



Equity Case Studies

Q3 Academy Tipton: Home-School Meetings

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Rebuilding trust through early, relational engagement



At a glance

Context: Large comprehensive secondary (11–19) in Tipton, Sandwell in the Black Country (c 1,550 pupils)

Equity focus: Improving attendance, behaviour and engagement by strengthening relationships with families

Key strategy: Structured home-school meetings offered to all families at key transition points

Who led it: Headteacher, later supported by Assistant Headteacher and pastoral teams

What changed: Improved trust with families, stronger engagement, and better outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds



The challenge we were trying to solve

When the Headteacher joined Q3 Academy Tipton, the school was emerging from a prolonged period of instability. Pupil numbers were falling, the school was heavily oversubscribed with hard-to-place pupils, its reputation locally was poor, and it carried significant financial debt. Trust between the school and the local community was low.

Around 70 per cent of pupils live in a small number of highly deprived postcodes in Tipton, an area characterised by low levels of adult qualifications, high unemployment, and limited access to professional employment. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were over-represented in exclusions, internal isolation and persistent absence. Many families had ongoing involvement with external agencies, and staff often experienced interactions with parents as confrontational or distrustful.

The school needed a fundamental reset in how it related to families. Leaders recognised that without rebuilding trust, improvements in behaviour, attendance and motivation would be limited.



What we did

The school introduced structured home-school meetings at key transition points, beginning with new Year 11 pupils and Year 7 pupils. Families were offered a 20–30 minute meeting with staff, ideally with the pupil present, to discuss how the school could best support the child in the year ahead.

Crucially, families were given a choice about where the meeting took place: at school, in their home (with staff attending in pairs), or in a neutral community space. Meetings were carefully matched to families, involving appropriate staff such as Heads of Year, senior leaders, attendance officers, SEND staff or safeguarding leads, depending on need.

These conversations focused on understanding pupils' strengths and needs, identifying potential barriers to success, updating contact details, and ensuring families felt prepared and supported. Practical issues, such as uniform, equipment or access to free school meals, were addressed early to remove obstacles before the term began.



Why this mattered for equity

For many families, previous experiences of education had been negative. By meeting families on their terms, in spaces where they felt comfortable, the school signalled a genuine commitment to partnership rather than surveillance.

This approach helped shift relationships from reactive to preventative, enabling the school to identify challenges early and support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds before difficulties escalated into absence, exclusion or disengagement.



What made it work

Staff received training and support, including from colleagues experienced in early years home visits, helping to build confidence and consistency. Meetings were voluntary in tone but clearly positioned as a core part of the school's way of working.

The offer was flexible, culturally sensitive and inclusive, with translation support where needed. Importantly, information gathered was acted upon, reinforcing trust and demonstrating that families' voices mattered.



Barriers and challenges

Some families were reluctant to engage, and a minority were suspicious of home visits, fearing surveillance or judgement. At the outset, this required clear, consistent communication about purpose and reassurance that meetings were about partnership, not monitoring.

Some colleagues felt anxious about visiting homes, even in pairs, and needed training, modelling and strong senior leadership support to build confidence. Logistical challenges were also significant, particularly around coordination, communication during school holidays, and ensuring information gathered was followed up effectively.

Sustaining the approach required persistence. In the early stages, leaders had to hold their nerve, respond to feedback, and refine processes while maintaining clarity that this was a core part of the school's way of working, not an optional extra.



What changed

Over time, relationships with families improved markedly. Parental engagement became more positive, attendance stabilised, and the school's reputation locally began to recover.

Pupil numbers have grown and year groups are now full, with the school oversubscribed in Year 7. The sixth form has doubled in size, and Ofsted judged the school "Good" in Personal Development, Leadership and Management, and Sixth Form provision, with other areas improving.



Project sustainability

The approach is sustained within existing school structures and does not require additional funding. Leadership responsibility has been shared beyond the Headteacher, embedding the practice into the school's culture rather than relying on individual champions.



Measuring outcomes

Formal surveys are not used, as leaders were concerned these could undermine the authenticity of relationships. Instead, impact is tracked through qualitative feedback, pupil numbers, attendance, behaviour indicators and inspection outcomes.

The strongest indicator of success has been cultural: home-school meetings are now an expected and welcomed part of joining the school, helping to create a more trusting and collaborative relationship with families from disadvantaged backgrounds.



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Organisation matters. Schools need to plan early, communicate clearly, and ensure administrative capacity is in place. Parents often need reminders, particularly over the summer break.

Most importantly, schools must be prepared to use what they learn. Gathering information without acting on it risks undermining trust rather than building it.

