

Helping your child achieve

Children are in school for about 19% of each working week so it is clear that a good education doesn't just depend on what happens at school. Parents and home have a huge part to play as well. Below you will find some information to help you support your child through their education, no matter how old they are.

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Families urged to support students

By Matt Gaw

newsdesk@archant.co.uk

Parents must get more involved in their child's education if results are to improve at west Suffolk schools.

The claim from Robin Millar, Forest Heath District Council cabinet member for families and communities, comes after a review of education attainment in the region following concerns about lower than average GCSE grades.

He said visits to pre-schools, primary, secondary schools and colleges suggested that shortcomings were the result of a lack of support from families and communities rather than failings with the curriculum or teaching.

Mr Millar said: "When we looked at the whole question one of the first things we

realised is that actually the problem doesn't start with GCSEs," he said. "We saw that you couldn't fault Suffolk County Council in terms of the effort put into teachers, curriculum, facilities, things like that.

"The thing we felt was missing was that there was relatively little involvement for families and communities in a child's education. That's not to say families and communities should be teaching children. "But if the child is in school for 15pc of its time, they spend most of their time out of the school. It seems that the bigger influence on the child that was missing was the support of the family and those around them."

Documents discussed at last week's overview and scrutiny committee stated that in 2011, 46pc of students at Mildenhall College of Technology achieved four or

more A* to C GCSEs. This compares to a Suffolk average of 55pc and an England average of 58pc.

In 2012, five months after the review of schools was completed, 34pc in Mildenhall gained A* to C compared to the county average of 51pc and an England average of 59pc.

Mr Millar said one example of how schools could work with parents was through 'homeschool contracts' that set out the school's expectations of parents' roles in a child's education.

Graham White, secretary of the Suffolk NUT, said it was important not to get "hung up" on GCSE results, but added: "We do need more parental support. I would always say to parents you need to support your children and value education because it is very important."

Reading With Your Child

1. Try relaxing your family's bedtime rules once a week at the weekend. Let your children know that they can stay up as late as they want, as long as they are reading in bed.
2. Help your child start a home library; paperback books are fine. Encourage your child to swap books with friends. Check used book stores. Give books as gifts.
3. If you want your children to be good readers, let them see you read.
4. With young children, try reading to them during bath time.

Discipline

1. Always follow through with what you have said. If you have promised a reward for good behaviour, then give the reward. If you have threatened a sanction for poor behaviour, then use the sanction.
2. For better discipline, speak quietly. If you speak in a normal tone of voice, even when you're angry, you'll help your child see how to handle anger appropriately. And if you don't scream at your kids, they're less likely to scream at each other or at you.
3. Try a "black hole" to keep toys and other belongings picked up. All you need is a closet or cabinet with a lock—the "black hole." When something is left out that should be put away, it gets put into the "black hole" for 24 hours. Once a favourite toy or something your child needs is locked up for 24 hours, there is greater incentive to keep it where it belongs.

Motivating Your Child

1. In addition to the three R's, children need the four A's: Attention, Appreciation, Affection, and Acceptance.
2. Praise children constantly. Let kids overhear you praising them to others.
3. Help kids learn from problems, not be devastated by them. When something doesn't work out as they'd planned, successful people try to learn something from the experience.

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Building Responsibility

1. Try using a box to help make your children responsible for school belongings. Have them choose a place for the box, perhaps near the door or in their room. Every afternoon, their first task should be to place all belongings in the box. When homework is finished, it goes in the box, too. In the morning, the box is the last stop before heading out the door.
2. Help children understand, and take responsibility for, the consequences of their choices: "I chose to do my homework; the result was that I got an 'A' in my maths test." "I chose to get up 15 minutes late; the result was that I missed breakfast and was nearly late for school."
3. Try giving your child the responsibility of growing a small garden, even in just a flower pot. The positive and negative results of carrying out their responsibilities are very clear.
4. One way to keep children moving in the morning: After they wake up, begin to play their favourite CD. Give them until the CD plays through to get dressed for school.

Homework

1. Try playing "Beat the Clock" with your child during homework time. Look over the assignment and figure out about how long it should take to complete it. Allow a little extra time and set a timer for that many minutes. No prizes are needed. There is great satisfaction in getting the work done on time.
2. Here are tips to make homework time easier for you and your child:
 - a. Have a regular place for your child to do homework. Use a desk or table in a quiet room. Be sure there's plenty of light.
 - b. Find a regular time for homework. You may want to make a rule: "No television until homework is finished."
 - c. During homework time, turn off the TV and radio.
 - d. Help your children plan how they will use their time.
 - e. Set a good example. While your child is doing homework, spend some time reading or working yourself. Then when homework is done, you can both talk about how much you've accomplished.
3. Nitty gritty homework tips:
 - a. Do the most difficult homework first. Save "easy" subjects for when your child is tired.
 - b. Do the most important homework first. If time runs short, the priorities will be finished. Do what's required first.
 - c. Finish the optional assignments later, even if they're more fun.
 - d. Look over your child's homework every day. Start at an early age and keep it up as long as you can. Praise good work. Your interest will encourage good work.

Remember, for the best education children need loads of support from their parents.

If you want further advice, please ask your child's class teacher or go to

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/