



# Warwickshire County Council Education Services

## Marketing your Primary School: Guidance for School Leaders

## Introduction

This guidance is designed to help Heads of Primary schools in Warwickshire promote their schools, to encourage parents to select it as a preferred school for their children.

We know that time and money are limited, but there are a few straightforward steps you can take to help position your school most positively.

The first section of this guidance will provide information and context regarding:

- How parents choose a school, and what is important to them
- Establishing your school's strengths
- Using what is important to parents and your school's strengths to establish key messages to communicate
- How to reach parents, and which channels you might choose.

The second section provides a suggested Communications Action Plan, stepping you through how to put the concepts from Section 1 into practice.

Finally, a simple Communications Plan template is provided for you to use in your school.

## Before you do anything else...

This year's closing date for primary or infant school applications is **15 January 2020**.

If you are concerned that your school may not receive enough first preferences, consider actioning the five steps below as soon as possible - before undertaking a full communications planning exercise.

If staff time is limited, ask for parent volunteers or if possible, invest in professional support.

1. Hold at least one Open Day before Christmas if possible. This could be as simple as assigning an assembly as open to prospective parents, with a tour of the school afterwards. If possible, the SENCO should be available to meet prospective parents interested in your SEN provision.
2. Put a poster and leaflets in all local early years settings, with school contact details and dates of any Open Days.
3. Check that your website is easy to find online, and that the homepage is welcoming.
4. Put information about joining in Reception 2020 on your website's homepage, with a link to WCC admissions website (<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/admissions>) and information about Open Days or an invitation to contact Head to arrange a visit.
5. Address any specific reputational issues. If you know there's a negative perception about your school, you will need to take action to rectify this. In the short term, use existing communication channels (eg. website, newsletter, social media, PR via local newspaper) to address any specific negative perceptions. For example: *your school received a disappointing OFSTED rating recently, which is likely to cause concern to local parents. Your messaging should acknowledge the OFSTED rating, your disappointment but acceptance of it, the action plan in place to improve standards and the many unrelated positive attributes of your school.*

## Section 1 – things to consider when marketing your school

### 1. How do parents choose a school?

Before you decide how to promote your school, it's worth considering what parents are looking for when choosing their child's setting. While academic performance and proximity to home are the two most popular reasons for parents to choose a school, they are by no means the only factors.

Table 1, below is taken from "Centre for Market and Public Organisation, Parental choice of primary school in England: what 'type' of school do parents choose? November 2009 Working Paper No. 09/224".

**Table 1: Reasons for nominating the school named as 1st preference on the LA application form**

Reason for school 'choice'	Number of parents that give reason	% of parents that give reason
School is near or nearest to home	6260	67.28
His/her friends go or were intending to go there	1837	22.43
His/her brother/sister went/go there	4320	46.93
Other relative/parent went/go there	1241	13.25
Wanted them to go to a different school to friend(s)	73	0.79
Wanted them to go to a different school to brothers/sisters	39	0.42
Wanted them to go to a different school to other relative/parents	31	0.25
How likely it was that he/she would get a place	556	6.38
School has good exam results/academic reputation	3814	43.55
General good impression of school	5483	62.87
School has strong anti-bullying policy	1105	12.52
School has small class sizes	1548	18.70
School caters for special needs	475	4.94
School offers specialised curriculum e.g. music, dance, activities	546	6.04
School has good facilities	3237	37.87
School offers childcare for parents who work or study	515	5.78
School is a feeder school	422	5.25
Religious grounds	978	10.24
Easy to get to on public transport	216	2.21
Ethnic mix of the school	470	3.91
School teaches in a language other than English	132	1.11
Wanted him/her to go to single-sex only school	1	0.01
Other reasons relating to the other children who go to the school	98	1.05
Did not like other/ local school	12	0.14
Reasons to do with nursery class/ pre-school	25	0.23
Connections (incl family) with school	45	0.51
Convenient location incl. close to childcare	123	1.42
Good school - good for specific reasons not elsewhere specified	4	0.02

Note: The table gives unweighted frequencies and percentages using survey weights. Parents were asked: "Which of these factors were important in choosing to put this school as first choice on the form?" Multiple answers could be given. If their child was already attending a nursery class at this school, parents were asked to give the reason they chose to send their child to that nursery class.

To summarise the above, top reasons for parents to choose a school are:

1. Close to home
2. Part of local community
3. 'General good impression'
4. Academic results
5. Good facilities
6. Small class sizes
7. Anti-bullying
8. Faith
9. Feeder school
10. Likely to get a place

Using this list, consider why current parents selected your school. If you're not sure what makes your school attractive to parents, you can use SurveyMonkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) or similar software to create an online survey for parents. Smaller schools could keep it simple with a paper-based questionnaire or just a show of hands at the next parent event. Ask parents to rank the 10 factors listed above in order of importance to them when they chose your school for their child, with the opportunity to give other feedback as well.

## 2. What are your school's advantages?

In addition to finding out what is important about your school to parents, as above, the next step is to consider what else might make your school attractive.

You may already have done this work, such as in your school's Self Evaluation Form (SEF). Considering this, and any other relevant strategic documents, make a list of your school's other strengths.

These might include some of the following:

- subject specialism
- wrap-around care, such before and after school provision and holiday clubs
- extra-curricular activities
- ethos and values
- nurturing environment
- forest school
- OFSTED rating
- non-academic focus – broad curriculum
- sport focus
- strong leadership – including Head
- teachers – stable, experienced work force
- SEND focus
- accessibility of Head, governors and teachers
- Early Years / Nursery provision or links
- links to secondary schools

### 3. Establish your key strengths

From the work done in stages 1 and 2 above, now select a small number of the most applicable factors for your setting. These should be the 3-5 positive elements that parents are looking for and that your school offers.

If desired, these can be used to create a key message / tagline to use throughout your school to promote these strengths. Capture your key strengths in your Communications Plan, a template is attached at the end of this document.

### 4. Reaching parents and choosing your channels

Most of your potential pupils will of course be in local families. Consider where local parents of 0-3 year olds live, work and socialise – and target your channels towards them. This might include:

- Nurseries– strengthen relationships with key potential ‘feeder’ nurseries
- Community centres
- Soft play and other play centres
- Large local employers
- Supermarkets
- GP surgeries
- Libraries
- Church Halls

Current parents – you also want your current parents to be ambassadors for the school, use existing channels to reinforce positive messages to your existing parent community.

Also consider looking further afield, and whether the key strengths of your school would be attractive to parents outside of your immediate local area. This is particularly relevant if road links and public transport options are strong. Identify any other geographical areas in which it might also be worth raising your school’s profile.

**Communication channels** are all the routes by which you can communicate with your existing and prospective parents. All selected channels should be used to communicate your identified key strengths and core message whenever possible, as well as other specific communications.

**Repetition of your core strengths and key messages through multiple channels is how you build a positive perception.**

#### i. Online

Your website is critically important. Wherever possible, all other channels should direct to the website.

The homepage should be welcoming and clear, and reflect the key strengths of your school. If you want to redevelop yours, hosting sites such as [Wordpress](#) or [SquareSpace](#) offer free or cheap websites that are easy to customise.

Google your school. Make sure that your school is visible on Google Maps and that your school 'owns' the profile – if you don't own it, visit [https://www.google.com/intl/en\\_uk/business/](https://www.google.com/intl/en_uk/business/) to register as an owner. This will allow you to respond to reviews and set the profile photo.

#### ii. Advertising

Simple posters and leaflets are inexpensive to produce and can get your message out quickly and easily. Most community facilities such as recreation centres, church halls and libraries will allow you to put up posters for free. You should consider putting advertising posters in the most popular early years settings and playgroups in the area of your school, as well as soft-play centres etc.

Paid advertising can be useful if you want to promote your school beyond your immediate area - parents may not know they're eligible to apply. For print adverts, consider local newspapers and community newsletters.

Digital advertising can be surprisingly affordable, 'Facebook business' sets out how to create an advert on Facebook here: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/business/ads>. This allows you to target adverts at Facebook users in a specific geographical area and age range, to a budget that you set (which can be <£50).

#### iii. Open Days

Primarily for potential new pupils and their parents, Open Days should focus on promoting a 'general good impression' as well as your other key strengths. Typically, schools hold a number of Open Days between October to early January.

Your SENCO, Reception teachers and other key staff should be available to meet prospective parents where possible.

It goes without saying that your school should be looking its best on Open Day – it's the perfect opportunity for a good tidy up!

#### iv. Public Relations (PR) via local paper

Local papers are often happy to receive suggestions to help them fill their pages. Email your local newspaper with invitations to school events and provide them with simple 'press releases' about good news stories.

PR is free and if you provide a photo with a press release it is much more likely to be printed.

#### v. Weekly newsletter

Many schools issue a weekly newsletter to current parents. Have a look at yours through fresh eyes, to check that it is promoting your key strengths. Newsletters can be distributed via email, printed copies, posted on your website and on social media.

#### vi. School events

Sports day, the summer fete, Christmas plays etc. are a great way to communicate with potential and existing parents. Remember to take photos to use in other channels.

vii. Other channels:

- Banners or signage on your school premises
- Social media – a school Facebook page is a free, easy and effective way to reach local parents
- Faith schools might consider links with local religious groups, for example advertising in the church newsletter
- School Prospectus.

Once you've considered where your potential new pupils can be reached and the various channels that you should use, document this in your Communications Plan template.

## Section 2 - Suggested plan of action for schools

The estimated hands-on time required is underlined.

1. Consider the actions described in the Introduction, 'Before you do anything else'! 1-5 hours
2. **Workshop with your Leadership team** (possibly at a Teacher Training Day) approx. 2 hours
  - Consider if there are any specific negative perceptions that need addressing 'head on', e.g. *High turnover of staff in recent year that you know has led to a perception of instability.* This would be addressed through messages in all available channels regarding recent appointments and the now well-equipped and stable work-force.
  - Establish school's key strengths and core messages – see stages 1 – 3 above
  - Brainstorm channels and how to reach your target audience (particularly, but not exclusively, local parents of <4 year olds) – see stage 4 above.
3. **Assign resources** approx. 1 hour
  - Appoint a Communications Lead – a staff member to work with the Head to deliver communications. This is likely already to be part of the role of administration staff, in which case take the opportunity to redefine and refocus this function
  - Assign a Communications Governor – ideally, an existing governor will take on Communications as an element of their governance responsibilities
  - If resources are stretched, reach out to your current parents to request marketing/communications support. E.g. Weekly volunteer role to compile newsletter? Any web-designer parents willing to help?
  - If you do have financial resources available, consider that strategic spending on key elements of your communications plan, such as the website, might be a worthwhile investment.
4. **Write your plan** approx. 2 hours
  - With your Communications Lead, use the template provided to document your Communications Plan
  - Review and finalise with your Leadership team, Communications Governor and any other stakeholders.
5. **Implement Communications Plan** ongoing as business as usual
  - Manage the delivery of your Communications Plan
  - Build progress reviews of the plan into established management time
  - Diarise an annual review of the full communications planning process.