



Home/School Agreement

Author: Joe Cowell

Date of Draft: December 2012

Date Ratified by Governors: 15th December 2014

Date of Review: No set date



Employers' Duties

In state-maintained schools, the employer is usually the local authority (LA), the foundation or the relevant diocesan board. In all instances, the governing body — via the Head — represents the employer.

Governors have a duty to:

- [adopt a home-school agreement](#) defining the school's aims, responsibilities, values and what is expected of parents and pupils
- consult all parents before adopting or reviewing a home-school agreement
- have regard to the Guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE)
- liaise closely with the Head and staff of the school
- take reasonable steps to get parents to sign a [declaration](#) that they accept their responsibility for fulfilling the agreement
- provide copies of the agreement to parents and possibly pupils also be aware of the [restrictions](#) on the use of home-school agreements and parental declarations
- ensure the [agreement](#) covers the standard of education aimed at, the school's ethos, attendance, discipline, homework and communication between home and school
- indicate how [complaints](#) should be made
- [avoid including anything that is unreasonable](#), too demanding or unlawful
- [review](#) the home-school agreement every two to three years
- ensure that parents are not required to make financial contributions to the school.

In Practice

Adopting a Home-School Agreement

Home-school agreements are regulated by sections 110 and 11 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

A home-school agreement is a statement which the governing body of a maintained school or city technology college is required to adopt specifying:

- the school's aims and values
- the responsibilities accepted by the school with respect to the education of its pupils who are of compulsory school age
- what is expected of the parents of pupils registered at the school
- how the school expects its pupils to conduct themselves.

When adopting a home-school agreement, governors should:



- consider [best practice for home–school agreements](#)
- consult parents
- study the [guidance on home–school agreements](#)
- liaise with the Head and other staff at the school
- ask parents to sign a [parental declaration](#).

Best Practice for Home–School Agreements

According to the Department for Education advice, home–school agreements are most successful when they are not imposed, but instead are arrived at after discussion among all the parties concerned, including the pupils.

Successful agreements are:

- fair and evenhanded
- workable, allowing for different family backgrounds and domestic arrangements
- concise and without too much detail
- reviewed regularly.

Home–school agreements achieve most when they are introduced as part of a whole-school approach to working with parents and carers rather than on their own.

It is important that parents understand what the school expects of them. Agreements must be clear and the tone and style must be appropriate. Agreements should also be:

- explained orally to parents who find reading difficult
- translated into the appropriate languages for parents who do not read English.

Consultation with Parents

Before adopting a home–school agreement, the governing body is required to consult all parents of pupils of compulsory school age who are registered at the school. They are known as “the qualifying parents”.

Similar consultation must occur [when the agreement is revised](#), which the governors are required to do from time to time.



Guidance on Home–School Agreements

When dealing with all matters to do with home–school agreements, the governing body must have regard to the Secretary of State’s guidance given in Home–School Agreements — Guidance for Schools (1998), produced by the DfE.

This document:

- explains the legal requirements relating to home–school agreements
- advises on how they may be fulfilled
- contains some model agreements and questionnaires for use when reviewing home–school agreements.

Good home–school agreements can help raise standards and contribute to school effectiveness, by enhancing partnerships between parents and teachers and by providing a framework for the development of these partnerships.

Open communication processes should be used to introduce and review agreements. The agreements should set out clearly what the school is trying to achieve, including the role of:

- the school itself
- parents
- pupils.

Liaising with the Head and Staff

Although it is the governing body which has the legal responsibility for adopting the home–school agreement, the DfE guidance says that when doing so there should be close liaison with the Head and other members of staff.

Parental Declaration

Signing by Parents

The governing body is required to take reasonable steps to ensure that the qualifying parents sign a parental declaration. This records that:

- they have taken note of the contents of the agreement
- they accept their responsibilities for its fulfilment.

Steps must be taken to secure that the declaration is signed by all qualifying parents as soon after the admission of pupils as is practicable.



Signing by Pupils

If it is considered that a pupil has sufficient understanding, the governing body may invite the pupil to acknowledge what is expected of him or her by also signing the declaration.

Exemption from Signing

If the governing body considers that it would not be appropriate to seek the signature, because of the particular circumstances of a parent or pupil, it is relieved of this requirement.

Refusal to Sign a Home–School Agreement

If a parent refuses to sign the home–school agreement, it should be made clear that this does not provide exemption from the rules of the school.

Distribution of Copies

All parents should be given copies of the agreement. The DfE Guidance also suggests that a governing body may wish to consider giving copies to the pupils.

Limitations of Home–School Agreements

There are several restrictions on how home–school agreements may be used.

It is not permitted to:

- cite the failure of a parent to sign a parental declaration as a reason for excluding a pupil
- exclude pupils because their parents have failed to comply with the terms of the agreement
- make the signing of the declaration a condition for admitting a child to the school
- ask parents to sign the declaration before their child is admitted to the school
- base a decision whether or not to admit a child on the likelihood that the parent will sign a declaration.

Failure to abide by the terms of the agreement may not be a reason to take action through the courts.

However, *Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century Schools System* indicates that the home–school agreement will carry greater weight in the future and that parents will “face real consequence if they fail to live up to the responsibilities set out within it, including the possibility of a court-imposed parenting order.”



Content of Home–School Agreements

The DfE Guidance outlines what the home–school agreement should cover, considering in particular:

- the [standard of education](#) of the school
- its [ethos](#)
- [attendance](#) required by pupils
- [leave of absence](#)
- [discipline](#)
- [homework](#)
- [communication](#) with home and parents
- how to make a [complaint](#).

Standard of Education

The Guidance suggests that the clause on standard of education might state that all pupils can expect to receive a broad and balanced education which will meet the needs of children of all abilities.

School Ethos

Under this heading the school might draw attention to principles which underlie all its activities — as the Guidance says, its “character and spirit”.

It might explain how these govern the way pupils relate to staff and to each other and the relationship the school has with its local community.

Reference might be made to the school’s aims for the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of its pupils.

Attendance

The home–school agreement should, in the view of the DfE’s Guidance, promote regular and punctual attendance. It should make it clear to parents that:

- they are responsible for ensuring that their children receive full time, suitable education
- they are responsible for ensuring that their children’s [attendance](#) is regular, for the whole of each day, and that the children are punctual unless there is a good reason, eg illness
- they must notify the school if their child cannot attend
- they should co-operate with the school and the [Welfare Services in Education](#) in resolving any problems which prevent the child from attending regularly and punctually.



It would be helpful for the school to clarify issues of punctuality and the [Registers and Records](#) by giving the times when the registers are taken and when they are closed.

The school, for its part, should undertake to inform the parents if their child had been absent.

Leave of Absence

The home–school agreement should make it clear to parents that leave of absence is required if a parent wishes their child to accompany them on a holiday in term time. It is also helpful if the school states its policy with respect to leave of absence.

Discipline

The home–school agreement should make clear that pupils will be expected to abide by the school's rules and any policies which promote good discipline, eg anti-bullying policy.

The role of parents in fostering good behaviour and positive attitudes should be acknowledged.

The agreement should express the expectation that parents and teachers will work together to achieve sound discipline.

It is expected that the content of this section will be strengthened following on from Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century Schools System.

Homework

With respect to homework, the home–school agreement should state clearly what is expected of:

- teachers
- pupils
- parents.

Parents should be reassured that they will be consulted on the school's policy for homework and any proposals for changing it.

Communication Between Home and School

The DfE Guidance suggests that the home–school agreement should stress the importance of good communication between the school and home.

Parents should be encouraged to share with the school any concerns they may have over the education of their children and urged to make known to the school any issues which might affect their work or behaviour. The home–school agreement should state the name of the person to be contacted in the first instance.



The school should make known to the parents when they may expect written reports and when there will be opportunities to discuss their child's progress with the teachers.

Schools are warned against making the agreement too detailed. If it is considered necessary to refer to policies, the Guidance suggests that parents should be advised where they might be found. The use of jargon should be avoided.

Complaints

The DfE Guidance suggests that the home-school agreement should express the intention that:

- all complaints will be handled sensitively
- a response to a complaint may be expected as soon as possible.

The governing body's complaints procedure might form part of the agreement. However, in the light of the guidance that the agreement should not be too detailed, governors might prefer to indicate from where the complaints procedure might be obtained.

Material to be Avoided

When considering what should be included in the agreement, the DfE's Guidance urges governors to avoid anything which might be considered unreasonable or too demanding, eg:

- the number of meetings which parents are asked to attend should not be excessive
- meetings should not be held at inconvenient times
- parents should not be asked to agree to make "voluntary" contributions towards the purchase of books or equipment.

The Guidance also warns against the inclusion of any conditions which would be unlawful, eg requiring parents to make financial contributions to the school.

An agreement should not ask for specific undertakings from one side while making only vague promises by the other. The Secretary of State may prohibit, by order, the use of certain words or the effect of such words being used in an agreement or a parental declaration.

Reviews

Governing bodies are required to review the home-school agreement from time to time. The DCSF guidance suggests that most schools are likely to do this every two or three years.

Feedback from parents is considered to be important. The use of questionnaires and the involvement of the school's parents' association is suggested as the means to do this.

Increased Emphasis on Home-School Agreements



The White Paper *Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century Schools System* sets out the Government's commitment to increasing the role of the home-school agreement in ensuring effective partnerships between parents and schools.

The requirement for a school to have a home-school agreement will be part of the parent guarantee. It is likely that more guidance on the new home-school agreements will be issued. This guidance may include a greater emphasis upon agreements setting out parents' responsibilities in relation to behaviour.

It is proposed that parents will be expected to sign the agreement each year once their child is in school. However, admission to schools will not be dependent upon signing it. If parents fail to live up to the responsibilities in the agreement, the White Paper indicates that a parenting order might be imposed.

The White Paper also proposes that parents will have the right to complain if they believe the school is not holding other parents to their responsibilities.

Case Study: Consulting on a Home-School Agreement

The home-school agreement at Castleford School needed reviewing. It was several years old and no-one paid much attention to it. It was agreed that the new agreement should be far more representative and should be the result of an extensive consultation and discussion. Deciding on what the key responsibilities for parents, pupils and staff should be is a very important undertaking and one that could generate some debate.

It was decided that some of the current discussion forums should be used initially but that it should also be promoted among the wider school community. Letters were sent out to parents, all staff were informed in the weekly meetings and pupils were informed in assembly. Each group was reminded about:

- what the current home-school agreement included
- who the representatives were
- how they might make their views known.

The letter to parents included a reply slip on which comments could be made. Pupils were



invited to “post” any comments they might have in a speakeasy box, and staff were asked for any written comments on their termly evaluation. When this process had been completed, the different representative groups met to consider the comments that had been submitted and to begin their own discussion. These groups included:

- the Schools Council
- the Parents’ forum
- a staff working party (including two governors).

Over a period of a month, each group put together their submission for the agreement. The final part of the process included the chair and vice chair of each group meeting together to complete a final version. This was a difficult part of the process and the chair alternated between the Head and the chair of governors.

Once the draft agreement was finished, it was circulated to all parents, children and staff for final comment. It had been a long process but as everyone had been given the opportunity to express their views and add to the debate, there was a real sense of shared ownership about the new agreement.