

Reporting to parents/carers – Glyncollen Primary School

Introduction

This case study looks at how we changed our approach to reporting as we moved towards communicating and engaging with parents/carers under the new Curriculum for Wales guidance. It explores how this way of working supported families during the COVID-19 school closure period and how it will translate to effective blended learning support.

Original context

Our current reporting arrangements evolved over time as we focused on transforming assessment. Reports, prior to development, were familiar, mass-produced statements generated from a digital tracking programme. Although teachers worked hard to personalise these reports for each learner, parents/carers often found the reports confusing, overwhelming and of little constructive benefit to them or their children. As is often the case, most were only interested in the teacher's personal comment and their child's views. They overwhelmingly felt that comments on their child's well-being were the most valued aspect. They also felt that reports should include general comments on their child's attitude to learning, progress across the curriculum and information on how they could help at home.

The statutory arrangements for schools with regard to reporting are that parents/carers receive a written report at least once a year. Our parents/carers received a written report once a year towards the end of the summer term, following two face-to-face consultations and a whole-class welcome session.

As we transformed assessment, we knew we also had to provide information that was clear and purposeful to both parents/carers and teachers.

Transforming

The first stage of developing reporting coincided with the move towards a 'narrative' approach. We abandoned reports created by digital programmes and returned to writing individual reports. We involved our learners and their parents/carers in reviewing and rewriting our assessment policy. Learners in particular were clear that they did not feel school reports were of any value to them.

The next development for us was to add half-termly comments to our practice. These short, written updates enabled parents/carers to be more informed about the progress their children were making between consultations and before the end of the school year.

Current reporting

Our main aim in reporting is to provide regular and effective communication on progress and next steps, while ensuring that parents/carers are fully involved in supporting learning in partnership with the school.

The formative reporting cycle now consists of:

- September: 'Whatever Next?'— whole-class meeting on what to expect your child to be doing this year
- October: Progress 1 written report
- December: Progress 2 consultation
- February: Progress 3 written report
- April: Progress 4 consultation
- June: Progress 5 written report
- July: additional statutory information only.

We have routinely provided written reports digitally so the move to face-to-face and remote learning in coming months will mean little change to the communication to parents/carers. In addition to the written updates, we will incorporate virtual or telephone consultations until we are in a position to meet face to face to ensure regular engagement continues.

Progress updates avoid jargon, avoid replication, avoid lists of activities, and in response to parents'/carers' requests, avoid descriptions of what the learners have learned. Updates do not focus on outcomes or judgements but instead focus on the 'how' and 'why' rather than the 'what', on the progress made, on children's learning behaviours and the support they need at home that will add value to what they do in school and aid progression. The information points implicitly to the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Below are excerpts from some of these progress updates.

'...Her final written retelling of the story was lively and full of imaginative detail, demonstrating her growing confidence with literacy. She should be mindful of where to use full stops and use tools such as a Sound Map to help her spell tricky words.

'...She is growing in confidence with numbers and is showing resilience to find a solution to problem-solving tasks.

'...She enjoys imaginative play and is happy to lead her own learning in role-play. She has recently been observed playing at 'rock climbing' in the forest and explained, 'we are rock climbing at 25,000 metres!'

'...is a lively, ambitious learner...participating enthusiastically with drama, problem-solving and written activities to engage fully with the story.

'...he has shown confidence when speaking in group discussions, speaking with growing maturity about different types of relationships...worked collaboratively in his group to research and plan a lesson for Year 5 on a healthy diet, creating resources and a presentation which was adapted well for the age group; however, he needs to carry out more preparation on how he will present in future, to ensure that he is more confident and participates fully.

'...has such a lovely sense of humour...willing to have a go. Continued focus and avoidance of distractions in the classroom will ensure that he continues to make good progress...'

Feedback

Parents/carers are pleased with the changes to the reporting process and feel that they are better informed about how their child is doing throughout the year. They feel that comments on progress and next steps mean they can be more involved in their child's learning and that the personal and individual approach means they recognise their child in the report.

This is a sound platform for continuing to work together during a time when face-to-face and remote learning is being used, where effective communication and engagement with parents/carers can help bridge this learning and support learners to take more ownership. The process builds a picture of progress for every child over time, contributing to their story. Frequent communication also leads to less anxiety and more reassurance for parents/carers and learners, and allows for those in need of more support to approach us more readily.

Progress and partnership, well-being and workload

The cycle of formative reporting has improved more than just the reports. Relationships with parents/carers have improved as they appreciate the timely, individual and honest approach to focusing on supporting development and progression.

It might seem like a lot more work but because the reporting element is now integral to learning, teaching and assessment, rather than one big job at the end of the year, it is actually less additional work. It is simply a reflection of staff observations, formative approaches and tracking, and part of the cycle of planning for learning. The reports are not giant tomes of information but practical and concise evaluations of progress and targets set. This makes for a manageable workload and a purposeful activity for teachers. Professional learning has been very much part of the process as every stage of the change was a whole-school discussion, thinking about key considerations, refining and learning from other schools.

Going forward

During lockdown it is important to help parents/carers understand how best they can support the learning at home. Regular reporting arrangements throughout the year to this point mean that parents/carers already have the most up-to-date information on their child's progress and needs.

At this uncertain time, when we do not fully know what the new academic year will bring, reporting in this way will support an inclusive learning approach. As schools start to reopen to more learners, reporting regularly throughout the year will support a more flexible approach, enabling us to work closely with our learners while at school and our families while at home. Evaluation of learning will be shared regularly, supporting parents'/carers' understanding about the learning they are being asked to support at home and why it is important.

The reporting format itself is still a work in progress and working in a blended way will provide an interesting and complementary platform for evaluating the impact of the approach and further refinement. Working with smaller groups of children will allow us to begin to include them in the process even more, creating communities of learning, encouraging more active participation, raising their own expectations and increasing self-efficacy. Furthermore, when so much time has been spent developing the digital skills of both staff and learners, we can utilise technology in innovative ways to enhance the formative reporting experience. Use of apps such as Flipgrid will allow learners to record their views, teachers to provide feedback and support, and parents/carers to join discussions that not only look at progress but also ascertain what is going well and what needs to change.

hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/supporting-learner-progression-assessment-guidance/#communicating-and-engaging-with-parents/carers