

AWARD WINNING PROJECTS

2016 Joint Winner - The Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's Junior and Senior National Schools, Knocklyon, Dublin 16 with their project

'Connecting with Parents and Helping Parents Connect'

Purpose of the project:

Their project centred around improving the way the Parents' Association keeps in touch with parents. Having a combined enrolment of 1584 pupils, the Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's Junior and Senior National Schools in Knocklyon found that communication with all the parents can be challenging.

Who needs to be involved?

The Parents' Association Committee and parent volunteers.

How to implement in your school?

The Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's National Schools followed a number of steps, which could be replicated in other schools, or could be used as guidelines by other Parents' Associations to do similar things.

Step 1: Highlight PA Committee members

Their first action was to include photos and brief details of committee members on their website and in a professionally printed newsletter. This gave parents the opportunity to recognise the committee and get to know the committee members who had children in their child's class or year. The increased visibility of the committee meant greater interaction with parents in the school yard, allowing parents to ask questions and find out about the PA events etc.

Step 2: Provide information about School and Parents' Association events

The PA committee went to school events and put information, photos and videos of these events on their website. This allowed parents who could not attend events, due to work and other commitments, to gain a greater insight into the wide range of activities which are often the highlight of the school year for their children.

In St. Colmcille's this led to a greater number of parents signing up to the PA website, once registered parents receive updates on events posted on the website via an email, making parents more aware of landmark events of the school, which they are then more likely to attend if they can.

Step 3: Organise Coffee Mornings for different groups of parents

A coffee morning was organised for the parents of incoming Junior Infant pupils. The coffee morning took place on the first day of school, when most parents have taken the day off work and have the opportunity to meet parents of other children in their child's class. A contact form was circulated and parents who wished to do so added their contact details and a volunteer from each class set up a WhatsApp group for the parents.

A coffee morning was arranged in June for the parents of the soon to be departing Sixth Class parents. This gave parents the chance to reminisce about the last 8 years of their children's school life.

Further Additional Educational Needs (AEN) coffee mornings were organised for parents and toddlers. Speakers were provided for every second coffee morning and parents were given the opportunity to meet other parents and exchange information regarding doctors, activities or to just chat and tell their stories.

Step 4: Set up a Volunteer Database

A volunteer database was set up on the website, which allowed parents to volunteer for various events, primarily the tea/coffee receptions which take place after the Communion and Confirmation masses. Being such big schools, providing refreshments at these events is a huge task and finding volunteers wasn't always easy, but by giving parents an easy mechanism to volunteer meant that more parents got involved and were given front line jobs, serving the tea/coffee etc and meeting with the parents, the more mundane tasks were left to the PA committee.

Outcome

Parents' responses have been very positive and parents are now contacting the Parents' Association Committee. Parents feel more included and are more informed. The PA went from "Do we have a Parents' Association?" and "What do they do?" to "What are the PA doing this month and do they need my help?".