

Case study

Parenting support at Tidemill School

School name: Tidemill School
Phase: Primary
Interviewee: Roy Broadfield
Local authority: Lewisham
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As Tidemill School in Deptford continues to develop a full range of extended services part of its parenting support offer is a programme to engage parents more actively with their children's learning and deliver real standards benefits.

From special measures to top 5 per cent

Tidemill School in Deptford has been turned around in recent years and is now surging forward, going from special measures to become the fourth most improved school in the country in 2003 and now to be among the top 5 per cent of schools in the value added tables.

Please see [other Tidemill case studies](#).

Despite these successes, the school remains conscious of the areas where improvement and focus is necessary and a key school improvement priority. One of them is parental support. When Roy Broadfield began working at **Tidemill** School, Deptford, he brought with him experience of the INSPIRE workshops run by Birmingham LA in order to promote parental engagement in their children's learning.

At Roy's instigation **Tidemill** initially ran a series of workshops closely based on the Birmingham INSPIRE model. While these were a great success in terms of parental engagement, with 259 parents out of a possible 270 parents attending, Roy felt that the model could be further developed to focus on outcomes above and beyond the well recorded beneficial effects on standards of involving parents more fully in the schooling of their children

With this in mind Roy adapted the programme to its present form and renamed it IMPACT – *Involving More Parents and Children Together*. A key part of the evolution of the workshops is the way that the programme is communicated to parents. Roy puts it this way, "INSPIRE was an invitation to parents while IMPACT is an expectation on them."

Making this expectation a reality involves the school using a variety of methods to encourage parents to attend – often capitalising on the different relationships that support staff have with parents to make important connections but also, where necessary, using personal phone calls from the headteacher to emphasise the importance of participation.

Also, crucially, the IMPACT model focuses more on giving parents ongoing support – they are invited to come and see the classroom teacher or phone with questions and parents who have access to email are also told that they can draw on school support in this way.

Participation in the IMPACT programme involves parents attending an introductory session which begins a five week period during which pupils focus on a particular aspect of the curriculum. This initial session is held during the school day and the small additional costs of running the workshop are funded by Lewisham Family Learning. There is also a clear expectation that parents will work with their children on homework tasks during this period and with classroom activities further supporting the outcomes of the programme.

IMPACT recount writing

A recent introductory workshop for a year one/two class focused on the pupils' recount writing (returning to the school improvement priority identified by the 2004 Ofsted). Out of a class of 28, 27 parents attended the session, with a show of hands indicating that about 30 per cent of attendees had previously been involved in INSPIRE workshops at the school.

Roy Broadfield then went on to explain the differences in focus between INSPIRE and IMPACT. Roy also points out that the way schools work now can be very different from their own experiences as children and that this can be particularly the **case** in a school where a significant percentage of parents at the school were educated in other countries.

In a brief presentation Government research is quoted that indicates that 72% of parents wanted to be more actively involved in their children's schooling. Roy also quotes from studies carried out by Professor Charles Desforges showing that children's attainment can improve by as much as 30% where there is active involvement in their schooling from parents or carers.

Critically, the presentation includes a promise to parents that if they engage with the process during the next five weeks then their children's writing will show measurable improvement.

To support this promise parents are then shown three writing samples from a previous IMPACT workshop for a reception class at **Tidemill**. Before and after writing samples from lower, middle and high-ability pupils offer a startling contrast which makes a compelling **case** for the improvement that can be achieved in five weeks.

The formal aims of the workshops are set out in the following way:

1. Encourage parents/carers to work in partnership with the school in order to improve the quality of children's recount writing.
2. Demonstrate to parents/carers some of the ways in which we work in school when doing recount writing.
3. Share with parents/carers some of the 'tools' we use in order to help children in their writing.
4. Make these tools available for use at home.
5. Give parents/carers the opportunity to work with their children in a supportive environment.
6. Empower parents with new skills and understanding in order that they can better support their children with their recount writing at home. (5-week programme)

Parents are then introduced to *Recount the clown* and the tools that they will be using to help their children improve their recount writing. The clown, which pupils have worked on preparing in advance of their parents coming in to schools juggles balls with the prompts, “Who?”, “What?”, “Where?”, “When?”, “Why?” and “How I felt”.

As parents move through from the initial presentation to the room where their children are waiting they will use the *Recount the clown*, and other tools, to support their children’s writing.

The first step in the process, before any pencils are picked up, is to use the prompts to have a focused conversation recalling a recent experience that the children have had to help generate ideas for the writing task. Those parents for which English is an additional language are told that this initial conversation can be held in their own language if they are more comfortable working in that way.

Pupils then move on to write sentences for each of the prompts – Who they were with... What they did...Where they went... – before linking these sentences to form the final piece of recount writing.

Part of the strength of IMPACT programme is the way that, following this initial session with pupils and parents, the tasks and the tools can easily be personalised to focus on the areas where individual children need particular support or stretch. The number of prompts can be increased or reduced as appropriate and the word bank which forms part of the toolkit can be extended or focused on a particular language area. For example, the examples of children’s writing during the initial presentation showed the impact of an emphasis on punctuation for a particular pupil.

Measuring the success of IMPACT

Tidemill’s experiences of running the workshops point to significant standards benefits delivered over short periods of time. Also significant is the feedback from parents who have been presented with this opportunity to engage more fully with the work of the school and the progress of their child. The following remark is typical:

“This workshop has given me so many basic ideas that will help me for some time to come when I am helping my child with his homework. Thank you.

And from a pupils perspective:

“I liked talking to my dad before we wrote our story together. I liked him being in school like a teacher.”

The plan for **Tidemill** is now to run termly cycles of IMPACT workshops, each focusing on different curriculum priorities for each year group as part of the school’s parenting support offer. Other schools and boroughs are also beginning to take note of the work at **Tidemill** and Roy has recently been invited to lead IMPACT workshops in Waltham Forest.

Writing samples from the same reception class pupil at the beginning of the IMPACT cycle:

we went to the
farm. I Lak the
cow and we eat and we

and at the end:

On Tues day I went to the
farm. I saw goats and pigs and
cows. I went to my shoot
farm. I went with my
teacher teresa.
we went to see the animals.
I felt happy and cool.