

Academic Resilience Approach

Information pack



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1. What is Academic Resilience?

Academic Resilience key points

- Good educational outcomes despite adversity
- We can spot the impact of academic resilience through individuals doing better than we might have expected
- Promoting academic resilience will lead to better behaviour and results for disadvantaged pupils.

Academic resilience means students achieving good educational outcomes despite adversity. For schools, promoting it involves strategic planning and detailed practice involving the whole school community to help vulnerable young people do better than their circumstances might have predicted. With this way of working, schools can help not only to beat the odds for individual pupils, but also with changing the odds for disadvantaged pupils across the board.

Sounds easy right? Well, we know if it were simple, everyone would have already achieved it and you could be doing something else right now instead of reading this. This resource will give you a hand with putting the theory into practice.

- View the [Resilience Framework](#) (pdf) in full size
- Download an [Interactive Resilience Framework](#) (pdf) with supporting information

The Resilient classroom

The Resilient Classroom: Want a resource so you can get on with promoting resilience in PSHE or tutor group? Try our [Resilient Classroom](#) (pdf) resource for bite size, downloadable activities for 20 min sessions.

Have a look at how one school developed the Framework into an individual child assessment tool using the headings (Eleanor Smith School, Newham).

- [Pictorial Framework – Version 1](#)
- [Pictorial Framework – Version 2](#)

How can we spot academic resilience?

These kinds of conversations would be going on in your school community if your school has done well at increasing pupils' academic resilience:

"Remember when George Smith left school and was offered that plumbing apprenticeship and we couldn't believe it? Apparently he has stuck it out and is doing well. Even his mum used to say he was destined for prison!" – Deputy Head

"Can't believe that Kuljinder is doing so well now. She left school with five GCSEs and has gone to college to do 'A' Levels. In Year 7 she got excluded and her mum was in a psychiatric hospital. Unbelievable." – Key Stage Four teacher

"Carl Jones was one of the lads painting the canteen this weekend as part of the alternative education programme. He was telling me about his previous exclusions and the kinds of trouble he used to get in to at weekends. He seems determined to do better at school now he can see a future for himself." – School caretaker

Of course it might not be your personal responsibility to make this all happen. But we'd like to convince you that whoever you are in the school community you have a valuable role to play in achieving academic resilience. Everyone in the school community can contribute... and sometimes new roles in school can help fill some gaps - the kinds of things that others haven't got time or skills to do. Have a look at the film below for some ideas from some other schools.



And basically the theme here is ‘so and so did better than we expected’. Imagine this kind of ‘positive gossip’ resounding round the staff room? Some more experienced teachers have told us that our approach reminds them of the old days when teachers were encouraged to get involved in other aspects of a pupil’s life. Young and old teachers have told us this:

“Helping those pupils who have lots of barriers to overcome is why I went in to teaching in the first place.”

It’s not rocket science. What we are saying is that positive progress for pupils facing adversity comes in many forms – building their resilience will help ensure that progress. Believing in potential is what teachers and others in school do so well – the school just needs to find ways to support staff to act on that belief.

What does the evidence tell us?

Some children are simply born brainy and despite the most difficult circumstances, they will do well in school. (For example Oprah Winfrey suffered all kinds of childhood horrors, but studied hard at school and went to university too). In fact for some brainy children, school can be a refuge and a much calmer, safer place than home.

We know that children with certain advantages are more likely to do well at school – intelligence, height, looks, etc plus stable home life, educated parents, decent housing – these kinds of factors are known to increase the likelihood of academic attainment.

At the same time, there are many risk factors which make a child less likely to achieve. There are certain issues that keep cropping up in the research findings about what can work in building resilience in vulnerable children and young people, including:

1. At least one trusted adult, with regular access over time, who lets the pupils they ‘hold in mind’ know that they care
2. Preparedness and capacity to help with basics, i.e. food, clothing, transport, and even housing
3. Safe spaces – quiet, safe spaces for pupils who wish to retreat from ‘busy’ school life
4. Making sure disadvantaged pupils actually access activities, hobbies and sports
5. Help to map out a sense of future (hope and aspirations) and developing life skills
6. Help to develop and practice problem-solving approaches at every opportunity
7. Help for pupils to calm down and manage their feelings
8. Support to help others e.g. volunteering, peer mentoring.
9. Opportunities for all staff, pupils and parents to learn about resilience

10. Staff treat each other with care and respect, modelling the behaviour they expect from pupils.

How will promoting academic resilience help our school achieve better results?

Building resilience involves doing a whole bundle of things that don't always happen in the classroom. We know from years of research that supporting pupils to build resilience improves their academic results.

But why is this? Why is it that say, helping a pupil with challenging behaviour join the Woodcraft Folk and take part in their activities each week, would have a knock on effect on academic achievement?

The same question could be asked again of this situation. Imagine a child being asked how their poorly mum was doing by a kindly dinner lady. Imagine that child feeling cared for as a result of that conversation. All these kinds of processes help pupils settle down, concentrate and feel better about themselves.

All of which, as anybody in the school community will know, will have an impact on learning and educational achievement.

Improved behaviour and attendance at school are all part of that. Of course there are longer term benefits – some of the processes and practices involved in resilience building will give pupils access to opportunities that they would never have had before.

For example, suppose the Woodcraft leader runs a fish and chip shop and that pupil who settled in her club ended up getting work experience there for a few weeks. Who knows, right now he might be running his very own chip shop.

Even longer term benefits for children, families and wider society include better physical health, increased life expectancy and better long term mental health for the most vulnerable members of society. What's not to like?

Some might say that all this boils down to us being kinder to pupils, but there really is more to resilience promotion than just that. It involves using tried and tested ideas to help support vulnerable pupils to genuinely close the gap.

It also involves leadership and commitment. Check out what these school leaders say about their expectations of the whole school community in making sure no child is left behind.



In our experience having an evidence-based resilience framework to help plan and support what you do – whether you are the head teacher or a parent – can make you stay on track and keep going especially when the going gets tough.

And let's face it, achieving academic resilience for the most vulnerable pupils isn't plain sailing, however kind you are.

2. Which pupils are we talking about?

Pupils key points

All pupils cope with some adversity

- Pupils who experience multiple disadvantages face greater challenges in schools
- This resource is about supporting schools to 'step up' for those pupils
- All pupils will benefit from an academic resilience approach
- There are many disadvantages and stressors that can have a negative impact upon pupils -these are called risk factors



All pupils will have to cope with some adversity, that is part of life. However pupils who experience multiple disadvantages (such as poverty, domestic violence, bullying, refugee and asylum seekers, young people with special educational or complex needs), face greater challenges in school than most.



All pupils will benefit from a school-wide approach to increasing academic resilience. In fact, more advantaged pupils often benefit more than others because they get even more support than they had before, so you need to be extra careful to ensure that disadvantaged pupils will benefit.



Risk Factors

There are many disadvantages and stressors that can have a negative impact upon pupils. These are called risk factors which can include, but are not limited to:

- Stress effects and malnourishment in the womb
- Poverty
- Parents with little formal education
- Family instability
- Parental alcoholism
- Poor parental mental health (Werner, 1989)
- Poor educational attainment
- Poor relationships with others
- Poor school attendance
- Low peer and adult support
- Not engaging with the wider community
- Being exposed to negative life experiences, such as domestic violence or drug abuse in the family
- Not mastering life skills

- Low self-esteem and self-confidence
- Having the feeling of little control or influence over one's own life

If you work in a school then you can probably picture many pupils that fit a few of these criteria in terms of risk. Most high-risk pupils will already have come to your attention because of their behaviour, or maybe if they are the quieter type, through concerns about academic progress, or perhaps lack of engagement in the class room?



High risk pupils

High risk pupils are often those that are on the receiving end of behaviour management strategies, safeguarding frameworks, attendance strategies, or pastoral support.

Beingboing have published a [safeguarding and resilience factsheet](#) that helps professionals consider the safeguarding issues whilst building resilient relationships with children, young people and their families.

You may be trying to work with the parents, get alongside them, engage them in some way. You may have referred to external agencies or carried out a 'common assessment' of some kind. You may already have a plan...

But some pupils just seem to eat up your plans and your energy along with it. In fact some pupils seem to eat entire banquets of professionals for breakfast and we are still no further forward!

Some pupils' circumstances are so risk-laden and tough you may be thinking 'We can't make this better no matter how hard we try'.

There's absolutely no easy solution to this. What we can do is encourage you to stick with them because that alone is perhaps what is making the biggest difference.



Did you know...? The most commonly cited resilience factor across all the research with adults who suffered adversity in childhood and yet did better than might have been expected, is an adult like you.

Those high risk pupils who eventually bounce back, look back when grown up and think about what made the biggest difference – and their tale will often include,

“That teacher/caretaker/Head/mentor (basically adult) who believed in me, never gave up on me, told me I could do it.”

Of course there are a lot of other things you can do along the way that have been proven to work. No one thing is a magic bullet – but think about how you can focus on strengths or hope in the situation, and build on them.

Use the [Resilience Framework](#) for ideas.

Medium and lower risk pupils (or those not taking up all your time...yet!)

Do you know who they are? Are you from a big secondary? Or maybe all your pupils have some element of risk, such as if you're a special school or perhaps a school in an area of poverty and all the social and health problems that go with that.

One way to try and get ahead of the curve and reduce demand on your time later on is to think about prevention and earlier intervention. Think about building resilience across the whole school population, and alongside this think about how you identify who is likely to be at greater risk **before** they hit your radar.

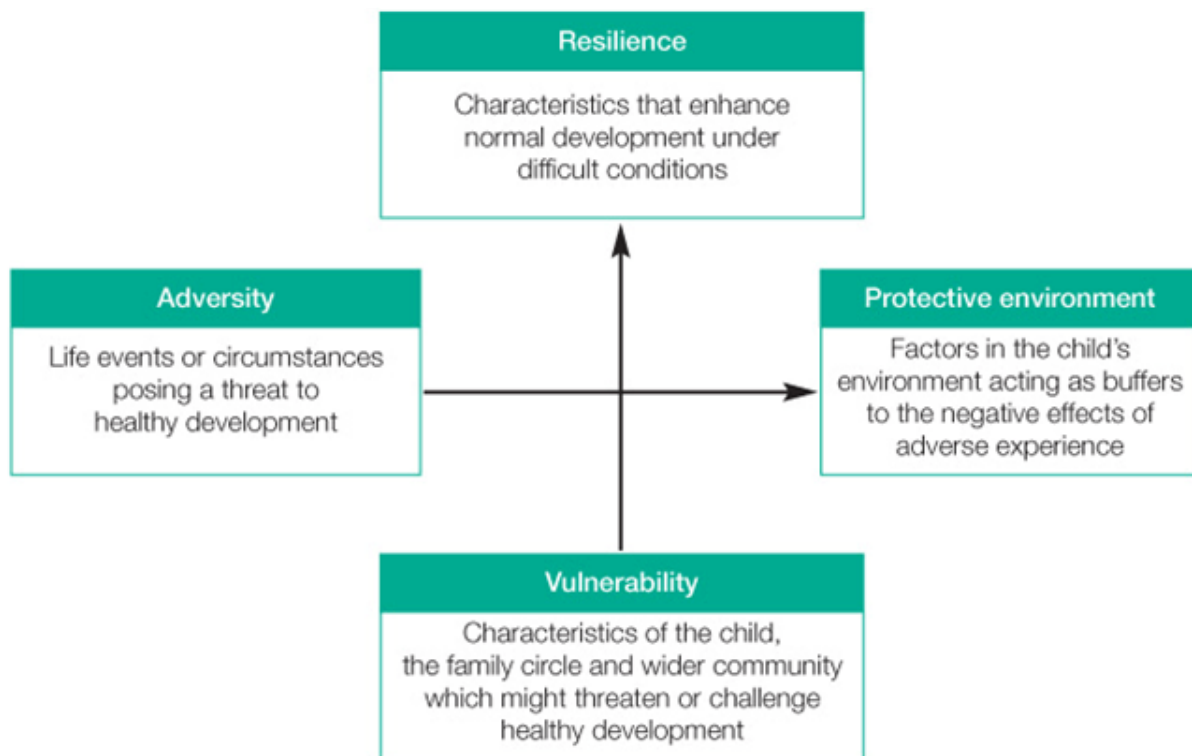
- Schools can do a lot to identify vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. Have a look at our ideas and things we have heard about that might help... Read more about how to [identify vulnerable pupils](#).

All a bit doom and gloom? Well once you've identified those pupils you need to pay special attention to, you might want to think about them in terms of the risk and resilience matrix.

Understanding risk and resilience factors

The Resilience Matrix, developed by Daniel and Wassell[1] provides a handy framework to begin to weigh up the particular risks against protective factors.

The Matrix was originally designed for use with extremely disadvantaged pupils. It was put together to help practitioners weigh up the strengths and risks already identified from the Common Assessment Framework and any other specialist assessments.



The Matrix is used to assist practitioners in making sense of the relationship between the child's vulnerability or resilience and the world around them, which in turn may highlight areas of risk requiring more comprehensive or specialist assessment and analysis. The Matrix can be used to examine and weigh factors in relation to:

- Vulnerability and unmet needs
- Adversity
- Strengths or protective factors
- Resilience

You might want to use it to do a quick overview of a pupil's risk and resilience factors before you get stuck in with applying the [Resilience Framework](#).

[1] Daniel and Wassell, (2002) Assessing and Promoting Resilience in Vulnerable Children Vols. 1, 2 & 3, London & Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd. See also: Daniel, B., Wassell, S. and Gilligan, R. (1999) Child Development for Child Care and Child Protection Workers, London and Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.

3. What can schools do?

Schools key points

- Focusing on just a few quick and easy activities can have an impact
- A whole schools approach makes a bigger difference – get the whole school community involved
- For specific ideas and activities, use the menu below

Where to start

Well, you can start by focusing on just a few things, apart from Quality First Teaching of course, which you'll know all about.

Get these few things going, or if you've already have, make sure you are doing them well and sharing them with the whole community.

Evidence and practice based experience tells us there are a few key actions that you could take in school that would have impact. (There are others of course and you might want to have a look at the [Resilience Framework](#) for even more detail on the kinds of things you can do but here we have picked out the strongest themes from the evidence base for schools).

Quick wins

The Resilient Classroom: Want a resource so you can get on with promoting resilience in PSHE or tutor group? Try our [Resilient Classroom](#) resource for bite size, downloadable activities for 20 min sessions.



Haven't got time for reading?

Watch our film made with young people talking about their school days and what you could do to make school life better for disadvantaged pupils.

Want to find out what other people have done? Try our [short films](#) or check out the schools that won the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition's [Resilience in Schools competition](#).

Are you using the Academic Resilience Approach in your school?

Have you been using the Academic Resilience Approach? We're really keen to [hear from people using the ARA](#) in their schools, or even just some of the ideas and tools.

Evidence

In the late 1970s Michael Rutter, a psychiatrist who specialises in resilience wrote a book with some colleagues, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*. It was about the effect of secondary school education on pupils.

That's a lot of hours and if you add the number of hours pupils spend in primary schools to this figure, you are talking about what equates to major opportunities to influence pupils and what kind of lives they will end up leading.

So the importance of schools in developing resilience cannot be overstated. Resilience researchers have, through numerous studies, been reiterating and evidencing this quite obvious fact for many years.

Let's just quote one of the most well-known of these researchers. Anne Masten and colleagues (Masten, Herbers, Cutuli & Lafortune (2008 p1) say:

"Effective schools and teachers provide children on a daily basis with mastery experiences, opportunities to experience success and enjoy achievement that also serve to foster intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and persistence in the face of failure."

Get as many adults from the schools staff and volunteering community (including cooks, cleaners, administrative staff, teachers, TAs etc.) together in one room for half a day and do our [Resilience Zap](#) with them. This gives a great introduction and can be either the start of a programme in school or simply a one-off activity.

How?

You can follow the [step-by-step guide](#) that shows you how to structure the day and what to cover.

Why?

Because building resilience is everyone's business. It's important to have everyone in schools aware of what they can do, how they can work together, and what they are already doing to build pupils' resilience.

So the more awareness you can build in your staff and volunteers, the greater the effects. Small changes really do have big effects for vulnerable pupils, and if you get a resilient move (a resilient move is any single action that someone in the school community takes to support pupils' resilience building) going in one part of the school, this can have knock-on effects elsewhere.

One headteacher involved in putting together our approach uses a famous quote from NASA to illustrate this idea.

"The folk tale goes like this, one day a visitor came to the space station and asked a cleaner who was sweeping up what job they did there. The cleaner replied 'I help put men on the moon.'"

Imagine what it would be like in your school if every adult in the school community's answer to a visitor asking what they do was 'I help our most vulnerable pupils achieve better than any of us could ever have imagined they would'.

Help pupils to understand what resilience is about and how they can apply it in their own lives

Part of this concerns raising aspirations for pupils who face the most challenges and helping them to see that they can achieve against the odds.

It can also help more advantaged pupils understand and appreciate just how lucky they are. It can ensure that all pupils in school have been given the opportunity to understand and do something to challenge the effects of social inequalities on educational attainment and life achievements for the most vulnerable young people.

How?

School assemblies are a good starting point.

- Try our [assembly guide](#) and tips for giving an assembly on resilience using stories from staff
- The Tutor Pack ([Resilient Classroom](#)) (pdf) also has ideas on how to do this in class. It has over 50 classroom activities covering every aspect of resilience and all in bite size sessions – perfect for schools to use in class or tutor time. Check out how it is being used at Hove Park School in Brighton

If you are a teacher, you will know that resilience fits naturally in to many different curriculum areas. And conversations about resilience should include conversations about how our society may need changing in some ways, rather than just working individually with pupils on their own resilience.

For KS4 and KS5 how about stimulating debate around inequalities and resilience? [The Equality Trust](#) have lots of material to help you with this (you are probably already doing some of this). For younger pupils, the majority of the activities in the [Resilient Classroom](#) resource pack are suitable for KS1 or can be easily adapted.

Why?

Helping pupils understand what resilience is and how it can be achieved will support them to take ownership of the processes involved. It may also help more advantaged pupils to achieve social justice for more challenged pupils in their schools and beyond.

There are simply piles of evidence showing us that unequal societies are pretty rubbish for everyone in them. The biggest resilient move anyone could make is to even up some of the big injustices in society (like massive pay differentials).

Mental health problems, teenage pregnancy and poor maths and literacy levels are just some of the problems which loom large in unequal societies. Getting the whole school community excited about understanding the problem and doing something about it might give us hope for a fairer future. It's all part of closing the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged – and their academic progress.



Ensure that vulnerable pupils have at least one supportive adult they can turn to in the school community

How?

For some pupils this will just be a case of identifying someone already working with them, it could be a learning mentor, a teacher, or Head of Year.

The key is to find someone who has a positive relationship with that pupil, perhaps where there is some good rapport, and to encourage and support that adult to stick with them.

Try not to keep changing that person. They need to develop a supportive relationship with someone over time.

Staff and volunteers also need to be given the authority to communicate to pupils that they do actually care about what happens to them. Hear how powerful that was for Lionel, now working at Eleanor Smith Special School in Newham.

What adults say and do is noticed by pupils who face problems and can be hugely significant – it can also be misinterpreted.

A good exercise is to get together a group of vulnerable pupils and [talk to them about support in the school community](#). We have done this with pupils with challenging behaviour for example and some pretty powerful and often surprising stuff comes up. It's good learning for the school.

But don't make the mistake of always putting pupils with challenging behaviour together. It's really useful for them to have individual time with good adult mentors, and be kept away from each other, all easier said than done, we know.

Some Heads we have spoken to made structural or staff changes in order to support relationship building in the schools, such as employing learning mentors or TAs specifically to support vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils or re-structuring so that a tutor goes through school with one group of pupils and develops rapport and relationships with those pupils.

Why?

Of all the strategies to help vulnerable pupils manage life better, this has the potential to make the biggest difference.

When looking back to their childhood, people who have achieved against the odds can often identify one significant adult who made the difference, someone who believed in them, was there for them over time, didn't judge them and didn't give up.

A supportive adult that you know is there for you and cares what happens to you can be an anchor in school for many vulnerable pupils. It will help them stay more settled in school and can provide them with a sense of stability and security. This has a knock-on effect on learning.

Help with the basics for those pupils who really need it

How?

Schools come up with all kinds of ingenious and resilient moves to help pupils who, for whatever reason, are not getting their basic needs met, like food, clothing, transport, even housing.

Thresholds for children's services are relatively high and schools are increasingly moving in to the gap or buying in their own helping services.

Of course there is the Pupil Premium which your school will be getting so have a think about what that's being used for. Some of that could, and probably is already, being spent on the basics.

In school this can mean activities such as breakfast clubs, taking pupils to health appointments when no-one else will get them there, washing uniforms and other pretty basic support. This can help level the playing field for some students – just as we try to for SEND pupils in learning support. Check out the level of support some schools offer in this short film about Sir John Thursby Community College in Burnley.

As the Head David Burton says,

“For some children the barriers to achievement are higher than for others, a hungry, cold, ill, malnourished, neglected child would be incredibly resilient if academic achievement were their first priority! We want to ensure all of the basic barriers are removed.”

Why?

We have heard tons of stories about poor diet, lack of sleep, unwashed clothes, chaotic homes and much worse (and no we’re not just talking about the staff!). And if we had a pound for every time a wise Head has said to us ‘How can my pupils learn if they are not fed, comfortable and feel safe?’

Of course we are assuming you have made referrals and raised concerns where relevant, so where does that leave you? The pupil concerned is still going to be in school (hopefully) and we all know that nothing quick is likely to happen unless it’s very serious.

Whilst it might not seem like the school’s job to address basic needs, we would say it’s all part of building academic resilience. If a pupil experiences care from a school then this can strengthen their sense of belonging which helps them feel settled and positive.

Helping a pupil to think through how they get their PE kit washed when they are staying with their dad for a few nights and have no washing machine is teaching a child how to solve problems in maths.

Asking a teacher to give a vulnerable pupil a lift home every week so that they can attend the drama club is helping them with their literacy. Need we go on...?

Provide multiple opportunities for children who find problem-solving difficult to practice that skill

How?

Every time a pupil ‘misbehaves’ what do the adults in your school do? Do they tell them what they should do?

OR do they ask them what they could do differently next time? See how Sacred Heart Primary in Islington approach behaviour in our short film.

Every time there's a problem to solve, allow the pupil to solve it with your support, including giving them enough time to think and explain (check out [The Communication Trust](#) for good tips on this).

All across the curriculum there are opportunities to practice problem solving – ask your staff for their ideas using our staff inset audit tool and just see what they come up with!

There are lots of approaches from making problem-solving part of project work, to rotating pupils on the 'shadow leadership team' or getting a group of them to run the school for a day.

Why?

Studies repeatedly show that children who can problem solve well tend to do better academically.

OK, it's not rocket science and basically none of your pupils will ever be rocket scientists if they are not taught or modelled problem solving!

Make sure your most vulnerable pupils have an activity they enjoy and help them to actually do this on a regular basis

How?

You might offer lots of clubs and enrichment activities but have you checked how many of your more vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils actually attend? In the same way you are monitoring progress of individual pupils, what about monitoring their uptake of other activities?

Closing the gap on attainment means closing the gap on life experience where you can. Getting dis-engaged pupils to engage in a lesson is hard – but what about something they love? Do they love art? Parkour? Singing? Set them up to achieve, make sure they get there, take an interest, encourage them to keep going and lay things on at lunchtime rather than after school if you can.

That way young people with caring responsibilities at home don't miss out, or those who have to run for the free school bus or the taxi home! See how important this is in Eleanor Smith Special School in Newham.

Why?

The experience of achievement helps build resilience and is important for all pupils and helps build resilience but not all get the chance to shine. Some parents spend hours every week driving their kids to music lessons, sports clubs, ballet, karate, and forking out a fortune along the way. Many of the pupils who need it the most, never get this.

Being lost in the flow of an activity, absorbed, creative, learning – all helps children to do better academically. Doing well at something a child values leads to increased confidence, self-esteem, coping, problem-solving and social skills.

Not every child will have the experience of a scout master teaching them to make a fire but for a pupil struggling to concentrate and sit still – this might just fit their bill!

Create safe spaces for pupils who wish to retreat from ‘busy’ school life

How?

Find out where’s safe and unsafe in school. Pupils will be able to tell you. If you need help to extract the info then why not use the relevant class activities in our [Resilient Classroom](#) resource.

Encouraging pupils to identify where they feel safe and unsafe and looking at ways this can be changed can help a student feel more resilient.

Why?

For especially vulnerable pupils, or pupils who are being bullied because of their race, sexuality or disability for example, a physically safe place in school can be of enormous benefit.

Some pupils live in an unsafe area such as those with high crime rates or gangs; for some home is unsafe. Even low cost, small changes to can make a huge difference to pupils.

We heard from focus groups with secondary pupils that those with SEND in school can feel safer than those that don’t have any additional learning needs.

This is because the school often creates a learning environment which is smaller and more personal for SEND pupils and which is accessible at other times of the day.

Help pupils to map out a sense of future, developing hope and aspirations

How?

The best advice we can give on this, beyond ‘Get a good careers advisor’, is to really think about which pupils need this help most? We are not talking about pupils who want to be doctors and lawyers like their parents. We are thinking about pupils who don’t have any adults in their family who work, or whose parent is learning disabled or depressed.

Whole school-wise, make it routine in the curriculum to link what pupils are learning to what they might do with this in life. Check staff are doing this – whatever the subject – maybe build it in to teaching observations for a term to help identify where it could be increased.

Target-wise, if vulnerable pupils have an interest in something, anything, jump on this and explore it: can this interest be grown in to an aspiration? This is where your ‘significant, supportive adult’ comes in – they can be the one who spots it and does something about it. Ask others in the school community for help.

Some schools buy in alternative curriculum or enrichment activities from local agencies for pupils which are designed to build towards a more positive future.

Pupils need ideas and inspiration – what is out there? What is possible? What have people like me been able to achieve? Invite back some ex pupils who have done better than you might have expected to talk about what they did and how they made it happen.

Here’s a few concrete ideas for whole school approaches:

- At Kings College in Guildford they have a different ‘Career of the week’ screen saver every week. It covers basic information on what the job involves, what it requires and how much it pays and pops up all over school.
- At Shevington High School in Wigan the careers advisor has made a downloadable PowerPoint pack for all tutors to use in the run up to choosing GCSE options covering every GCSE subject – covering what the subject involves that you might already enjoy, and the kinds of jobs it could lead to in different sectors.
- At Sir John Thursby in Burnley they have a recruitment agency in school to help pupils to know there are jobs out there to aim for and how to get them. This has helped them maintain a 0% NEET rate in recent years. Students have also sought advice from their student-led recruitment agency to help older siblings and parents.
- Use our [Resilient Classroom](#) resource which has bite sized exercises for the classroom designed to help pupils map out a sense of future and build aspiration

Why?

For some pupils believing in a better future means they are not only more able to cope with difficult situations in the present, it can also give them a sense of purpose to school life.

Future-focused programmes which concentrate on long and short-term career goals and which include elements such as mentoring, vocational field trips and speakers, job readiness and on-the-job training, and life skills have been shown to promote self-esteem, sense of purpose and willingness to embrace new experiences.

Helping pupils to cope – teaching self soothing or management of feelings

How?

This is the territory of many a school-based programme such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and many of the resilience or emotional wellbeing programmes designed for the classroom. It doesn't matter too much what methods you prefer as long as you do something. Again, we would urge you to think about this in both universal and targeted terms.

Relaxation is something everybody needs to learn how to do, but some pupils who are going through difficult times, or who are more likely to experience anxiety, may need additional support to learn effective strategies for self-soothing.

Check out what Sacred Heart Primary School in Islington are doing to help pupils manage their feelings and learn about them.

Hear what young people affected by mental health problems have to say about how school could have helped them to cope better.

Getting help

How?

Sometimes when feelings become overwhelming or affect a pupil's behaviour so much that they can't function you may need to get some expert help. So here's a few links:

- If a pupil is referred to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental health Services) and gets an appointment – we know that many vulnerable pupils do not always make it to their appointment for a variety of reasons. You could suggest they check out [My CAMHS Choices](#) – which might demystify the whole thing for them.
- Alternatively, a pupil may need some help but won't make it in to a statutory service – so why not check out what your local voluntary sector has to offer locally. There may be

a list of services on the council website or you could search the national [Youth Wellbeing Directory](#) for local, high quality services.

- There are many tried and tested, and well evidenced, treatments for a whole range of emotional and mental health problems. Sites like [YoungMinds](#) can help you think about this.

Why?

If a pupil is feeling over whelmed with anger, anxiety or loss then how will they manage their school work, their social interactions and their whole day without something going wrong – which in turn is likely to lead to more ‘bad’ feelings.

Can you think straight when you feel upset, overly stressed or otherwise engulfed in some emotion?

Support to help others such as through volunteering or peer mentoring

How?

Volunteering is a great way to introduce kids to responsibilities and obligations outside the home, which in turn make them feel valued and that they’re making a contribution to their community.

It doesn’t have to be formal volunteering or mentoring of course. It can be charity days or fund raising activities. Pupils generally like to be thanked and praised (even when pretending to be ‘not bothered’) exposure to external agencies and non-school adults who treat pupils with respect and express gratitude can be a hugely positive influence.

For more vulnerable pupils, find out what they are interested in and see if there’s something you can set them up with. Set them up to achieve, even if you have to do a bit of background work to support their placement as a volunteer or mentor it will be worth it.

Why?

Volunteering gives pupils opportunities they might otherwise not experience, such as making important decisions, and experiencing success as a direct result of their efforts, which was valued by others.

Feeling good about ourselves can lead to feeling good about other things like school for example.

4. How can services support me?

Services key points

- We understand the idea of commissioning or buying in help from external services can be daunting
- There are differences between commissioning and procurement
- Use this page to think about why schools need to buy in services, and how to ensure services are of a good enough standard to meet your pupils' needs

Where to begin?

“Commissioning”, “procurement”; “quality assurance”; “outcome measures”... suddenly feeling drowsy?

Well, stay awake! This is important stuff because it is about making the most of your budget to get the best for your vulnerable pupils.

Two things we want to help you with in this section:

- ‘Commissioning’ as opposed to ‘buying’ services – what’s the difference and how it will help ensure the best possible support for vulnerable pupils at the earliest stage
- When you know what services you need, help to find and procure the best quality, child and school-focused services

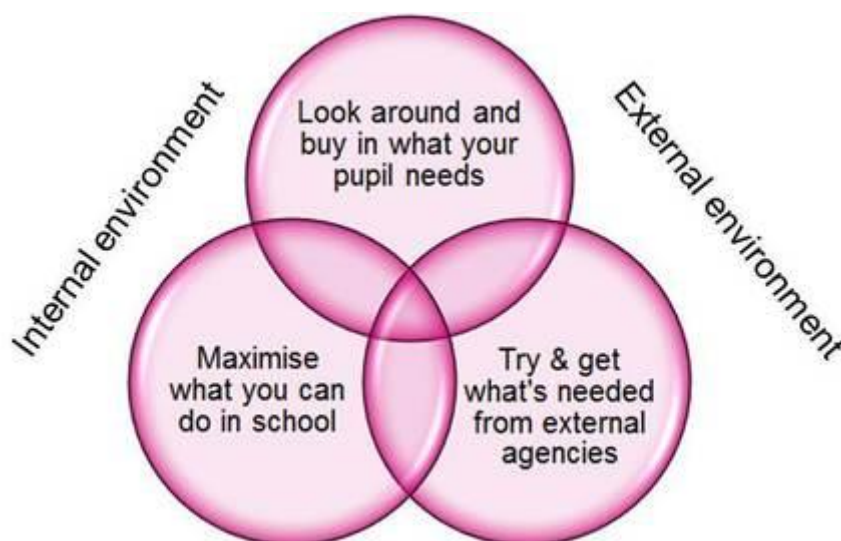
Many schools find the whole commissioning area baffling. But, before you jump straight to our Quick Guide to Commissioning below read why it is important to think beyond buying what you need right now to thinking about longer term, strategic commissioning.



What schools do

When a pupil needs extra support or more specialist input, schools tend to draw on all the resources available to them both internally and externally.

Sometimes they do one of the below and sometimes all three at once, whatever it takes!



Academic resilience is all about maximising what you can do in school with your existing resources. It's all about strategic planning and detailed practice to help your vulnerable pupils to do better than you might have expected. It's not always quick to put in place but it will be effective.

So you have that activity going on in school, but some pupils and their families need support that you cannot provide; it needs to come from the external system.

Schools cannot exist in isolation. You have to interact with the broader system of services and community groups and you need to get the best from it. You also have your pupil premium to help pay for some of that extra help.

Working with other agencies

You are worried about a pupil so you try everything but sometimes the services available to your pupils are not quite hitting the mark. It may be that you can't get a referral accepted. Waiting times are too long. Sometimes an appointment might be offered but the very pupils who need the service most are the ones that don't turn up!

You try to work with the external agencies but there are challenges – for some pupils the ‘team around the child’ feels more like ‘the crowd around the child’.



And once you have worked out who is who, who is assessing what, who knows what, and who is allowed to say what to who; another two weeks have gone by and your pupil has been bouncing off the walls and testing even your most angelic staff!

Are we painting a familiar picture? And it's not that those individual professionals are not doing everything they can to help within the limitations of their own services. And let's face it, they look as tired as you feel at the end of term! The bottom line is that some pupils need the kind of help which the school simply cannot give – either time-wise or skill-wise – and the external world of services is not always available or possibly even appropriate.

So, having argued your case for help until you're blue in the face and with your hands truly wrung, you come back to look at the school budget. And you wonder, 'What if we use a little bit of school funds, probably your pupil premium funding, to buy in the exact kind of service we need?'

Finding and buying in services

There are certain questions you will ask when you make the decision to buy in a service:

- Where will I find what's out there?
- How will I know if it's any good?
- Will the service be value for money?

Finding a service

Schools tell us that it can be really hard to find services. There are numerous charities and other voluntary sector (non-profit) services out there. Finding and procuring a service from them can be time consuming.

Some local authorities have developed a local directory, or possibly even gone a step further and created a contract or framework agreement with services which would be worth knowing about.

Because we know schools have a difficult job in finding local services, we have supported a project, led by the CAMHS EBPU (Evidence Based Practice Unit) to develop a national directory of services on one website the [Youth Wellbeing Directory](#).

Contract or framework agreement

A contract or framework agreement is a method of contracting a range of services. The council or another body such as a Multi Academy Trust or Academy chain, can set up an over-arching contract with a range of providers (having gone out to tender).

There will then be a method for organising how the contract is drawn down by schools. In other words, schools might be asked to use the CAF (Common Assessment Framework), or a local multi agency team, or some other mechanism to assess and identify need.

Once identified, the contract can be used to access a service through the contract. In other words, schools don't have to contract individually with each service as that has already been done which saves you lots of time!

The contracts are funded through different means in different areas, for example, top slicing the Dedicated Schools Grant in negotiation with School Heads, or pooling of Pupil Premium funding or possibly as part of a local authority 'local offer' to SEN pupils.

The great thing for schools is that they don't have to do the finding and then assessing of service quality. The bad thing for schools is that the service they particularly want might not be on the framework. The very bad thing for the services is that it can mean that they put a lot of work in to winning a contract – but it is a zero-based contract. In other words they might not get any money unless the service is requested, which may have an impact on the sustainability of the organisations.

Either way the whole thing is likely to work way better if schools and services participate in setting it up, commit to help in developing local services and widely publicise it. No pressure – but engagement is everything.

Schools as commissioners

Not all commissioning has to be done in a rush. There is an expectation that schools will also act more strategically when it comes to assessing how best to use their budget over the longer term.

Recent years have seen unprecedented changes in public services. Funding and decision making which previously rested with the local authority has been devolved directly to schools, giving greater autonomy but not necessarily a bigger pot of money.

Schools are being held increasingly accountable for closing the gap in progress and achievement for disadvantaged groups of learners. Schools are awarded Pupil Premium in order to support disadvantaged pupils so that they are not left behind – and you have to tell OfSTED and the world how you spend it.

[Legislative changes for SEND](#) pupils also mean new responsibilities for assessing and planning with health and other services. Personal budgets can be used by parents to purchase support from any service or organisation they wish. At the same time advice and support services from local authorities have shrunk, along with many health and other services due to funding cuts.

- All this is going on and what are the implications?
- How will you plan for it?
- The [Council for Disabled Children have produced a briefing for schools](#).

If ever there was time when schools need to achieve (dare we say it) ‘more for less’ – it is now. Having said that we have been pretty impressed with the innovation which is emerging in these tough times.

For example, **commissioning models** to save money such as:

- Earlier identification of ‘at risk’ pupils and building their resilience through a range of support rather than waiting until they hit the wall and it’s all (expensive) hands on deck!
- Joint work with other schools on needs assessment and then gaining efficiencies through joint procurement of services such as counselling or family support.
- Some Academy chains and trusts are developing health education programmes and/or more specialist support services for the member schools.
- Some schools have opted out of paying for/buying back local authority ‘traded’ services and have used the funding to procure more specialist support such as play therapy in primary schools, alternative curriculum therapeutic activity in short stay

schools or Forest Schools.

- Some schools have developed their own in house bespoke posts such as a 'hybrid' role with some traditional and newer responsibilities. For example, family support or welfare workers (building on the role of attendance officer) or family link/liaison staff who have a remit to link not only with family but also external service.

If you want to get involved in this kind of innovative commissioning with other schools then there's likely to be a few ways in which you could start a ball rolling (and we'd be surprised if it hasn't already come up).

For example, depending on the kind of school you are in, you could;

- Take the discussion to a locality based school cluster or group (if your school is part of one and if you are interested in hearing about what kind of services might be out there to be jointly commissioned) and invite the local [Council for Voluntary Services](#) for an overview.
- Similarly to above – raise it for discussion at your area's Heads' forum.
- Ask the Local Authority Children's Commissioner for support – they would love to help you get organised if it helps organise the local system a bit more!
- Talk to your Academy board or appropriate lead within the trust.

If you are interested in finding out more about joint commissioning for resilience and mental health please [get in touch](#) as we can help you explore this area.

Procurement vs commissioning

Schools often ask, 'What's the difference between commissioning and procurement?' The language is intertwined and can be confusing. It might however be worth knowing more about it because it might help you get better value for money and outcomes over time, so this is our extremely simple answer:

Procurement is about

- Buying services – service specifications or service level agreements, contracts, procurement rules and requirements

Commissioning is thinking more strategically about

- 'Need' over time, and comparatively across school e.g. demands on existing resources, competing needs, and the kinds of outcomes you are not getting but would like to such as: better concentration, attendance, improved peer relationships, family links and anger management.
- What kinds of services or professional skills best meet those needs and get those outcomes e.g. the evidence base, performance of existing services, new service

models that might work better.

- How to get them e.g. through procurement but also considering options for joint commissioning, market development (helping local services to develop what you are interested in purchasing).

A scenario [illustrating the difference between procurement and commissioning](#) is available to download.

What to do next

If you read this and want more guidance on commissioning there are hundreds of resources and websites out there:

- Here is a [handy catalogue](#) we have put together to help you find them.
- Also you can download this short [checklist](#) to help you.
- If you are thinking about commissioning a specific resilience based programme you could download the resource on [pros and cons of some of the many approaches that are out there](#).

Once you have identified needs and looked at what's out there, you might realise that you are going to have to design what you need and go out to tender (ask organisations to bid to do the work).

Be clear what you want when you go out looking for services. To help you prioritise and organise your own thoughts, we've asked lots of Head Teachers what is most important to them when they are buying a service from outside.

These are some of the things that come up frequently:

- Experience in relation to working in a school environment
- Want to know costs up front
- What qualifications staff have
- How services meet standards such as safeguarding
- How information will be shared between school, family and other services
- Importance of references from other schools
- Basically the more integrated with the school the better!

Watch our short film about an alternative curriculum service provided by Sussex YMCA and purchased by secondary schools in Brighton and Hove for pupils at risk of exclusion. This service was designed with input from schools in order to meet their needs.



Of course, there are many examples of great value services on for schools from charities and other non-profit making organisations.

We picked this one out because we like the model of employing ex pupils on other programmes which the charity runs – this is a great resilience enhancing model and provides added value all round.

Find a service near you through the national [Youth Wellbeing Directory](#) and start designing services to meet your needs.

5. Engaging parents

Every school knows that the more engaged a parent is in their child's learning, the more learning is supported in the home, the more likely the child is to do well. Sounds easy enough. Let's face it... some parents are dead easy to involve. Others can be all too eager to get your attention and are queuing up to talk to staff at every opportunity. But we all know that often the very families you would like to be involved more, can be the hardest to hook into school life.

The tough truth is, parents are not all the same and successfully getting them on board is likely to mean that you have to take into account that they need different things at different times and some need much, much more than others. But hold this in mind – like many difficult tasks requiring hard work and non-stop effort, the rewards can be great!

OK, you might at times find yourself seriously weighing up effort versus outcomes – particularly when thinking about more disadvantaged pupils or those with challenging behaviour BUT research suggests it's worth that effort. This may well be one of those 'no pain, no gain' moments.

There is a consistent relationship between increasing parental engagement (particularly of less easy to reach parents) and improved attendance, behaviour and achievement.

In 2007, an extensive literature review and in depth case study of 30 schools over a year, carried out by [Professor Alma Harris and Dr Janet Goodall, at the University of Warwick](#), turned up some pretty useful key messages (Harris and Goodall 2007):

- Parental engagement is a powerful lever for raising student achievement in schools. Where parents and teachers work together to improve learning, the gains in achievement are significant.
- Parents supporting learning in the home has a greater influence than them supporting learning in school.
- Many schools involve parents in school related activities. This constitutes parental involvement rather than parental engagement. Unless they are directly connected to learning they have little impact on pupil achievement.
- Parental engagement is heavily linked to socio-economic status, as well as parental experience of education. Parents of certain ethnic and social groups are less likely to engage with the school. Schools that offer bespoke forms of support to these parents (i.e. literacy classes, parenting skill support) are more likely to engage them in their children's learning.
- Teachers tend to think of parent engagement being about helping improve behaviour whilst parents think of it as being about offering support to a child's learning.
- [Read more](#)



What studies and practice examples show (which we have included at the end of this section), is that schools that are good at this stuff consistently reinforce that ‘parents matter’. They seek to build a two way relationship with parents and carers – it’s not a ‘bolt on’ activity, It’s part of the school culture.

If you are starting, bare in mind that parents who are viewed as ‘less easy to reach’ often see the school as ‘hard to reach’. But engaging those very parents can have greatest effect on pupil learning and behaviour.

There are a whole load of reasons why it’s hard for many parents to take part, get involved, support their child’s learning, or even understand what you are all on about! Not just time and child care issues, but things like language, literacy, and confidence can all get in the way.

Does it help when they get sent home reports which talk in terms of ‘target level X’, ‘behaviour for learning’ and other such educational mumbo jumbo?

Schools can tackle barriers firstly by trying to understand parents and what might help them get involved in their child’s learning – which means finding out about them and putting strategies in place to work with them – both generic approaches and bespoke to individual families. This means an investment of time and resource in building relationships’.

Remember, parents are not all the same

If you read the research jargon, we know that ‘spontaneous levels of parental involvement’ work to promote school achievement (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

In other words, some parents are always actively involved in their children’s development and educational progress. Their parenting has included ‘teaching’ their children at home from pre-school level, they visit the school to build good relationships with teachers and help out with school activities.

But what about those parents and carers with whom you would like to have a conversation but mostly don’t seem to be able to catch them? Where are they? At parents evening, school performances, sports events? No...can’t see them? Was that them slipping out the door before you had a chance to say hello, let alone launch into a proper conversation?

Sometimes there is a mismatch. Parents on the one hand want to know their children are happy at school and all is going well. School on the other hand tends to want to talk to parents when there is a problem – it makes the starting point already potentially tricky.

Not surprising really is it? For many of us, while we can criticise our own children, it is rarely easy to hear other people speaking negatively about them.

And if you are most interested in engaging the least resourced families in school, then parents may be feeling in need of some help themselves. It might be with their child’s behaviour for example, but it could be with a whole host of challenges.

Finding the right time and the right person at school to talk with about things can be hard. Engaging with parents and building a successful dialogue with them could mean that parents look to schools for extra help.

If a parent does disclose problems, then it’s a great opportunity to talk about ‘how can we together identify some support and help’. That might be about information on local services, or searching on the internet for information about the problem or where to seek help. Being seen to work with the parent, by that parent, will have a huge impact in terms of building trust, support and developing a shared approach.

Basically....

It's tricky territory all round and lots of research and programmes seem to suggest that building good school-home links is all about the relationship and the style of conversation.

Here's what parents consistently say about what helps in conversation with anyone from school whatever the occasion

- Listen to them
- Acknowledge distress / difficulty
- Demonstrate empathy
- Be open and honest
- Treat them as individuals and don't stereotype

If this sounds like a course in basic listening then maybe there's something to think about here – who does the difficult conversations with parents and have they had any help with 'listening skills' or planning how to structure the interaction?

Plenty of parents can find school intimidating. They may be worried about their parenting being criticised. It's easy to forget how super sensitive parents can be to this, so finding something positive to say as early as possible in your contact with a parent can help to lessen the worry and build a dialogue.

You may well have views about their parenting, so even if the only positive thing you can think of is that you are glad they could make it in to see you, say so.

It's pretty common for parents to report negative memories of schooling themselves and so just stepping inside the school building can throw up unexpected awkward feelings.

Simply being asked to meet with a teacher can unknowingly signal a message that 'they must be in trouble' and can put parents on the back foot or remind them of being in trouble when they were at school.

Acknowledging, in a light hearted way, that lots of parents say it can be weird to be back in school can go some way towards normalising the situation for parents.

Locked gates, entry phones and poorly signed entrances are barriers so showing them around the school to help make the school environment feel less alien and more familiar and having a few parent welcome posters displayed can send out a good signal.

It's probably worth keeping in mind that some parents will have had poor experiences with teachers in the past or might be having a hard time with other types of professionals.

These experiences don't help to pave the way and can set parents up to expect the worst from all professionals. By the time they get to you, they may be inadvertently laying at your door all the horrible stuff that's happened at other meetings.

In these situations, often it's useful to give space to parents to let off steam. The best you can do sometimes is to express your regret for bad things having happened and your wish to start afresh and do things differently.

- Asking parents the most effective way for you to keep in contact with them, might be worth a try. And it's worth considering who the most appropriate person in the school is to have these tricky conversations with parents. Some staff members seem like they were born for it, whilst others are more suited to other tasks.
- For more help on 'structured conversations' ['Achievement for All'](#) offers support to schools and training on this. See their [handbook](#) for useful tips.
- The LEAP method can be a useful way to help structure those conversations effectively. Check out the [LEAP guidance for Head Teachers and school staff](#).
- Other things that can help are more about offering support and training for parents.

For parents of pupils with special educational need and disabilities (SEND) it might be worth putting them in touch with Parent Partnership Services (PPS – google it to find your local one) which can offer information, advice and support for parents/carers of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN).

There is a PPS in every local authority and often a parent support organisation or a parent carer council or forum too, where they can meet up with others in similar situations and access specialist support.

- If you or parents or carers have any concerns about a child's emotional or mental health then you can always give the [YoungMinds parent helpline](#) a call for some advice and support.

Of course, the local authority often has information on parenting support courses and parent groups – it's worth finding out what's on offer.

Starting and sustaining relationships

Whether it is the first day of primary, secondary, or sixth form – transition times are when parents can be most anxious and most hungry for information.

It is also your chance to make a lasting impression – have you heard that adage that 90% of our first impressions happen in the first 90 seconds of meeting? Many schools maximise on the peaked interest and put plans in place for engaging with parents at this time.

Other ways in which schools engage groups of parents include information days on topics such as staying safe on line; coffee mornings; cultural celebrations or fun stuff that has nothing to do with their children's school achievement.

Use these days to get to know your parent cohort. It can be the start of identifying parents who may need more intensive support, as well as spotting super active parents who could be willing to help you engage with the less easy to reach parents further down the line.

For those who didn't turn up? ...maybe follow up with a phone call, email or post card after the event? Seems time consuming but in the long run we'd suggest it's probably worth

Keeping it going

Follow up, follow up, follow up. Maybe a general follow up text or letter home thanking parents for attending and reminding them to give you a call if there is anything they want to discuss could be a worthwhile routine.

Be clear about how parents can get in touch, with whom, for what – make the information accessible on the website. Does your site have contact details for staff?

Some parents are able or willing to put in more than others, and can be a useful ally now or at a future date. Consider finding a task to be sure to catch the moment or if you haven't got a job for them right now, maybe get them lined up by asking if you could contact them in future if you need a hand with something. Sometimes the best go-between for parents and schools can be other parents.

Targeting parents

Just as you might organise information around [pupils' needs](#) in order to target support, help them to engage in learning and prevent problems emerging later on – why not do the same with parents? You could add to the pupil information to include facts about parents and home life. Seems controversial? Is it?

We are not talking about confidential information about parents' drug habits being shared around school, but suggesting contextual information that might help you

understand parents and more importantly their child/ren. You may need to check out with parents in a general way at least that it's ok to hold this information in school.

This can mean finding out and recording things such as:

- Family make up mum/dad/ siblings/extended family/ blended family – who is in the house and who is close by – this could be a great year 7 tutor group activity Postcode – what is happening in the local neighbourhood, how far is the family from school – do you have any parents having to travel a significant distance?
- Cost of travel, working hours, younger siblings and other barriers for getting into school
- Additional needs and problems – parents disability, health issues such as mental health or substance misuse, will have a huge impact – when are the opportunities for this kind of information to be shared in person by a parent never mind a child?
- Race, religion, family heritage
- Family hobbies, interests, activities, jobs

For large schools creating a systematic way of collecting, sharing and retaining this information appropriately is a challenge. The more staff know about a child's context the more they can understand them and differentiate how they respond at times.

Okay, some information you have from parents is sensitive and some might be confidential, so how it is recorded and what is shared requires some serious thought and planning.

Crucially you want to help the parent to help the pupil, so thinking through what you know about the family will help you to plan your interaction. If appropriate try and involve the pupil too, the most effective strategies will have everyone on board.

Parents and carer resilience

Just as [Academic Resilience](#) is concerned with pupil's doing better than expected despite adverse circumstances, it is also about our expectations of their parents and helping them to make their contribution.

School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement. Schools that improve and sustain improvement engage the community and build strong links with parents.

Where schools build positive relationships with parents and work actively to embrace racial, religious, and ethnic and language differences, evidence of sustained school improvement can be found. (Goodall et al., 2010 p.16)

Schools that have prioritised parent engagement work tend to have spent some considerable time thinking about:

- Have we challenged our own expectations of some parents and families?
- How will we start again with a fresh approach, and keep starting a fresh?
- What do we actually mean by engagement at this school?
- What do we do to offer support to parents here – especially disadvantaged parents?
- How can we be resilient ourselves, and promote resilience amongst parents and carers – because we are the adults on whom our pupils depend in life?

Obviously, we can't answer these questions for you but can suggest using the resilience framework to think about how this might translate to your school setting.

How is our school supporting the parents of our pupils to build their basics, feel that they belong to the school community, help their children or themselves to learn, cope with the demands of school life and feel like they can make a difference for their children's school achievement?

A good general rule of thumb for planning is this...Think of positive experiences you could provide. Up-building and confidence boosting opportunities.

All parents, like staff, like praise. How can you give it and how can you increase the opportunity for it? Some positive strokes, even in the most dire situation, can be the beginnings of a more two way conversation.

Some good ideas we have heard about...

- [“Tips for Reaching Hard to Reach Families”](#) – This is American but has some nice tips – 2 pages clustered into five headings: personalise, focus on the message and the messenger, get creative, what and how you communicate, make involvement easy and exciting.
- Of course there are schools like the De La Salle Humanities College, a Roman Catholic boys' school in Liverpool which have a whole load of good parent engagement stuff going on. [Paula Howard has led on several initiatives at the school.](#)

Finding them isn't always easy...Let us know if you have any examples which you think others would like to know about.

Otherwise here's some ideas

For engaging en masse:

- Offer non stigmatising sessions such as 'keeping your child safe online', or 'how maths is taught'. The latter is particularly good for demystifying the school day particularly as the secondary experience is characterised by parents feeling redundant as pupils knowledge begins to exceed their own.
- Contact local services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), housing, support and activity focused charities, and host them termly in the school hall after school – invite parents along and ensure there is a mix of non-problem focused activities and organisations there too such as the leisure centre, allotments, volunteering agencies (this could be a shared activity between several local schools with rotating host arrangements).
- Some schools in deprived areas regularly host CAB type agencies in the school hall!
- Pamper sessions for parents, or pizza and football days offer an opportunity for parents to meet other parents, especially good for more isolated families.
- Link into culturally specific expertise – cooking and open events on cultural festivals.
- Annual school trip such as trip to the sea side – invite parents too and for secondary maybe lay on a reason why they are needed to attend (separate minibus for parents might help).
- Take a trip to university with parents and kids – some schools target free school meal families and offer this trip free using the pupil premium.
- Get parents who have made some changes involved – run coffee mornings with a theme such as 'how to support ourselves with our challenging boys'.
- Work on a small group of parents to wedge in, and then snowball through them to reach others.
- Instead of focusing on helping parents to support their children's learning, develop programmes to help parents directly – adult education classes, advice and support to access services, formal or informal parenting or parent support courses, fun stuff like yoga and cooking.

For targeted action

- Plan meetings after school when some parents can best get there and provide food and nice drinks – food could be provided by the pupils food technology lesson.
- Send follow up postcards to parents, saying how much you enjoyed meeting them or value working with them – be explicit about the research that suggests the more a parent engages the better, but explain what that means in three bullet points!
- Have parents meetings / open nights in small cosy rooms instead of empty cold halls that are half empty – break out in to groups if it's a school wide event especially if you expect parents to ask questions.
- Develop the role of a combined Teaching Assistant and Family Support Worker so they

can go home after school with the child and help with homework/tea/bed/parenting practices.

- Tailor activities to match the needs of particular groups –basic training in cooking for young mothers, free legal or immigration advice.
- Ask parents directly and personally to participate in or help with a particular activity.
- Make sure materials and communications are translated if English is a second language.

For improving attendance

- Alerts for parents regarding truanting – a phone call or text message to parents whenever child is absent from school. Simple, quick and immediate communication works best. The embarrassment and direct approach encourages parents to try harder to improve child attendance.

For making school more accessible

- Drop in surgeries, such as a monthly head teacher or head of year evening or on a Saturday morning provides reassurance – parents drop in without having to make an appointment and this way, they always have the opportunity to speak to someone in school.
- Get contact details of staff – name, job title, class (if appropriate) – up onto the website for all staff – you will NOT be inundated!
- Create soft entry points such as regular places for fun low-key mornings where a group of parents do an activity like creating books and adding story time. This non-threatening, indirect and informal approach is great for building relationships.
- Actively promote things and make sure everyone knows about activities on offer including text reminders the day before.
- Choose the right staff and ask parents from the same culture, neighbourhood, background to help.
- Have ‘parents welcome’ posters in the school.

For communicating progress

- Provide brief reports for each child on a monthly basis which offer parents feedback on how their child is performing. This helps parents to notice problem areas early.
- It is most useful if they cover each subject individually so that specific information concerning progress in each area is identified.
- Explain the terminology and of course if a parent is not there...give them a call.
- Some schools say a call home every term from every teacher will work wonders!
- Use diary planners with the child and parent and send messages home via the planner. Ask parents to sign the planner when homework assignments are completed.
- Integrate symbolic systems of evaluation with the homework diary which are quick

and efficient for both parents and teachers to use and simplify the feedback process.

- Insert different coloured slips into the homework diaries to indicate poor performance or misbehaviour which are instantly noticeable to both pupil and parent or stamp merits into the homework diary if an assignment has been done well.
- Don't just contact parents when something is wrong – ring home day is Wednesday.
- Every week all members of staff are encouraged to phone a parent and report something positive about a pupil.

For preparing staff

- Adopt positive thoughts – parents are allies, how can we tackle this/sort this together, remember teens are often not sure but don't like to show that they are not sure.
- When parents apologise for their kids bad behaviour, be sure to say it's the child's behaviour, not the parent's so no need to apologise but work together to change.
- Train senior staff specifically in how to be positive and supportive with parents who are easily ignored or patronised or told off.
- Target the best people in the school to liaise with them.
- Treat parents as the experts in their child.

And finally, we also appreciate that it can be particularly hard when we meet parents who seem intent on disrespecting their children or consistently avoid getting involved with school.

We cannot always know why and it can sometimes feel like all the good work done at school just gets undone once the pupil goes home. Maybe it is worth remembering that parents are the primary sphere of influence for children and are involved in their lives for much longer than school.

They have the potential even unintentionally, to sabotage your efforts, so our suggestion is to do all you can to explore what might lie behind their disengagement and keep trying to encourage a working relationship with them.

For some disadvantaged pupils, you getting involved as one of the significant people in their lives might be their biggest hope for changing their future. Helping them not just to cope, but do better than expected given their circumstances.

While we are not suggesting that you become social workers or family therapists – sometimes schools can be a positive influence in a difficult situation.

Some pupils may be having a pretty tough time at home, or in care, and someone in school, like you, getting a bit more involved might make the difference between sink or swim, or it's their chance to cling to your rope and float whilst they catch their breath!

6. Academic Resilience resources



[Fostering academic resilience: A brief review of the evidence for the resilience-attainment link](#) (doc)

[Resilience Framework](#) (pdf)

[Interactive Resilience Framework – with supporting information](#) (pdf)

[Pictorial Resilience Framework for children with learning difficulties](#) (ppt)

[The Resilient Classroom](#) (pdf) – bite-size, downloadable activities for 20 minute sessions, useful for PSHE or tutor group sessions

[Resilient classroom slide pack](#) (pdf)

[Ideas for Assembly Time](#) (doc)

[Guide to resilience approaches in schools and communities](#) (pdf)

[Co-production in promoting resilience – what does this mean for schools?](#) (pdf)

Identifying vulnerable pupils resources

[Identifying a pupil's risk and resilience factors](#)

[Pyramid of Need](#) (ppt)

[Safeguarding factsheet](#) (doc)

School Audit resources

[Resilience Zap Session Programme](#) (doc)

[Resilience Zap Presentation](#) (ppt)

[Staff Audit exercise with guidance](#) (doc)

[Questions to ask as part of the audit](#) (doc)

[Audit process overview](#) (ppt)

[Senior Leadership Team questions to ask](#) (doc)

[Staff resilience survey with guidance](#) (doc)

[School resilience survey with guidance](#) (doc)

[Pupil focus group exercise](#) (doc)

[Pupil focus group powerpoint resource](#) (ppt)

Engaging with parents and carers resources

[Parent engagement research and best practice](#) (pdf)

[Achievement for All structured conversation handbook](#) (pdf)

[LEAP guidance on structured conversations with parents for Head Teachers and school staff](#) (pdf)

[Communication tips](#) (pdf)

[Do parents know they matter?](#) (pdf)

[YoungMinds Parents Helpline](#) – if you, parents or carers have concerns about a child's emotional or mental health, call the parents helpline for advice and support

Commissioning services resources

[Commissioning case study](#) (doc)

[Commissioning resource catalogue](#) (pdf)

[Commissioning checklist for schools](#) (doc)

Further information and resources

[Resilience Framework guidance](#)

[Beingboing resources](#)

[Short films to promote resilience approaches in schools](#)