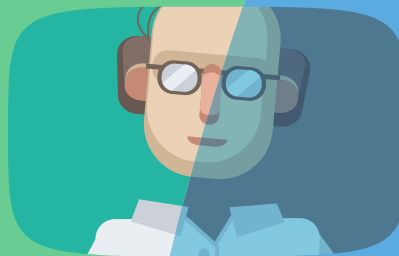
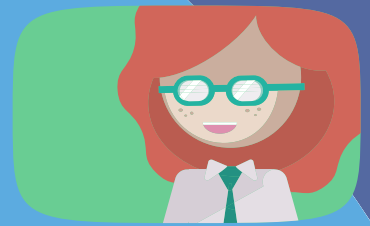




Short Guide

How to effectively manage virtual parents' evenings



* Includes checklists

to share with your school administrators, teachers and parents to maximise the learning conversation.

Forging
relationships.

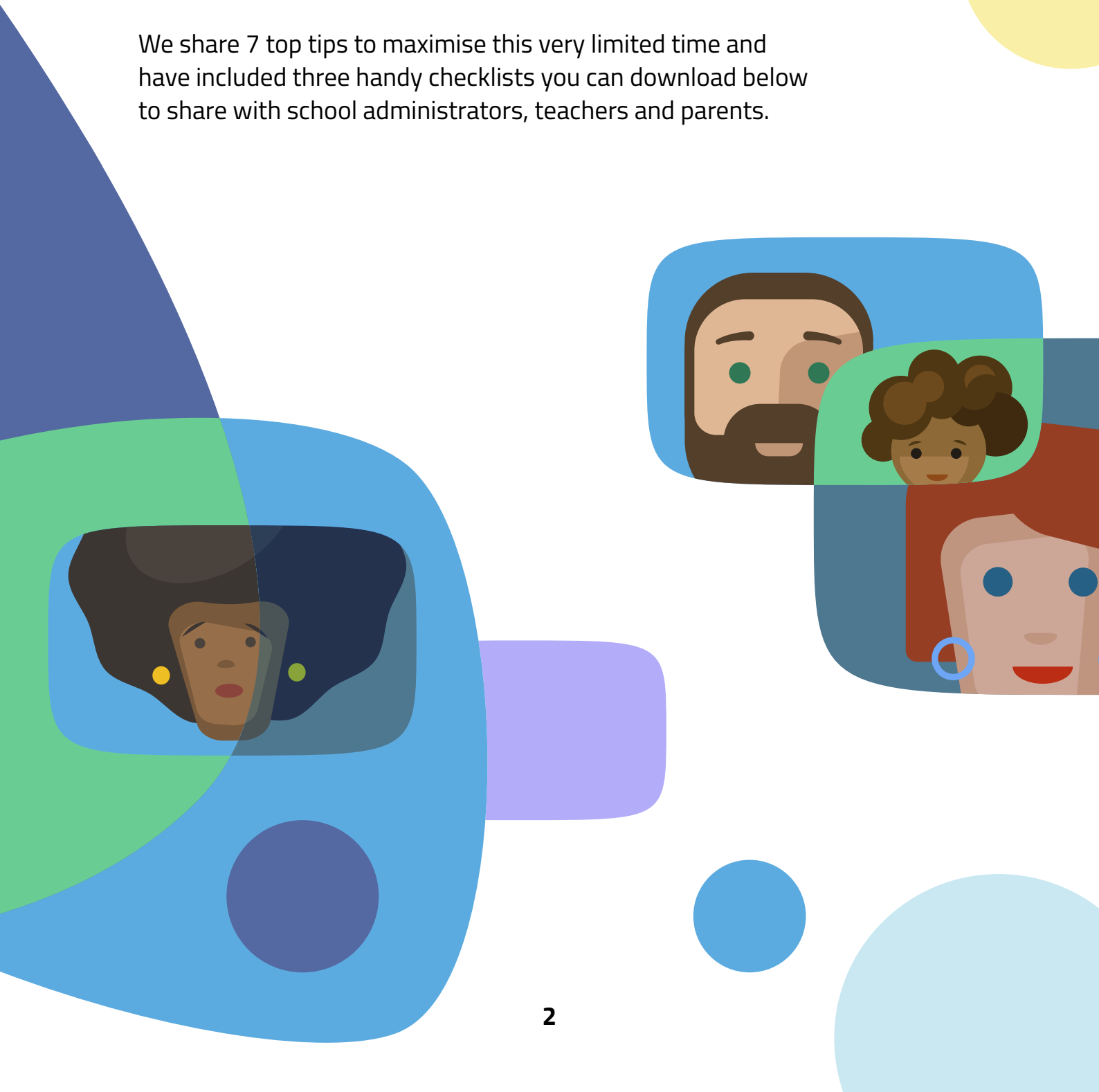
Fostering
a love
of learning.

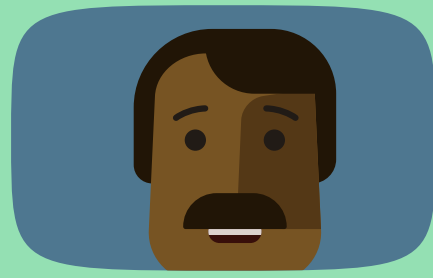
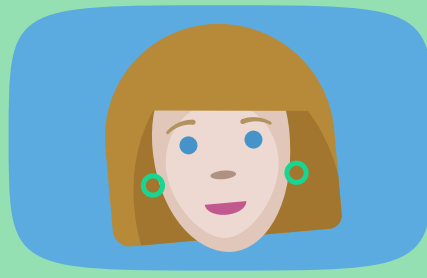
Celebrating
SUCCESS.



Parents' evenings – they're so important and so difficult to get right, even before you factor in the obstacles that come with online video conferencing. There's so much to unpack in each meeting, and so little time. For teachers, it can feel like speed dating or a hurried half-time team talk when your team is 3-0 down. Remember, education is all about teamwork. The key aim of the night is to forge an alliance with parents, to deepen that connection between home and school. The human element of this process underpins everything.

We share 7 top tips to maximise this very limited time and have included three handy checklists you can download below to share with school administrators, teachers and parents.

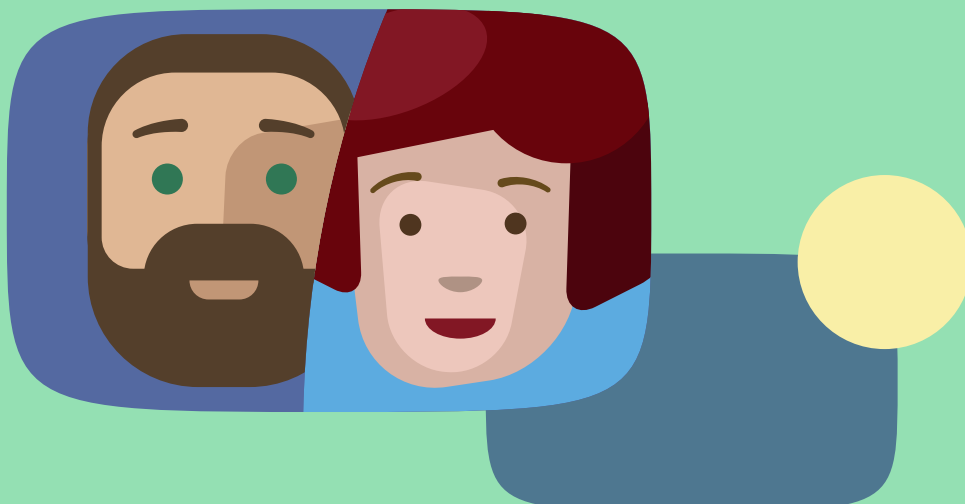




1 Be approachable and establish trust

Establishing common ground and trust is vital. School and home share common aims - teachers and parents both want the best for the child. Parents' evening offers each teacher the opportunity to show parents they're open, approachable, human. The child may well be painting a different picture! It's an ideal time to accentuate the positive and celebrate achievements, in order to highlight the importance of the parent / child / teacher partnership.

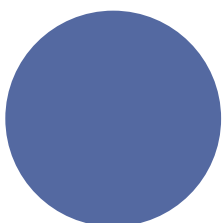
Virtual communication – in other words, video meetings, with all their complications – does not always make this easy. There's the challenge of getting parents' attention when they have other distractions at home, and catering for the different parties who wish to be present. One call may have to include pupils with two parents (who may be separated), as well as a teacher, and perhaps senior assistance. The organisation of such meetings can prove tricky. It's far from easy for any school's admin team.





2 Provide easy, accessible online information for all

Promoting and scheduling the right time with parents and teachers can prove a tortuous affair. An accessible online parents' evening scheduler is a real asset, promoting parents' evening through a range of communication channels, and thereby boosting attendance rates, especially of those parents who are less likely to attend, often the ones that teachers most need to see.





3 Give sharp focus on the future

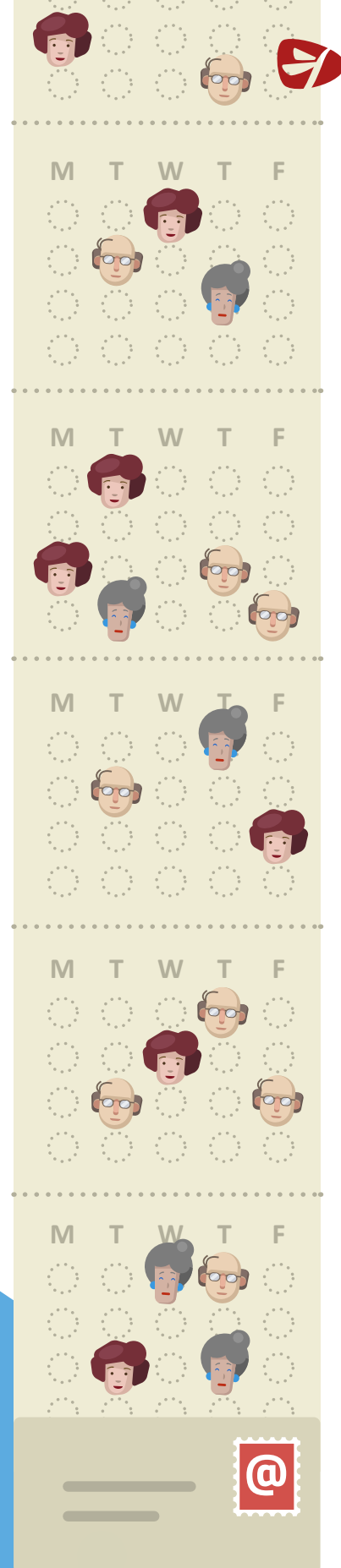
Each meeting needs to be laser focused. There's no time to lose. You don't want to lose precious time simply relating historic information and revisiting old ground. It's perfectly feasible to present all this information to parents before the meeting even begins. To do so circumvents unnecessary questions, while sharpening focus on the future and how to take things forward. Parents don't need teachers to read grades to them – that can be communicated continuously through the year. What they need is advice on action to take following those grades.



4 No alarms and no surprises

When parents receive regular, incremental updates throughout the year, they bring a whole set of different expectations to parents' evening; they're able to form a more balanced and long-term picture of their child's progress. They know that learning is a long and winding road with ups and downs along the way, and progress is often two steps forward, one step back.

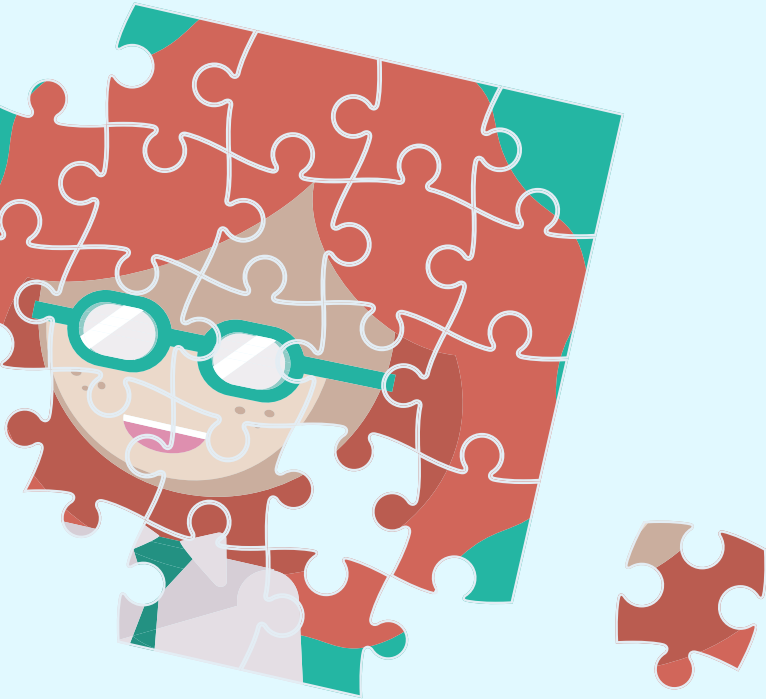
Ongoing online feedback allows for a "cooling off period" after any recent disappointments: in other words, no alarms and nasty surprises at parents' evening, which makes for calmer meetings with greater purpose and less potential conflict. It's fairer and less stressful for teacher, parent, and child.



5 Frank and open dialogue

If everyone is informed and forewarned before the meeting, they'll find it easier to broach more difficult discussions: missing work, attendance issues, problematic behaviour that needs to be addressed. Ongoing feedback before parents' evenings paves the way for clear, measurable, realistic target-setting for all – pupil, parent, and teacher. That way, no one is in any doubt about their responsibilities, obligations, and what they have to do next. No time is lost to denials or recriminations, the meeting does not become a blame game.





6 The missing pieces of the jigsaw

Parents' evenings allow teachers to join the dots, and fit that final, most significant piece into the jigsaw puzzle: the parents. "Parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning. This was the "single most important finding," concluded the government-commissioned **Review of best practice in parental engagement** in 2010, echoing John Hattie's findings three years before: "The effect of parental engagement over a student's school career is equivalent to adding two or three years to that student's education." (Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement, 2008)

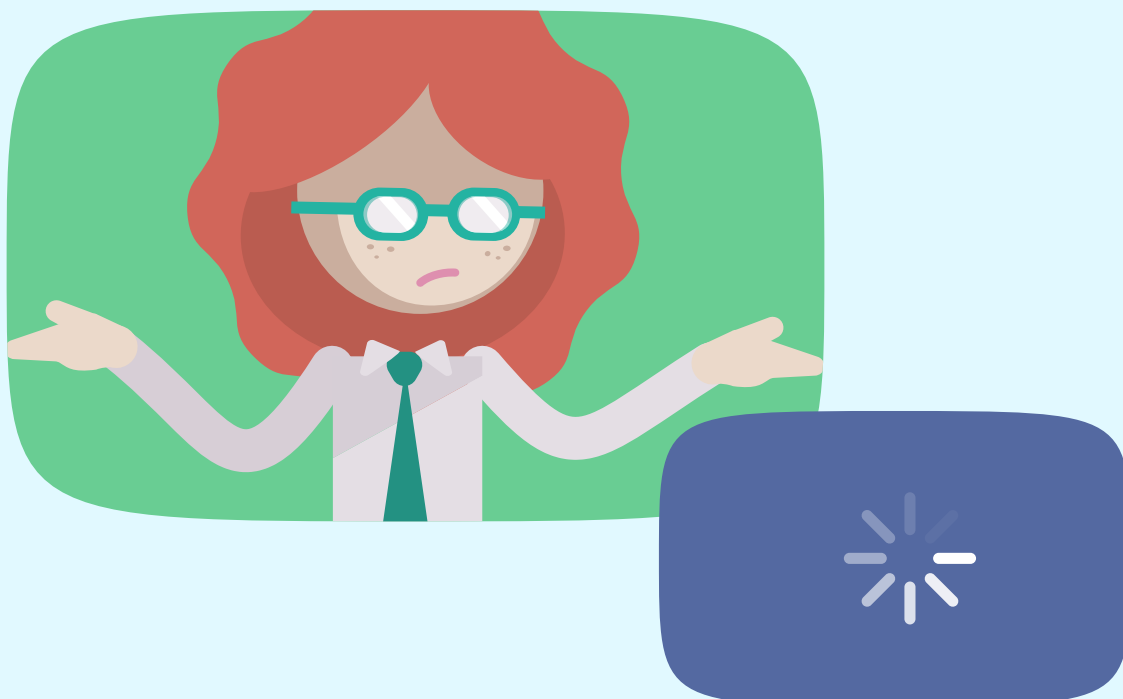
Parents' evenings allow everyone to have their say. They offer valuable insight into where parents are coming from, what challenges they face for example. This in turn, allows schools to unpick issues such as poor attendance, or why work is late or not being done at all.

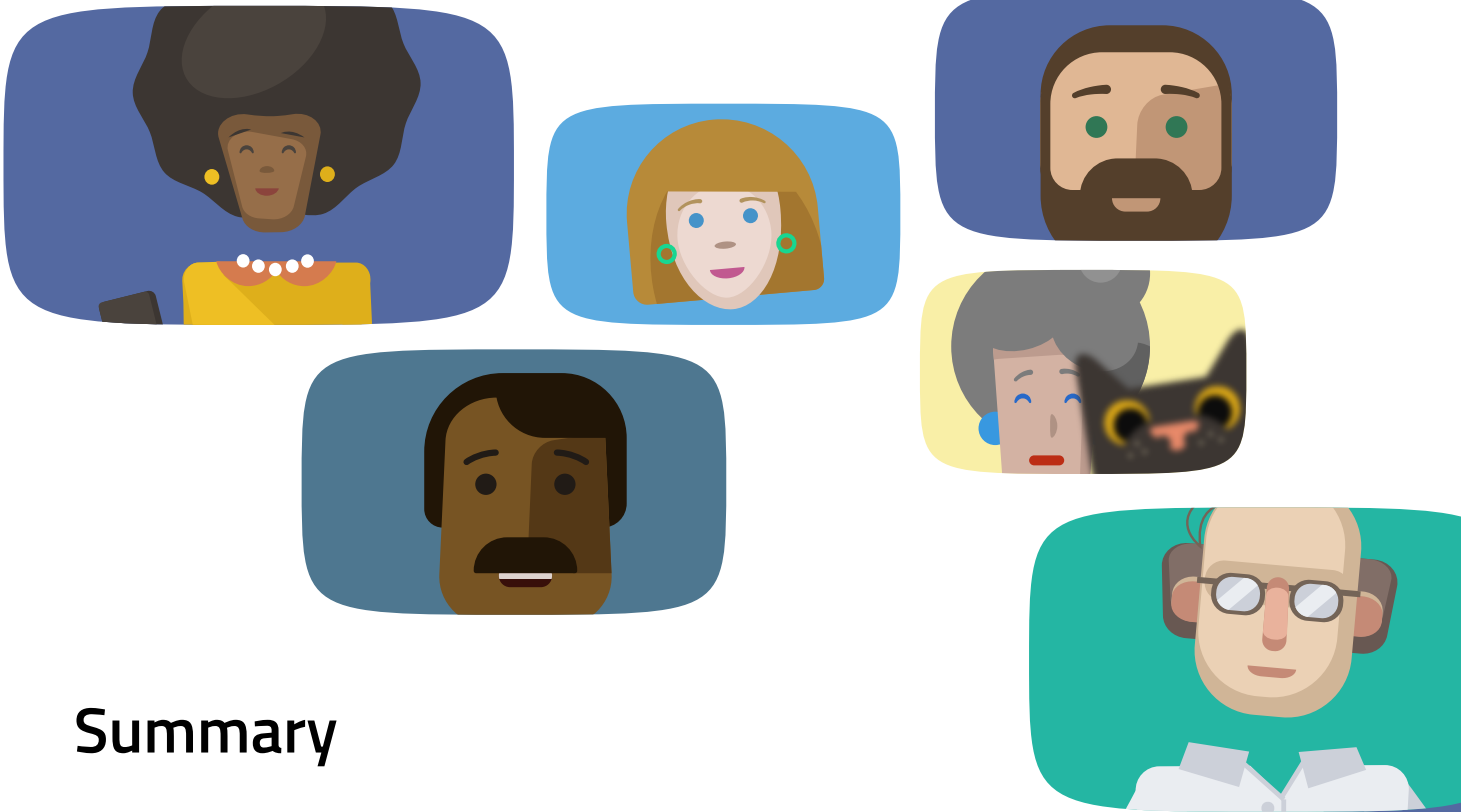
7 Preparation is key

A virtual parents' evening is a real opportunity to 'physically' engage your greatest advocates, for teachers to get first hand insight into their pupils at home and ultimately create a trusting relationship with parents. Preparing these evenings well in advance is key.

It's best to put together a small team tasked with coordinating all aspects of the virtual evenings, from scheduling the event and promoting it through targeted communications, to checking on registration levels and sending out reminders when parents haven't yet responded. Such a support team will also be key in helping teachers out with using the parent booking platform ahead of the evening, and on the day (delivering or coordinating basic platform training if required).

Finally, they will be key to collect feedback at the end of the parents evening series (see draft questionnaire later in this document) and ensure the experience is continuously improved upon and a resounding and highly anticipated event every term.





Summary

In short, parents' evenings, especially those conducted virtually, are ill-suited to communicating an entire academic year and the future ahead. The true value of these face-to-face discussions can all too easily get lost while we talk about data and the facts that inform it – in other words: the past – when the focus should be on the future. With so much to cover, time is of the essence, so it helps if teachers can hit the ground running and make every minute count. Continuous feedback means that parents' evenings can become a forum through which to discuss how to improve a child's learning, rather than a snatched conversation in which to cram a whole term's worth of feedback.

With that in mind, we've outlined below a handy checklist on "How to effectively manage virtual parents' evenings" for school administrators, teachers, and parents. It highlights best practice before, during, and after the night itself. For example, the importance of using communication channels to promote it and, thereby, boost attendance, or the need to structure each interaction to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Parents' evenings are a perennial challenge for all schools, but a challenge worth meeting.

Virtual Parents' Evening Checklist for School Leaders & Administrators

Before

- 1 Target messaging, invites, and reminders.** Make sure parents have plenty of notice, both of when the parents' evening will be, and when they will be able to make appointments. It doesn't hurt to send reminders as the parents' evening draws closer.
- 2 Issue protocol / guidelines to parents.** For example, they should ideally log in 5 minutes before each meeting to make sure their connection works fine.
- 3 Delegate scheduling to an automated scheduler platform.** Note that some purpose-built parents' evening platforms will allow teachers to customise their availability, making for a more 'on demand' and accessible model for parents. In this way schools don't have to have parents' evenings on one night for all teachers in a year group, which is the traditional (in-person meeting) model.
- 4 Choose the right platform.** Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet are highly regarded video meeting tools, but they require the school to set up each video meeting individually, which can be a lot of work. Certain purpose-built parents' evening platforms will create the video meetings automatically, in many cases saving schools tens of hours of work.
- 5 Integrate a purpose-built parents' evening platform.** Importing the school's management (MIS) database, curriculum and other records will make the set-up of parents' evening as quick as clicking a few buttons.
- 6 Provide parents with continuous visibility of grades and results.** This ensures the meeting is spent on key areas of immediate concern, and historic data is there to inform target-setting. The bulk of each meeting can also be firmly focused on the future rather than the past.





During

- 1 Provide troubleshooting instructions.**
- 2 Share tips on audio considerations and visual background.** For example echo is usually reduced if both teachers and parents use headphones. Make sure your face is illuminated and avoid bright lights and windows behind you.
- 3 Be mindful of body language.** Be conscious of what appears on the screen for viewers.
- 4 Be ready to pick up a topic or issue after parents' evening.** See it as another interaction in an ongoing conversation.

After

- 1 Ensure continuous reporting** to keep parents up to date throughout the year.
- 2 Feedback and review your approach internally.** To support this you could provide an opportunity for selected feedback questionnaires to be sent out (see example questionnaire below).
- 3 See parents' evening as complementary** to the many interaction channels (emails, newsletters, direct meetings with parents).



Virtual Parents' Evening Checklist for Teachers

Before

- 1 Schedule breaks in between meetings.** You need to pace yourself. Like teaching in the classroom, parents' evenings are a performance art: requiring great concentration throughout, they're draining.
- 2 Give special thought to parents with more points to discuss** and how to pick up additional topics after the parents' evening.
- 3 Help parents to prepare** for a video parents' evening to make sure they get the most out of these valuable conversations. Remind them to review recent reporting data online, and bring pen, paper, and a list of questions / queries which seem most relevant to them at this point in time.
- 4 Don't lose sight of your main aims** - show parents that you know their child well, and understand how they are progressing and learning, as well as developing emotionally. For example with friendships, behaviour, and independence.
- 5 Assemble the evidence:** collect exercise books or recent work for the child to take home and show to their parents. This may be a useful lead-in to specifics; use post-it notes to bookmark relevant pages, perhaps writing key ideas on these notes for the parents to physically take away.
- 6 Prepare main messages** - time will be limited on the night.
- 7 If at all possible, pace your teaching** on the day of parents' evening and save your voice. Have something warm to drink - herbal teas with a bit of honey are always a favourite!
- 8 Get a good night's sleep.**





During

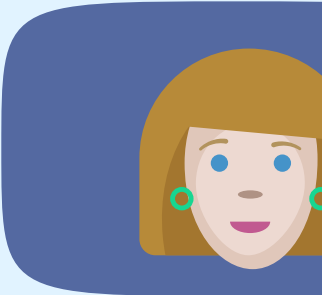
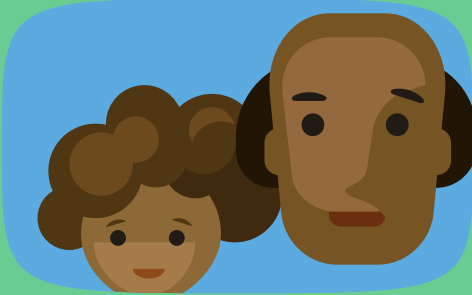
- 1 Test connection ahead of time** - ideally, teachers should have access to the mobile phone number of parent(s) in case connection doesn't work.
- 2 Check your webcam is working.**
- 3 Manage your time** - acknowledge 'forced' nature of 5-minute parents' evening slot, and emphasise common goals: you all want the best for the child. Focus on a couple of areas and agree next steps.
- 4 Always lead with the positive.** Don't underestimate the importance of an orderly start and rapport (small) talk - albeit brief - to establish common ground or a connection with parents.
- 5 Allow opportunity for the child to speak** and ask questions - they are the most important. In your tips for parents you may want to ask them to position their child in the middle with parents on either side.
- 6 Use screen share when needed** to showcase student work and deliver feedback to parents.
- 7 Discuss how the parents can support their child's learning** and social / friendship interactions.
- 8 Leave time for the learner or their parents to ask questions** (if any), and discuss and agree clear follow-up actions and timelines.
- 9 Take note of the family dynamic** - (how many parents are present, background, body language, etc.) and level of investment in the child's development.
- 10 Provide a high-level assessment of the student's attitude and engagement** versus the quantified grades that parents should have seen ahead of time; encourage parents to make the most of the school's portal and ongoing online reporting on their child's progress.



After

- 1 Follow up with key points** discussed during the meeting. This might include areas for parents to action and next items to discuss - see it as another interaction in an ongoing conversation.
- 2 For parents who want to know what to do next - encourage them to apply what they learned** from the parents' evening to the tasks and homework set for their child. They should also be conscious of real-life moments where this knowledge can be applied for personal growth. Parents will often focus on areas for development while forgetting to highlight the positive things. It helps to remind them that one of the best ways to encourage their child is to praise effort and past performance and highlighting current strengths. An attitude of 'Yes, you can; just see what you've already achieved' can make all the difference.

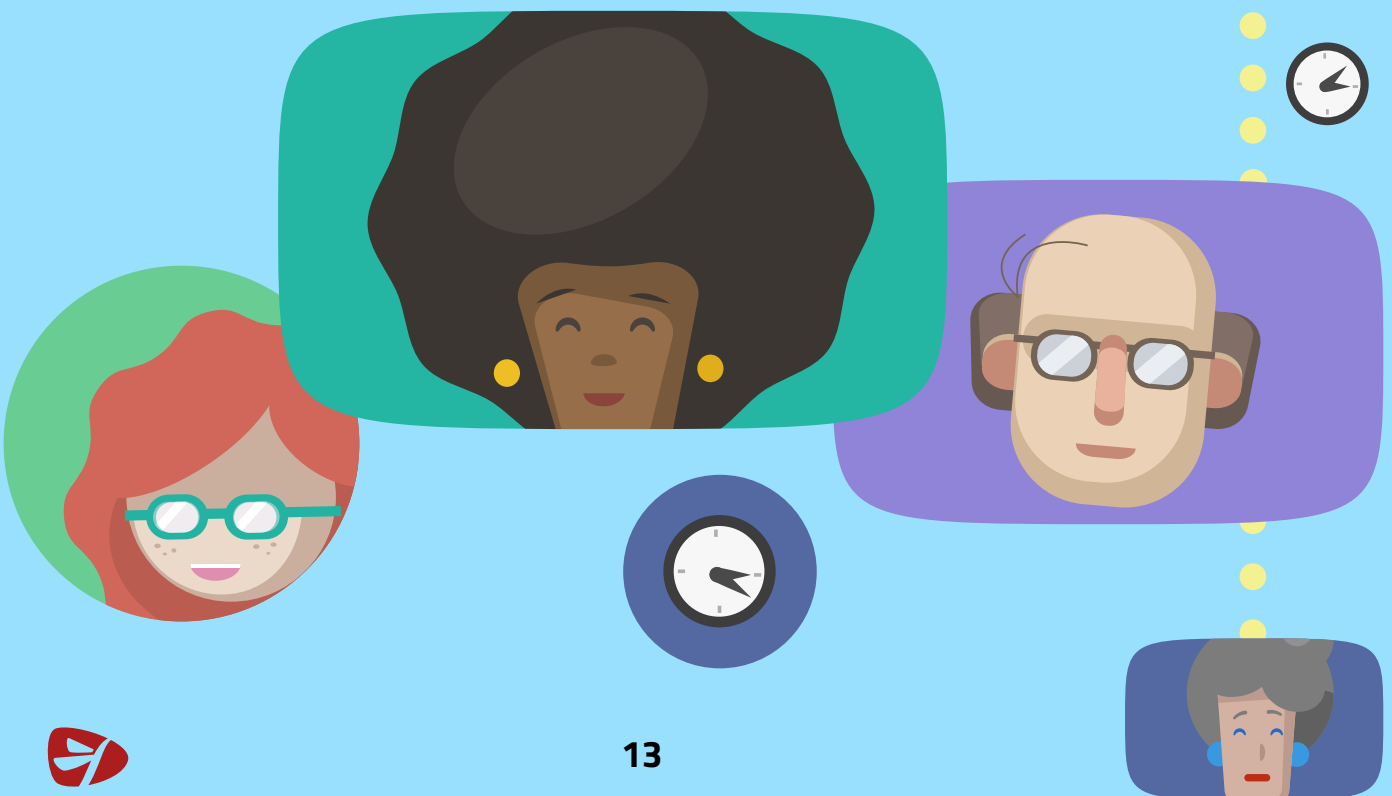
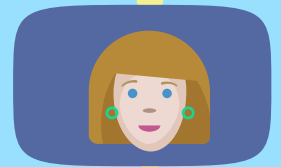




Virtual Parents' Evening Checklist for Parents

Before

- 1 Ask your child if they have any questions** they would like asked, and if they have any concerns about their progress.
- 2 Write down your key questions.** What areas would you like to cover during meetings. Give teachers a heads-up so that they're ready for it. For example, you may want to ask what the teacher believes they could do to support your child at home, what are the child's realistic targets, what do they need to do in order to achieve their goals, and what their strengths and weaknesses are, so these can be encouraged and supported at home.
- 3 Test your computer or device's webcam** and microphone, either using the video platform that will be used or any of the computer or device's software. It is recommended that both parents and teachers update their smartphone / tablet's operating system, or internet browser to the latest version, in advance of any video meetings.





During

- 1 Arrive early for your video meeting.** Logging in and joining video meetings, especially forgettable tasks such as approving the use of a webcam and microphone, can take time. Arriving 10 minutes early means you should have plenty of time to ensure you are logged in and prepared in good time.
- 2 Be mindful of the limited time** and how it will naturally slip away quickly during the conversation. Prioritise your main questions to maximise your time with teachers and be sure to allow your child to participate. You may want to position them in the middle so that your child feels important and a part of the conversation.
- 3 Take notes throughout the meetings.** If you've put names to faces, begun to establish some rapport and trust with your child's teachers, and noted the key issues, the meeting will have been a success.

After

- 1 Have follow-up conversations with your child** after the parents' evening has finished - perhaps after a 'cooling off period'. This will allow them to reappraise the positives and the negatives, while using the opportunity as a springboard to set some new goals and targets.
- 2 Apply what you learned** from the parents' evening to the tasks and homework set for your child. Don't forget that the best way to encourage your child is to praise effort and past performance, while highlighting current strengths. This attitude of 'Yes, you can; just see what you've already achieved' can make all the difference.



Example Questionnaire

If you're looking for some inspiration for a parents' evening feedback questionnaire here's an example you can start with:

Parents' Evening Feedback Questionnaire

We would like to hear how you felt it went. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this short survey so we can review the new procedures for next term's meeting.

Did you find it easy to book an appointment slot?

- Yes
- No

Was 5 minutes enough time to discuss your child's progress?

- Yes
- No

Did you feel able to ask the questions you and your child needed to?

- Agree
- Disagree
- Other (please specify)

Did you feel your child's teacher knows your child?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

Did you feel informed about your child's learning plan and next steps?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

Do you have any other comments or areas we could improve on for our next term parents' evening?





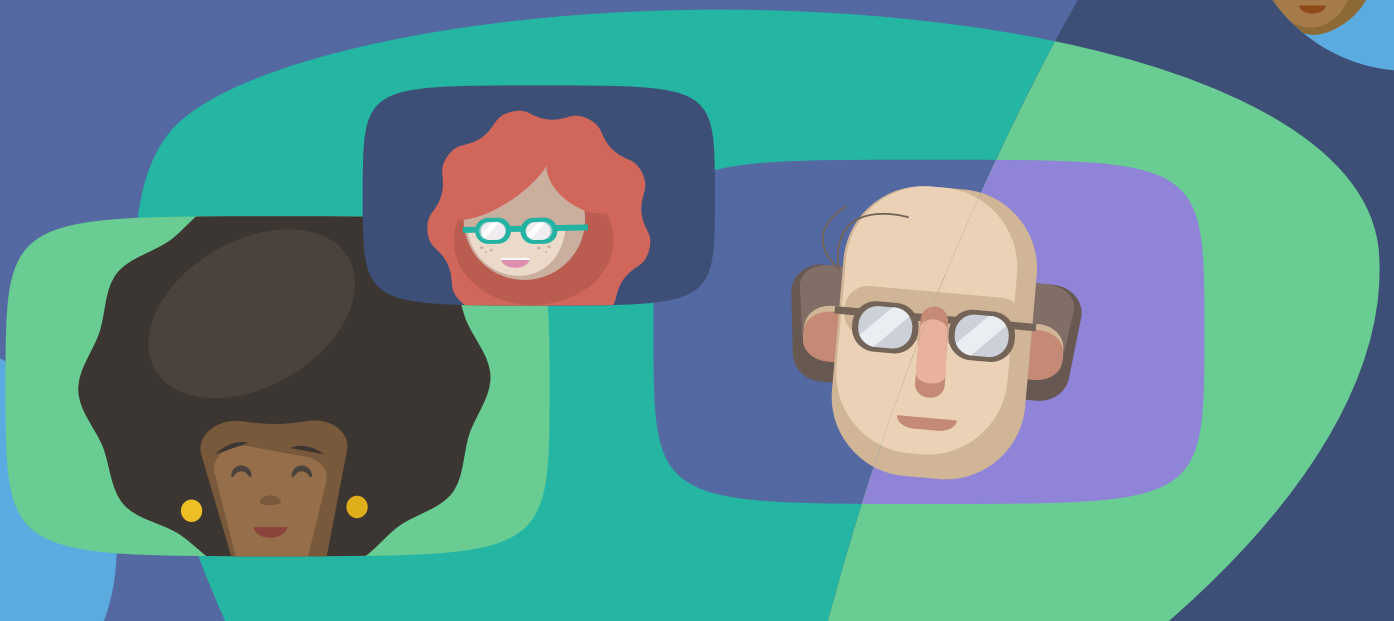
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