

Coronavirus (COVID-19): six steps to planning and conducting a virtual parents' evening

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Adapting parents' evenings

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, schools have had to adapt processes and procedures in order to minimise the risk of transmission and to remain open.

Parents' evenings are an example of one of the activities that schools will have to adapt. Following extensive closures, parents will be keen to chat with staff about their child's progress, particularly if they are new to the school.

This article outlines steps to help you plan and conduct a virtual parents' evening that is engaging and effective for parents, staff and pupils.

One: pick your platform

If your school already has a policy in place for the platform you use, e.g. Zoom or Google Meet, then this step should be covered. If, however, a platform has not been chosen yet, this should be decided as soon as possible.

You also need to consider the demographics and personal preferences of parents, and decide whether you will conduct video meetings, or just audio instead. Some parents may not have a good internet connection, and others may not have access to internet at all, which means not everyone will have the ability to take part in face-to-face meetings online. It may be considered unfair if teachers conduct video meetings with some parents, and audio ones with others. You should pick an option you are comfortable with and that suits parents too.

Two: organise appointments

Send out invites to parents and ask them to book an appointment. Secondary schools may need to organise appointments over several evenings, as parents may want to talk to a number of different subject teachers. This may result in one parent having several different appointments, depending on how many teachers they want to speak to, so it's important to ensure timings are adhered to.

To avoid disruption, send out reminders and meeting links in advance so parents are aware of their time slots and can plan around these accordingly. Schools should ensure they have received responses from all parents ahead of the evening itself – it may be helpful to set a deadline by which parents should respond. Staff will also need to be sent an appointment list before the event that includes a clear list of who they are talking to and when.

Having a parents' evening manager platform may make planning and organising easier. Some platforms enable parents to book appointments online, e.g. [Parents' Evening Manager](#) – these are then synced with the school's management information system, enabling staff to send paperless invitations and manage appointments.

Three: send reports to parents in advance

It can be useful to send parents information before the evening itself outlining details of what might be covered during their appointment. Not only will this save time during the meeting itself, it also allows parents to look through the information and compile a list of questions or concerns they want to discuss. This shows that the school is committed to involving all parents and keeping them updated on their child's progress.

To help parents who are unable to attend a meeting, the report should also include information to reassure parents' current concerns, for example how their child has settled back into school following the lockdown, their progress so far, and what parents can do at home to support their child in catching up on lost learning time.

Four: have rules in place

It is important to establish some ground rules for staff and parents so that all participants are following the same procedures.

The following list includes examples of rules that could be implemented to ensure the smooth running of your virtual parents' evening:

- Conversations should take place in an appropriate room, such as a study or living room, rather than a bedroom
- All participants should be appropriately dressed and as they would be for a physical face-to-face meeting
- Conversations should not be recorded without permission from all participants
- Both teachers and parents should be given the choice to use video or just audio
- Children should be allowed to attend, as they would under normal circumstances
- Parents should try to be on time as slots cannot be flexible
- In the unlikely event of verbal abuse, staff should end the conversation and refer the incident to the SLT
- All participants should check their devices are working properly before the meeting, to ensure minimal disruption when the meeting takes place

Your school could consider putting together a disclaimer for parents that outlines the rules that should be followed and providing them with instructions on how to use the chosen platform if required.

Five: conduct a practice run

Before the event takes place, make sure staff have checked their devices work and that they have a strong internet connection. Ask them to log in an hour before the event, enable their video and camera, and check that these functions work properly. It may be worth asking parents to do the same ahead of the meeting, to make sure any technical issues are identified before it commences.

To reduce the possibility of technical issues, schools can consider asking staff and parents to have a back-up device, if they have one available, ready for use if necessary.

Six: evaluate feedback

For most schools, conducting virtual parents' evenings will be a new experience so it's important to collect and evaluate feedback to see if improvements can be made ahead of the next event. Send out a survey to parents and staff and ask them about their experience and what could be done differently, to ensure a better outcome next time.

The coronavirus pandemic has been tough for many school staff, pupils and their parents, and organising virtual parents' evenings will likely involve additional work and effort from members of the school community. Planning appropriately and ensuring effective communications between staff and parents will help to ease the burden on staff and reduce anxieties faced by parents.

What's next?

Our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Parent Survey](#) can be used to gather information from parents about different aspects of your school's response to the coronavirus outbreak. The template can be amended so you can include questions relating to your parents' evenings and gather feedback on areas for improvement.

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