



*Minimising burdens in schools  
More time for learning*

## **JOINT LETTER TO SCHOOL HEADS AND CHAIRS OF GOVERNORS**

### **Exploiting ICT to Improve Parental Engagement Including Online Reporting**

Schools Minister Jim Knight announced at the BETT Education Conference in January that from September 2008 all maintained schools will be expected to start the move towards online reporting, with:

- All secondary schools providing parents with online reports by September 2010; and
- All primary schools meeting the requirement by September 2012.

This announcement followed a period of review and discussion between Ministers and social partners to develop an approach that supports the quality of dialogue between schools, learners and parents, includes the appropriate use of technology to minimise bureaucracy and to avoid additional workload for teachers and support staff.

Research and existing practice show that good parental engagement improves the achievement, attendance and behaviour of learners. Many schools are already using ICT more effectively to reach out to a wider range of parents in a direct and meaningful way, including through online reporting. Ministers want to enable good practice to become universally adopted, so that technology is being exploited in a way that shows improvements for schools, parents and learners.

Mobile and digital technologies have the potential to reach a wider range of parents than traditional methods, but schools will still need to continue to use a variety of approaches, especially in engaging the hard-to-reach and those without digital access. The online reporting expectation does not therefore replace face-to-face and direct engagement, nor does it duplicate or replace the existing statutory requirement to report to parents annually, but will provide parents with up-to-date information at appropriate points through the

year to maintain their interest and enable a richer dialogue. Following the joint discussions and looking at existing and emerging practice, Ministers are content at this stage not to specify the frequency of reporting, and schools will have the flexibility to determine what frequency best suits both the school and their parents and learners.

In moving towards this expectation, schools will need to look at how they can use their existing data and systems more efficiently and effectively. All schools already collect and manage a range of information - the emphasis should be on streamlining data collection into an integrated information system, seeking to enter data once and use it many times and on maximising the use of integrated Management Information Systems and Learning Technologies. As with any move to new ways of working; schools will need to review their own capability – across the whole school - to implement online reporting. There may be initial changes or investment needed, but experience shows that schools which are already using technologies in this way have experienced long-term timesaving benefits for staff as well as better reaction from parents.

Parents and learners should be provided with online access to information about:

- Attendance and behaviour (both positive and challenging);
- Progress and attainment;
- Special needs.

But schools should consult with parents, learners (schools are particularly encouraged to ensure learners have a voice in this discussion) and staff in deciding what aspects of these areas will be most meaningful and useful to provide and how ICT can be exploited. The focus should be on arrangements that are manageable in school, effective for staff and meaningful for parents focusing on the quality of information, rather than quantity. Many schools are benefiting from engaging their learners in this discussion.

Therefore the type of information provided should be appropriate for the parent/learner and its provision proportionate for the school as existing practice shows that online reporting is most successful when a local, sustainable approach is developed that suits both parents and staff, and fits with existing data collection methods.

Although the requirement to report online is not until 2010 (secondary) and 2012 (primary), Schools will need to start preparing for online reporting now, both by working with the staff and parents to prepare for a new way of communication, and by reviewing their technology to assess how to move forward. Support to help schools on their journey is being provided through a detailed support toolkit that provides direct access to resources

A range of technological solutions already exist to enable online reporting and Becta, the Government agency for ICT in education, has been working with key industry suppliers to ensure that they are engaged with this agenda and promoting the interoperability standards between school systems. Suppliers recognise the importance of this agenda and the need for their products to effectively support schools. They assure us they understand the needs of schools and will respond to the new opportunities opening up. All schools are

already using technologies successfully; some are pressing ahead with new technologies and bringing in innovative approaches. Becta has been working with schools across the spectrum to develop case studies of school experiences and provide access to technical and procurement information to help you move forward.

Becta has also been working with practitioners from over 80 schools to develop a comprehensive package of school-focused resource and support to guide schools. We recognise that schools are currently at different points on the journey towards online reporting, and the package enables each to pick the resources that will best help them move forward.

It includes support with assessing your own school's readiness, both with the wider parental engagement and the whole school agenda. There is an emphasis in the resources on learning from schools that are already moving towards online reporting, drawing on real school experiences, blogs and school diaries.

There will also be an opportunity if schools wish to attend workshops, and contact local peer-to-peer support provided by schools already engaging with this programme.

We recognise the importance of sharing good practice with the wider school system wherever it emerges. Therefore these resources and the overall programme will continue to be reviewed and updated as schools progress and new learning comes to the fore.

Enclosed with this letter is an introductory pack which tells you more about the support available and enables you to start determining how you will approach this expectation.

For secondary schools additional resources are included:

- an online reporting framework and guidance designed to help you assess your school's readiness and determine priority areas for attention
- details of the SSAT's EPRA (Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement) toolkit which looks at the wider issues of developing parental engagement
- You will also have the opportunity to attend a workshop during the autumn term. Details will be available on the Becta web-site from July 2008.

An additional range of resources will be available in the autumn term focused specifically on the needs of primary schools as they move towards the 2012 expectation.

In addition to the enclosed materials, further information about parental engagement and online reporting can be found at [www.becta.org.uk/schools/parentalengagement](http://www.becta.org.uk/schools/parentalengagement). This includes school experiences, FAQ's and research reports as well as copies of the enclosed materials for you to download.

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Stephen Crowne

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