

Teamwork with teachers

Jokes about teaching abound: Those who can do, those who can't teach. Is teaching a vocation or a vacation? Contrary to popular belief, few teachers go home at 3.30. Nor do they sleep under their desks, tempting as that may be when Parents' Evenings, Open Evenings and productions finally finish at 10pm. Teaching days are long – after spending several hours with a classroom full of children or young people, there are still meetings to attend after the final bell rings, as well as lessons to prepare and the marking mountain to tackle. Most teachers work at home in the evenings and during weekends – a 60 hour week is quite normal, balanced out by the additional seven weeks of holiday above the working norm.

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Formal contact

Every school has parent consultation evenings. Some include pupils in these conversations even at Infant school. Teachers will talk about progress and share the data which they have collected. Trust the judgment of your child's teacher on academic progress unless you have good reason to question it. Be willing to listen – you won't be the first surprised parent to

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find that the messy, noisy, obstreperous child who shares your home is tidy, thoughtful and helpful at school.

Know what you want to communicate and what questions you want to ask. Good teachers acknowledge the fact that parents know their children best and that they are sharing in a partnership. If you don't feel that this is the case, say so and ask if you can meet to discuss it further. Remember when you attend parents' evenings that teachers are just as anxious about the meeting as parents. Be a Barnabas parent – a great encourager.

Informal contact

Every school has an established means by which parents can make informal contact with questions or problems – make sure you know what this is. Teachers usually respond to phone calls and emails within a day (or on the same day if it's urgent) so don't assume if you don't have a call returned or an email answered that the teacher is avoiding you – he or she may be out of school, in a lengthy meeting or dealing with something urgent.

It's particularly hard to be patient when your child is anxious or upset and you've had a long, hard day at work, but most teachers are caring professionals who take parental concerns seriously. Reassure your child that you are dealing with the situation. Remember that your child's teacher has also had a long, hard day at work and may well have children of their own waiting for them to arrive home.

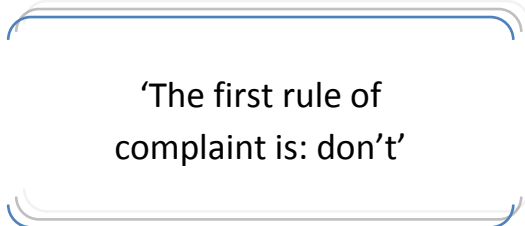
Sweat the small stuff

Staff spend a vast amount of time dealing with paperwork and parents who return forms promptly are always much appreciated. Every trip is punctuated by last minute phone calls to secure consent – ensure that you aren't one of them. Keep appointments for parent consultations or phone to cancel if you can't make it. Make sure that your emergency contact details, together with any medical needs and necessary drugs, are all kept right up to date. It may seem obvious, but it's not unusual for staff to repeatedly request the replacement of out-of-date inhalers or epipens, only to find that an emergency contact mobile number is no longer active. Being busy at work is no excuse.

When a school is inspected, parents receive survey forms as part of the process. Parents can also request to meet an inspector. Forms are often only returned when parents are dissatisfied, so fill in your parent survey with an honest and realistic appraisal of your experience. Include the positives and encourage other parents to do the same – it will have an impact.

If things go wrong

The first rule of complaint is 'don't'. The stronger and more trusting your relationship is, the more likely you are to be able to resolve problems through dialogue, but sometimes parents have done all they can to work with the school and the problem hasn't been



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resolved. All schools must have an established complaints procedure which you will need to follow, so ask for a copy of the policy if it isn't available on the website. Think in advance of any meetings about what you want to say and write it down so

that you can stay focused. Check emails and letters for clarity and courtesy before you send them – it's all too easy to over-react when you're upset. Remaining calm when your child's wellbeing is at stake isn't easy, but it is the most effective way of resolving any problem.