



**CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
MELBOURNE**



# Parent Engagement in Action

A practical guide and toolkit for schools

## The Guide

**Parent Engagement in Action:  
A practical guide and toolkit for  
schools**

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# PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

## Foreword

*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) states:

*'Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that the primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs... It is necessary to foster initiatives which encourage commitment, but which provide at the same time the right sort of concrete support which the family needs and which involve it in the Catholic school's educational project. The constant aim of the school therefore, should be contact and dialogue with the pupils' families... in order to clarify with their indispensable collaboration that personalised approach which is needed for an educational project to be efficacious'.<sup>1</sup>*

As formal schooling begins, a strong partnership is formed between families and the school to ensure the learning that takes place is of the highest quality. This partnership has the greatest impact on student learning and wellbeing when the relationship between families and the school is strong, and building relationships is core work of the school. The Catholic Education Office Melbourne emphasises the significance of this work when it names the active engagement of families in learning as a key strategic objective for .

*Parent Engagement in Action* is a product of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships Family School Partnership (FSP) initiative in schools across the Archdiocese of Melbourne. It is based on national and international research, and on

what has been learned through the experience of schools in the FSP initiative.

The *Parent Engagement in Action* resource guides school leaders through a process of reflection and evaluation focusing on parental engagement across four key focus areas: Relationships, Learning, Leadership, and Reflection. It consists of two components: The Guide and The Toolkit.

It is designed to assist school leaders and teachers to examine what they are doing well to engage parents in learning, and where they can improve. Leaders can use the *Parent Engagement in Action* resource to help their parish and school community form a deeper understanding of parent engagement. They are offered a selection of tools to assist with the collection and analysis of existing and new data around parent engagement, including the School Improvement Framework data. There is as much emphasis on formal data and research as there is on local information and knowledge. School leaders are encouraged to use the information gathered through this resource to evaluate and plan for improvement.

Three years in the making, this resource is an exciting development for Catholic school communities. It is a leading edge resource that enables school leaders to develop a clear picture of what parent engagement looks like, and presents a process for establishing effective reflective practices that focus on building relationships and nurturing links to learning.

I commend *Parent Engagement in Action* to you as an excellent resource to support your community to continue building on the outstanding work Catholic schools are undertaking to improve outcomes for young people through engaging parents in learning.

Stephen Elder  
**Executive Director**  
Archdiocese of Melbourne

<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education 1998 *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, Vatican City



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

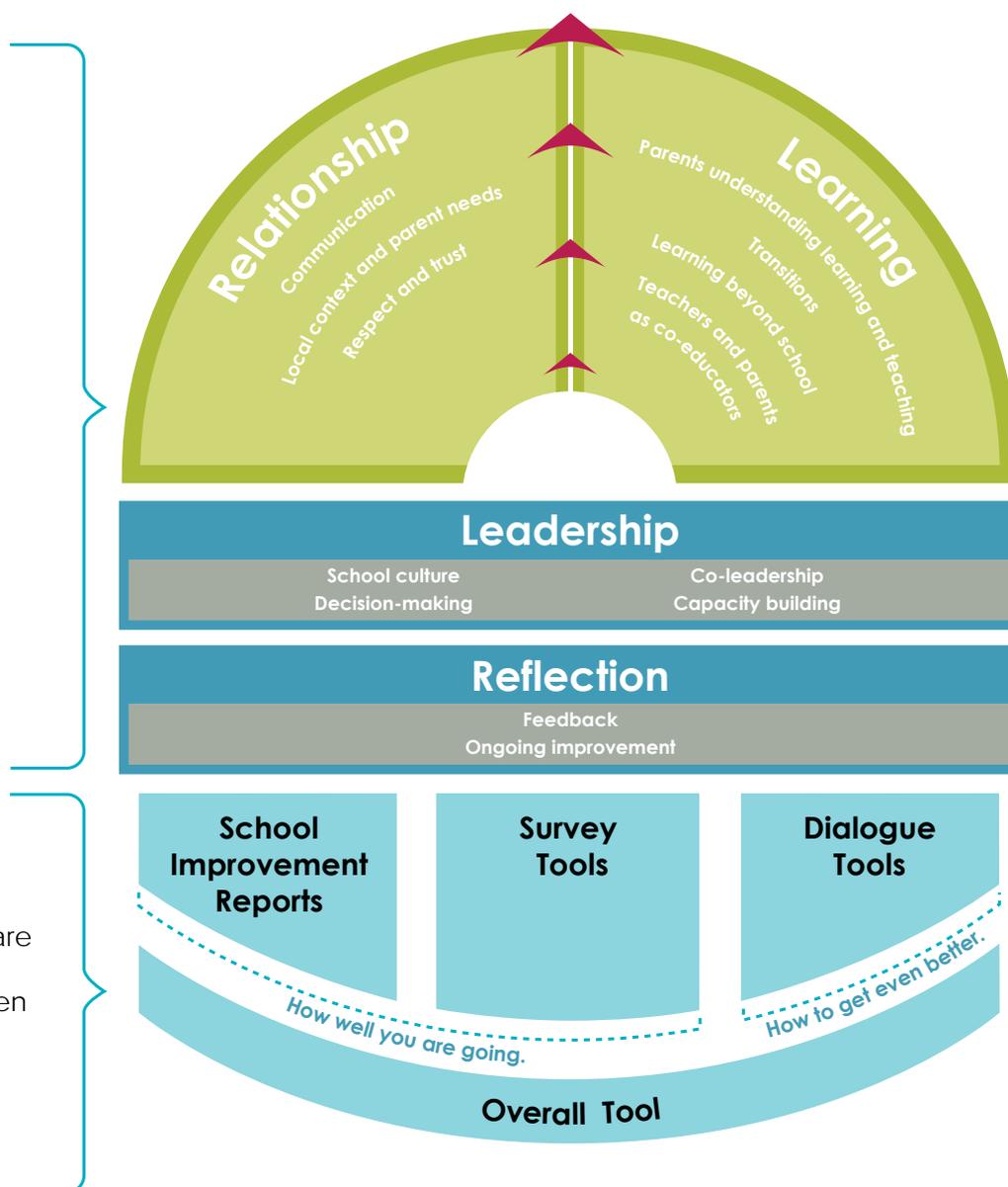
## Overview

Parent engagement is developing **relationships** with the primary caregivers of students to empower them as active partners in their child's **learning**. Where this works well, **leadership** and **reflection** are essential supports and are critical to being strategic. There is always somewhere to start, and always somewhere to improve.

Below is a summary of learnings, grouped into **key areas** of focus. Each key area has **themes** which help to define it. This Guide offers information and ideas about each key area. There is also a [Toolkit](#) to help you measure and reflect on parent engagement.

**The Guide**  
What parent engagement involves  
*Sections 1 – 6*

**The Toolkit**  
To reflect on:  
• How well you are going.  
• How to get even better.  
*Overview in Section 7*



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

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SECTION ONE  
Introduction



# INTRODUCTION

## About

This resource (the Guide and the Toolkit) are built on the learnings of school communities and Catholic Education Melbourne through their experiences as part of the Family School Partnership (FSP) Initiative. It is backed by Australian and international research and professional learning.

The purpose of this resource is to help school leaders and educators know:

- How well they are going with parent engagement
- How to get even better.

It includes:

- What we (the FSP school communities and Catholic Education Melbourne) have learnt about parent engagement ([Our learnings, page 5](#))
- A summary of the key areas of focus for effective parent engagement, with a development continuum in each key area ([Key areas and steps, page 7](#))
- Reflection tools that support the measurement of effective parent engagement ([Toolkit overview, page 37](#)).

This project was funded by Catholic Education Melbourne through the Smarter Schools National Partnership Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) School Communities Initiative.

**The best way to use this resource is:**

1. Read through this Guide:



There is **information** about each key area: Leadership, Relationship, Learning, and Reflection.

2. Reflect on how well you are going:



Use the **reflection questions** to self-reflect, or reflect with other staff, parents and/or students. Use the Toolkit to gather information.

Identify strengths and challenges.

3. Reflect on how to get even better:



Discuss the **ideas** that will build on strengths and overcome challenges

Trial and adapt strategies that strengthen relationships and focus on the students' learning

Make it a part of your everyday work, and periodically review how you are going using the Toolkit.

**If you are short on time, there are some suggested entry points on [page 33](#).**

# INTRODUCTION

## Our learnings

Key learnings from the FSP initiative that inform this resource include:

- Parent engagement is developing **relationships** with the primary caregivers of students to empower them as active partners in their child's **learning**.
- **Leadership** and **reflection** are critical to being strategic with our activities. There is always somewhere to start, and always somewhere to improve.
- No single strategy fits all school contexts – but questions and ideas have helped us adapt strategies to our needs.
- Start with a conversation with a parent and ask questions that build the relationship. Collectively as a school try to reach every parent.

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## What kind of school do we want?

- Parents are the first educators of their child. Catholic schools partner with parents for their child's education, supported by collaboration with the parish community, Catholic Education Melbourne and the wider community. We also respect parents' fundamental human rights, including the right to know, understand and share in school decisions that affect the education of their child.
- Research shows that effective parent engagement is essential for schools to improve student learning and wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>
  - Schools that undertake effective parent engagement are up to four times more likely to improve literacy and up to ten times more likely to improve numeracy.
  - Effective strategies are important for all schools, but are particularly important for schools with diverse communities, and in cases where students are not meeting minimum learning benchmarks.
  - A lack of parent engagement will undermine the effectiveness of other school improvement strategies.
- Parent engagement takes time and resources. These need to be planned for in the school's structures and reviews, with support and expectations set for all staff (such as through the School Improvement Plan, Annual Action Plans and any follow-on workplans). We have also found capacity building essential, such as professional learning and using staff that act as a bridge between the school and parents, e.g. cultural and home liaisons.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the substantial research into parent engagement see Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders 2012, 'Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research', a report by The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra.

# INTRODUCTION

## Our learnings

### What kind of teachers do we want to be?

- Engaging parents as active partners in their child's learning is one of the most effective strategies to improve student learning and wellbeing outcomes.
  - Children spend the majority of their time outside of the classroom. Parents are the primary educators. Parents can become partners with you to achieve the students' learning goals.
  - The key is to build respectful relationships with parents, and focus the relationship on their child's learning.
  - Effective strategies are important for all teachers, but are particularly important when trying to overcome educational disadvantage.
- Work out the needs of your particular students and their parents. Different strategies will work for different parents and in different contexts. Plan for it and try different strategies. It can be part of what you already do, or there may be ways you can adapt what you already do.
  - In primary schools you may invite parents into your classroom. In secondary schools you may follow a collaborative approach with your colleagues to meet your students' parents.
  - Younger students may be excited to invite their parents along to the classroom and for their parents to be partners in teaching and learning. Older students may appreciate being empowered to lead teaching and learning with their parents, and having their work celebrated.
  - Encourage your students to invite their parents to talk to you.
  - Focus on your learning at home strategies, and how to link family activities with what the students need to learn. Ask parents how these strategies could be even better.
  - Seek to know and understand the parish and the community. With colleagues explore some of the learning opportunities in the local community (e.g. libraries, community centres, adult education services).
- Be careful about 'education speak'. Practice explaining student learning goals and teaching strategies to someone who isn't a teacher.
- Be open to trying new things. The evidence about the importance of parent engagement is growing all the time. It is now accepted as an essential part of effective teaching. In other ways it simply reflects long-standing traditions of teaching.

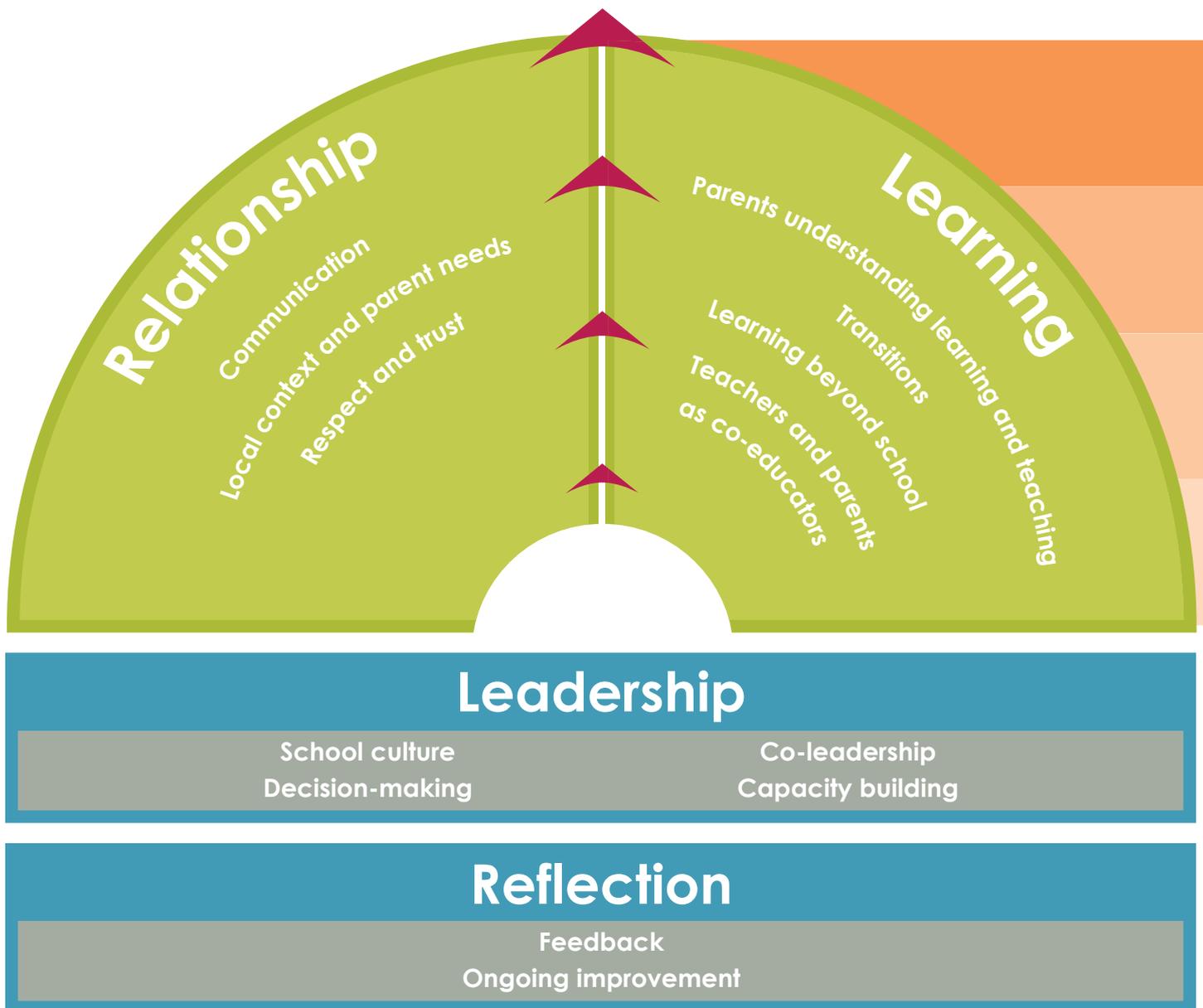
*'Getting to know the parents is critical. Teachers who do this are the teachers who have a better year.'*

# INTRODUCTION

## Key areas and steps

Below is a summary of our learnings, grouped into **key areas** of focus (Relationship, Learning, Leadership, and Reflection). Each key area of focus is critically important. The most effective parent engagement strategies build respectful relationships with parents, and focus the relationship on the students' learning. Where this works well, leadership and reflection are essential supports.

Each key area has **themes** which help to define it.



# INTRODUCTION

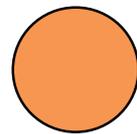
## Key areas and steps

Each key area has **steps** (a development continuum). Each step is important. Our focus will shift at different times of the year and with different parents to allow multiple entry points. Each step is cumulative and supports the next to be achieved more often.

Overall, we start at Foundation, build Involvement, aim for Engagement, and aspire to Partnership. Aiming for the most effective strategies is the best approach to achieve long-lasting 'small effort, high impact' changes.

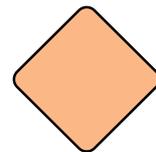
### Partnership

Strategic, embedded in school life, collaborative, shared responsibility.



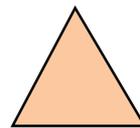
### Engagement

Conversations, listening, empowering, evolving, can be parent-initiated.



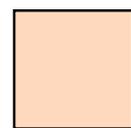
### Involvement

Information sharing, explaining, preparing (structures and processes in place), school-initiated.



### Foundation

Gathering knowledge, inviting contact, knowing the community, making a commitment



# INTRODUCTION

## What we mean when we say

### What we mean when we say

- Parents – any primary caregiver for a young person
- Learning – all aspects of learning, including social and emotional learning, and in-school and out-of-school learning
- Leadership – the act of planning for and encouraging parent engagement to improve.

### Why focus on parents?

'Parent' refers to the primary caregiver and is often used interchangeably with 'family'. While engagement of the broader family unit has a significant and positive impact on the development of children and young people, this resource focuses on parents or primary caregivers as the first point of contact (where possible) for targeted engagement strategies. This is not to exclude other members of the family (e.g. grandparents, siblings, etc), but recognises the fundamental role that parents or primary caregivers play in maximising learning and development outcomes for children and young people.

## About the FSP initiative

Catholic Education Melbourne's Family School Partnership initiative commenced as part of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships reform agenda. Thirty-five low SES school communities have been supported to build effective relationships with parents and communities as key partners in children's and young people's learning.

Participating schools have been supported by a Family School Partnership Convenor, brokerage funding, professional learning and resources. The quotes in this Guide are from the teachers, principals, parents and Convenors involved.



## SECTION TWO

Parent engagement key area

# Leadership



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Leadership



### Reflection Questions

- What can we/I do to improve the engagement of parents?
- How can we involve parents more in our school improvement planning and decision-making?
- How do we/I ensure parent engagement is everyone's responsibility in our school?
- How do we/I build everyone's capacity to engage parents?

*'Ask and listen for the authentic parent voice ... talking is action.'*



### Information

Strong leadership for parent engagement is essential. School leaders, teacher leaders and parent leaders see how things can be better, and plan for the time and resources needed to make it happen. They set parent engagement as a priority and make it a core part of 'how we do things here'.

Leadership by principals and other school leaders influences whether parent engagement is prioritised and made possible through allocated time, resources, professional learning and capacity building. This determines how much parent engagement happens. It also enables school-wide strategies and sets school-wide agendas, culture, values and vision.

Leadership by teachers and other school educators sets how respectful relationships are established with parents. This shapes the effectiveness of the school's parent engagement. It also enables classroom, year level, or subject area specific strategies.

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Leadership

### Themes

#### School culture

- Culture and values are respectful and celebrate diversity and cultural identities
- School is accessible and welcoming
- New parents to the school are welcomed
- Parents feel welcome in the school
- Strategies provide multiple entry points for different parents at different times
- Parent groups are representative of overall parent community
- Parents feel they are a valued part of the school community
- Parents feel ownership of the school.

#### Decision-making

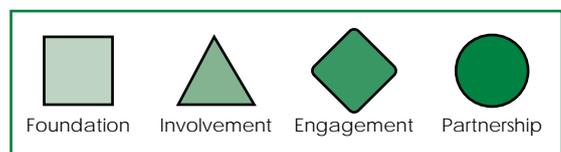
- School improvement planning prioritises parent engagement
- Processes, policies, procedures and infrastructure are developed to prioritise parent engagement
- Consultative decision-making
- Collaborative decision-making.

#### Co-leadership

- Responsibilities and expectations for parent engagement are set for all staff
- Positive behaviours and attitudes to parents are modelled by leaders
- Parent groups help the school meet its needs
- Positive behaviours and attitudes to parents are modelled by staff
- Parent groups help engage other parents
- Positive behaviours and attitudes to parents are modelled by parents
- Parent groups start initiatives and contribute to school planning process.

#### Capacity building

- Staff needs regarding time, resources and support for parent engagement are known
- Time and resources are prioritised for parent engagement
- Staff support needs are met by professional learning and capacity building
- Professional learning includes staff and parents
- Partnerships are established with parish priests and local schools and organisations to meet staff, parent and student needs.



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Leadership



Ideas

### How accessible and welcoming is our school culture and my classroom?

- Do a school walk-through with parents.
- Invite parents into the classroom.
- Establish a parent space in the school.
- Create multilingual signage.
- Discuss obstacles to parent engagement and how to overcome them, such as care for pre-school children, contact after hours, parking, transport, etc.

### How do I make more collaborative decisions?

- Develop parent groups: Parent Action Teams, School Boards, Parent and Friends Committees, parent clubs, parish committees.
- Revisit school plans, processes and policies with staff and parents.
- Involve people – ask for input, support joint reflection and involve parents in evaluation using the Toolkit.

### How do I strengthen everyone's co-leadership of parent engagement?

- Model positive and respectful behaviour and attitudes to parents as primary educators.
- As a staff group discuss the time and resources that are needed to support everyone to effectively engage parents.
- Collectively set expectations for parent engagement and plan together on how you will meet these expectations. For example, the types of engagement or the frequency of contact.
- Trial new strategies in teams – start with keen colleagues and go from there.
  - Have it as a regular topic at staff meetings.
  - Create targets for parent engagement in the School Improvement Plan, Annual Action Plans, individual workplans, across all areas.
  - Include a budget for parent engagement.
  - Include it as part of induction for new staff.
  - Celebrate good parent engagement.

*'Try something new,  
take risks, and let go of  
control.'*

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Leadership



Ideas

### How do I find the time to engage parents in their child's learning?

- Do things you already do – just differently. For example, change the way you do parent–teacher interviews or information evenings to build relationships as well as focus on the students' learning. Reach all parents by using personal invitations. Encourage parent feedback by asking questions and make it fun! Include food. People naturally enjoy two-way conversations that encourage honesty, respect and a diversity of views.

### What types of capacity building will be useful?

- Access to cultural and family liaison people.
- Access to interpreters.
- Professional learning on parent engagement (for leaders, educators, and parents).
- Working in clusters with other local schools to share learnings and pool resources.
- Working with the parish priest or local community partners to harness community resources (e.g. local library, government, charities and service organisations, businesses, child care centres).
- Establish a Professional Learning Team on parent engagement.

*'What are the barriers to parent engagement in our school?'*



## SECTION THREE

Parent engagement key area

# Relationship



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Relationship



### Reflection Questions

- Do we/I know how to contact each parent, including those who can't come to the school?
- How do we/I get to know our school's parents and our local community?
- How can we/I have deeper relationships with the parents of my students?
- How well do we/I invite and welcome parents to get to know us?



### Information

Parent engagement happens through relationships. Ideally these are built through respectful conversations. In seeking to remove barriers and know and understand our parent communities, we have been surprised by how much common ground we have.

The invitation is important – so parents know they are welcome. Act against any perceptions of unequal hierarchy: use first names, ask questions, listen, and work with parents to achieve common goals.

Aim for conversations to be non-judgemental, open and respectful. Encourage feedback and celebrate difficult conversations that end constructively – it means there's honesty and respect there!

Know the local community to understand the parents and link in with local opportunities.

Parents also need to understand the school, so communication and information sharing needs to be clear, regular and in local community languages.

Trial and adapt parent engagement strategies that build respectful relationships with parents. Find out if your strategies have met parents' needs. Partner with parents to trial or adapt new strategies.

It all builds school community and social capital – but it can also be fun.

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Relationship

### Themes

#### Communication

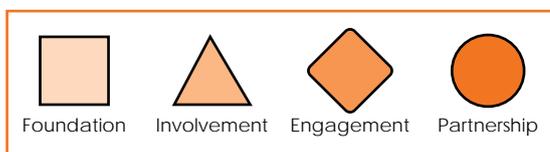
- Regular conversations with parents
- School structures that support staff to have frequent conversations with parents
- △ Communication and information sharing is easily understandable, in multiple formats, happens often and is in local community languages
- △ Information events, parent–teacher interviews and reports are accessible to all parents
- ◇ There are regular opportunities for parents to give feedback
- ◇ Staff listen to parents
- Relationships exist with all parents
- Feedback becomes an open and honest action learning cycle.

#### Local context and parent needs

- Parents' needs and preferences are known, including work hours, contact details, languages and cultural backgrounds
- Students' preferences for parent engagement are known
- Staff know the local community
- △ Parent engagement strategies are trialled based on parent needs
- △ Parents understand how the school operates
- ◇ Parent engagement strategies meet parent needs, and are accessible to all parents.

#### Respect and trust

- Invitations to parents are personal and first names are used
- △ Each interaction allows for parent feedback and builds a relationship of openness and respect
- △ Staff are open, honest and non-judgemental with parents
- △ Volunteering opportunities exist for parents
- ◇ Relationships of openness and respect exist between staff and parents
- ◇ Parents feel comfortable to be open and give honest feedback
- ◇ Difficult conversations end constructively
- ◇ Parents know each other
- ◇ Parents help run parent engagement strategies
- Staff see parents as people first and parents second
- Parents and staff partner on joint projects.



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Relationship



### Ideas

#### How do I build deeper relationships of respect and trust with parents?

- Start with celebration – tell the parent what you see are their child's learning strengths (e.g. academic, social emotional learning, faith-based).
- Find out the parent's hopes for their child.
- Find out the parent's passions and interests.
- Ask students to create a personalised invitation to their parents to a parent engagement event or activity.

#### How do I set up ways to have regular conversations with parents?

- Structure classes and school practices for interaction with parents (e.g. school dismissal in the yard with parents, rosters, home liaisons).
- Have informal conversations before and after class or school.
- Find out how and when it's best to contact each parent.
- Have regular phone calls.
- Do home visits.
- Maintain contact logs with telephone numbers, times to contact, email addresses, home addresses and expectations about frequency of contact coordinated across the staff group.

*'We are not working FOR parents, we are working WITH parents.'*

#### How do I meet parent needs and have fun, while also building respect and trust?

- Meet parent learning needs (e.g. English language classes, computer classes, job training).
- Hold events for parents (e.g. for cultural or language groups, for fundraising, for faith-based activities, around food, sports, games, dances, excursions, or around times of the year such as orientation, beginning of each term, mid-year, end-of-year, Mother's Day, Father's Day).
- Send notifications to parents (e.g. SMS, emails) about events.
- Celebrate achievements and milestones together.
- Ask students how they would like their parents to be involved.

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Relationship



### Ideas

#### How can I help parents to understand the school?

- Ask parents for feedback about the school's current communication, events, parent–teacher interviews, and reports.
- Do school tours for parents.
- Utilise translators and cultural liaisons.

#### How can I get to know the local community?

- Visit local organisations.
- Subscribe to local mailing lists (e.g. local council, library, community centre, community organisations).
- Conduct community tours for staff.

*'Changing the power dynamic is critical to enabling better relationships and building trust.'*

*'We don't just enrol kids, we enrol families – we need to know their stories.'*



# SECTION FOUR

Parent engagement key area

# Learning



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Learning



### Reflection Questions

- How do we/I explain what we are teaching in the school, and how we do it?
- How do we/I support parents with their child's key educational transitions?
- What can we/I learn from parents regarding their child's learning happening in their home and community?
- How can we/I empower parents to partner with me to achieve the students' learning goals?



### Information

High impact parent engagement strategies are focused on the students' learning.

Parents have been educating their children since birth. We know that learning happens everywhere. Explain to parents what you are trying to achieve with their child. Invite parents to become active partners in achieving those goals.

The relationship with the parent can be focused on their child's learning goals, development stages, individual needs, or be based on the broader needs of the class, year level or subject area, or for supporting educational transitions.

Explain what strategies you are using in the school and classroom, and how they could use similar strategies at home. Explain what other supports the parents can access to help their child. Ask the parents about their child's learning needs, strengths and challenges, and how the parents respond to these. Discuss what else you and the parents could be doing to meet the individual learning needs of the child – both in and out of the classroom.

Trial and adapt parent engagement strategies that meet student needs. Find out if they have met their needs. Partner with parents to trial or adapt new strategies.

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Learning

### Themes

#### Parents understanding learning and teaching

- Students' learning needs are known
- Students' development stages are known
- Learning is consistently visible throughout the school and in its communications
- ▲ The language of learning is explained in parent friendly language
- ▲ Classroom arrangements and strategies are explained
- ▲ Strategies for meeting student learning needs are explained
- ▲ Strategies for responding to student development stages are explained.

#### Transitions

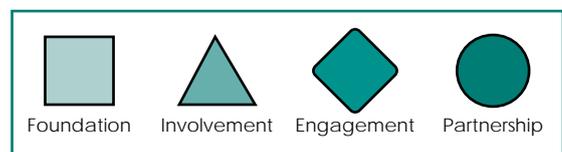
- ▲ Information is provided to parents regarding student educational transitions
- ◆ Parents explain their child's learning needs at key transition points
- Parents and staff work together to prepare students for the next phase of schooling.

#### Learning beyond school

- It is acknowledged that learning happens everywhere (including at home)
- ▲ Learning at home is used to meet student learning needs
- ◆ Parents explain their usual family activities
- ◆ Staff and parents discuss the learning at home that is already happening
- ◆ Parents contribute to the learning at home strategies that build on family activities.

#### Teachers and parents as co-educators

- Parents are celebrated as primary educators
- Learning achievements are celebrated
- ◆ Parents share their strategies with staff for meeting individual needs of their child
- ◆ Parents contribute to learning in the classroom
- Teachers and parents learn strategies together to meet individual learning needs and development stages of the child
- Parents are partners in the child's learning
- Parents, students and staff partner on joint learning projects
- School is a learning community for all.



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Learning



### Ideas

#### How do I explain learning and make it visible?

- Practice explaining student learning goals and teaching strategies to someone who is not a teacher:
  - ◦ Examples of words that may not be parent friendly include: literacy, numeracy, curriculum, comprehension, differentiated learning, cohort, incursion, learning intentions, manipulatives, pedagogy, rubrics, critical thinking, deductive and inductive reasoning.
- Give parents the strategies they can use with their child (i.e. don't just encourage the parent to read with their child).
  - ◦ Tell the parent the focus for your class this term (i.e. the specific vocabulary or grammar focus).
  - ◦ Explain the strategies you are using and discuss with the parent how they can use those or similar strategies with their child.
  - ◦ If possible base this discussion on the particular learning needs of their child.
  - ◦ Provide opportunities to practice the strategies and give and receive feedback.
  - ◦ Follow up later to see how the strategies are working and discuss how to deepen or extend them.
- Make all parent engagement events have a focus on the students' learning.
- Make all communications and information sharing have a focus on the students' learning.
- Exhibit student work along with the assessment criteria used.
- Invite parents to mark student work using assessment criteria.
- Include parents in celebrating their children's learning achievements.
- Explain educational transitions and opportunities (don't assume parents know).

*'Parent engagement for learning, through learning, about learning.'*

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Learning



### Ideas

#### How can I capitalise on learning happening everywhere?

- Be explicit to the students that learning happens everywhere.
- Design curriculum or teaching strategies to link in-school learning to the students' life outside of the classroom. Think about where the students could use what you are trying to teach them. Be creative.
- Ask parents about the learning that is occurring in their home and community and seek to make connections to in-school learning.
- Discuss the current homework with parents and get feedback.
- Design learning at home strategies with parents (e.g. design grids of activities and learning outcomes, such as grocery shopping for numeracy, visiting family members for literacy, etc., partner with a local library or organisation to get books into homes, or design holiday activities).
- Engage parents in their child's social and emotional learning – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

#### How do we learn together?

- Ask parents their child's learning strengths and challenges, and how they respond to them.
- Set up co-learning opportunities between teachers and parents at least once per term (e.g. community classrooms, learning together events).
- Empower students to lead learning activities with their parents.
- Invite parents into your classroom.
- Invite parents to be visiting teachers (e.g. interviews, storytelling, specific subject areas).
- Set up inquiry projects or play groups with the students and their parents.

*'We focus everything we do with parents on the student's learning.'*

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Learning



### Ideas

- Set up events: Term or semester events, orientation events, celebrations of learning achievement, reading/maths events, classroom information evenings, parent-teacher interviews (e.g. ask questions, co-learn), before and after school learning activities (e.g. open the library after hours one night).
- Where appropriate invite parents to your school activities which are focused on improving student learning (e.g. professional learning, curriculum development, Professional Learning Team meetings, staff meetings).

*'Child-centred. It's all about the kids.'*



# SECTION FIVE

Parent engagement key area

# Reflection



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Reflection



### Reflection Questions

- How do we/I invite feedback from parents?
- How can we/I make parent engagement even better?
- How do we/I know which strategies are working, and which ones need improvement?
- We are/I am trying to do too much, what should we/I focus my time on?

*'We have limited time and resources, we need to be strategic.'*



### Information

Reflection about parent engagement is important for everyone in the school. It can help work out:

- Which strategies are high impact, and which strategies are also important
- Which strategies are working well and how to make them even better
- Which strategies need development, and how to develop them
- Which strategies to stop.

It can also help to:

- Learn and continually improve
- Be strategic and sustainable
- Be collaborative and make wise decisions.

The reflection questions throughout this Guide may be useful. The Toolkit also provides a range of surveys and dialogue tools you can use. Reflection can be done individually, or with peers, parents and/or students.

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Reflection

When using the Toolkit, be clear about what you are seeking to find out. Also, be clear with people about how the information you collect will be used and who will see it. Make sure you have approvals from the principal for any research.

If making a collaborative decision, explain the boundaries of what can be decided, how much people can influence the decision, and if someone will have the final say. Focus on creating safety for everyone participating.

Principals and other school leaders can build consideration of parent engagement into school review and planning processes, policies, meetings and responsibilities.

Teachers and other school educators can build consideration of parent engagement into term and weekly planning.

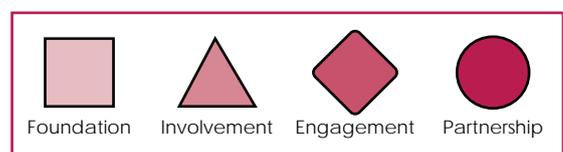
### Themes

#### Feedback

- Self-assessment on parent engagement attitudes, skills and support needs
- ▲ Consultations occur with staff and peers
- ▲ Peer-assessment on parent engagement attitudes, skills and support needs
- ◆ Consultations occur with parents and students
- ◆ Parent-assessment on parent engagement attitudes, skills and support needs
- Parents and staff host regular reflection conversations.

#### Ongoing improvement

- Purpose and targets are defined
- Action learning approach is used
- School review and school-wide data is available
- ▲ Strategies are based on consultations with staff and peers
- ▲ Feedback from staff is acted upon, and the results shared with staff
- ◆ Strategies are based on consultations with parents and students
- ◆ Feedback from parents is acted upon, and the results shared with parents
- Decisions are evidence-based
- Parent engagement strategies are effective and high impact.



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Reflection



### Ideas

#### How do I collect valid and meaningful information?

- Use and adapt the tools in the Toolkit (section 7). Be aware that 'anecdotal' data becomes a very valid data source (called qualitative data) if you collect it consistently. It is often the most important data source to measure parent engagement activities.
- Plan your reflection:
  - Limit it to a few key issues
  - Keep your questions very clear, with one concept per question
  - Create simple statements to test, which can produce number results (e.g. 'I found this event useful' with responses to tick: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
  - Provide multiple ways for parents to respond (i.e. a paper form, an email, a phone call or face-to-face).
- Feedback and consultation includes surveys, interviews, phone interviews, focus groups, forums, workshops, meetings, talking circles, community conversations.
- Provide multiple ways for parents to provide feedback – the same questions can be used across surveys and interviews.
- Other evidence can also be used such as school-data, attendance figures, student results, photos and filming (with permissions).

#### What do I do once I have the information?

- Look at the information objectively, and focus on strengths. People naturally focus on negative feedback more than positive feedback. Some good questions to ask include:
  - ○ On balance was there more positive than negative feedback?
  - ○ What were the themes across the feedback, both positive and negative?
  - ○ How can you focus on the strengths identified, and build on those to address any challenges identified?

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Reflection



### Ideas

#### How can I be strategic?

- Use this Guide to consider whether each of your current parent engagement activities include elements of each key area (i.e. Leadership, building Relationship, focusing on the students' Learning, Reflection).
- Use the themes and steps in each key area to consider how a strategy might be further developed to be higher impact.
- Use the Toolkit to see what peers, parents and students think.
- Use the ideas in this Guide to think of new strategies that will meet needs in your school.
- Do a traffic light analysis:



- Red: stop activities that are making little difference
- Orange: keep doing activities that are making a difference to the students and parents
- Green: start new and different ways of working that will have long term positive impacts for students and parents.

*'We started small and learnt as we went.'*

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT KEY AREA

## Reflection

### What are the best ways to consult with others and are these valid evaluation techniques?

- Below are some effective ways you can evaluate your parent engagement strategies. It is suggested these become part of your school review process and the development of your School Improvement Plan and Annual Action Plans.
- The [Toolkit](#) provides surveys and dialogue tools to help you consult with others.

	What for	When	Who with	How
Self assessment	Starting out Reflection Individual activities	Any time	Yourself	Build time in your schedule and find a way to prioritise it. Keep a journal, take photos or film.
Peer assessment	When working collaboratively When trying out new strategies	When you have time with a colleague	With a colleague	For you: define what you are wanting to know. For your colleague: Keep it based on the facts, not your opinions.
Surveys/ Phone interviews/ Focus groups/ Conversations	To gain the perspectives of others To collect and analyse consistent data	Once off or periodically (i.e. beginning or end of term, semester or year)	Parents Students Teachers Leaders Community Organisations	Keep it simple and short. Test both simple statements and allow for open responses. Plan how you will collect and analyse the data.
Feedback/ feedback sheets	To learn from and improve upon activities and events	After an activity or event	Whoever attended an event	Plan for the method of feedback before the event or activity.
Workshops	When designing an approach, or discussing big issues that require creative solutions When reflecting as a whole school/ year level/learning area	At key points in decision making processes	Parents Students Teachers Leaders Community Organisations	Plan how you will capture the summaries of each conversation. Plan how you will allow people to prioritise issues or actions. Be clear if any decisions can be made by the group or if it is information gathering only.



SECTION SIX  
Lost or  
overwhelmed?



# LOST OR OVERWHELMED?

## Suggested entry points

If you are short on time, here are some other suggested ways to use this resource:

		Page
I am not convinced that parent engagement is important	● Our learnings	5
I do not have time to do parent engagement, or it is too difficult	● Leadership	11
I have an upcoming parent engagement event, how do I make it as high impact as possible	● Relationship	16
	● Learning	21
I have an upcoming leadership team meeting	● Leadership	11
	● Dialogue tools for leaders - Toolkit	41
I have an upcoming professional learning team meeting	● Learning	21
	● Dialogue tools for teachers - Toolkit	41
I am undertaking school improvement planning	● Leadership	11
	● Reflection	27
	● Overview of the Toolkit	37
I want teachers in our school to reflect on parent engagement	● Survey tool for teachers - Toolkit	39
And how to get even better	● Dialogue tools for teachers - Toolkit	41
I want leaders in our school to reflect on parent engagement	● Survey tools for leaders - Toolkit	39
	● Dialogue tools for leaders - Toolkit	41
I want to find out from parents their views about our school's parent engagement	● Survey tools for parents - Toolkit	39
	● Dialogue tools for parents - Toolkit	41
I want to find out from students their views about our school's parent engagement	● Survey tools for students (primary or secondary) - Toolkit	39
	● Dialogue tools for students - Toolkit	41
I am simply lost and overwhelmed and do not know where to start	● Lost or Overwhelmed: Start here	34

# LOST OR OVERWHELMED?

## Start here

- 1 Have a conversation with a parent. Use first names and invite a parent to have a conversation. If appropriate, provide food. Tell them what you appreciate about their child. Spend more time listening than talking. Three key questions could be:
  - What are your hopes and dreams for your child?
  - What do you love about this school/our class?
  - If there was one thing you could change about this school/our class, what would it be?

Identify the child's strengths with the parent and develop a learning plan.

- 2 Have a conversation with a student. Invite a student to have a conversation. Ask them how they would like their parents to be involved. For older students don't be surprised if there is some resistance, but ask more questions – e.g. What about when they do great work? What about if they needed help? Develop a plan based on the student's preferences.
- 3 Have a conversation with other staff, the School Board, the parish priest, or other community members.
- 4 Start small and make it fun. Trial a strategy that can help you achieve something you already want to achieve. Talk about it with other people in the school. Plan, act and reflect – and don't forget to celebrate getting it to happen!
- 5 Rethink an existing school activity. Try changing it to better build deeper relationships with parents through respectful conversations, and to better equip parents with strategies to partner in their child's learning.

# LOST OR OVERWHELMED?

## Making connections

If you use this resource, you are also making connections with other key resources including:

### **The Partnership objective in the *2011–2015 Directions for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne***

- Increasing the active engagement of parents in their child's learning.

### **The Partner objective in the *CEM Student Wellbeing Strategy 2011–2015***

- Promoting school community partnerships for learning.

### **The CEM *Charter for Promoting Outward Facing School Communities***

- Foster engagement in learning and build ownership, whereby students, teachers, families, schools and communities work in partnership to develop ideas and realise them.
- Build social capital and connect to children, young people and their families within the community, so everyone experiences a sense of belonging and hope for the future.
- Extend beyond the margins of formal schooling and as such can be owned collectively; they share resources, accountability and responsibility.
- Enhance the confidence and capacity of the community to engage in learning and promote wellbeing and achievement for all children and young people.

### **The Australian Government's *Family–School Partnerships Framework***

- Communicating
- Building community and identity
- Consultative decision-making
- Participating.
- Connecting learning at home and at school
- Recognising the role of the family
- Collaborating beyond the school

### **The seventh standard of AITSL's *National Professional Standards for Teachers***

- Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

### **The requirements and professional practices of AITSL's *National Professional Standard for Principals***

- Vision and values
- Developing self and others
- Personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills
- Leading the management of the school
- Knowledge and understanding
- Leading teaching and learning
- Leading improvement, innovation and change
- Engaging and working with the community.



SECTION SEVEN

# Overview of the Toolkit



# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

## Introduction



The Toolkit helps you and your school know how well you are going with parent engagement, and how to get even better. The tools are designed to be as simple or as in-depth as you wish. They can be used by you alone, in a team or as a school.

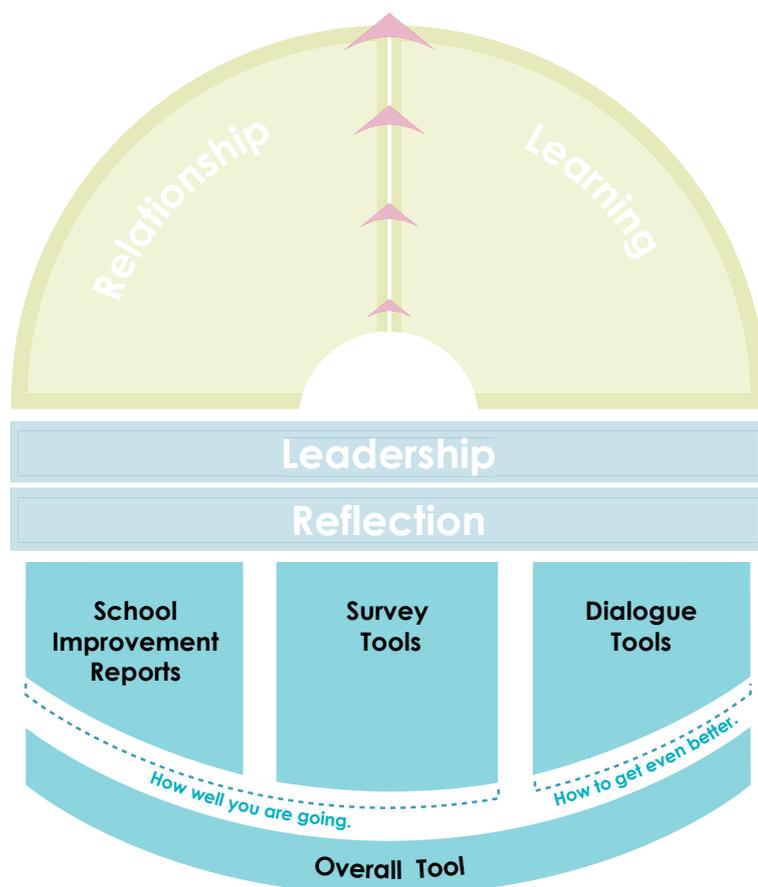
**You can pick and choose between the tools. Don't do too much to begin with – start small!**

- Start by picking one key area in one of the tools (i.e. focus on the Learning section of one of the Dialogue Tools in an upcoming meeting)
- Build to using a broader suite of the tools as part of your review or planning processes.

The [Toolkit](#) is available as a Word document from the CEM website. It is provided in Word format so that you can make the tools your own.

We encourage you to adapt the tools to your particular school context. This may include adding your logo, translating them to local community languages, or adding in questions about your particular parent engagement strategies. We encourage you to keep the difficult questions in – this will allow you to track progress over time but also to focus on what matters.

There are three sets of tools, plus an overall tool. Explanations and samples of these are provided on the following pages.



# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

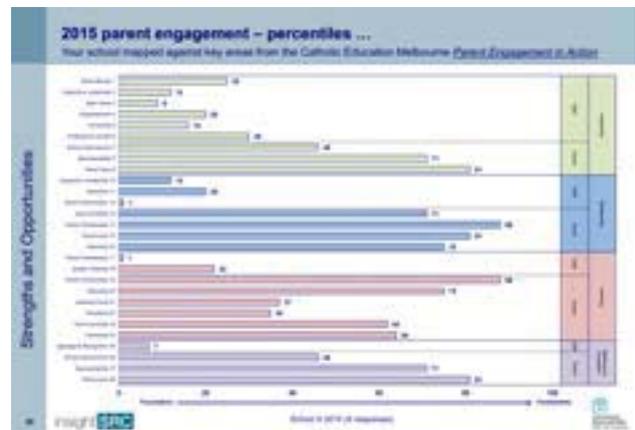
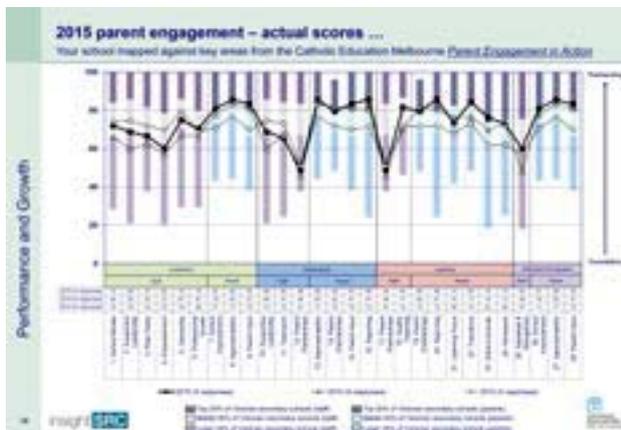
## School Improvement Reports

There is a School Improvement Survey: Parent Engagement Supplementary Report available for schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

### How to use

This tool has been developed to assist with assessing 'How well you are going with parent engagement'

It maps School Improvement Survey data against the key areas of parent engagement. It provides a broad benchmark across years and compares your results with other schools. It can complement the Survey Tools and Dialogue Tools of this resource to identify key areas to prioritise. It can also measure changes over time.



### How to access

Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne receive the Parent Engagement Interpretative Report as part of their School Improvement Report. Please contact Catholic Education Melbourne for more information. Please note: this report is only available for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

## Survey Tools

### How to use

The survey tools have been designed to assist with assessing 'How well you are going with parent engagement' but also help with suggestions for improvement.

These tools can be used as a **self-reflection tool** or can be used **with your peers, parents or students**. They can be used **online, over the phone** or handed out in **paper form**. They can also be used as **individual reflection tools** to spark discussion in staff meetings, professional learning team meetings, workshops with parents or classroom discussions, etc. If you prefer, you can focus on one key area at a time.

They will help identify how your school is going with parent engagement activities across each key area. They can be used as a starting point and can be followed by the more in-depth dialogue tools. They can be used regularly or as pre and post tools, to measure changes over time.

When using these survey tools:

- Reach more parents by using a variety of formats (i.e. online, phone, paper, etc.), translations and cultural liaison officers
- Be clear about what you are seeking to find out and use this to determine which groups you survey. Also, be clear with people about how the data will be used and who will see it
- Use a clear introduction. A suggested introduction is provided in the Toolkit.

There are survey tools for:

- Principals and leaders
- Teachers and educators
- Parents
- Secondary students
- Primary students.

These surveys are available as a [Word document](#).

# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

## Survey Tools

### Survey for teachers and educators

Notes:

- Parents = primary caregivers
- Yes = it's the norm (ie, usually, most of the time, or at least regularly)
- No = it's not the norm (ie, not usually, sometimes, occasionally, irregularly or never)

Leadership	Yes – it's the norm	No – it's not the norm
<b>School Culture</b>		
The school's culture and values celebrate diversity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school is accessible and welcoming for all parents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I engage with my students' parents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I work with my year level or subject area team/s to engage with the students' parents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My classroom/year level/subject area's parent engagement strategies provide multiple entry points for different parents at different times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Parents feel a valued part of the school community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My students' parents feel ownership of the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: <i>More could be done to celebrate cultural 'special days', and try to reach those 'hard to reach' parents more often.</i>		
<b>Decision-Making</b>		
The school's improvement planning prioritises strengthening in parent engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school's processes, policies and infrastructure help parent engagement to happen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If a key decision about my classroom affects parents, I consult with them before making the decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If a key decision about my classroom affects parents, I make the decision with them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments: <i>I consult with parents sometimes, like when I am offering something to <del>parent</del> parents. Sometimes it depends.</i>		
<b>Co-leadership</b>		
My responsibilities for parent engagement are clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The expectations of the school about how much I engage with parents are clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The school leaders model positive behaviours and attitudes to parents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

CEDM Parent Engagement in Action – Toolkit



# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

## Dialogue Tools

### How to use

The dialogue tools have been designed to assist with assessing 'How to get even better at parent engagement', but they also help describe the current situation.

These dialogue reflection tools can be used as a **self reflection tool** or can be used **with your peers, parents or students**. They can be used for **face-to-face** or **phone interviews**, or as **discussion points in meetings or workshops**, such as in staff meetings, professional learning team meetings, workshops with parents, classroom discussions, etc. If you prefer, you can focus on one key area at a time.

The tools will help identify your school's strengths in parent engagement and the ways in which you can build on those strengths. They can be an in-depth follow-on from the survey tools, or simply a good conversation starter.

When using these dialogue tools as an interview:

- Reach more parents by using a variety of formats (i.e. after school, before school, face-to-face, phone, home visits, etc.), translations, interpreters or cultural liaison officers
- Be clear about what you are seeking to find out and use this to determine the sample group. Also, be clear with people about how the information will be used and who will see it
- Use a clear introduction. A suggested introduction is provided in the Toolkit.

There are dialogue tools for:

- Principals and leaders
- Teachers and school
- Parents
- Students.

These tools are available as a [Word document](#).

# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

## Dialogue Tools

### Dialogue questions for parents

#### Leadership – About the school

1. When you come to the school, does it feel welcoming? If so, how? If not, why not?

Comments: I feel welcomed by the school staff, they are very friendly and respectful.

- 1.1. How could the school better welcome you?

Comments: Maybe having the welcome signs in different languages.

- 1.2. Is the school easy to enter? If so, how? If not, why not?

Comments: It's pretty easy to enter but not all the gates are open, so it can sometimes I don't go into the school.

- 1.3. How could the school be easier to enter?

Comments: It would be great if the gate near the Parish could be open during drop-off and pick-up times.

2. Do the school staff involve you when making important decisions? If so, please tell me about it.

Comments: Not really, but I remember something in the newsletter about school council meetings.

- 2.1. What important decisions would you like to be involved in, if any, and how would you like to be involved?

Comments: Maybe being involved in decisions about getting more aid workers for children who miss out on funding.

3. Do the staff invite you to help run some of the school's activities? If so, please tell me about it.

Comments: Yes, I help with the Cultural Day. The teacher asks me to make traditional food & then to talk about it on the day.

- 3.1. What school activities would you like to help run, if any, and how would you like to be involved?

Comments: I have heard of another school that my friend's daughter goes to that has groups for parents who they learn to sew. I could help run something like that.

CEOM Parent Engagement in Action - Toolkit

# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

## Overall Tool

This tool helps you to:

- Analyse the information collected using the other tools in the Toolkit
- Make conclusions about how well you are going with parent engagement
- Develop your parent engagement strategies to help you get even better.

Section	Allow you to:
1. <b>School Improvement reports</b>	Utilise School Improvement data based on your School Improvement Surveys to map parent engagement key areas. Please note, these reports are only available to schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne as part of their School Improvement Report.
2. <b>Survey Tools data analysis</b>	Analyse the responses from the Survey Tools used. This allows you to identify key strengths and areas for development.
3. <b>Dialogue Tools data analysis</b>	Analyse the various interviews or discussions from the Dialogue Tools used. This allows you to identify strengths and ways to improve.
4. <b>Overall summary</b>	<p>Reflect overall on 'how well we are going?', based on the School Improvement Survey reports, the survey tools data analysis and the dialogue tools data analysis.</p> <p>This section invites reflection on the overall strengths and opportunities for improvement in each key area. Once this section is completed, it can be discussed as a school community, subject area or year level.</p>
5. <b>Priorities and directions</b>	<p>Reflect overall on 'how we can get even better?', based on the overall summary, the school's relevant School Improvement Plan and Annual Action Plan goals, and any existing parent contact points.</p> <p>This invites personal or group reflection on specific opportunities that exist to improve parent engagement.</p>
6. <b>Developing strategies</b>	<p>Develop the parent engagement opportunities further.</p> <p>This invites personal or group reflection on developing the identified parent engagement opportunities to better address each key area. It can also be used to improve existing parent engagement strategies to be higher impact.</p>

# OVERVIEW OF THE TOOLKIT

## Overall Tool

### 4. Overall summary – "How well we are going"

Areas	Summary of strengths and opportunities for improvement		
	School Improvement Reports	Survey Tools	Dialogue Tools
<b>Leadership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School culture</li> <li>• Decision-making</li> <li>• Co-leadership</li> <li>• Capacity-building</li> </ul>	Staff survey: A strength, our particular relationship with parents - particularly feedback and responsiveness with our approachability with the principal Parent survey: School improvement and responsiveness with the principal Staff survey: Staff rating relationship with the principal - highly positive Parent survey:	Leaders: Strength: School culture very high Teachers: n/a Parents: Culture strong but decision-making n/a Students: n/a Leaders: Good but could be better Teachers: Want to be more involved in decision-making Parents: n/a Students: n/a	Leaders: Need to set responsibilities better Teachers: Unclear how to include parents in decision-making Parents: n/a Students: n/a
<b>Relationship</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Local context &amp; parent needs</li> <li>• Respect &amp; trust</li> </ul>	Staff survey: Staff rating relationship with the principal - highly positive Parent survey:	Leaders: Good and regular communication happening Teachers: Want to be more involved in decision-making Parents: n/a Students: n/a	Leaders: Good and regular communication happening Teachers: Want to be more involved in decision-making Parents: n/a Students: n/a
<b>Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents understanding learning and teaching</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Learning beyond school</li> <li>• Teachers &amp; parents as co-educators</li> </ul>	Staff survey: General area for improvement when compared with other schools Parent survey: Parent partnerships and extra-curricular very strong	Leaders: Challenge: Learning beyond school Teachers: n/a Parents: Higher response in lower years, teach by learning together. Parents talk to them. Students: n/a	Leaders: Learning events could be made more regular Teachers: Learning at home strategies working well in lower years - could engage and share good practice Parents: n/a Students: n/a
<b>Reflection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Ongoing improvement</li> </ul>	Staff survey: staff rating ongoing improvement Parent survey:	Leaders: Regions detailed review Teachers: n/a Parents: Lower years parents feel included Students: n/a	Students: Focused on learning with students staff - leading. High stake understanding well Leaders: Repeat this process next year Teachers: Learning events really important Parents: n/a Students: n/a

CEOM Parent Engagement in Action – Toolkit





## CATHOLIC EDUCATION MELBOURNE

Thanks for reading through this Guide! It represents what we (the school communities and Catholic Education Melbourne) have learnt about parent engagement through the Family School Partnerships initiative.

This Guide outlined how:

- Parent engagement is developing **relationships** with the primary caregivers of students to empower them as active partners in their child's **learning**
- **Leadership** and **reflection** are essential supports and are critical to being strategic.

Focusing on these four key areas (Relationship, Learning, Leadership, and Reflection) ensures the most effective parent engagement. Each key area has steps starting at Foundation, building to Involvement, aiming for Engagement and aspiring to Partnership. Each step is important and supports the next to be achieved more often. Aiming for the most effective strategies that span each key area is the best approach to achieve long-lasting 'small effort, high impact' changes.

This Guide described each key area, including:

- Reflection questions
- Information
- Steps organised into themes
- Ideas in relation to each theme.

It also gave an Overview of the Toolkit. The Toolkit helps you and your school know how well you are going with parent engagement, and how to get even better. Each tool is based on the key areas, themes and steps described in this Guide. There are tools to use individually, in teams, or with parents or students. The Toolkit is available as a [Word document from the CEM website](#). You are encouraged to use the Toolkit and adapt the tools to your particular school context. You can also pick and choose between the tools. Don't do too much to begin with and start small!

For further information, please contact  
Catholic Education Melbourne on

(03) 9267 0228