



## Organise your parents meeting ...

We recently organised a meeting of parents from a range of schools in our area. We had more than twice the numbers we were expecting through the door which made for a great meeting.

Here's the steps we took:

1. **Ask yourself why you are you having the meeting** – think about what the aim of the meeting is. Are you trying to raise awareness among parents? Are you trying to get others involved, e.g. your local council or MP? Are you trying to get media attention? All those things are probably part of it. But make sure you know why you're doing it and what a successful meeting looks like in your head.
2. **Get a small group together first** – we called a meeting of parents we knew from our school, using informal links, friends and class emails. We had about a dozen people in our living room. We used this meeting to get buy-in from everyone in the room. That was our committed base of volunteers. And that gave us a good idea of the task in hand and our initial resources. And those resources can be pretty impressive when you ask what people can bring to the table in terms of skills, networks and time.
3. **Speak to your local Head** – as a courtesy, we approached our Head to tell him our plans. He was (and continues to be) very supportive. Most Heads will be. Remember you're sharing your plans – not seeking their permission. But investing in that relationship is time well spent.
4. **Get Governors on board too** – they can be a risk-averse bunch at times but, parent governors in particular, can be good and supportive friends in all this. Make very clear to the Head and the Governors that this is not a campaign aimed at them and their school. Ours is a campaign aimed at the government on behalf of all schools in our community and across the country.
5. **Firm up a date** – sounds obvious but get that date in people's minds as soon as possible. It focusses everyone on the task.
6. **Get a good venue** – we were very lucky, as our Head allowed us to use our local school hall for free. Many Heads will, we've seen it happening elsewhere. Get

somewhere accessible, connected to public transport and remember that it is much better to be too full than have people rattling round in an oversized venue.

7. **Get your speakers** – we were lucky with our speakers, they all wanted to do it and were all available. Choose speakers that either (a) have expert knowledge and relevance to the issue, e.g. teaching union or (b) represent your local area, e.g. your MP or someone from your local council or (c) are involved in this, or a similar, campaign already. Some people might fit every description.

For our launch event we went for:

Kevin Courtney, National Union of Teachers

Claire Kober, Leader of Haringey Council

Catherine West, our MP

Madeleine Holt, an experienced campaigner from Rescue our Schools

Matt Dykes and Jo Yurky, co-founders of the Fair Funding for All Schools Campaign.

We are happy to help you with speakers if you like.

8. **Get yourselves a leaflet** – something you can use on line and put in people's hands. We can help with that. We have designed leaflets that you can use. We have branding and logos you can use. But feel free to make your own. Hard copy is essential. There's nothing like publicising with a school gates hand out, particularly if you get the kids involved too. Everyone takes a leaflet. And it generates a buzz. You know what school gates are like.
9. **Reach out to other parents** – having established our group of 15 volunteers, our first task was to get this talked about across the whole school. Then we had to reach out to all the other schools in our local area. To start with, we mainly used friends, contacts and informal networks to get in touch with like-minded parents at other schools. Before long we had small groups of parents at about 5 other local schools. They helped spread by word of mouth, school gate leafletting and generally hyping things up a bit. And everyone knows someone else who knows someone else.
10. **Reach out to schools in other ways** – use those other parent groups to contact their Heads and Governors, see if the school can use official channels to publicise the event. Make contact with Heads and Governors at other schools where you might not have parent networks. Parents at Secondary schools were much harder to get to. But we managed to get the Governors at one of local Secondary to email every parent at the school. Some will do this kind of thing, some won't. But, remember, on this issue we're all on the same side. And many Heads and Governors are crying out to see parents fighting for funding for their schools.
11. **Use local networks** – every community has all sorts of networks such as local political organisations, church and faith groups and so forth. There's probably a whole load of local on-line community websites with message boards and forums that you didn't even know existed, they are very local and get seen by a surprisingly

large number of people. Map them all in your area and use them. Don't be shy - people want to hear about your event in their community.

12. **Social media** – Twitter, Facebook ... you know the drill. But do come to us, we'll put it out there for you and give it our full support.
13. **Use your speakers** – whoever agrees to speak at your event wants a decent turn out. See if they can use their networks to promote and publicise it. We had friends at the NUT promoting it, we had local councillors promoting it and we had our MP promoting it.
14. **Do a press release** – another thing we're happy to help you with. Local press are very keen to hear about this. Parents organising and cuts to schools are two big stories in one for a local community. School cuts is growing as a national news story too. We can help you with content and media contacts.

And on the night ...

15. **Get people's contacts** – pass round sign in slips and get as many contacts as you can, they are invaluable.
16. **Get the techy stuff right** – don't fall prey to bad sound and non-working equipment. Keep it simple.
17. **Get a good chair** – have a strong and experienced chair and structure the meeting carefully. Brief all speakers in advance, let them know they have, say, 7 minutes maximum to speak and give them 3 or 4 points you want them to address. Break up the session so that people can ask questions and put comments to the panel half way through, rather than making everyone wait till the end.
18. **Get good photos and try and film it** – you will want good images and we want them too! The more images we get out there the better. Parents need to know we're all part of a big thing.
19. **Get donations** – get some collection buckets and volunteers. Ask nicely for donations for campaign essentials – venue hire, leaflets and the like. People are generous and they want to help. You'll be surprised.
20. **Enjoy it** – it's exciting, fun and massively empowering for you and everyone in the room. Always remember that.