

1. Many people recommended Parentmail as a way of keeping in touch with parents. I wondered if any school has successfully managed to introduce such a system where they have a core of parents who are VERY BAD at keeping their details up to date. I would guess that at any given time, 40% of our parents have changed their mobile numbers and have not told us! We have fewer than 10% of our parents who have given us email addresses. There seems to be a big push towards electronic communication with parents, so I would be interested in hearing how other schools coped

- We have been using e-mail addresses to send out letters, notices etc. to parents for about a year. One of the points that must be adhered to is that you have to obtain either signed permission or e-mailed permission from each parent saying you can send mail in this way. As with the Phone Preference and Fax Preference Service (TPS and FPS), the Data Protection Act exists so that people do not receive spam when they have specifically requested NOT to have mail sent to them via e-mails. We still have about half a dozen parents who do not wish to have things e-mailed to them, and a handful who still do not have e-mail access at all. For these people we have to have a manual list reminding us to send things out manually (as hard copies). We now hold all parental contact details on a database and in September last year we sent the details to each parent asking them to update anything and return to us. We also enclosed a sheet asking them to tick the details we could circulate to parents in their child's age group so parents can contact each other about social events etc. We then manually produced spreadsheets for each year group giving only the details the parents asked to be circulated (e.g. one parent wanted just name and phone number given out; another wanted name, address and phone number but not e-mail; etc.etc.) When we sent out the lists, lots of parents who had not returned their original amended database sheets eventually contacted us with such details because they wanted to be on the year group list – so the circulation of the year group list meant a good response from the updating point of view. (Parents don't like to think they are being excluded from such a list.) As well as sending these letters etc. out via e-mail, we also have a password parents' area on our website where parents can go and download the documents which their children have either 'lost' on the way home or forgotten to bring home from school. This way they can look at this area the end of each half term or end of term and download the documents which they need; they are all given appropriate heading so parents will know which they should download (e.g. 3rd years Geog trip; GCSE options form; etc.). Occasionally we may have leaflets or pamphlets to send out so this is done via the royal mail. We have had a good measure of success in getting updated information at Parents' evenings. As they arrive, we ask them to check their details on a pre-printed list (e-mails and/or mobile numbers). Of course, this does not help if the parents don't attend!
- Also in response to email addresses, I currently line manage our admin team and we are having terrible trouble getting email addresses from parents, they simply don't want to give them to us. Out of a total of 980 students on roll only approximately 15% of parents have given us their email addresses. We do send updates out every year but at the moment this doesn't appear to be making it any better.
- We use 'teacherstoparents' text messaging service and keep our parents details updated by putting a data collection sheet in their child's tray each open evening so that details can be amended. Also when a class goes on a trip at the bottom of the trip letter we ask for two contact names and numbers in case there is an emergency on the trip and then use these to update our records.

- We have just introduced ParentMail – and it seems to work really well. We are very lucky, however, in that 90% of our parents were happy to give it a trial. It has made a huge difference to the amount of photo-copies we churn out and has saved a lot of time in the office. It's relatively easy to set up (we are lucky to have a great Parents' Association who agreed to fund the first year) but does obviously rely on the enthusiasm of parents – I can't see the point if less than 50% want to take part. One word of warning – don't telephone ParentMail any more than you have to, they charge a premium rate for phone calls (and funnily enough, they're not terribly quick at responding by email!!)
- We are a large inner-city secondary school and desperately trying to get parents to engage with us to alert us of contact detail changes. We recently sent out a data check and only got a 25% response. Some may think this is good however we are still encountering difficulties with regard to not receiving notification of changes to contact information. We also have a push on getting parents e-mail addresses so that the school could address the move towards electronic communication with parents – this has proved difficult with some parents welcoming the move and others ambivalent. How do we move onto electronic communication with parents without their engagement? I look forward to the feedback on Parentmail as we need to explore every avenue to get parents to engage.
- I have managed to get an 85% response from parents by keeping a list of those that haven't sent forms back and sending out once or twice a term. Whenever we are given a new mobile phone number we try to remember to check ParentMail and update (doesn't always happen though!).
- We have signed up with Teachers2Parents texting service and parents have been informed that if we don't have up to date phone numbers they will not receive messages, we also send out a reminder on our monthly newsletters.
- We have been using text2parents since September, I find it has cut calls down and letters. We remind parents to keep their mobiles up to date on a fortnightly newsletter because "we use this as a main form of communication", it is the parents responsibility to do this if they want to be kept informed. I don't believe that emails would work here because that is assuming everyone has access to a computer which they do not, however, most people own a mobile phone.
- We have a similar system running here, currently on trial called Keep Kids Safe. We also have parents who are VERY BAD at keeping their details up to date. So when it is parents evening or any promotional evening, we have a large noticeboard in reception where the parents sign in asking for up to date mobile phone numbers/email addresses. We have reminders in virtually every piece of literature we send out and eventually we hope to move to a paperless system although it is very very difficult!
- We have 3 parent conference days during our school year where we close the school and allocate appointment times for all parents. When parents come in we hold a meet and greet point, where we have each child's information to hand as the parents' sign in we go through the details with them. This seems to eliminate the problem we used to have although it is a lot of admin work it is worthwhile.
- We tried the idea of e-mailing parents with various letters, newsletters etc some time ago but it became a bit of a nightmare as parents don't let you know when they change their e-mail provider and also if their e-mail box became full we were getting bounce backs which meant they had to be resent or a paper copy given to the students. I admit it does seem like a good idea and if everything went smoothly it would save a lot of time etc but

we are a large school with well over 1000 students and so we abandoned it because it wasn't working for us.

- We tried e mail but it just ended up as extra work. Parents did not check it and less than half wanted it anyway. We abandoned it because it created extra work i.e. doubling up still having to produce some paper letters, as well as an e mail and was no more reliable than a proper letter overall!
- I would agree we have very few email addresses despite repeated requests, and the only parents I regularly manage to email are those who are separated and are not the parent with residence.
- We use Parentmail and at first struggled to get parents on board, ironically enough because they were not receiving the communications via the book bags. The parents have now realised they are missing out and as the parents' attitude is very much keeping up with everyone else, we are finally starting to get more details.
- We now send out the Parentmail letter to be completed with all the other paperwork for new starters, therefore we hope to eventually have everyone available signed up. Our parents appear to be very good at updating their info both with us and with Parentmail and this has improved dramatically since the introduction of Parentmail, as they now see a purpose for it.
- We have introduced Parentmail, and have publicised it repeatedly to parents. We have 58 families out of 250 that have not provided email information, so still receive paper copies of information. It has been stressed to parents that they are responsible for keeping us up to date with the information, and should a number change or address change, Parentmail provides a printable list saying that the message could not be sent.