

# DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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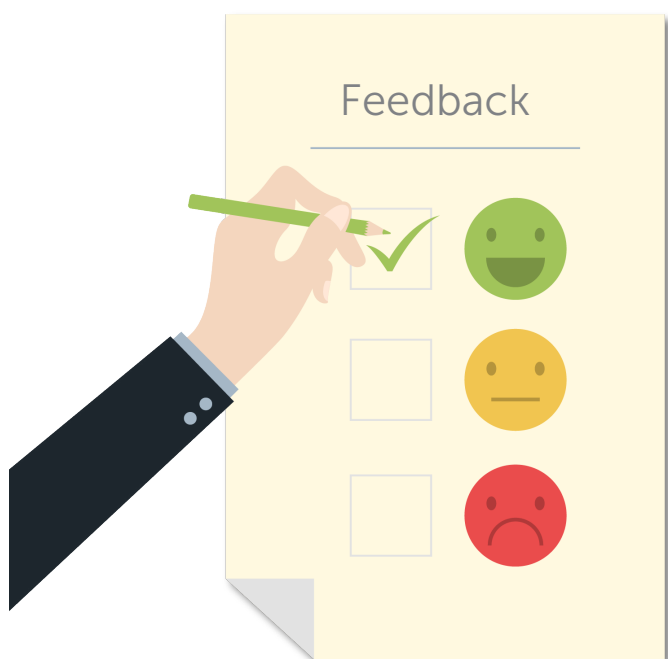
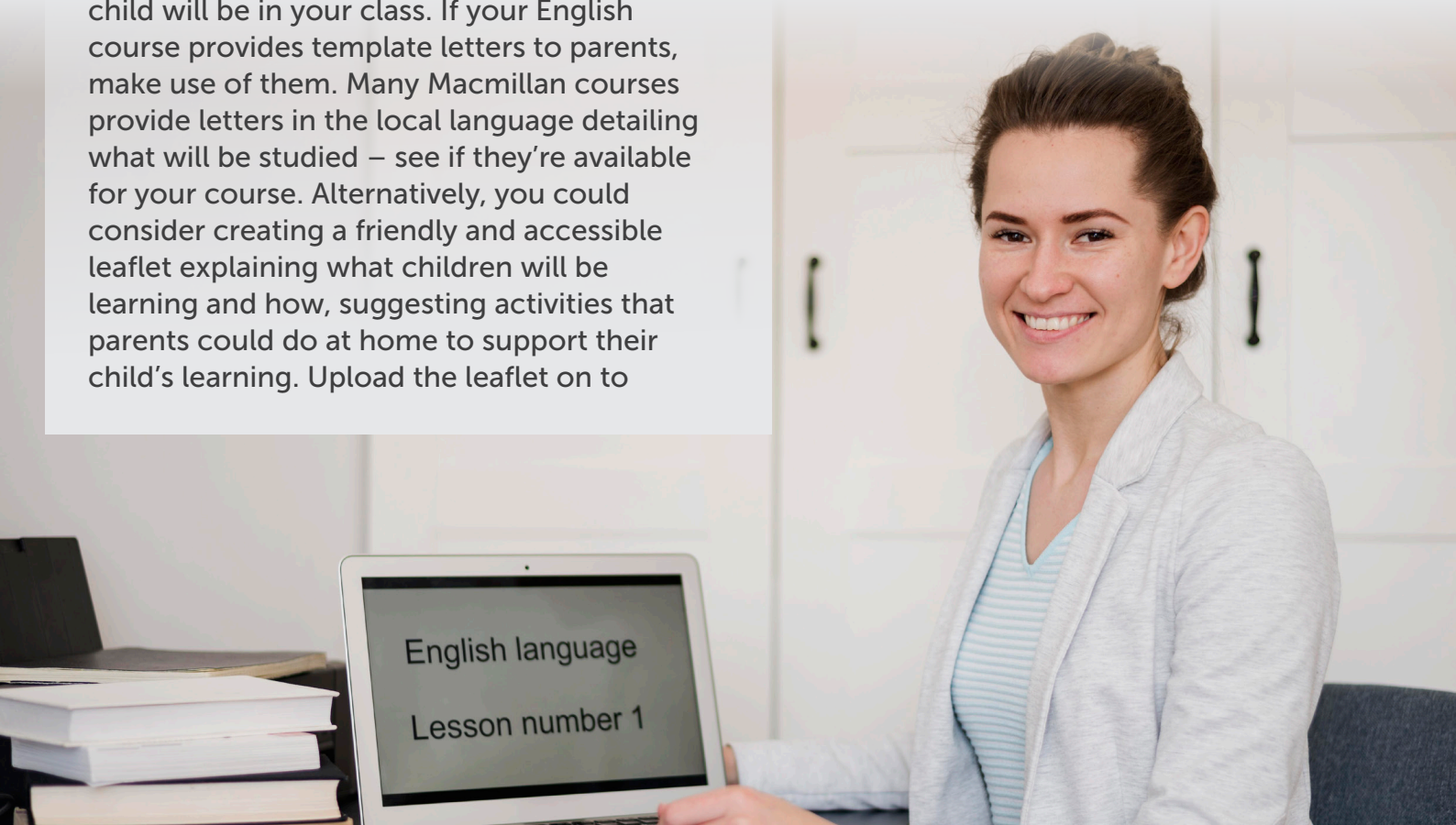


Does your school already have a communication strategy in place? If not, don't worry. This article is full of ideas and suggestions to make you feel more confident about setting up your own, including ways to make the best use of technology. If your school already has a strategy, why not read these top tips to ensure you are getting the most out of it? There may be some suggestions that you'd like to try.

## Set expectation early and make parents aware of learning objectives

Make contact with parents (phone call or letter) to introduce yourself and set expectations as soon as you learn their child will be in your class. If your English course provides template letters to parents, make use of them. Many Macmillan courses provide letters in the local language detailing what will be studied – see if they're available for your course. Alternatively, you could consider creating a friendly and accessible leaflet explaining what children will be learning and how, suggesting activities that parents could do at home to support their child's learning. Upload the leaflet on to

the school website, give it out at parent's evenings and leave some where parents will see them and pick them up.



## Give feedback on a regular basis and be available

Provide parents with regular feedback on their child's performance, especially good feedback. Don't just contact them when there is a problem! Try to have individual contact with each home once a month. If there is a problem, set up a separate dialogue with the parents.

Send completed work home with the child so that they can show their parents what they've been doing in class

Put aside a set time every week when parents can talk to you if they need to. Make sure they know that you will be available and how to contact you. It's important that they realise the need to share information with the school about their child.



## Use every opportunity to communicate with parents

This in turn will help increase parents' awareness of how they can support their child's learning. Remember all of the methods of communication available to you and try to find the one with the highest response rate for your class. Do parents have a preferred means of receiving information? Are there certain parents who may have literacy difficulties and would appreciate being kept informed by telephone, rather than in writing? Are there parents in your class who do not speak the local language? Consider using a translator to make sure these parents are not excluded.

Parents' evenings are one key component in your communication strategy but by no means the only one. Are you using your school website to communicate with parents? Why not set up a private area for parents where they can login and view news about their child's class and progress?

When you send emails to parents, create a group in your contacts list so you can easily send an email to all the parents at the same time (make sure you enter the group in the 'bcc' line so that parents can't see each other's email address.) This is really useful for sending information about the syllabus, homework, trips, work for the holidays, school events etc. You could request a read receipt with your email so that you can see when a parent has read an email.

Send home a folder of work every month for

parents to review and comment.

Don't forget the telephone. Calling parents with good news shows a personal interest in the development of their child.

NB: Always remember your school's objectives and image when communicating with parents!

## Invite parents to be involved

Encourage parents to be involved in school events and initiatives and invite them to volunteer to help, for example with school trips or reading.

Show them how they can help their child to get the most out of the digital components in their language course in the following ways: by reviewing target language with their children by carefully looking at presentation language together or by listening to the course audio together and repeating what they hear. Show parents how to play English games with their child at home and encourage them to sing songs to reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure. Music is one of the best ways to learn vocabulary and course songs are usually included in student practice kits.

Make sure all parents attend parent workshops.





## Make best use of technology

Technology is a great way to help engage parents in their child's learning

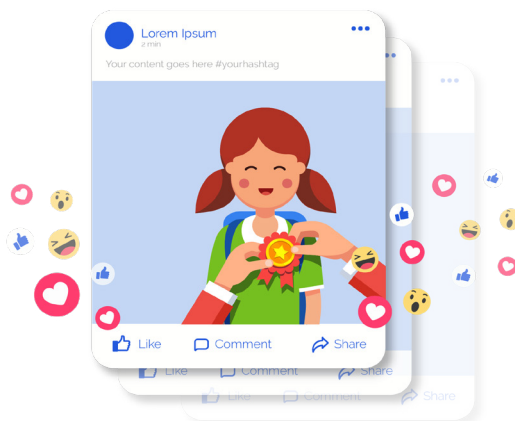
Use social media to communicate with parents: start discussions, get feedback and get interactive.

Consider tweeting achievements and news or posting them in a school group on a social network.

Set up a text-messaging system or What's App Group. Make sure parents always get news by setting up and using a messaging system – send alerts to parents, including 'Happy Holidays'!

Start a class or school blog. This is a great way for teachers to display and share work or class videos and for parents to comment. Why not ask parents to author some blog posts to show you value their views and opinions?

If your English course has digital student books, student practice kits, eBooks or apps, make use of them in the classroom to encourage learning at home. Mark-up tools that enable children to do activities at home with parents, make notes or write on digital pages.



## Other communication strategies for engaging parents

These could include annual school calendars, tea towels with hand-drawn self-portraits by the children, articles in local papers, school trips, flyers to be given out to members of the local community or posters.

You could use a reward system: something as simple as rewarding stars or stickers for good work and behaviour, or as sophisticated as a merit card system. Perhaps your school already has an online reward system or you could make use of emails and social media to send illustrated messages of congratulations?

## Points to ponder

What is most important to you? Is there something you're currently unhappy about in the way you communicate with parents? Think about the suggestions above and identify the ones that would make a difference. Can you think of all the communication strategies available to you? Talk about them with a colleague. Which are your favourite? Which have the highest response rate and why?

## Further resources

Macmillan Apps are free, easy to install and navigate. The games are motivating and engaging and are a great way for children to share their learning at home with parents whilst practising and consolidating their English skills. Visit the course page of the course you are teaching to find out more.

Read the rest of Macmillan's Home-School Link articles at [macmillanenglish.com/blog-resources/teacher-resources/young-learners](http://macmillanenglish.com/blog-resources/teacher-resources/young-learners) and watch the short videos on YouTube (Macmillan Education ELT) – look for the playlist called [Macmillan's Home-School Link for young learners](http://macmillanenglish.com/blog-resources/teacher-resources/young-learners)

*This article originally appeared as part of Macmillan's Home-School Link series by Aimee Bates.*