CONSULTATION PAPER

Reporting to Parents

Introduction

Parents still receive an annual written report in hard copy. The format is traditional, and other than moving from handwritten to word processed reports, practice has developed slowly in this area in recent years. Subject teachers report on behaviour, homework, classwork and current attainment against targets for each subject. Tutors write a more individual, personalised report on the child's social development and lastly the Progress Leader adds a more evaluative summary report. However, largely due to the emergence of quite powerful ICT data systems, the school has developed a system of more frequent progress reports, and parents with children in Key Stage 3 receive a progress report three times a year. GCSE and BTEC students in Key Stage 4 receive five progress reports each year. It is timely to consider whether the two different systems are the most efficient way of reporting to parents.

Issues relating to the traditional 'annual written report' system

Legislation requires schools to report achievement at the end of each Key Stage, and to provide parents with at least one written report a year. We still issue a written paper report for each pupil on an annual basis, and it is clear this still has benefits:

- Teachers can comment freely with very few restrictions
- It provides an opportunity to praise pupils who are working well and to recognise and acknowledge hard work and good behaviour
- Equally it provides opportunity to comment on negative attitudes to learning, poor behaviour and to highlight reasons why a child may be underachieving
- Improvement priorities and the necessary actions can be described in detail.

However, some limitations within the system are apparent:

- As the reports are issued once a year only, they can soon become out of date
- Because the process is slow reports can be issued several weeks after they are written
- Parents subject evenings can involve the repetition of information already communicated in the report
- The cost of printing and posting is high
- Teacher workload is considerable, and unevenly spread out (a teacher in a small department may teach half a year group and be required to write 75 reports in a short time period)
- The use of ICT has led to some bland and repetitive reports

The current progress report system

Progress reports have evolved, in part due to the capacity of different ICT systems the school has adopted (SIMS, Reports Manager and now PARS). In response to trialling a number of systems and responding to feedback from pupils, parents and staff the format is now based on the following:

- Three 'attitude to learning' grades for each subject – behaviour, homework and classwork. The cumulative attitude to learning league table score and league table position is shown in the same section of the report.
- Predicted end of course attainment grade for each subject (or NC Level if Key Stage 3). The attainment data is colour coded, red if attainment is below target grade, green if above it and amber if equal to it. Target grades are shown in this section.
- Percentage attendance for each of the six half terms. (*Not currently RAG rated, but it is proposed to amend this*)
- Cumulative behaviour points given by teachers on the PARS system, either as rewards (commendations) or disciplinary points. The pupil's relative position within the year group is also shown in this section.

Even in autumn term, a progress report can include 40 items of data for each individual pupil and by the summer term this is nearer to 50. However, in contrast to the traditional written report, progress reports currently do not inform parents of :

- The name of the subject teacher
- Targets for improvement and what the child must do in order to improve and meet these targets
- Comments on the child's enjoyment of the subject, or any judgement about personal development

What does Ofsted expect ?

Neither Ofsted nor the DfE prescribe a particular system of reporting to parents. They judge the effectiveness of the system, not the system itself. The 2011 Ofsted report raised concerns about the perceived delay in reporting concerns to parents about under achievement, and anecdotal evidence suggests the wider area of reporting produces more parental complaints and queries than any other issue, such as bullying. A number of schools graded either Good or Outstanding no longer produce annual written reports on paper; practice varies between regular progress reports on paper, to on line reporting which is password protected and which parents can freely access as often as they wish in order to review their child's progress. Whatever system is used is only as good as the **quality** and **accuracy** of the data teachers are entering into it. Ofsted judges the quality of assessment as part of the Teaching & Learning judgement, but the format and style of assessment is for school leaders to decide.

Areas for consideration

1. How much impact does the current system of annual, paper written reports have upon the achievement and progress of pupils?
2. In contrast how effective are the regular progress reports – are they equally effective, more effective or less effective at promoting achievement and progress?
3. Is the **quantity** of data being communicated to parents appropriate? Is it too much, sufficient or inadequate?
4. Given the clear link between low attendance and poor educational achievement, shouldn't attendance be RAG rated on school reports?
5. Written reports are time consuming to produce and the workload demands are heavy. Is the amount of effort used to produce them proportionate?
6. Could the two different reporting systems be rationalised into a single system, combining all the data reported in progress reports with briefer written comments from teachers (for example, one or two improvement targets for each subject ?)
7. As we are collecting assessment data continuously would it be more efficient in the long term to allow parents to access this data remotely? Several schools have a system already enabling a parent to log in using a username and password, enabling them to view assessment data, timetables, attendance registers etc.
8. Are there any options which haven't been considered?

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