possibly PTA funded – and thinking, 'ok, how do we use this?'.

Technology has the potential to contribute greatly to teaching and learning, but there is a caveat: 'good tech requires good educators'. In other words: the

technology we have access to in classrooms is only as good as the teacher who's planned for its use.

Key questions

At its worst, so-called 'edtech' (technology developed specifically for the education market) can prove to be little more than a series of expensive toys which end up languishing in a cupboard in a classroom, much like those Christmas presents at home which inspire hysterical excitement

for about five minutes, but are quickly discarded once the novelty has worn off. We all know the story.

However, used with expertise, edtech tools can certainly increase and sustain engagement, enhance the learning experience, support progress and ease teacher workload. Essentially, if it's genuinely going to contribute to good teaching and learning, every potential technology purchase has to pass a very simple, two-question test:



Will this help pupils to learn more effectively?

If the answer is a confident 'yes', then you can ask question two:

Does the potential impact merit the cost?

If, and only if, the answer is another yes, then it's worth considering the investment.

Get involved

The best way to know your own school is spending wisely on technology is to get as involved as you can. Join the PTA, be part of the school's governing body, offer your services more generally in any way you can. For example, if you have a particular interest in technology, you could ask to support IT lessons, talk to the school's IT coordinator, and understand what its IT development plan covers (I recommend schools have a five-year strategy, and you should be able to see this on request).

Lastly, ask your children and their friends what they think of the use of technology in their school and their lessons (taking into account, however, that they may be disappointed if it doesn't match up to the gadgets, devices and games they are able to use at home).

Tools of engagement

Tech enabled classrooms give teachers a wider range of tools with which to do their jobs well; to engage, inspire and challenge learners. When I started out in education, projectors were being installed in classrooms and very quickly became the 'norm' in every school across the UK. These alone have transformed the way learning happens; and now, coupled with the internet, they are enabling teachers to deliver their own content, and content from others online - for example, via YouTube. Remember those days when

Miss or Sir had to book access to a TV room so that the whole class could watch a beaten up VHS tape of an old 'Wildlife on One' episode? Not any more; now, the projector displays streamed, high quality content onto a screen which, if compared with the old 24" TV of my day at school is mind blowing in itself. The possibilities for exciting, relevant lessons are endless.

More recently, canny teachers are starting to use virtual reality technology (which is developing at a rapid pace just now) to help pupils develop their imaginations and creative writing skills by immersing themselves in new environments; meanwhile, Skype is a brilliant way of connecting children with their peers all around the globe, giving them a much deeper understanding of the world around them, and how the same issue can affect different communities in various ways.

These are just a few examples of innovative teaching with technology; if you are able to get along to the BETT show in London next January, I heartily recommend it, as you'll find countless more - perhaps you could arrange to go as a PTA delegation, with your school's IT lead? Ultimately the message is that, as with every other aspect of our lives, technology has the ability to transform and improve the classroom... but we still need expertise to get the best out of it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Wright is a teacher and head of computer science and ICT department in Coventry. Teach, Reflect, Doodle (Bloomsbury Education) is his fantastic personal manual for teachers to doodle and document their thoughts in.



3 edtech investments to consider today

The BBC Microbit

These tiny, programmable computers take teaching computing from a potentially dull subject into a real, practical world subject (for an example see my traffic signal lesson at tips4teaching.co.uk) - and for children who develop an interest in programming at an early age, are an ideal way to put their learning into action.

Google docs/drive

This (originally free, now nominally charged) suite of software for schools brought true digital collaborative working, teaching and learning to the masses almost ten years ago now. Whole classes can work together on a single project from multiple devices - and it's amazing to see what even relatively young learners can produce in this way.

Mobile devices

iPads and other similar tablets are having a great impact in classrooms across the world. Supported by good Wifi signals in schools they can allow teachers to be freed from the front of their rooms to move around the class while still presenting on their whiteboard or learners' screens. A change like this can really improve behaviour management as much as the engagement of pupils.

Want more VOLUNTEERS?

10 easy ways to get parents involved with the PTA...

There are two hallmarks of a thriving PTA. One is the clinking sound of a healthy bank balance. The other is the number of parents who are willing to help. Lots of engaged parents = more funds and a greater sense of community spirit at the school. Here's a run-down of 10 simple ways to get parents involved and enthused about the PTA...

1. Explain the options

Don't assume people know how to get involved with the PTA. Ask the head if you can have an eye-catching poster up in the school / sent home with each child at the start of the year.

You want one that contains:

- A picture of the Chair (so everyone knows who they are).
- PTA contact details.
- A list of all the different ways parents can get involved: very hands-on (being a Class Rep); minimal time commitment (make a one-off donation to funds); everything in between (heading events; baking cakes; writing the newsletter etc).
- A line that says, 'We'd love to hear from you – please get in touch'.

“When parents build strong relationships with one another it usually leads to greater participation with broader school activities...”



TOP TIP:

Want a list of who's who on the PTA? Simply check out the My School Page on Classlist – if your school is using the Classlist app.

2. Start small

When parents build strong relationships with one another it usually leads to greater participation with broader school activities (like the PTA). To support that bonding, ask each Class Rep to take on mini-PTA projects, like making decorations for a Halloween disco. Invite as many parents as possible to help, either at someone's house or in the pub. This gives the group a task to bond over (and helps the PTA).

3. Keep it personal

Every time a new child starts at your school put a letter into his/her bag welcoming the family and asking the parents to a coffee morning/ evening. Getting to know parents makes it much easier to ask them for help when the next PTA event rolls round.



Classlist

TOP TIP:

At schools using Classlist, new parents can be included in the class conversation straight away.

4. Say “yes”

Make it a policy that if anyone approaches you with a fundraising idea, even (especially) if it's something you haven't tried before, and is willing to take the lead on it, they'll get the full support of the PTA. They win. You win. The school wins.



5. Make it easy

A quick and easy way to reach all the parents in a school is to go online. Classlist (see box) is a free app that lets you:

- Collect and maintain accurate contact details for all the parents in your school.
- Set up chats about school/ PTA events/ lost uniform/ homework.
- Put up requests for volunteers (and helps parents to volunteer easily, just by clicking a button).
- Sell tickets for events.
- Send newsletters and emails.
- Use listings to sell second-hand uniform.
- Create an inclusive online community, where everyone can find out what's going on.

6. Ask for input

PTAs usually ask teachers how they would like any funds spent. Ask parents too. It will make them feel included and more motivated to raise money.

7. Use visuals

People notice images and talk about things that make them laugh. Create fun

posters that illustrate how close you're getting to achieving your fundraising goal. A skinny teddy bear that gets fatter as the money builds?

8. Share the feedback

One of the rewards of fundraising is seeing how people benefit from the money you've brought in. Share that joy! If you've created a new playground, the children could write notes to their parents, explaining why it's so great. That feedback provides instant motivation for parents to contribute funds to the next project.

TOP TIP:

Use Classlist to organise your paid events and you can easily track the amount raised by looking at your dashboard.

9. Encourage "nominations"

All sorts of skills come in handy to the PTA – so encourage parents to nominate the skills of other parents. (Much easier than asking people to say what they're good at themselves). Then you can go to the nominee and say that you've been told how great they are at design/ dancing/ wine-tasting – would they be up for creating a poster/ running a sponsored dance session/ holding a wine-tasting night?

TOP TIP:

Create your own willing volunteers list – parents can self nominate on Classlist's skills register

10. Show your appreciation

It's the ultimate in simplicity, but a note thanking people for their help buys a lot of good will (and raises the likelihood of parents volunteering again).

'CLASSLIST MAKES THE PTA SO EASY'

Maria Blick is the PTA Chair of Christ Church Cathedral School in Oxford.

She says:

"Using Classlist has transformed my experience of being on the PTA. It's easy to use – parents fill in their own contact details, so there's no running around with bits of paper, trying to gather everybody's email addresses. There's lots of space for social chat, so it's a fun place to be. And because people spend time on the app, whenever the PTA put up a message we get instant responses. People start putting up ideas for extra fundraisers, volunteering to take things on, or suggesting other people who can help.

The whole process is inclusive: using Classlist makes people feel part of the school, so it breaks down barriers. We – the PTA – are easy to contact: parents can just ping over a message. We can send emails and newsletters out to the whole school, without having to bother the office. And we can use the app to sell tickets for events, as well as second hand uniform and PTA merchandise (we recently had some very fetching personalised aprons up for grabs). It makes life so simple – it's brilliant."

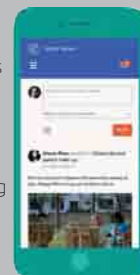
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GIVE CLASSLIST A TRY!

PTA members now have the chance to experience the benefits of Classlist for four weeks. Sign up with a few key members, at www.classlist.com (it's great for organising and sharing details of your PTA meetings) before going fully live with the whole school.

Then if you like, you can give it up, though we don't think you will...

P.S. There's no cost. Classlist is a **FREE** app and it stays free after your initial four-week trial period.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Susan Burton is the founder of Classlist, an app to make life easier for parents and PTAs (www.classlist.com)



Spring into **ACTION!**

Seasonal fundraising is as much about celebration as it is making money – and there's still time to add a few flourishes to this term's events programme, urges **Hannah Kirk**

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Your PTA needs to provide regular events throughout the year, and the more themed ideas the better. A little and often approach with a few big 'showstoppers' (the Christmas bazaar and summer fete, for example) can really help to raise funds and provide an important community focus for the school, too. There is of course a fine line between bombarding parents and guardians with a relentless fundraising campaign and actually raising money for the school – and maintaining that balance is important. However, if you are looking to keep the momentum up

for your fundraising activities there are a number of seasonally themed and generally popular events that you can run during the spring term.

Easter Egg Hunt

This is always very popular with children, although in our school outside space is at a premium so running it at the school can be a problem. We are however, lucky to have a large park very nearby, which we can use with relative ease after speaking to the local council. We tend to run the hunt on a Saturday and sell tickets, one ticket per child prior to the event.

We then place laminated Easter themed signs in various places around the park and have willing volunteers standing under them to dish out mini eggs when the children (guided by more volunteers) reach the clues. If demand is high then we stagger the groups (and make sure the mini egg

supply is plentiful at each post!) The final clue involves a larger prize; normally chocolate based. Reasonably priced themed chocolate prizes are available from most pound or 99p shops at this time of year.

Selling tickets means that waste is at a minimum as you can buy supplies for exactly how many children are attending. The start and finish point is at the school, meaning that we are able to sell refreshments for the children and adults; we have even served cream teas in the past, weather permitting!

Themed Tuck Shop

Throughout the year, a quick and hassle free way to generate funds is to run a pop up tuck shop in the playground on a Friday afternoon at school pick up time. Most commonly this is done in the summer term by buying boxes of ice cream lollies which normally come in a 4-pack and selling them to children and parents at the end of the school day. We also do this at Easter, selling



themed chocolate treats on the last day of term. This can also be teamed up with an Easter cake sale; we have a number of keen bakers who are happy to donate their time and ingredients – and rice crispy nests always go down a treat.

Easter Bonnet Parade

This event can be run in tandem with an Easter egg hunt, or as a separate event. The children are encouraged to make their own Easter bonnet and take part in the parade for a small donation (50p or £1 per entry). If done in conjunction with a hunt then the parade can be used as an enticement to get families back to the start/finish point for teas and coffees. It helps to have a number of categories; depending on the size of your school you might like to give class or year prizes, with an overall winner for each Key Stage. You could even have a 'grown ups' category (which, if nothing else, might make it a little more likely that the 'Y1' winning bonnet will actually have been made by a child...)

Quiz Night

Our PTA chooses the month of March to run our annual quiz night. This is held at the school in the main hall. Tickets are sold as teams, or individuals and couples buy tickets separately and we organise them into a team or teams. Selling wine, beer and soft drinks too helps the night go swimmingly! The main supermarkets can do great deals on reasonably decent wine, if you are buying a sufficient quantity. You also will need to apply for a temporary liquor licence from the council if you are selling alcohol. This is reasonably straightforward and cheap. A quiz, quiz master and scorer are required and a bar rota is normally drawn up to cover the evening – we

“As the weather improves more outdoor activities can be organised – and a car boot sale can be extremely profitable and relatively hassle free.”

normally suggest that each team donate one team member for half an hour to help run the bar, meaning the whole evening is covered and no one has to miss out on the entire quiz. Pizzas are very popular and if you contact some of the high street outlets they are happy to do a variety of deals for bulk buying. We charge £12 per person, which includes pizza, plus a bottle of white and red wine on the table. To raise additional funds during the evening there are various different activities that can be done. We always have a game of heads or tails. Those that wish to play pay £1. Players stand up, choosing to place their hands on their heads or their 'tails'. The quiz master flips a coin; if it's 'heads', then players with hands on their tails sit down, and vice versa. This continues apace until there is one person left standing, who wins an instant cash prize (usually half the pot). The quiz winners are presented with a small cup bought from a key cutting shop and, much more importantly, the respect and envy of their fellow competitors.

Car Boot Sales

As the weather improves more outdoor activities can be organised – and a car boot sale can be extremely profitable and relatively hassle free. Once you have a date in mind, contact your local authority to see whether you need a permit, especially if you

are renting the space outside the school. Calculate how many cars you can fit on the premises, allowing space between vehicles. Normally the cost per pitch is between £5 – £10. You will need to consider how the cars access and leave the field, how long the sale will go on for, and whether it's worth putting on a refreshments stall or even sideshows, like a lucky dip stall. Finally, ways in which to clear rubbish need to be considered, regardless of venue. Ensure that the participants are aware that they will need to take their rubbish with them, but have a backup plan for a sweep of the area to ensure the site is clear; never assume that there will be enough volunteers hanging around at the end to do it spontaneously!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hannah Kirk is secretary of St Margaret's School PTA, in Ipswich, Suffolk.





NATURAL DEVELOPMENTS

From logs in a circle to a multi-purpose eco-pod, outside classrooms are simply brilliant environments for learning, says **Juno Hollyhock**

As executive director of Learning Through Landscapes – a charity that helps children to connect with nature, become more active, learn outdoors, develop social skills and have fun – I can confirm that PTA hosted visits to primary schools are always a delight. There is the inevitable welcoming committee of smartly turned out pupils paraded with pride down shiny corridors smelling of antiseptic, waterproof marker pen and Bovril flavour crisps.

The organised ranks of pupils' work are mounted on fresh, crisp, clean sheets of sugar paper firmly taped to noticeboards on classroom walls, and highly coloured lists of useful hints such as 'Be Kind', 'Don't borrow without asking' and 'Don't steal Jonny's

lunch' remind us how we are to behave.

Even though I work for an outdoor charity, I can pretty much guarantee that any visit will be focused for a lot of the time on the inside. There might be an assembly where the head speaks passionately about nature and the natural environment as we all sit on rubber mats in the gym, and I spend many (very pleasant it must be confessed) hours perusing scrapbooks of wildlife pictures, works of nature based art, models and photographs of the outside.

But then, come that bit before afternoon break where every child is either bursting at the seams with unspent energy or snoring quietly head down on the desk, the time finally arrives when I get a sneaky peek at what I am really here to see: the outdoor classroom.

Anything goes

Now what constitutes an outdoor classroom is as diverse as your imagination.

I have been dragged by the hand to be shown, with great pride, what on first inspection appears to be a few randomly strewn bits of fallen tree sat forlornly upon a muddy slope – but is quite clearly held dear by the children as their outdoor classroom of choice.

On other occasions I have been led with great pomp and circumstance to an all singing, all dancing, glass enclosed, eco friendly, pressure treated timber enclave with internal sound systems, built in bird box cameras, composting toilets and photo-voltaic cells on the roof.

So which is better? And why should we have outdoor classrooms anyway?

Well, the truth is that, whilst the all singing all dancing option can be incredible, a good teacher with the right support can reap as much learning benefit from the muddy circle of logs; so we should not feel that there is a right or a wrong way



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“The outdoors is a living textbook rich with natural, interesting, replenishable resources”

to deliver outside teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning outside allows a teacher to draw on a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional resource that changes almost every day. Elements of nature can be felt, smelled, tasted and heard as well as seen, so bringing all of the senses into play at a time when children are most able to learn with every aspect of their being. The outdoors is, if you like, a living textbook rich with natural, interesting, replenishable resources. Mud, trees, wildlife, flowers and plants, earth and sky, wind and rain all offer a fantastic learning tool for so many different parts of the curriculum.

Parent power

Many schools are so constricted by budget that they have little or no choice in what their outside space has to offer. Fortunately indeed is the school with the forward thinking PTA, willing to take on some of the burden of creating stimulating, interactive, exciting outside spaces to nurture young imaginations and provide rich and interesting learning environments.

A PTA is in the perfect position to take into account the teaching and learning needs of the school at the same time as taking a realistic approach to developing the outside space. PTAs often have unique links into parent skill-power and local business support. A day of volunteering parents alongside some resource and materials from local businesses can, almost magically, transform an outdoor space into an outdoor classroom. If a PTA is keen to support their school to use this incredible learning resource then there are a few questions that need to be asked:

- Who on the leadership team in the school wants this to happen? Leaders can ensure that new ways of working are embedded in the day to day life in a school; there's no point having an outside classroom if no-one wants to use it
- How will a new outdoor classroom be maintained – what are the views of the maintenance team? A floor to ceiling glass wall is lovely in principle but needs a lot more cleaning than the log circle....



■ What funds might be available from the school budget? Could any areas of budget be reviewed? For example, if the school has an expensive mowing contract, could the head be persuaded to reduce this to allow longer grass and wildflowers to grow around a circle of seats and spend the savings elsewhere in the grounds?

■ How will teachers manage outside – does the PTA need to support the provision of some training?

■ Do parents understand the importance of the outdoors for their children's learning? What can the PTA do to spread the message and encourage this?

■ How can the PTA help the school to involve the pupils in creating outdoor spaces for their learning?

■ What does the school want to achieve with their new outdoor classroom?

The most important question is the last one; if teachers, parents and pupils alike are all clear about what they want to achieve then getting there is much easier.

Often listing the outcomes that you wish to achieve can show you very clearly what you need to do. For example, a head who wants a whole school altogether outdoor learning experience will not fit them into an outdoor classroom that has walls. A school that wants to teach and learn in the outdoors every day of the year will need

to pay due regard to some form of robust shelter arrangement. Teachers who want to examine the science of growing in different climates may need a polytunnel or a greenhouse as their outdoor classroom.

Talk about it

Once you know what you want to do, communication is key; parents and carers bring a whole wealth of experience and skills with them – they may be willing to volunteer with preparing a concrete base for an actual outdoor classroom or supporting fundraising activities for some seating, you may even have construction folk in the parent cohort who can help save valuable expenditure.

Engagement with parents/carers can include newsletters via paper or electronic means, the handing out of flyers at home time, displays and updates at parents' evenings, invited meetings with refreshment, a barbecue in your school grounds or a set of social network pages. Showing examples of what the PTA wants to achieve is always helpful and can often stimulate offers of help and support. More importantly, this type of communication can be used to explain why the school and the PTA feel this is important and therefore can help parents and carers to plan for their child's involvement.

Not every school needs to raise significant amounts of money to create an outdoor



classroom; there are many things that can be achieved through the application of some volunteer labour, donations of materials, and a bit of effort and thought.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Juno Hollyhock is executive director at Learning Through Landscapes (ltd.org.uk).

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YES, NO, MAYBE...

So you've raised the money - now who decides how it's spent? **Tes Macpherson** has been finding out how PTAs around the country make their purchasing decisions

At PTAsocial, we help hundreds of PTAs to get more parents volunteering to fundraise for their school. However one thing PTAs often struggle with is how to decide what to do with those hard-earned funds once they have them.

You know you have a duty to spend the money wisely, and may be looking for inspired ideas. Or perhaps you are not sure how these important decisions ought to be made. You could ask the parents for their opinion - but will they really know what is urgently needed? If you just follow the headteacher's advice, what happens when parents disagree on priorities? And what if the school asks for equipment that sounds like it ought to be paid for from statutory funds?

With all this in mind, we asked some of our customers to share their experiences and tell us what they've been buying, and how they decide on spending priorities. Here's what they said...

"You could ask the parents for their opinions - but will they really know what's needed?"



School: Alverstoke Infant School
Location: Gosport
Representative: Garry Smith
2015/16 profit: £9905

"Over the past few years, we have paid for a Paralympian to come into school, as well as authors for World Book Day, and a pantomime. When we have cake sales, the money is used to buy items for the class that's baked that week; so, things like dressing up clothes and specific books.

We've also helped with rejuvenating outside spaces, and recently purchased three mud kitchens.

In terms of deciding how the money is allocated, we ask the head periodically what she wants - and if something pops up, she will approach us for financial support.

We do say no sometimes, if we think a request is inappropriate or believe the school should cover it. A while back we were asked to pay for Wifi, but didn't see it as something we should finance; we were also concerned that it's not something parents could see, and therefore have tangible evidence of where the funds had been spent."





School: St James' School
Location: Tunbridge Wells, Kent
Representative: Deb Powell
2015/16 profit: £30k

"In recent memory, PTA purchases have included: a log cabin to enhance our Forest School accreditation; laptops and laptops; updating the website; replenishing reading books; AV equipment; a fire pit; an all-weather surface for the trim trail; annual subscription to Empiribox science lessons; full library refurbishment, and the Accelerated Reader scheme.

Our process for deciding how the money is allocated is that the heads bring their wish lists to the AGM, and the Committee agrees the spend based on available funds and the greatest need. Staff give their input to the wish lists, and we communicate them to all parents. I've been Chair for just over a year now, and I haven't had to say no to a wish list item yet. We did query the request for interactive whiteboards as it was felt school funds should meet the cost, but with budget cuts we have agreed that on occasion such requests are necessary and we make every effort to meet them.

In 2016 the PTA ran a parent survey and the only point raised about funds allocation was a request for us to raise money for other charities less fortunate than ourselves. We realised that we were communicating the PTA funds raised and how they were allocated but not doing enough to communicate when and how funds were raised for other charities. We now combine the two in an end of term thank you to parents and sponsors

We run various social events whereby the PTA either funds or subsidises prizes/supplies. Some parents did not want funds to be spent on chocolate and did not know that it was acceptable to do so under the constitution. On this occasion a committee vote decided the outcome and a compromise was met. We created a PTA

Handbook to ensure complete transparency of our funding goals against the constitution and worked harder at gaining sponsorship for our events which helped reduce the number of requests for stuff as well as cash from parents."



School: St John's
Location: Rowlands Castle
Representative: Anita King
2015/16 profit: £7781

"The funds we raise are needed for ongoing spending (subsidising the school text messaging service, watercooler servicing, Y6 SATs breakfasts, Christmas crackers etc.); one offs, like chess club resources, team sports kits and playground bins; teachers' allowances, which they spend as they choose; and 'big ticket' items. Over the past few years, those have included a new PA system, digital cameras, and outdoor learning equipment: a climbing wall, willow dome, outdoor stage, beach area and a treehouse.

Although it is ultimately the PTA that decides how the money is allocated, the decision is partly based on the priority of the head's wish list for the school. We

have to take into consideration our annual commitments and any items we're already fundraising for or have allocated funds for. Parents will sometimes suggest items. For example, recently they suggested a replacement bike shed and this is now on the wish list. The PTA reviews the wish list, decides which items it can afford to pay for straight away, and which items can become fundraiser objectives.

Decisions on spending are made during PTA meetings, and we have said no to a few things. For example we were asked to pay for a carton of soft drink for each child after a Sports Relief run - we decided the cost of this was too high and offered to serve squash, instead! Sometimes a request is turned down because the item is seen as core to the education of children; we believe the PTA is there to provide the extras that the school wouldn't be able to pay for if there were no fundraising by parents - school should pay for the essentials. We've also turned down requests to get involved in some fundraising ideas if they've not been seen as part of the PTA's remit."



School: Highgate Primary
Location: Highgate, London
Representative: Claire Bardner
2015/16 profit: £16,800

"We are a state funded, local primary school with a diverse community, over 38 languages spoken, and a slightly higher than average number of pupils on free school meals. Our main fundraising project has been to transform our outdoor spaces; we had 1970s tarmac and wanted to bring in nature, as this is one of



the key school values. This has taken a large chunk of our spending, however, we also run monthly cake sales where the proceeds are split between the classes and the PSA, and spent on improving the classroom environment, experiences for the children, and subsidising school trips. We also cover the cost of story-tellers and the extremely popular whole-school steel pan workshops for Black History Month; contribute to the library; help celebrate Chinese New Year; and get each child a gift from Santa at Christmas. We are big on enhancing school life, and have a fantastic staff who suggest great things for our kids which we are only too happy to be able to make happen.

A while back, we started getting teacher requests to subsidise coach travel for trips. We declined, as this is a massive cost (£600+ a time), and we felt money could be found elsewhere, alternative modes of travel used, or different venues to cover the same subjects. If there is a visit that absolutely needs a coach (e.g. Celtic Harmony, in the middle of nowhere), we encourage the school to look within its budget, for the classes to raise money themselves, or we subsidise another part of the trip so parent contributions can cover the coach. With funding allocation, the PSA always looks at how the children are directly benefiting in terms of enhancing their school experience. When we cannot achieve consensus, we widen the number of people we ask to ensure we are getting a representative viewpoint, then go with the majority, and look at addressing concerns in other ways - for example, looking at what we have done historically, and levelling the field by also giving to another group if they feel left out, and so on."



School: Fleetville Juniors
Location: St Albans, Herts
Representative: Rachel Adamson
2015/16 profit: £15,396

"To determine funds allocation, the PTA asks the head teacher if there are any particular needs; consults the governing body and teaching staff; and taps into playground chat, collecting feedback from parents and

taking a collaborative approach. There are no 'official' surveys, as people may not fully understand the issues involved (and if they're formally consulted it may result in expectations for a particular result). This is a small, open-minded community with no antagonism.

We look to spend on projects not covered by statutory/council funding, so for example, we wouldn't fund structural changes for the school. When there was a classroom refurb recently, the PTA paid for the 'cherry on top items', like smart screens. In other words, we support projects that enhance learning, but couldn't be classed as essential.

It's in the PTA constitution that our mission is not just fundraising, but to build community, so not all of our events are for profit. For example, we hold a present wrapping event, where kids go to a pop-up shop and buy gifts for their parents for £2-£3 each; it just about breaks even. And we always spend about £200 putting on a Year 6 leavers' party, which is free for the kids to attend. Usually we wouldn't focus on something that only benefits one year group, but as most of the kids go through every school year it is a nice farewell."

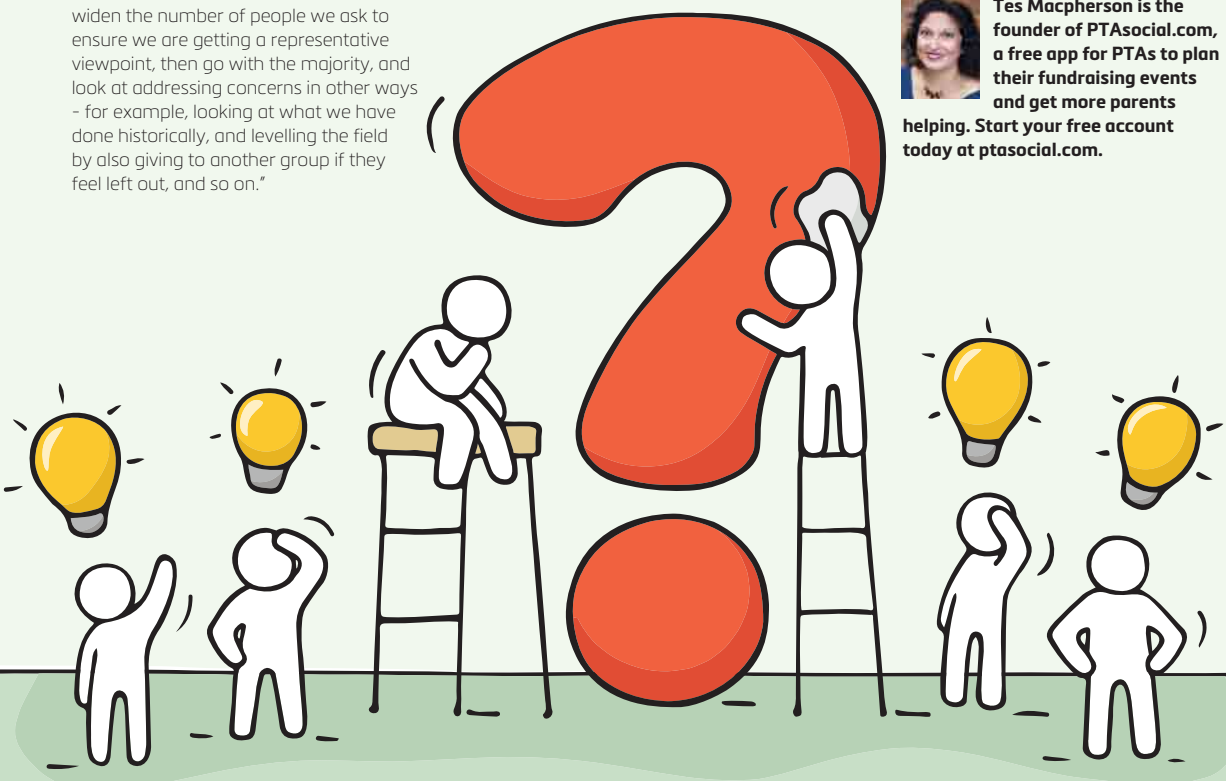
"It's in the PTA constitution that our mission is not just fundraising, but to build community, so not all of our events are for profit"



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tes Macpherson is the founder of **PTASocial.com**, a free app for PTAs to plan their fundraising events and get more parents helping. Start your free account today at ptasocial.com.





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education

5 surprising things children learn from SCHOOL TRIPS

Some parents not keen on PTA funds being used to support educational visits and residentials? Perhaps **Elaine Skates** can persuade everyone to get on board...

My diary is choc-a-bloc with school diary dates: cake sales; deadlines for payments; instructions to send lunch in plastic bags, money for the gift shop and wellies for the trip to the country park. Believe me, sometimes I could really do without an educational visit to throw my morning routine into worse than usual chaos – no matter how passionately I believe in the power of these memorable learning experiences. Imagine how much worse the planning for the staff at the school. So why do they bother?

Most schools these days see school trips as being so much more than end of year jollies. They understand the value of learning outside the classroom (LOtC) experiences to support achievement and personal development and should have very clear learning objectives in mind when planning trips. The purpose of the visit may be to achieve a particular outcome in the area of literacy, maths, science or history but schools appreciate the opportunities for unplanned and incidental learning that arise during an educational visit and which make them such powerful educational tools.

1 “I can make my bed and tie my shoelaces.”

If you are feeling resentful about contributing to the costs of a trip to the zoo because your child has been loads of times before with you, then you are missing the point. The achievement for your child is *because* they are going without you. Your child will need to take more responsibility for their own property and needs (with support from their teachers of course) and this will do wonders for their independence and self-confidence, which they can build on during subsequent experiences.

“It is an adventure that is all about them – not the household – and it really does boost their self-belief in what they can do.”

Parent talking about the impact of her 6-year-old's Learning Away residential.

2 “School is amazing!!”

Let's face it – some kids just don't like classrooms and the thought of being asked to sit at a desk and write a story is their idea of torture. These active learners learn best by doing. The more learning outside the classroom these children are offered the more engaged they will be at school, both inside and outside the classroom.

“Jonas has responded exceptionally well to outdoor learning. In his own words: “I've found something I'm good at!” He continues to act as the strongest role model within his group and he participates enthusiastically in all tasks. He works with skill and interest.”

Evaluation of the impact of outdoor learning sessions for children with educational needs.

3 “I can do it!”

New experiences push children out of their comfort zone, so they may well be nervous before an educational visit. However, the experience of overcoming their nerves and trying something new can have a tremendous impact on their resilience and



self-confidence – helping them overcome their fears and insecurities back at school.

"I just loved it. I loved the fresh air. We had to jump off crates but I wasn't scared. The birds are not scared when they fly high so why should I be scared. I didn't think I could do it but when I did I just felt like an albatross."

Pupil from Percy Main Primary School on his educational visit to the Beamish Museum.

4 "I actually love paintings/ history/bugs/abseiling [insert as required]"

A school trip can expand the horizons of children and give them experiences they would never be exposed to at home. When choosing outings with our children we are likely to choose activities that we enjoy ourselves. Some of us would rather stick pins in our eyes than spend a few hours at an art gallery, but that doesn't mean our children will feel the same. An educational visit can be the start of a brand new passion for a child,

helping them to develop their own interests and identity.

"Harry's mum sent me a Facebook message. He was so fired up after his class visit to Dukesfield Arches that he wanted to do some more archaeology in the school holidays; where could she take him?"

Learning Coordinator, Dukesfield Smelters and Carriers Project.

5 "Mrs Umbridge and Gregory Goyle are actually pretty cool... (who knew?)"

The opportunity to spend time with teachers and peers away from the school environment can have a transformational impact on relationships which have a long term impact back at school. Teachers are often pushed out of their comfort zone, so pupils can see that they are human after all, whilst pupils who may not excel at school work or sport have the chance to excel at a new activity and be seen in a different light by their peers and their teachers.

"The residential provided her with the opportunity to develop as a person and for her to reinvent herself in front of her peers. All of her teachers noticed that during the residential Child A became the child all the others wanted on their team because they felt she was good at everything."

Case study from Learning Away website, where a residential transformed an isolated pupil's self-esteem and peer relationships.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Elaine Skates is a mum, school governor and CEO of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC) – a national charity that works with schools to ensure that more children have more opportunities to learn beyond the classroom walls.



"Most schools these days see trips as being so much more than end of year jollies..."



Should we ban the **BAKE SALE?**

It's traditional for PTA events to feature sugary treats, says **Maggie Sims** – but in a world where schools have to follow strict food rules, perhaps it's worth considering a more healthy approach

We all know that too much of the sweet stuff is not good for us, but we're still having school bake sales more than we perhaps should – coffee mornings, summer fayres, the end of term or even World Book Day; all an excuse for cake. At the moment, we're having two to three times more sugar than we should. Eating foods high in sugar too often can mean having too many calories, which can lead to weight gain and obesity, and a greater risk of tooth decay. Latest research from the Children's Food Trust, where I am head of cookery, found that 54% of parents know their child has too much sugar in their everyday meals and snacks, with mums and dads reporting 12-year-olds to be the most problematic group. Cutting down on the sweets and chocolates and cakes and biscuits they buy, getting rid of sugary squash in the house and buying different breakfast cereals were the steps most parents wanted to take to reduce the amount of sugar their child has. But when asked why they hadn't already made those changes, more than one quarter of parents who wanted to take action said they were habits which are hard to change, and almost one in five said their child would complain too much.

It's tough to break the cycle. But being overweight is not a choice a child makes. The way children eat is the product of what they learn at home, in childcare, at school and in what they see in the wider world around them. They watch how adults eat, talk about and behave around food. They observe that adults link food with emotion in both positive and negative ways. They see how we cook and shop and they're bombarded with food marketing through multifaceted channels and media, which grow increasingly more complex and frequent as they get older.

Double standards?

With all that in mind – should we really be using the lure of the white stuff in schools? Should we 'ban the bake sale', like some schools over in the States have done? There are School Food Standards in place to make sure that the food served up to pupils throughout the day gives them the energy and nutrition they need to grow, learn and thrive, while limiting the salt, sugar and fat that can hold them back. So should we have similar rules over what can be brought into schools, even if it is a special occasion or raising funds for a good cause?

New rules in the USA don't dictate how many bake sales offering noncompliant goodies a school can hold each year. It is left to individual states to set the limits, but cautions that such sales should be 'infrequent.' One State, Georgia, said it will allow 30 bake sales per year per school during which students can buy foods that don't meet the new standards. But there are about 2,500 public schools in Georgia, so that's 75,000 bake sales per year. It doesn't really solve the issue.

Delicious DIY

So what can we do if a ban isn't the answer? We all know that there is no silver bullet when it comes to diet. The best thing we can do for our health is eat in moderation – more fresh ingredients like fruits, vegetables, starchy foods, meat and dairy, less processed and fast foods. Children today have become so used to food arriving quickly – across a counter, out of a wrapper, or through a car window. But foods like this are rarely good for you.

“The way children eat is the product of what they learn at home and at school”

In contrast, learning to cook from scratch with simple, healthy ingredients can provide endless nutritious, satisfying meals, which is why cooking is such a vital life skill. Giving children the confidence and skills they need to get hands-on in the kitchen will not only give them a greater understanding of what goes into the food they eat, but help them make healthier food choices throughout their lives; and it's never too early to start – children of different ages can do different tasks in the kitchen, with different levels of supervision.

Alternative offerings

And actually, a bake sale can be a fantastic opportunity to get your little ones into the kitchen, as well as learn new skills yourself. If you're short on time, there are simple tasks that children can get involved with,

Get baking!

Find all the recipes mentioned here, and many more – plus bags of brilliant advice and information about all aspects of healthy eating for kids, at childrensfoodtrust.org.uk

like mixing or rolling out dough, transferable skills that can lead to whipping up bread, homemade pizzas with tasty toppings, omelettes, pancakes and much more. And bake sales don't need to be all about sweet things. Mix them up with some savoury treats. Flapjack must surely rank as one of our favourite snacks, but it can be full of fat and sugar. The Children's Food Trust has a savoury version which includes carrots, oats, cheese and dried herbs – great for a healthy snack on the go to grab at playtime. Our Bread in a Bag recipe is a real crowd pleaser which uses a very novel way to make bread which is lots of fun, and perfect spread with a little hummus or soft cheese.

'Taste tester' is the perfect role for picky eaters who are reluctant to try new things, mixing them into a small muffin or layering them under a crumble can be a great way to experiment, and they don't need to be void of nutrients either. Our Orangey Carrot Cake recipe is a lower-fat version of the popular dessert. Most of the fat has been replaced with other nutritious ingredients like natural yogurt and wholemeal flavour, which create a tasty, moist treat. Our Chocolate Surprise Cupcakes uses cooked beetroot which cuts down the amount of sugar you need.

Sure, these recipes involve a bit more work than if you were to grab a box of cake mix, but they're designed to be easy to follow, and the rewards are so much larger. So instead of banning the bake sale, why not make a pact with your school to revamp it? No more squashed butterfly buns and mini bags of Haribo. By cutting down on the amount of events where sugar is served you'll be able to put more time into what's on offer, and that feeling of being 'treated' to something you wouldn't normally eat really can be the sweetest feeling.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Maggie Sims is the head of cookery at the Children's Food Trust, the charity on a mission to get every child eating well.

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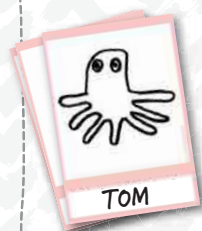
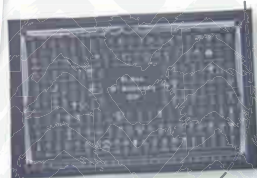


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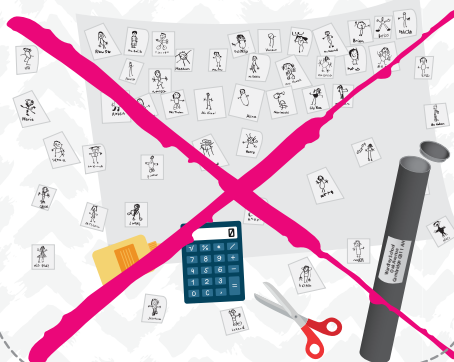
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My PTA life

Vocal coach and TV presenter **Carrie Grant** may not always be able to attend events at her children's school – but she's still fully involved...

How many children do you have?

Four: Olivia is now 22, Talia is 15, Imogen is 11, and Nathan, seven – so the two youngest are still at primary school.

And have they all been to the same one?

Yes. It's funny, when we moved to where we live now, in North London, I remember everyone excitedly telling us how good the schools were – but that wasn't really on our radar. And then of course, once you have a child it suddenly becomes this huge thing! Luckily, though, people were right, and Olivia got a place at our local primary, which is lovely. All the others have followed her there.

What do you especially like about the school?

We loved that it had – and has – an incredibly strong sense of community; that's really important to us as a couple and family. Also, when Olivia was there, the head was amazing. He was a really good leader, who believed in the kids and served them, not his own ego. There have been many changes of leadership over the years, and some quite turbulent times recently in terms of staff turnover, but the essential ethos of the school has stayed the same.

How involved have you been able to be?

Well, we've always been supportive, and ready to help – but over time, all four of our children have been diagnosed with SEN, which puts you in quite a difficult position, as parents. The whole landscape changes, and it can be hard to engage. Even just turning up to an event becomes hugely problematic; we can't leave our kids to run around unsupervised while we serve teas and coffees, for example, and the unstructured nature of many activities can be challenging for our crew (as my husband David likes to say, "We put the funk into disfunctional!").

But you do what you can?

Oh definitely! If there's a bake sale, then we'll make cakes with the children, and we give as much time as we're able, in a way that works for our family. There was a brilliant festival organised last year, for the school's 80th anniversary – and while David and I were too busy filming to be a part of it on



the day, I was more than happy to go in and help pick spaghetti out of the grass afterwards as part of the clear-up gang.

Is the PTA very active?

It is at the moment. There was a bit of a lull a few years back, when all the parents seemed to become completely disengaged, but it's totally turned around now – thanks largely to the energy and talents of about five incredibly passionate, transformative people. It's so good to see the seeds of community being sown again.

So what is it that those five people are doing, do you think, that's working?

They are certainly very creative and organised – but most of all, I think, a successful PTA is about identifying assets that a school already has within the parent body, then making the most of those. And that includes finding those people with the gift of hospitality, socialising and networking – because you can have all the brilliant ideas, and be the most efficient planner ever; but without the ability to reach out to

others and make them feel welcome and comfortable, nothing will really get done. Our school communities are so wonderfully diverse these days, we really should be working out how to get the very best out of that, for everyone – parents have so much to offer; it's a case of finding their skills and interests, and giving them ways they could be used to help make school a better place.

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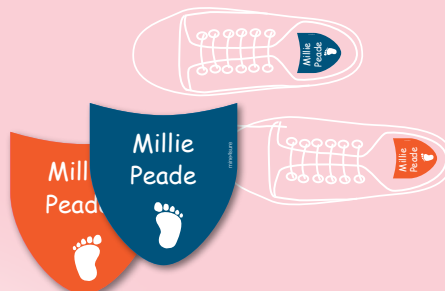
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