



The Family Information Service: strengthening family engagement

Helping families helps schools

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Strengthening family engagement: helping families helps schools

Supporting families is one of the most important things schools can do to help students thrive. When families are well informed and feel supported, children are more likely to do well at school and feel safe and secure. This article shares simple but effective ways schools can help families, with a focus on the role of the Family Information Service at West Sussex County Council and the importance of understanding parents' rights around wraparound care.



What is the Family Information Service and why should schools use it?

The Family Information Service (FIS) provides information to parents/carers of 0-25 year olds on childcare, family support and activities. The FIS is a statutory service, meeting Section 12 of the Childcare Act. The FIS can help parents [find childcare](#), including everything from childminders and nurseries, to before and after-school care, and holiday clubs.

The [FIS website](#) is packed with useful, up-to-date information. It also includes a searchable directory for wider family support, such as parent groups, youth services, and mental health resources. By including FIS links in newsletters and on school websites, schools make it easier for parents to find the help they need.

If a family is struggling to find childcare, they can use the "[Extra Help to Find Childcare](#)" [page](#). This service connects families with the FIS specialist team, who can offer personalised help and advice for parents/carers. The FIS receives information **directly from Ofsted**, so families get accurate and reliable information on registered childcare in West Sussex.

The FIS also shares updates through social media ([@FISWestSussex](#)) to distribute relevant information to parents and families. Schools can support families by signposting parents to FIS social media channels and, where appropriate, sharing FIS updates or posts on their own school pages to help spread useful information more widely.

If you are a school that runs your own early years and childcare provision, there are weekly and termly newsletter communications shared by the FIS. They contain useful information on topics such as current best practice, legislation changes and tools and resources. Schools can complete the FIS [school run childcare form](#) to register their childcare provision with the FIS and meet the Local Authority's statutory duty to record early years and childcare information. Schools can then be added to these newsletter



mailing lists. Please note, if the childcare on your school site is run by a **private provider** and **not** the school, you **should not submit this form**.

Understanding the “Right to Request” wraparound care

Many families rely on childcare before and after school or during the holidays. National plans aim to make wraparound childcare (from 08:00 to 18:00) available for primary school-aged children by September 2026.

Parents/carers have a legal “Right to Request” that schools consider offering wraparound care. This applies to families with children **up to age 14** (or up to 18 for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities). If a parent makes a request in writing, by email or letter, the school must consider it and respond within one academic term.

While schools are not required to say yes to every request, they must take each one seriously. This includes looking at the level of demand, what would be involved in setting up the care, and whether it is practical. If the school decides not to move forward, it must clearly explain why. It is important to note that this right only applies to childcare and does **not** include after-school clubs or enrichment activities like sports or music lessons, unless they form part of a formal childcare arrangement.

Working together for better outcomes

By promoting the FIS Service, schools can give parents easy access to trusted information about childcare and family support. Signposting families to the FIS website and social media channels, and sharing relevant updates in school communications, helps ensure that parents know where to turn for help. This helps build parents/carers’ confidence and makes it easier for families to find the services they need. It can also reduce the number of childcare-related enquiries schools have to manage, while supporting children and young people’s overall wellbeing.

Understanding and responding appropriately to the Right to Request for wraparound childcare also builds trust and transparency between schools and families. Even if a school cannot provide wraparound care immediately, acknowledging and assessing parent/carer requests shows a commitment to working with families. Clear processes and open communication ensures parents feel heard and supported, which, in turn, contributes to a stronger and more engaged sense of school community.

Next steps for school leaders

Promote the Family Information Service

- Add the [FIS website](#) link to your **school website and newsletters**
- Share relevant updates from [@FISWestSussex](#) on your social media and **encourage parents to follow**
- You can also promote the following **useful web pages**:
 - Information on Tax-Free Childcare, Universal Credit Childcare, Early Years Funded Entitlements and more on the [West Sussex County Council website](#)

