

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Education Board	Dated: 10/06/2025
Subject: Parental Engagement Toolkits Report	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none">delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes	Diverse Engaged Communities Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services Dr Deborah Bell, Strategic Education and Skills Director
Report author:	Dr Scott Caizley

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the initial pilot evaluation of the Parental Engagement Toolkits, which were implemented across schools within the City of London Academies Trust (CoLAT). It highlights key findings from the first stage of the research, with further detail available in the full evaluation report included in Appendix One.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. As part of the Education Strategy 2019–2024's priority to strengthen home–school relationships, the Education Strategy Unit (ESU) initiated a strategic review in 2022 across our City Family of Schools. As part of this process, the Lead Policy Officer conducted a comprehensive survey of headteachers to assess current parental-engagement practices and identify areas for improvement.
2. From the review, the data showed how all participating headteachers agreed that their schools could enhance engagement with parents and carers. To contextualise these findings, the ESU also mapped existing support structures at each individual school, which include:
 - Strategic communications campaigns
 - One-to-one advisory support
 - Annual programmes and events
3. Analysis of headteacher feedback revealed ten primary barriers to effective parental engagement:
 - Poverty
 - Bi-directional communication breakdowns
 - Low parental attendance at school events
 - Limited parental understanding of attendance importance
 - Perceived diminishing value of formal education
 - Time constraints, especially for single-parent households
 - Parents' own negative school experiences
 - Schools underestimating the impact of parental engagement
 - Language barriers
 - Geographical distance from school
4. A cross-cutting theme was engaging families from underrepresented backgrounds (e.g., Global Majority communities, low-income households, non-English speakers). Several school leaders also observed that many institutions prioritised direct learner interventions over parent-focused activities.
5. In response, the ESU partnered with The Parenting Circle, a leading charity specialising in parental engagement, to co-design two practical toolkits. As part of this process, the ESU hosted consultation roundtables with civil servants, MPs, parents, carers, teachers, and Oxford academics. Insights from these roundtables directly shaped the development of two tailored toolkits - one designed for primary schools and the other for secondary schools
6. A pilot study in collaboration with Brunel University London to assess toolkit feasibility and user experience was then conducted. The pilot study included a

mixed sample of 45 parent carers across CoLAT schools. While the pilot demonstrated strong interest, variable implementation limited the volume of evaluative data. The final report can be found in **Appendix One** of this report.

Key Findings from Pilot Study

7. Key findings from the report are highlighted below:

- **Strong Foundations Identified, with Opportunities for Growth:**
While no statistically significant changes were detected between baseline and follow-up surveys, the evaluation revealed a solid baseline of parental engagement, confidence, and knowledge. This provides a strong foundation on which future toolkit implementation and refinements can build to enhance measurable impact.
- **High Baseline Engagement and Confidence Levels:**
Despite the lack of change, survey results showed consistently high levels of parental engagement, confidence, and knowledge across the sample. For example, 93% of parents felt confident speaking with teachers about their child's learning.
- **Qualitative Feedback Indicates Positive School Efforts:**
Many parents noted increased communication, support activities (e.g., workshops, coffee mornings), and learning-focused initiatives (e.g., reading marathons), particularly at the primary level. Parents of children with SEND praised tailored approaches.
- **Variation in Practice Across Schools and Phases:**
Parental experiences varied significantly across schools and between primary and secondary phases. Primary schools showed more visible efforts to involve parents, while secondary parents called for more regular engagement opportunities.
- **Teachers' Limited Engagement with the Toolkit:**
Only 3 of 9 surveyed teachers had actively used or reviewed the toolkit. This limited uptake likely contributed to the lack of observed impact, revealing a gap in dissemination and implementation.
- **Toolkit Structure Needs Improvement:**
Teachers described the toolkit as too informational and lacking practical, actionable guidance. They suggested converting it into a clearer step-by-step resource to support real-world application.
- **Barriers to Engagement Persist:**
Both parents and staff highlighted structural barriers, including time constraints, communication overload, and socio-economic challenges, that limit meaningful engagement.
- **Strong Desire for Reciprocal Engagement:**
Parents expressed a clear interest in being more involved and valued as equal partners in their child's education, signalling a shift toward a more collaborative model of engagement.

Current Position

8. The toolkits are now entering a second phase of pilot testing, extending beyond CoLAT. This next phase will allow for a more robust and

representative evaluation of the toolkits' effectiveness across a broader range of educational settings.

9. Key lessons from the first pilot phase, particularly around onboarding, induction, and consistent usage have informed significant refinements. The toolkits have now been revised in co-production with Ofsted inspectors and educators from a diverse range of schools. These changes ensure the materials are more practical, accessible, and reflective of the real-world challenges identified during the initial evaluation.
10. The Parenting Circle is actively incorporating feedback to develop improved, bespoke training modules for early adopters, which will accompany the revised toolkits. The Lead Policy Officer continues to collaborate with the Parenting Circle on data collection and evaluation, ensuring a methodologically rigorous and evidence-informed approach.
11. In addition, the Parenting Circle is now in discussions with the City of London Corporation's Virtual School to explore how the toolkits might be adapted for use with carers and special guardians. This expansion will focus on reaching those who are often underrepresented in parental engagement initiatives, embedding equity and inclusion at the heart of the framework and future evaluations.

Options

12. It is proposed that the next phase of the toolkit work proceeds without the need for additional funding. Existing officer time will support data analysis and monitoring, while the charity partner will continue to lead on campaigning and school engagement using its own resources.

Proposals

13. It is proposed that the toolkit initiative progresses into its next phase without requiring additional funding. The implementation model has been designed to be sustainable, utilising existing internal capacity and external partner support. Specifically:
 - Officer-led data analysis will track toolkit usage, engagement levels, and emerging impact across participating schools. This will provide valuable insights to inform future improvements and demonstrate effectiveness.
 - Ongoing research participant recruitment, dissemination and awareness-raising will be led by the charity partner, who has committed to promoting the toolkits through its established networks, events, and campaigns. This ensures visibility and take-up continue to grow without cost to the City of London Corporation.
 - Partnership working between officers, schools, and the charity will be maintained to support implementation, gather qualitative feedback, and share best practice across the sector.

Key Data

14. Embedded into the report which can be found in Appendix One.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications: This proposal aligns with the City of London Corporation's Corporate Plan 2024–2029 by supporting strategic outcomes related to educational excellence. It directly contributes to the CoLC Education Strategy 2024–2029 by fostering strong home-school partnerships and supporting the engagement of underrepresented communities. The refined toolkits support national priorities around attendance and attainment, as well as Ofsted's and the DfE's emphasis on family engagement and inclusive practice.

Financial implications: None.

Resource implications: None.

Legal implications: None.

Risk implications: None.

Equalities implications: This proposal actively supports the Public Sector Equality Duty 2010 by promoting inclusive parental engagement strategies tailored to the needs of protected groups. Efforts to co-produce the toolkit with educators and engage families ensure that the framework is equitable, culturally sensitive, and accessible.

Climate implications: None.

Security implications: None

Conclusion

15. The initial evaluation demonstrates results regarding the effectiveness and relevance of the Parental Engagement Toolkits. The findings will inform the next phase of development and refinement. Continued monitoring and stakeholder feedback will be crucial in shaping the toolkits to ensure sustained parental involvement and improved student outcomes moving forward.

Appendices

- **Appendix One:** Full evaluation report by Brunel University London

Dr Scott Caizley

Lead Policy Officer for Education

E: scott.caizley@cityoflondon.gov.uk