**Support for parents**

BY N E D A M U L J l 2021-08-16

AS schools welcome students for the academic new year, it`s become quite apparent that online education is here to stay at least for a while.

Perhaps even more than teachers, parents have been anxious about the children`s learning gaps through school closure and the shift to online teaching. Whilst it seems like an uphill task for parents -who may not be as digitally savvy as their children it has been an easier ride for our digitally native generation. At the very least, online teaching has equipped them to be able to use links to dig up information as directed by their teachers, use break-out rooms to collaborate with their peers, use the chat box to contribute input in online lessons and complete tasks. In schools where teachers have been on top of their game in providing help and support, students have adapted quite seamlessly to online learning tools.

However, parental support is equally essential on this learning journey. Not all parents are familiar with online teaching and its vast potential, nor do they understand their role in helping their children navigate it. In our culture, parents have traditionally sat across the child at a table with books open, monitoring homework, egging and urging along the way until the work is done. In the brave new world of online learning, parents find their role redundant and the obvious reaction is to presuppose that children are learning `nothing`.

Schools have a critical role in providing the necessary information to parents to ease this process. Not only is a constant stream of structured communication from the school critical to the process, it is actually detrimental to children`s progress if the adults involved are working in different directions.

Never before has teamwork between parents and teachers been as vital as it is in the current climate. For example, one mother who lamented that she has no clue how to help her child complete online tasks, was told by the school principal that she didn`t need to have the expertise. Her role was to encourage and empower her child, create the environment with the necessary logistics to make it work and leave the rest in the teachers` able hands.

Whilst parents need to facilitate a productive learning environment, schools will be well served taking up the responsibility to keep the parents informed about course content and strategy. The education landscape is now far removed from the parents` own experiences and most of them need a bit of direction to steer the course. In many other countries, this has been general practice for a long time many schools have structured programmes in place to apprise parents of work being undertaken, targets to be met and progression through the terms. This not only serves to allay fears of learning not tak-ing place, it also helps through onboarding them so they are not relying on filtered information from their children. To top it off, structured communication with parents has the added benefit of maintaining a rapport with teachers which contributed towards building the essential trust which is a vital cog in teamwork to support children.

Implementation of communication chan.

nels is trickier, for you can take a horse to the water but you can`t make it drink.

Traditionally in our culture, parents have not worked actively with the school nor had a great deal of access to the teaching and learning process all of it might need to change if we are to support children in this new learning environment. This does not imply that schools need to spend precious time being answerable to parents; a degree of trust in teachers and the management`s expertise is required. However, a user-friendly website, a cleverly constructed digital flyer sent regularly can provide all the specific information.

Research shows that effective communica-tion between parents and teachers reduces absenteeism, increases student motivation and keeps checks and balances on general behaviour. It also increases the par-ents` trust in the school system that they have chosen for their child. Parental support also makes teachers feel more valued and appreciated, and this potentially improves the teachers` performance. Communication with parents, both through formal and informal channels, can help identify learning gaps, specific challenges and contribute towards establishing a positive ethos for the school.

Whether parents actually understand the work being done is irrelevant supporting children does not necessarily involve teaching them. For example, reading support programmes that provide information to parents usually chart out the frequency, type and structure of reading that should be encouraged at home. The parents` role is to listen to their child read aloud, monitor the amount of reading as volumes of reading isn`t necessarily productive and can be detrimental to student motivation. These programmes guide parents on how to help boost reading through active listening, basic prompting and passive encouragement. m The writer works as senior manager, professional development, Oxford University Press Pakistan.

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