Reaching hard-to-reach parents

One of the biggest barriers to achievement for many children is lack of support at home. The problem is how to reach out to families who find it hard to engage with school. Here are some ideas that may help.

1. Make parents feel genuinely welcome.
   Put yourself in the place of parents – make the entrance inviting with comfy chairs, magazines, local radio playing, toys on the floor for toddlers to play with, information in community languages and big bright posters inviting families to join in with a wide range of activities.

2. Create family activities suitable for parents.
   Schools that are successful in engaging parents always start where parents are, rather than where they would like them to be. Some parents won’t come in for workshops about literacy or maths, but they may come in for nail art, stress management or to use an internet cafe. Dads might come in for a workshop on den-building with their children. Once you have managed to hook parents in with non-threatening activities you can build up slowly to ones that focus on academic learning and the curriculum.

3. Send good news home regularly.
   Some schools send praise postcards. Some send texts about a child’s achievements. For many parents, their previous experience may have been contact with their child’s school only when there has been a problem – so it is really important to show them that you are different.

4. Focus on how you have conversations with parents.
   Show that you are really interested in the parents’ views by having a dialogue about the child’s progress, not a monologue. Start a conversation by asking what the child is interested in and likes doing outside school. Some schools find they discover a child’s hidden talents this way. You can ask parents if there has been anything the child has particularly enjoyed doing at school and maybe talked about at home.

The secret of success lies in putting yourself in parents’ shoes and making them feel comfortable