

iFamilies: Improving Attainment and Progress through Family Engagement

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Overview

Project Aims

- To improve students' attainment by engaging families in the learning process.
- To make families part of the school community.
- To give families the opportunity to contribute to the school curriculum.

Rationale

- The project resulted from ongoing work with the family engagement agenda. Many of our families wanted to engage more with the school and we wanted to support them to do this in a meaningful way.
- Families relish getting hands on with their children's learning and iFamilies offers an excellent opportunity for families and students to work together to raise attainment.

Project Outline

- Families sign up for a four week programme, which requires them to attend one after-school session each week.
- Students and their families work together on a themed piece of work, which is then often used as exemplar work in later lessons with a broader range of students.

Impact

Summarising families' responses to an iFamilies survey, this is what they enjoy the most about the programme:

- Working with their children at school.
- Seeing first-hand the progress their children are making.
- Having an input into the curriculum.
- Learning new computer skills.
- The ability to bring other family members, both younger and older.
- Short sessions and programmes.

Many parents welcome the fact that they can bring their younger children to iFamilies. Being able to pick up their younger children from primary school and bring them along is not only highly convenient but brings a real family feeling to the sessions.

What do families say about iFamilies?

"It's great to feel that I am a part of what the children are learning."

"I've loved coming to iFamilies and working with my daughter."

"I was nervous about using the computers because I'm not very good. But I picked up new things very easily."

"I went home and used Storybird [a piece of software] with my younger children."

"When is the next session?"

How To

Key Points

- 1) Choose a **format**: iFamilies programmes at Shireland Collegiate Academy have taken the format of either:
 - a series of one hour sessions that take place after school for a 4 or 5 week period.
 - an 'intensive day' that lasts for 4 or 5 hours during school holidays.
- 2) Choose a **topic** and a **title**: an iFamilies programme can be based on a discrete topic or as an enhancement to a currently-running class project.
- 3) Choose each project's **themes**: typical theme outcomes include developing literacy, numeracy, history and personal learning skills.
- 4) Choose each project's **activities**: typical theme activities include the production of interactive presentations, creative writing opportunities and on-line activities such as interactive treasure hunts.
- 5) Choose the appropriate **software**: typical theme software includes Story Bird, Tiki Toki, Glogster and Weebly (all web-based).

Further Notes

- iFamilies is a flexible model that can be adapted to cover any curriculum area.
- iFamilies is suitable for any age group – it can equally serve Primary as successfully as Secondary.

The following additional points should be taken into consideration when setting up an iFamilies project.

Curriculum Area

To start with, the area of the curriculum to be covered has to be decided upon. ICT? Numeracy? Literacy? An iFamilies programme could contain a mix of different areas to suit the needs of a particular cohort of students.

With iFamilies it pays to be ahead of the learning of the year group. Much of the added value of iFamilies comes from iFamilies' students becoming 'leaders' and sharing their increased knowledge and confidence with the remainder of the year group.

Scoping

Decide who is going to be involved with iFamilies and get together. Decide what outcomes you would like to achieve or competencies you would like to cover. Is there an important project coming up in which you would like to train iFamilies' students as student leaders?

Think about:

- Project Title / Theme.
- Software and other resources available.
- Which areas of the curriculum, competencies of assessment focuses you want to cover.
- Learning outcomes.
- Available staffing.

Promoting iFamilies

Get the message out to families!

If you have an open evening or a parents' evening where all of your students' parents are together, this could be a great time to launch an iFamilies programme – get families to sign up there and then! If you want to contact families via post, an example letter can be found in the appendices.

Promoting iFamilies is easy – in fact, it practically promotes itself. Families are full of enthusiasm about their children's education and they are a vast, untapped reserve of knowledge – they love getting hands-on with the curriculum.

Here's the message to get across to families:

Do you want to:

- Give your child a head start?
- Get to know staff?
- Experience the latest curriculum developments?
- Feel a part of the school community?
- Boost your child's progress?

If families were to answer 'yes' to any of the above questions then an iFamilies programme could be an ideal solution.

Means of communicating the message:

- Students: assemblies, taster sessions, mini projects.
- Families: letters, open evenings, texts.
- Primaries: end of Year 6, SATs coaching/revision sessions.

Running the Programme

Now for the best part – running an iFamilies programme!

It's best to be flexible here as families have so many demands on their time. If families haven't arrived at the start time, don't panic – they are probably stuck in traffic, or have been waylaid picking up a younger child from school and will probably be on their way.

One of the best ways to maintain your families' interest and to retain as many families as possible on the programme is to prepare things the whole family can do together – creative writing, solving numeracy problems or finding treasure on a treasure map are all great ways of involving everyone. Try to avoid students actively working with family members being passive observers.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Example iFamilies Letter

Dear Families

Shireland's popular iFamilies programme is designed for families eager to boost their child's learning. Now partnered by OCR (one of the UK's leading exam boards), iFamilies is sure to continue going from strength to strength.

What is iFamilies?

iFamilies allows parents, carers, aunts, uncles and grandparents to join their child for interactive, weekly one hour IT sessions from 3:30 – 4:30.

The next iFamilies theme is 'Gold' and lasts for four weeks starting from Monday 15th September 2014. This theme focusses on helping to boost students' progress in literacy, history and personal learning skills. Activities include producing interactive presentations, story writing and creating an online treasure hunt.

Is iFamilies for me?

iFamilies is for anyone wishing to learn new computer skills, work in partnership with their child and have fun.

And don't forget the younger members of the family. If you have picked up a younger brother or sister from primary school, they can join in iFamilies, too.

In addition, there will be iFamilies certificates for students and family members at the end of the programme.

What happens next?

If you are eager to be part of iFamilies, we recommend returning the attached booking slip at your earliest opportunity.

Appendix 2 - A Typical iFamilies Theme Outline

The following outline is for the Gold theme. This is a four week programme which has proved to be extremely popular.

Storybird was to be introduced to all of Year 7 as a creative writing tool and iFamilies students, who used it first, were used as Digital Leaders to teach and support the rest of Year 7 in using the software. The stories which had been produced during iFamilies sessions were used as exemplar materials in lessons.

This is one of the aspects of iFamilies that parents find most appealing – to know that they have been involved in producing something which will be taken into the classroom makes them feel a connection with their children’s learning that they have never felt before.

Title	Inca Gold Fact File	The lost treasure of 1715	Lost treasure code breaking	Treasure Hunt
Software used	Prezi	Storybird	Internet	iTreasure
Activity	Families will research Inca gold and create a fact file outlining details such as: Why were the Spanish so fascinated by gold and what did they plan to use it for?	Families will create an online story based around lost Spanish treasure ships in 1715. The story should focus on how lost gold can fascinate people.	Families are given a newspaper article with a code they must break to find the whereabouts of the lost treasure.	Families will use iTreasure to create a treasure hunt either around the school or the local area.
Outcome	Improving web search and research skills. Making independent decisions on how best to present information gathered from a number of sources.	Literacy outcomes focusing on Ideas and Organisation from the 6 + 1 Traits of Writing.	Further Improving web search and research skills. Working well as a group to achieve a goal.	Setting realistic challenges for other. Gaining an understanding of geotagging and navigation.