

Effective Communication



This section will help with:

- talking with your child's school to make sure their needs are met and maximise their outcomes
- how to respond to your child's report to help them to make progress
- how to follow up concerns you may have about your child's educational experience and progress

Effective Communication

School Reports

The purpose of a school report is to provide a picture of your child's current attainment levels and their effort – often called Attitude to Learning – in each of their subjects.

A school report ideally should never deliver any unpleasant surprises! If your child is making less progress than expected or if their behaviour has changed, you should expect the school to communicate this to you in a timely manner and not wait for the report or a parents evening to let you know.

Lots of schools now use numbers and codes to indicate how a pupil is getting on in each subject. This is an example of this type of report:



STUDENT PROGRESS ASSESSMENT – YEAR 7 December 2015

STUDENT: Joe Bloggs FORM: 7ABC

Based on their prior attainment, your son/daughter should be working in line with:

Approximately the top 30% of students nationally	For English
Approximately the top 50% of students nationally (broadly in line with the National Average)	For Maths
Approximately the top 30% of students nationally	For all other subjects

Subject	Autumn 2015				Spring 2016				Summer 2016			
	Current Attainment	Current Progress	Attitude to learning	Managing Homework	Current Attainment	Current Progress	Attitude to learning	Managing Homework	Current Attainment	Current Progress	Attitude to learning	Managing Homework
English	Top 30%	Expected	1	2								
Mathematics	Top 30%	Above	1	1								
Science	Working Towards Nat Avg.	Well Below	3	3								
French	Top 10%	Above	1	1								
Geography	Top 30%	Expected	1	2								
History	Top 30%	Expected	1	2								
Information Technology	Top 30%	Expected	1	2								
Religious Education	Top 50%	Below	1	2								
Technology	Top 10%	Above	1	1								
Art	Working Towards Nat Avg.	Well Below	3	3								
Music	Top 30%	Expected	1	2								
Performing Arts	Top 30%	Expected	1	2								
Physical Education	Top 10%	Above	1	1								
Reward Credits					15							
Behaviour Points					0							
Attendance (%)					100							
Punctuality (Number of Lates)					2							

The school will provide a guide to accompany the report to explain the codes and will enable you to gain an overview of how they are getting on. If you are not sure about what something on the report means, you can contact the subject teacher, Head of Year (or equivalent) or the Designated Teacher to discuss it.

How to respond to your child's report

Hopefully, your child's report will be a positive picture and will show that they are making expected progress. In which case, there will be lots to celebrate and praise.

On the other hand, the report may feel disappointing to you and your child. A positive but proactive response will be the most appropriate way to deal with this.

Below are some suggestions about how to approach dealing with a range of scenarios that can arise from receiving a report for your child.

General Advice

Talk with your child's teacher

If your child's report doesn't provide any detail about why they received the marks that they did, ask the teacher. Could it be because your child did not understand the concepts covered? Or are they not handing in their homework or assignments? Did they perhaps just barely miss the cut-off for a higher mark?

It can be difficult to hear that your child is achieving what you consider to be average results, despite the fact that they are working as hard as they possibly can.

As a foster parent, you should always keep in mind that academic performance doesn't remain the same throughout your child's academic career. A period of average results does not mean your child will always perform at that level. As children go through the process of 'growing up', they experience ups and downs in all areas, including those who are most able.

Your child's teacher will help you understand the reasons your child has received the marks they did, so that you are able to respond appropriately and make the necessary changes.

Talk with your child

When you talk with your child about their report, try to ascertain if they have a realistic view of their situation. For example, your child may think they only sometimes forget to complete their work or assignments. But their teacher might reveal a consistent pattern of them neglecting their work.

Your child might also be under the impression that, because they have always done well in maths before, they don't need to worry too much about applying themselves in that subject. However, as maths becomes increasingly abstract, some children struggle and may need to put in extra effort. Their teacher can point you and your child in the right direction and help provide remediation if necessary.

Sometimes, lower than expected results can simply reflect the curriculum becoming more involved. Science, for example, can become more difficult for some children with the introduction of memorisation and lab work. When the curriculum becomes more difficult, your child will need to work harder just to maintain their results.

It is very important to start the conversation with your child by praising the positive first. Congratulate them, not only on high results, but also on getting better grades in subjects they previously had difficulty with. Ask them which grade they are proudest of and why. Involve them in discussions about their successes and challenge them to explain how they got such a good result. It is far more useful to ask, "What went right?" for a good result to see how that achievement can translate to other more difficult areas.

When talking with your child about problem areas, focus on discussing the class itself. Ask if the work was too difficult or if the class went too fast. For example, if maths is "useless" and "boring," find ways in the future to show them how maths is used in subjects they love, from shopping to computer games.

(Source: <https://www.worksheetcloud.com/blog/3-adult-ways-to-respond-to-your-childs-school-report/>)

Suggestions for how to approach specific issues within a report

Grades improved, but less than you expected.

It might be tempting to say, "I was expecting to see more improvement than this." But it's important to remember that any improvement is progress, and even a little bit can take a lot of effort. Recognising this provides an opportunity to talk about what's working well.

Instead, try saying, "Well done! What do you think helped you to make those improvements? Would the same strategies be helpful for other subjects, too?"

Grades and attitude both need improvement.

When the news isn't great, it might be tempting to say, "You're grounded until your attitude and grades improve!" But take a deep breath and try this approach instead: "I need to take some time to think about what I want to say. We'll talk about this tomorrow."

Then, think about what "improvement" looks like. Be realistic and define it for your child: "Here are the expectations for the next half term. Let's come up with a plan to make it happen."

Grades have improved since the last report card.

When the results are positive, it might be tempting to say, "I knew if you tried harder you could do better!" But "trying harder" isn't how children with learning and attention issues do better in school.

Instead, you can say something like, "Well done! Looks like using new strategies for homework and studying really paid off."

Grades stayed the same, but attitude and effort improved.

When you're looking for improvement in grades you may overlook teacher comments about progress in other areas. It might be tempting to say, "Well, your attitude is better. If only your grades were better, too." But if your child doesn't enjoy school, greater effort and an improved attitude are progress.

Instead, try saying, "It's good to hear you're more comfortable in school, and to see that you're doing well with your homework. Let's work on answering longer questions for the next half term."

Some grades improved, and others dropped.

Since some subjects have improved, it might be tempting to say, "What happened with the rest of your classes?" But as your child gets older, the expectations for learning change and may be harder to meet in some subjects.

It's more productive to say, "Your maths and science grades look great! But I'm a little disappointed about the others. What's different in those classes?" Talk about changes that might help, such as a quieter homework area or working with a tutor. If they are old enough, you can also suggest that they speak with their teachers about strategies that could help them improve.

Your child is failing most classes despite working hard.

If you're surprised, it might be tempting to say, "You're failing everything?! I thought you were working hard!" Your child's performance may have little to do with effort, though. Do they have the necessary supports? Maybe it's time to consider an evaluation or revisit their PEP objectives and interventions.

You can say this instead: "I'm really surprised by these grades—I know you worked hard. After we talk about what you think could help you, I'm going to ask for a meeting at school to come up with a better plan."

Grades have taken a sudden nosedive.

When your child is suddenly failing everything, it might be tempting to say, "What on earth is going on with you?" But it's important to think about any other signs that something's wrong. Have you seen changes in their behaviour or in their friendships recently?

If so, you could say, "I'm really not happy with this, and I've noticed other changes in you lately. Take a day to think about what your teachers and I can do to help. Tomorrow we'll talk and come up with a plan for moving forward."

Your child is disappointed they didn't do better.

It might be tempting to say, "I don't understand why you're upset. This report card looks pretty good." If your child has been expecting a bigger "payoff" for their hard work, however, it might not look good enough.

Instead you can say, "I understand that you're disappointed, but I'm happy with this. I see your hard work paying off."

You know they didn't put in the necessary work.

Out of frustration it might be tempting to say, "I knew this was going to happen! I'm taking your phone until you fix it!" But your child can't prove it's "fixed" until the next report card. And that's too long for any form of punishment to be meaningful or effective.

A better approach might be to say, "You can't change your report card, but you can—and will—change your approach to school. You aren't going to use your phone until your homework is done and checked each day."

(Source: <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/understanding-childs-challenges/talking-with-your-child/tips-for-reacting-to-childs-report-card>)

Parents Consultation Evenings

The Parent's Consultation Evening is an important opportunity for parents, carers and students to meet tutors and teachers to discuss student progress in all subject areas, share any concerns with staff. They often follow shortly after a report. The school will give details of how appointments can be booked; some manage appointments online, whilst others rely upon children booking appointments with subject staff.

You should use the evening to make sure you are clear about what your child's strengths are and, importantly, what next steps needs to be focused upon to help them to make progress.

The following are some questions that you may want to ask at a consultation evening to support your child's progress and attainment:

- What are their strengths in this subject, and how can they be developed further?
- What skills do they need to develop to meet and/or exceed their target grade?
- How will they be assessed in this subject?
- What extra support or intervention could there be available to support this?
- How are you accommodating my child's special educational needs or attachment needs?
- What can I do to support my child to make further progress in this subject?
- Could I have a copy of the assessment criteria?
- End of Key Stage 3 – would this subject would an appropriate option for my child at GCSE?
- End of Key Stage 4 – would this subject be an appropriate Post 16 option for my child?



What should you do if you are concerned about the educational experience of your child?

There are a number of people who you can discuss concerns with. It is natural to sometimes be worried about how a child is getting on at school and sharing your concerns will mean that they can be addressed.

If you have concerns over the educational progress of your child:

1. Contact the School's Designated Teacher.
2. Contact the Social Worker
3. Contact the Virtual School Head (VSH) representative or VSH on 01473 260818

If you have concerns about the provision for your child:

1. Discuss with school, the child's social worker and your Supervising Social worker
2. Request a joint meeting between school / carer / social worker / supervising worker and child (where age appropriate)
3. Contact the Virtual School Head (VSH) representative or VSH on 01473 260818

Suffolk's Education Champions

Suffolk's Education Champions are experienced carers with a strong interest and passion for the education of young people. We have a number of Education Champions across the county with varying interests and areas of expertise, including Primary, Secondary and SEN. The Education Champions are available to support Suffolk Carers and provide a friendly and flexible service to support Carers to support their young people.

The support they can offer includes: being a listening ear, a sounding board to try out new ideas, support with attending school meetings and general education advice and guidance.

They also have access to some additional education resources and are happy and willing to share their experience and knowledge, whilst fully understanding the day to day challenges.

Education Champions attend the support groups across the county and can be accessed directly at these or by contacting Heidi Austin, who oversees and supports the Education Champions, by emailing heidi.austin@suffolk.gov.uk.