

The role of parents in schools

As parents, if you believe that school is important, there is every chance that your child will too. A positive attitude to school on the part of parents is closely linked to pupil motivation and learning, both socially and educationally.

Here is a short guide to how you as parents can help to ensure peace of mind and predictability in the school setting for your child.

1. What factors motivate children towards school?

The way in which parents talk about the school, its teachers, the academic subjects and the value of education has great influence on children's attitude to school. Parents and the school each have different roles in children's socialisation and informal education. Through positive home-school cooperation, the school and the parents can help pupils to thrive and do well at school.

2. What do we mean by home-school cooperation?

The school has a duty to facilitate productive home-school cooperation for everyone involved. Parents are expected to follow up on any arrangements made by the school for their child. Parental involvement is not just a right, but also an obligation. Productive home-school relations stimulate pupil well-being and educational attainment. It is important for parents to support their child's development and learning at school.

3. How can parents motivate their child to thrive at school?

- Talk about school at home and what your child experiences at school
- Encourage your child to tell you about the different academic subjects and the teachers at the school
- Join the school community by attending school events
- Get involved in your child's homework
- Encourage your child to bring school friends home
- Foster productive home-school cooperation by talking to the teachers and the school's leadership
- Contact the school if you have any concerns

4. What is the value of the school community for you as parents?

School is not just an arena for your child's education. The school also provides parents with an opportunity to connect with other parents of children at the school and in the local community. We also know that positive relations among the parents of pupils in a class help to create a positive learning environment for the pupils. In this way, the school can serve as a meeting place for the whole family.

5. Why are parents' meetings important?

Parents' meetings ("foreldremøter") are part of the Norwegian Education Act (Section 20-3) and are generally gatherings where the school tells parents about the education the pupils receive, parental involvement and school procedures. But parents' meetings are also an arena for interaction and discussion among parents. In this arena, the parents can form networks and act collectively to present the parent perspective vis-à-vis the school. Parents' meetings may be held for individual classes, whole year-groups or the entire school. In addition, at each school, there are class contacts ("klassekontakter") and a FAU ("Foreldrerådets Arbeidsutvalg"), which is the working party of the parents' council to which you as parents can be elected.

6. What is FAU?

FAU (“Foreldrerådets Arbeidsutvalg”) is an organisation of the representatives of parents with children enrolled in a school. The main role of FAU is to facilitate two-way cooperation between the school and the parents as a group. FAU is an official association, required by law, to enable parents to have their say in the running of a school, and is a forum in which parents’ points of view about changes and developments at the school must be heard and taken into account. All parents of pupils at a school are automatically enrolled in the parents’ council (“Foreldrerådet”). The parents’ council elects a working party (FAU) as a board representing all the parents of pupils at the school. If you would like to be elected to serve in the FAU working party, you can volunteer when members are elected at the annual general parents’ meeting. This meeting is usually held in the spring.

7. What are class contacts?

A class contact (“klassekontakt”) is a parent elected to represent all the parents of pupils in a class, and whose main role is to liaise between the contact teacher (“kontaktlærer”) and the parents. The class contact is not a legal requirement, and is organised differently from one school to another. Some schools elect two class contacts, who also serve as FAU representatives. Some schools elect one class contact and one FAU representative. Regardless of the setup, those parents who are elected as class contacts or FAU representatives are expected to cooperate effectively in creating a positive learning environment for the whole class and positive relations among the parents. Serving as a class contact or a FAU representative will involve you as a parent in meaningful and engaging responsibilities, and is the foundation for productive home-school cooperation.

8. Confidentiality

All employees of schools, before-and-after-school clubs (“SFO”), school nurses and doctors and the Child Welfare Service are subject to a duty of confidentiality. This duty of confidentiality also extends to parents serving as class contacts and FAU representatives. Confidentiality means that they must not disclose any information they gain about you/your child to anyone else without your *consent*. Consent means that you agree to someone passing on information about you or your child to the person or body you approve. Confidentiality is required by law, and violation of the duty of confidentiality may result in a fine or prison.

9. Duty of disclosure – exemption from the duty of confidentiality

The Norwegian Education Act (Section 15-3) and the Norwegian Kindergarten Act (Section 22), state that the personnel serving an educational institution have a duty of disclosure. This means that if they have reason to believe that a child is at risk at home, then they must notify the Child Welfare Service. The school must inform you as the parents if such a report has been made. In serious situations of child abuse, personnel can notify the Child Welfare Service without violating their duty of confidentiality and without having to inform the parents.