



Equity Case Studies

Bligh Primary School: Home Visits

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Strengthening relationships between school and home to create the foundations for learning



At a glance

Phase: Primary (3–11)

Context: Large community primary school in Strood, Medway, (c.650 pupils), part of Maritime Academy Trust

Equity focus: Building strong, trusting relationships between school and families to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds

Key strategy: Universal home visits at the start of the school year

Who led it: Headteacher and SLT, supported by class teachers, teaching assistants and office staff

What changed: Stronger parent–teacher relationships, greater pupil confidence at the start of school, improved engagement and attendance



The challenge we were trying to solve

Bligh Primary School serves a community facing significant and entrenched disadvantage. Strood West is in IMD decile 2, placing it in the bottom 20 per cent of areas nationally. Levels of unemployment, poor health outcomes, low qualifications and child poverty are high for the South East of England.

Over a third of pupils are eligible for free school meals, with some year groups exceeding 40 per cent. The school has higher-than-average numbers of pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans and frequent engagement with social care and external agencies. While attendance has improved markedly in recent years and is now broadly in line with national averages, sustaining this progress requires strong relationships with families.

Leaders were increasingly frustrated that the same barriers between school and home kept recurring, limiting the progress pupils could make. It became clear that a reset was needed, not another intervention, but a different way of working.



What we did

The school introduced universal home visits as a foundation for learning, beginning with a pilot in Year 1 in September 2022 alongside two other Maritime schools.

The core aim was simple but ambitious: to ensure that every parent and carer had a strong, trusting relationship with their child's class teacher from the very start of the school year.

Home visits were positioned as part of a wider strategy to blur the traditional boundary between school and home, enabling staff to better understand families' contexts and helping families feel more comfortable engaging with the school.

Over time, it also became clear that the visits had a powerful effect on pupils themselves. Children arrived on their first day of school more confident, already knowing their teacher and having a clearer sense of what to expect. This, in turn, supported attendance and readiness to learn from day one.



Why this mattered for equity

For pupils from disadvantaged or under-resourced backgrounds, relationships between home and school can be fragile or shaped by previous negative experiences. **When trust is low, even well-designed academic support can fail to take root.**

Home visits reframed the relationship. Instead of expecting families to cross the threshold into school on the school's terms, staff crossed the threshold into families' homes, signalling respect, openness and partnership.

Equity here was about creating the conditions in which learning could happen, rather than reacting once difficulties had already emerged.



What made it work

Careful logistics. Each visit involved one teacher and one additional adult (often a teaching assistant). Staff completed around ten visits per day, over three days. This balance was deliberate: more visits would have reduced quality, while fewer would have limited reach.

Clear structure, flexible delivery. Staff followed a shared visit outline but were encouraged to bring their own personality. One adult typically spoke with parents while the other engaged the child, often asking to see their bedroom or favourite toy to help put the child at ease.

Thoughtful communication. Parents selected preferred time slots in July, before the summer break. Reminders were sent by text in early September, and parents were asked to contact the school if plans had changed.

Staff preparation and support. Training took place in the summer term to build confidence. SLT accompanied staff who needed additional support and modelled effective visits. Notes were taken after visits rather than during them, to avoid the visit feeling like an inspection.

Safeguarding clarity. A safeguarding lead remained on site during visits so staff could escalate concerns immediately if needed.

It comes from the top - the Headteacher and SLT must fully buy into this to make it a success.



Barriers and challenges

The first year proved the most challenging. Some parents were initially reluctant to invite staff into their homes. Leaders addressed this through clear, consistent messaging, explaining that home visits were a requirement and emphasising their purpose: **building relationships so pupils could thrive.**

Delaying the start of term by three days to accommodate visits was controversial at first. However, once the impact became clear, this was accepted as a vital investment in long-term success.

For some staff, particularly those new to teaching or the area, visiting homes was emotionally challenging. Ongoing support and space to debrief were essential.



What changed

There has been a significant shift in culture. Relationships with parents are more open and collaborative, and teachers feel better equipped to have honest, productive conversations.

Staff note that parents' evenings are more effective, as relationships have already been established. Pupils arrive at school more settled and confident, and families are more proactive in engaging with learning.

An unexpected benefit has been recruitment: prospective staff are strongly attracted to a school that prioritises knowing its community so deeply.



How impact was measured

Surveys of teachers immediately after visits and again one month later

Feedback from parents and conversations with pupils

Staff reflections on changes in communication, honesty and efficiency in meetings

Teachers consistently reported that home visits improved their understanding of pupils and families, enabling more focused and effective support.



Financial sustainability

The programme is supported by the Maritime Academy Trust. Within Bligh, office staff play a key role in administration and communication, while SLT provide oversight and staff support.

The initiative requires no additional financial resource, beyond three days of staff time at the start of the year.



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Start with one year group to refine logistics.

Communicate early, clearly and repeatedly with families.

Provide extra support for less confident staff.

Stay firm in the first year – resistance is normal.

Consider flexible alternatives (such as neutral venues) only as a last resort.

Build in emotional support for staff encountering challenging home environments.