

Using SWGfL Merlin to support Parental Engagement

Introduction

Colleagues will be aware that there is an expectation that schools will provide secure, online access to information for parents to support their child's progress. This should not be seen as an end in itself, rather a tool to support the school in engaging with parents. Schools will already be using a wide range of strategies to engage with parents from face-to-face contact, invitations to events and meetings, communication via letters or email to the use of websites and other technologies.

These strategies and others will continue to be used by schools, however, this paper specifically addresses the provision of secure, online communication with parents and the role that SWGfL Merlin, which has been funded for Devon schools, could play in achieving that.

Developing a solution

So what information should be made available to parents?

Schools are encouraged to consult with parents over what information should be made available but it is clear that it should include attendance, behaviour, SEN, progress and attainment.

For many Devon schools this information will be stored on SIMS so how can it be made available to parents online?

The data recorded on the SIMS system is sensitive and needs to be kept secure so giving parents a login to SIMS is not the way forward! A more secure method is to pull the relevant information off SIMS and display it to parents via a system that requires them to login first.

There are a number of options for doing this including:

- using a learning platform that is linked into SIMS;
- SIMS Learning Gateway;
- using SWGfL Merlin.

Devon is recommending that schools that do not already have an alternative solution in place seriously consider using SWGfL Merlin. SWGfL Merlin is funded for Devon schools until 2014 so there will be no additional SWGfL Merlin cost for using the Parental Engagement Tools. For schools already using

SWGfL Merlin it will be a development of its use rather than learning to use a new tool.

[Please note: there may be a cost for linking SWGfL Merlin to your SIMS system – this is the cost for a piece of software, a SIF Agent]

How will it work with SWGfL Merlin?

SWGfL are currently developing the Parental Engagement Tools, these will be available during the Autumn term. The tools will provide the following:

- 1) Automatic creation and management of SWGfL Merlin accounts for parents or carers based on the information held on SIMS.
- 2) Tools to enable schools to control what information is presented to parents.
- 3) The ability to display:
 - a. Attendance Data
 - b. Behaviour information
 - c. Summative assessment results
 - d. SEN information
 - e. Timetables (where appropriate)
 - f. Overview of contact data
- 4) Formative assessment tools including:
 - a. Goal setting
 - b. Importing of frameworks
 - c. Setting of targets and attainment levels
 - d. Reporting on progress towards targets
 - e. Learning profiles
 - f. Advanced e-Portfolios

What do I need to consider in terms of security and safeguarding?

SWGfL Merlin has been designed with safety and security as the highest priority. Often it is the human factor that can be the weakness e.g. poor password security. The system will set up accounts for parents or carers based on the information held in SIMS so it is important that this is accurate and up to date. The ability to deny access if required will be available under the control of the school. Parents will have a limited SWGfL Merlin account that will only give access to specific information. They will not be able to access their child's account.

Issuing parental login details may be an opportunity for the school to run a session with parents to explain the system and emphasise the safety and security issues – some schools have combined such a session with an opportunity to talk more generally about e-Safety.

What do I need to do to prepare for using SWGfL Merlin parental engagement tools?

Devon LDP ICT Team along with ScoMIS will be running a number of sessions over the next two to three terms to help schools prepare but in preparation schools broadly need to be considering the following:

- 1) Plan for online reporting as part of the overall strategy for engaging with parents.
- 2) Consider who will lead on this, plan time for training and implementation.

- 3) Your school needs to be using SWGfL Merlin. All staff need to be users. Pupils that are users can help their parents find their way around SWGfL Merlin. This needs to be a whole school commitment.
- 4) Think about how data is collected and plan for making it available to parents. Is the data accurate, up to date, consistent and correctly formatted? Are staff clear that data they are providing may be directly displayed to parents as it is held on SIMS?
- 5) Consider how best to emphasise the safety and security issues to staff, pupils and parents.

[Please note: this solution assumes that the data you wish to share with parents is held on your SIMS system. The integration of other systems with Merlin will need to be investigated on a case-by-case basis]

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