

Parental participation

Making it real among ethnic minority parents

Scotland's schools have been changing over the past five years with increased migration. Classrooms are more diverse and this brings fresh challenges including students with English as a second language and different learning cultures



Gathered Together was started in a response to this growing diversity- It is a pilot project in partnership between BEMIS (an umbrella organisation for Ethnic and Cultural minorities in Scotland) and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council and funded through the Scottish Government Early Intervention Fund. It works across 6 local authorities to empower Ethnic Minority parents to become more involved in their children's education and school communities, as well as supporting schools and parent councils to better engage with all parents.

A central part of their work is identifying schools that are embracing the increased diversity and have been working to promote parental involvement, particularly among parents from ethnic minorities. St Albert's primary school in Glasgow has needed to be particularly creative in how they engage with parents as 98% of the children are from ethnic minorities, largely Pakistani and South Asian

families. Engaging with parents from other cultures comes with a lot of challenges- as well as the language barrier, many of the parents have no experience of parental participation.

Head teacher Clare Harker said schools should "commit to getting to know your local community, and understand it without judgement". Understanding is the key to being able to better support families - for example many parents do not feel confident in helping their children with their homework. In an effort to address this the school, together with their EAL teacher Shagufta Ahmed, started a learning group for parents- showing them how to help their children with homework and making learning fun. As well as helping the parents support their children's learning it started to create trust between the school and the parents- improving communication and opportunities for parents to get involved. The parents from that group now help the school with paired reading and translating the school newsletters

into Arabic (see <http://www.st-alberts-pri.glasgow.sch.uk/>, the website also has podcasts of the newsletter in Urdu and Arabic).

St Albert's has been working to get parents into the school as the first step towards greater parental involvement- they held regular parents' drop-in mornings for the parents of children in primary one, which proved hugely popular. These open days gave a chance for parents to see what their children are doing, for the children to show off their pictures on the walls, to speak to teachers and- importantly for parents from different cultures- the chance to see that there is real learning going on in schools! In Gathered Together's work with parents from ethnic minorities they often hear concern being expressed that children in Scotland are "playing too much". By opening up the classroom to parents they are able to see and understand just how much learning is going on, even if it is different to the more structured style they experienced in school as children.

Gathered Together's work across Scotland we are trying to capture and share as much good practice in involving parents as possible- gathering stories of success and the impact that it's made on the parents and schools. If you want to hear more about the work that St Albert's (there is a lot of great stories that we didn't have the space to mention) and other schools are doing, or have your own examples of good practice visit <http://gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk/>

