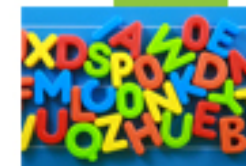




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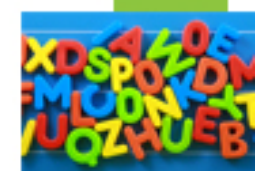
# Parent's involvement in their child's learning

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## Introduction

This document has been developed by Kent County Council's Supporting Parents Team. It provides staff in education authorities, early years, children's centres and schools with a practical resource to support parental involvement in all aspects of children's learning.

*"Parents and the home environment they create are the single most important factor in shaping their children's well-being, achievements and prospects. Parents and carers are a crucial influence on what their children experience and achieve."*

*Every Parent Matters - DfES (2007)*

Children have two main educators in their lives - their parents and their 'teachers' (the term teacher is loosely used to describe those who they have contact with during their lifetime within the education system - from the early years through to secondary school). Parents are their children's first and most enduring educators (EYFS 2007). It is now widely recognised that the home learning environment is a major factor in determining children's achievements and impacting on their outcomes. There is significant research to support this - some of the messages from this are:

- It is possible to engage vulnerable parents and improve the home learning environment (*Evengelou et al 2008*).
- Parenting behaviour influences children's development from the moment of birth (*Gutman and Feinstein, 2007; Feinstein 2003*).
- The quality of the home learning environment is more important for a child's intellectual and social development than parental occupation education or income (*Sylva et al. 2004*).
- Children whose fathers are involved in their learning do better at school and have better mental health (*Flouri and Buchanan 2001*).
- The influence of the home is "enduring, pervasive and direct" (*Desforges with Abouchaar 2003*).

As the prime educators until the child attends nursery or starts school, parents remain a major influence on their children's learning through their early years, school and beyond. There is no clear line to show where the parents' input stops and the formal educators input begins. Early years providers, children's centres, schools and parents all have crucial roles to play and the impact is greater if they all work in partnership. A successful home to setting/school relationship can be a key element in making the setting/school stronger and more effective. In particular, it can make a real difference for groups of underachieving pupils and their families. Developing these relationships may not always be easy. Due to pressures and circumstances, many families will need special arrangements, or extra help, to enable them to become actively involved in their children's school





life and to help their children get the most from schools/settings and progress satisfactorily. This toolkit will help to develop parental involvement in learning.

Research increasingly shows that mothers, fathers and carers are the biggest single influence on their children's lives - and are their prime educators. Good parenting in the home makes an enormous difference to the outcomes of children's learning and development; socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually.

Every Child Matters highlights the importance of working in partnership with families and the support that mothers, fathers and carers can give when:

- promoting healthy choices for their children
- providing safe homes and stability
- supporting learning
- promoting positive behaviour
- working towards being economically active.

## Aims of the toolkit

The toolkit contains good practical methods about how to develop effective partnerships with parents. It will:

1. help develop a clear framework for strengthening and measuring the work of schools/settings with mothers, fathers and carers as part of their self-evaluation;
2. let mothers, fathers and carers know what they should expect from organisations in Kent and how they can become involved in their local schools. It will also increase awareness of the value of parent and carer involvement and build on the work already taking place across the county;
3. help form a parental involvement charter which will act as a tool that helps schools, pre-schools, children's centres, settings and play schemes to:
  - use an approach which ensures that mothers, fathers and carers are involved in services, and is consistent and applicable district wide
  - develop a shared set of values and a common language for involvement
  - reflect on the way that this work is currently being undertaken and measure the impact, drawing on existing self-evaluation processes such as schools' Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings and children's centres' self - evaluation frameworks



- identify and implement strategies that can be used to develop this work
- promote the inclusion of mothers, fathers and carers from a wide range of backgrounds and with different experiences of family life
- help mothers, fathers and carers feel directly involved in the services they use; through this partnership their children will have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The format of the Toolkit will enable schools / settings to consider key aspects of their approach to involving mothers, fathers and carers in their children's learning. When completing the checklists, areas which are assessed as being in need of improvement (i.e. under the "No" column) together with the items which emerge in the Key Actions column can be used as a basis for planning in the school / setting and for supporting other plans and forms, such as the Ofsted Self Evaluation Form. The Toolkit will also enable schools / settings to identify areas of good practice.

## Audience

- Early Years Practitioners
- Children's Centres
- Playschemes
- Pre-schools
- Headteachers
- School staff

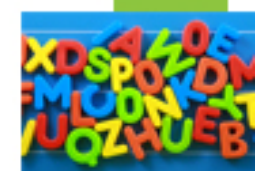
The document will also be useful to people who are helping parents and settings/schools work together to support children's learning. This might include teaching assistants, family liaison officers and parenting support advisors. It will help to support and develop parental involvement strategies and set up parent councils in partnership with parents and schools.

## Advisory note

This document recognises that people who raise children are not only birth mothers and fathers; adoptive parents, foster parents, step-parents, same sex parents, members of the extended family and grandparents may all be involved in raising children. Therefore when we use the term 'mothers, fathers and carers' we are referring to the significant caring adults for the children in any type of family.

It is important to value diversity within and between families. Therefore, when using this document, please make every attempt to differentiate between the separate issues raised within families themselves and then plan and take action based on individual feedback e.g. do not assume that by meeting the needs of "parents" you are addressing the individual needs of mothers, fathers, step-parents etc.

Where the document refers to schools and settings/children's centres this term is used in its widest sense and the term settings refers to PVI settings, child minders and out of school provision.



# The Toolkit

## Preconditions for parental involvement (including checklist)

There are many opportunities to contact parents informally, for example at:

- day to day contact in the playground or at the setting/school gate
- breakfast or after school clubs
- fundraising events
- social events - a school disco
- community activities
- setting/school events - sports day, concerts, etc.
- introductory home visits.

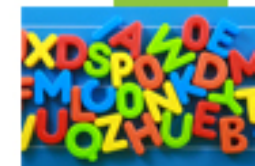
Preconditions for parent involvement include:

1. teacher/staff attitudes and beliefs
2. the school / setting as a welcoming place for parents.

### The qualities that underpin a helping relationship and partnership

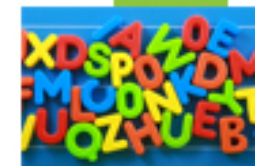
- **Respect:** valuing parents as individuals, believing in their fundamental ability to cope and make a difference in their family lives and working within the ethos of partnership.
- **Empathy:** showing an understanding of the challenges a parent is facing in their lives and being able to see the situation from their point of view.
- **Genuineness:** being sensitive, honest, non-defensive and trustworthy.
- **Humility:** working in the context of an equal relationship and using parents' strengths, views and knowledge alongside your own at every stage of the process.
- **Quiet enthusiasm:** bringing a friendly, positive energy to the relationship and a consistently calm, steady and warm approach.
- **Personal integrity:** in addition to empathising with the parent, being able to hold alternative views and offer these when appropriate.
- **Expertise:** the knowledge and experience that the helper brings to the work to complement the parents existing knowledge and skills, both in building the relationship and in providing information and support.

*Braun et al. 2006*



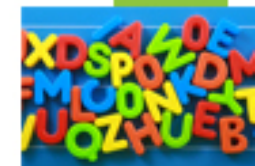
## Checklists for preconditions for parent involvement: the school / centre / setting as a welcoming place for parents

Attitudes and values - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Do all staff understand the importance of the parents' role in the process of educating children?							
2. Do all staff view parents as experts on their children and as equals?							
3. Do all staff understand that parents' attitudes towards school affect their children's attitudes?							
4. Do all staff recognise the strengths of families raising children in adverse circumstances, including parents who are in poverty, incarcerated, divorced or experiencing domestic violence?							
5. Do all relevant staff expect to have personal contact with parents?							
6. Are parents involved in deciding what the issues are?							
7. Do parents choose issues that are most important to them?							
8. Are all parents involved in this process in ways that are accessible to them?							
9. Do people know about other routes they can use to raise issues that are of concern to them?							
10. Do all parents have the opportunity to contribute?							
11. How are people who are less confident or less experienced getting encouragement to take part?							

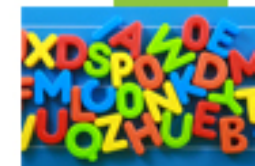


Attitudes and values - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
12. How will people know if their ideas and views have led to changes?							
13. Is there support within the education authority to support parents, families and children who may be experiencing particular difficulties?							
14. Do parents know that members of the extended family can be involved too, if this is how the family want to do things?							
15. Is there a special area for parents within the school?							
16. Have you asked parents and pupils for their ideas?							
17. Can you identify the range of ways parents and staff are able to meet and share ideas about ways people could support the school?							
18. Do activities happen at various times including weekends, holidays, evenings, daytime?							
19. Are parents informed of and involved in new initiatives? Is there effective communication about these and opportunities for parents to discuss how they will be taken forward in the school and what their involvement will be?							
20. Are there opportunities to do one-off things with no long-term commitment as well as taking on longer-term tasks and roles?							
21. Are there fun activities to take part in and let people get to know each other outside the school - such as a barbecue in the summer?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Respect, communicate, listen to and be honest with mothers, fathers and carers. Acknowledge and respect every family is different but equal and that we need to look at each family's individual circumstances when we are working with them. Promote positive parenting messages.							

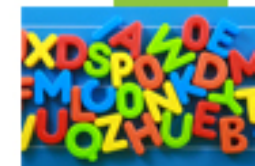




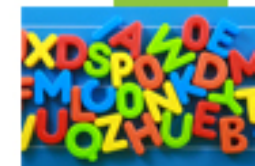
Attitudes and Values - children's centres / settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes 2. Yes, but it needs to improve 3. Currently being examined 4. No		
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Do all staff understand the importance of the parents' role in the process of educating children?							
2. Do all staff view parents as experts on their children and as equals?							
3. Do all staff understand that parents' attitudes toward play and learning affect their children's attitudes?							
4. Do all staff recognise the strengths of families raising children in adverse circumstances, including parents who are in poverty, incarcerated, divorced or experiencing domestic violence?							
5. Do all relevant staff expect to have personal contact with parents?							
6. Are parents involved in their child's learning?							
7. Do we seek feedback from parents on any concerns they have about our setting/centre e.g. the play area?							
8. Are all parents involved in ways that are accessible to them?							
9. Do parents know who to contact if they wish to seek further advice?							
10. Do all parents have the opportunity to contribute to the setting/centre?							
11. How are people who are less confident or less experienced getting encouragement to take part in the life of the setting/centre?							
12. How will parents know if their ideas and views have led to changes? Do we give them feedback?							
13. Is there multiagency support within the local area to support parents, families and children who may							



Attitudes and Values - children's centres / settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
be experiencing particular difficulties? How do we let our parents know of that support?							
14. Do parents know that members of the extended family can be involved too, if this is how the family want to do things? What do we offer them?							
15. Is there a special area for parents within the setting/centre to meet?							
16. Have you asked parents and children for their ideas on the setting/centre?							
17. Can you identify the range of ways parents and staff are able to meet and share ideas about ways people could support the setting/centre?							
18. Do activities happen at various times including weekends, holidays, evenings, daytime?							
19. Are parents informed of/involved in new initiatives? Is there effective communication about these, opportunities for parents to discuss how they will be taken forward in the setting/centre and what their involvement will be?							
20. Are there opportunities to do one-off things with no long-term commitment as well as taking on longer-term tasks and roles?							
21. Are there fun activities to take part in and let people get to know each other outside the setting/centre- such as fun days and local visits?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Respect, communicate, listen to and be honest with mothers, fathers and carers. Acknowledge and respect every family is different but equal and that we need to look at families individual circumstances when working with them. Promote positive parenting messages.							

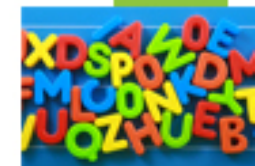


Accessibility - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Do locked entrances have a clear way for parents to gain access?							
2. Are staff welcoming to parents?							
3. Are security checkpoints handled courteously without demeaning parents?							
4. Do school office staff respond to the entrance of visitors with a smile and an acknowledgment of their presence?							
5. Do teachers invite parents to visit their classrooms?							
6. Do teachers know and use the parent's name?							
7. Do staff view parents as partners?							
8. Does a school welcoming committee involving parents and school staff visit parents at the beginning of the year?							
9. Are special efforts made to welcome parents and children new to the school?(i.e. transition from early years or transferring in)							
10. Are parent - teacher conferences scheduled at convenient times for parents to attend? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are language translators available for parents who are not comfortable communicating in English?</li> <li>• Is child care provided?</li> </ul>							
11. Are parents invited to join their children for lunch?							
12. Is the school environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pleasant and inviting in terms of colour and welcoming signs?</li> <li>• Easy to navigate in terms of directional signs?</li> <li>• Supportive of parents' interest in their</li> </ul>							

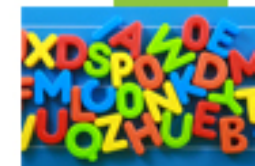


Accessibility - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
children in terms of class or individual photos of children, art work and school projects displayed on walls?							
13. Do parents who do not use English as their first language get information about their children's learning and about opportunities to get involved? (This includes parents who are deaf and use British Sign Language as well as people who use other spoken languages)?							
14. Are parents who have a disability aware of the support they can receive to get to school and to other events such as consultation meetings?							
15. Do parents and teachers and staff have access to aids and equipment, or to services such as translators, which will help them to communicate with each other?							
16. Do parents who find it difficult to come to the school on their own know that they can bring a friend or relative who may be able to support them?							
17. Are there arrangements in place for parents who have other daytime responsibilities to keep in touch with the school?							
18. Is there encouragement and practical help for fathers to be involved?							
19. Is the school environment welcoming for dads?							
20. Are both mothers and fathers encouraged to be involved in every aspect of parental involvement?							
21. Is there practical support to help parents - mothers or fathers - who are living on their own with the children to be involved?							

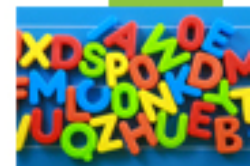




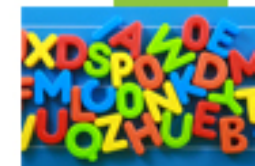
Accessibility - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
22. Do parents know that their partner or a relative can represent them in situations where the involvement is specific to their role as the child's parent?							
23. Do all partners of all parents feel they are welcome to get involved at the setting/school, and be part of events to involve families, so that each child is there with their family?							
24. Are there arrangements in place to make it easy for parents living in each part of the setting/school catchment area to be involved?							
25. Does the setting/school keep parents of children and young people who are temporarily absent from the school informed of school activities?							
26. Are the parents of children with additional support needs encouraged to take part in the same range of activities as the parents of other children?							
27. Are children who are looked after encouraged to identify the people who are taking on parenting roles for them and who they want to see being involved?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Offer a range of opportunities in each District for mothers, fathers and carers to be consulted and influence the way that local children's services and agencies work. Based on what parents have told us, do more to involve and support fathers and male carers, whether they live in the family or not. (Kent Learning Disability Partnership Board 01622 696113)							



Accessibility - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
How good are we at:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Do locked entrances have a clear way for parents to gain access?							
2. Are staff welcoming to parents?							
3. Are security checkpoints handled courteously without demeaning parents?							
4. Do staff respond to the entrance of visitors with a smile and an acknowledgment of their presence?							
5. Are parents encouraged to become actively involved with their child in the setting?							
6. Do staff know and use the parent's name?							
7. Do staff view parents as partners?							
8. Are special efforts made to welcome parents and children new to the centre / setting?							
9. Are parent - staff meetings scheduled at convenient times for parents to attend? a. Are language translators available for parents who are not comfortable communicating in English? b. Is child care provided?							
10. Are parents invited to join their children for lunch?							
11. Is the centre / setting environment: • Pleasant and inviting in terms of colour and welcoming signs? • Easy to navigate in terms of directional signs? • Supportive of parents' interest in their children in terms of class or individual photos of children, art work and school projects displayed on walls?							
12. Are parents involved in creating learning journals?							

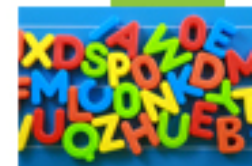


Accessibility - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
How good are we at:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
13. Do parents who do not use English as their first language get information about their children's learning and about opportunities to get involved in a way that they can understand? (This includes parents who are deaf and use British Sign Language as well as people who use other spoken languages)?							
14. Are parents who have a disability aware of support they can receive to get to the setting/centre and to other events such as consultation meetings? (Kent Learning Disability Partnership Board 01622 696113)							
15. Do parents and staff have access to aids and equipment, or to services such as translators, which will help them to communicate with each other?							
16. Do parents who find it difficult to come to the setting/school on their own know that they can bring a friend or relative who may be able to support them? How do we let them know?							
17. Are there arrangements in place for parents who have other daytime responsibilities to keep in touch with the setting / centre? How do we let them know?							
18. Is there encouragement and practical help for fathers to be involved? If so how?							
19. Is the setting / centre environment welcoming for dads?							
20. Are both mothers and fathers encouraged to be involved in every aspect of parental involvement?							
21. Is there practical support to help parents who are living on their own with the children to be							



Accessibility - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
How good are we at:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
involved in the life of the setting?							
22. Do parents know that they can be represented by a partner or a relative if they cannot attend meetings themselves?							
23. Do all partners of all parents feel they are welcome to get involved at the setting/centre, and be part of events to involve families, so that each child is there with their family?							
24. Are there arrangements in place to make it easy for all parents irrespective of where they live to attend events?							
25. Is parent attendance at groups monitored to support families? Are they made aware of term/event dates if they miss a session e.g. if their child is in hospital							
26. Are the parents of children with additional needs encouraged to take part in the same range of activities as the parents of other children?							
27. Are carers of looked after children encouraged to identify the people who are taking on parenting roles for them and who they want to see being involved?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Offer a range of opportunities in each district for mothers, fathers and carers to be consulted and influence the way that local children's services and agencies work. Based on what parents have told us do more to involve and support fathers and males carers whether they live in the family or not.							





# Communication between settings/ schools and parents, including checklist

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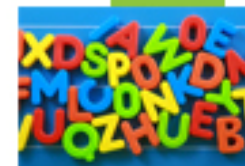
## Communication to and from parents

An effective setting/school keeps parents informed through regular two-way communication. Sharing of information is vital to a pupil's success and is facilitated by the activities outlined below.

## Strategies for good communication

Both settings/schools and parents would agree that the basis for developing positive relationships is good communication. Good communication needs to be carefully planned. Some authorities and schools have developed communication strategies which outline some of the principles of good communication and the various ways it will be done, for example by:

- reaching out to parents at places they already visit: shops, post offices, supermarkets, libraries, doctors' surgeries and ensuring that information is available there and a positive image of the school is presented
- using local media: TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, posters etc, to let parents know what is happening in the school and share 'good news' stories about what the school and children are doing
- ensuring all information is attractive and easy to read, using colour and pictures where possible
- avoiding the use of educational jargon or terms that parents may be unfamiliar with
- having one-to-one conversations with parents
- having a direct approach to communications with parents - 'just ask them'
- using electronic methods, for example, text messages and email
- building relationships through contact with parents at drama, music and sport events, parents' nights, school concerts
- making use of parent to parent contacts - 'snowballing' (where one parent agrees to bring along or introduce another), school gate, parents' nights, information sessions led by parents
- making use of existing opportunities for example focus on transitional phases (pre-school to primary, primary to secondary)
- sharing key facts such as the research findings on the difference parents make.



## Links to the Parenting Strategy

- Look at the best ways to get information to parents and carers, for example the Internet, local newspapers, and radio, phone help lines and text messaging.
- Provide clear and easy to understand information on services that are available to support mothers, fathers and carers.

## How pupils can help

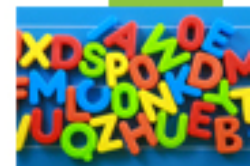
Pupils have a really important role in encouraging their parents to get involved with the setting/school. Once they are made aware of how important it is that their parents get involved and support the setting/school they often have a host of good ideas about how this could be done. They often know what would work best for their parents and their families.

## Links with the community

Settings and schools do not exist in isolation, they are based in communities. Some larger settings/schools may serve more than one identifiable community and will need to be aware of any differences in each community. Settings and schools provide a service that is available for everyone which makes them a key resource for children and families in that neighbourhood. They are often also part of a network of statutory and voluntary organisations that provide services and support to communities. Parents can encourage or build on links between the setting/school and the local community. The starting point, as always, is what is important for this setting/school. They may already involve some people from the community working in the school alongside parents. Children's centres and community venues can often be good places to make contact with parents who may lack confidence in approaching the school or getting involved there. For some parents, a school can be rather daunting and it is important to meet people where they feel most comfortable. Parent councils are well placed to make links with other agencies. In particular they are encouraged to develop links with pre-school and further/higher education establishments to ensure continuity of education for children and young people.

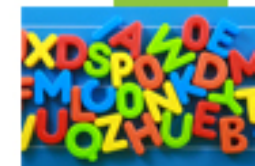
For low-income families and families from different cultural backgrounds, offering home visits is more successful at involving parents than programmes requiring parents to visit the setting/school. However, when parents do become involved, their children make even greater gains.

When parents receive frequent and effective communication from their setting/school, their involvement increases and their attitudes toward the school are more positive.



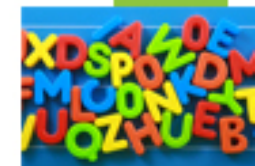
## Checklists for communication to and from parents

Information - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Is a transition information event held prior to starting school and during first weeks to enable parents to communicate information about their child's characteristics and their desired goals?							
2. Are contracts between the school and each parent developed that include agreements concerning expectations for the child's progress, parental provision of a place to study and a commitment to talk daily about school tasks, pay attention to academic progress and compliment gains?							
3. Do parents know how to reach teachers directly?							
4. Do staff encourage parents to let them know what is happening in the child's life that may affect school performance?							
5. Do staff set aside a small amount of time each day and use all possible means to communicate frequently with parents? This could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters by post</li> <li>• E-mail</li> <li>• Telephone</li> <li>• Face to face</li> </ul>							
6. Are parents given a homework log with instructions for facilitating homework and incomplete school work?							
7. Do staff establish a regular schedule for positive communications to parents? including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebration notes on positive things that have happened</li> <li>• Folders or completed student work sent home</li> </ul>							

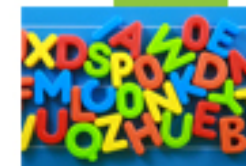


Information - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
weekly or monthly for parents to review and return comments							
8. Communications to emphasise strengths and how parents can help							
9. Are report cards and regular progress reports sent or given to parents?							
10. Is the communication process modified as needed for non-English speaking or low literacy parents?							
11. Are conferences held with every parent at least twice a year with follow-ups as needed and at times when parents can attend?							
12. Do children and staff collaborate on classroom newsletters that provide information about school activities, policies and schedules with the opportunity to ask questions and elicit suggestions and information on community resources and family activities?							
13. Does the school provide parents with clear information on class level achievement expectations, school activities, school policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools and school goals?							
14. Does the school promote informal activities that facilitate the interaction of parents and staff?							
15. Does the school conduct an annual person-to-person survey of families on students' needs and suggestions and reactions to school programmes?							
16. Does the school provide staff development on effective communication techniques?							
17. Is information available in the languages used by parents of children at this school or living in this area?							

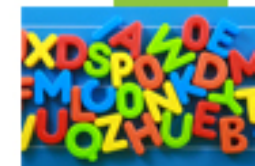




Information - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
18. Do parents know they can get access to support such as translators to help them be involved?							
19. What arrangements are there to include parents who live a distance away?							
20. Do parents know they can contribute in many different ways - such as text, email, letter, phone, leaving comments and suggestions at the setting/school, as well as through meetings?							
21. Do parents know how they can share information about their child with the school? How are they able to do this?							
22. Are parents asked about how they want to get information and communicate with the school and does the school make arrangements to respond appropriately?							
23. Is it easy for parents to communicate with the school in ways that suit them?							
24. Is there a school and/or education authority website? Does it include a parents' section? Does it contain details of what children will be learning each term? Does it contain suggestions of what parents can be doing at home to extend and reinforce this learning?							
25. Do parents who are not living with their children - for example, parents who are separated or someone who is working away - get regular updates on what is happening for their child?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Look at where we need to improve our services and take the appropriate action to make them more helpful to mothers, fathers and carers. Provide clear and easy to understand information on services that are available to support mothers, fathers and carers. Look at the best ways to get information to parents and carers for example the internet, local newspapers and radio phone help lines and text messaging. Provide regular opportunities for staff working with parents and carers to receive information exchange ideas and share best practice.							



Information - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Is centre / setting information shared prior to starting or during first weeks, with time for parents to communicate information about their child's characteristics?							
2. Do parents know they are welcome to talk to staff?							
3. Do staff encourage parents to let them know what is happening in the child's life that may affect them?							
4. Do staff set aside a small amount of time each day and use all possible means to communicate frequently with parents? This could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters by post</li> <li>• E-mail</li> <li>• Telephone</li> <li>• Face to face</li> </ul>							
5. Have staff established a regular schedule for positive communications for parents? including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebration notes on positive things that have happened</li> <li>• Communications emphasise strengths and how parents can help</li> <li>• Encouraging parents to contribute to learning journals</li> </ul>							
6. Do centres / settings communicate clearly with parents and support those who have difficulty with understanding?							
7. Are meetings held with every parent at least twice a year with follow-ups as needed and at times when parents can attend?							



Information - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
8. Does the centre / setting provide parents with clear information on activities, policies, centre / setting ethos and expectations?							
9. Does the centre / setting promote informal activities that facilitate the interaction of parents and staff?							
10. Does the centre / setting conduct an annual survey of families and suggestions and reactions to the centre / setting?							
11. Does the centre / setting provide staff development on effective communication techniques?							
12. Is information available in the languages used by parents of children at this setting/centre or living in this area?							
13. Do parents know they can get access to support such as translators to help them be involved?							
14. What arrangements are there to include parents who live a distance away?							
15. Do parents know they can contribute in many different ways - such as text, email, letter, phone, leaving comments and suggestions at the setting/centre, as well as through meetings?							
16. Do parents know how they can share information about their child with the setting/centre? How are they able to do this?							
17. Are parents asked about how they want to get information and communicate with the setting/centre and does the setting/centre make arrangements to respond appropriately?							
18. Is it easy for parents to communicate with the setting/school in ways that suit them?							



Information - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
19. Is there a setting/centre and/or CFIS website? Does it include a parents' section? Does it contain details of what children will be learning within the setting/centre? Does it contain suggestions of what parents can be doing at home to extend and reinforce this learning?							
20. Do parents who are not living with their children - for example, parents who are separated or someone who is working away - get regular updates on what is happening for their child?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Look at where we need to improve our services and take the appropriate action to make them more helpful to mothers, fathers and carers. Provide clear and easy to understand information on services that are available to support mothers, fathers and carers. Look at the best ways to get information to parents and carers for example the internet, local newspapers and radio phone help lines and text messaging. Provide regular opportunities for staff working with parents and carers to receive information exchange ideas and share best practice.							

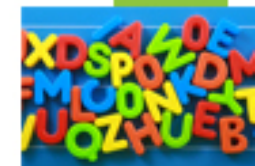
## Partnership in pupil learning (including checklist)

### Partnership in pupils learning

An effective setting/school will view parents as partners in facilitating children's learning and will enable their involvement.

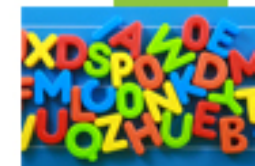
Parents are much more likely to become involved when they are encouraged to do so. When they are treated as partners and given relevant information by people with whom they are comfortable, parents put into practice the involvement strategies they already know are effective, but have been hesitant to utilise.





## Checklists for partnership in pupils learning

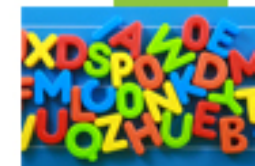
Skills - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Are parents given information and orientation / training on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Required skills in all subjects at each grade?</li> <li>Homework policies and how to monitor and discuss?</li> <li>How to assist children with their developing skills?</li> <li>How sufficient sleep, nutritious food, limited TV, discussion at meals together and a quiet place to study can improve academic performance?</li> </ul>							
2. Do parents participate with teachers in helping children set academic goals each year?							
3. Is there a regular schedule of interactive homework that requires children to demonstrate and discuss with parents what they are learning in school?							
4. Does the school library have preschool and elementary books that parents can borrow to read to and discuss with their young children?							
5. Is there information in the school and in other places about access to adult learning and other ways parents can build their own confidence and skills?							
6. Are parents encouraged to share their interests and skills with their children? How does this happen?							
7. Does the school ensure that they understand the needs of all parents and provide ways of supporting them to help their children's learning							



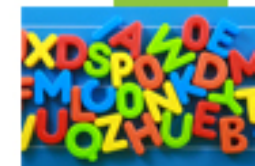
<b>Skills - schools</b>					<b>Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning</b>		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
at home? For example, some parents might need help with literacy and numeracy skills in order to support their child.							
8. Is the school aware of any specific skills that parents have and are parents encouraged to share skills and experience in the school setting?							
9. Are there opportunities to take part that don't need much skill or confidence?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b>							
Make sure that staff who work with mothers, fathers and carers are appropriately qualified and have the opportunity to access on going training and support through good line management.							

Parent effectiveness is enhanced when the setting/school provides training. For example, written directions with a send-home instructional packet, workshops where parents participate in constructing and using instructional games, or training and ongoing supervision by setting/school personnel.

<b>Skills - children's centres/setting</b>					<b>Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning</b>		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Are parents given information and orientation / training on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to assist children with skills that they will be developing?</li> <li>• How sufficient sleep, nutritious food, limited TV and discussion at meals together can improve their children's development and well-being?</li> </ul>							
2. Does the centre / setting have books that parents can borrow to read to and discuss with their young children or actively encourage links with the local library?							



Skills - children's centres/setting					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
3. Do staff encourage parents and children to share experiences from home?							
4. Is there information in the setting/centre and in other places about access to adult learning and other ways parents can build their own confidence and skills?							
5. Are parents encouraged to share their interests and skills with their children? How does this happen?							
6. Does the setting/centre ensure that they understand the needs of all parents and provide ways of supporting them to help their children's learning at home? For example, some parents might need help with literacy and numeracy skills in order to support their child.							
7. Is the setting/centre aware of any specific skills that parents have and are parents encouraged to share skills and experience in the school setting?							
8. Are there opportunities to take part that don't need much skill or confidence?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Make sure that staff who work with mothers, fathers and carers are appropriately qualified and have the opportunity to access on going training and support through good line management.							



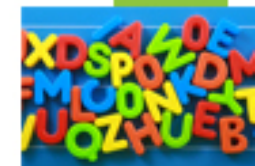
## Parent volunteers (including checklist)

### Parent volunteers

The effective setting/school stretches its resources by encouraging parents to volunteer. The precondition for parent volunteers is a welcoming environment.

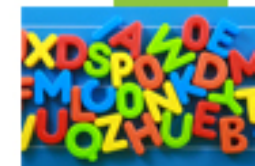
Volunteers - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Does the school encourage participation by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing clear instructions including a volunteer orientation packet?</li> <li>Creating ways to express appreciation?</li> </ul>							
2. Do parents accompany classes on trips?							
3. Do parents volunteer to extend the capacities of staff by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helping the class teachers in the classroom?</li> <li>Bringing their talents, skills, knowledge, experiences or unique culture to the classroom as guest speakers?</li> </ul>							
4. Monitoring in the canteen and on the playground at lunchtime?							
5. Do parents volunteer to improve the school environment or equipment?							
6. Do parent teams welcome and orient new families at the beginning and during the year?							
7. Do parents volunteer in a telephone tree to provide all families with school related information?							





8. Do parents volunteer to organise and manage resources?								
9. Do parents have the use of a room as a place for volunteers?								
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b>								

Volunteers - centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
				3. Currently being examined		4. No	
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Does the centre / setting encourage participation by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing clear instructions including a volunteer orientation packet?</li> <li>• Creating ways to express appreciation?</li> </ul>							
2. Do parents volunteer to extend the capacities of staff by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging with children in the centre / setting?</li> <li>• Bringing their talents, skills, knowledge, experiences or unique culture to the classroom as guest speakers?</li> </ul>							
3. Do parents volunteer to improve the centre / setting environment or equipment?							
4. Do parent teams welcome new families throughout the year and give them relevant information?							
5. Do parents volunteer to organise and manage resources?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b>							

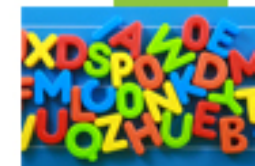


# The setting/school as a resource for parents (including checklist)

## The setting/school as a resource for parents

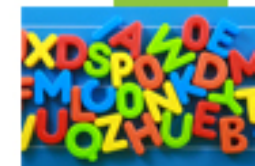
An effective setting/school connects to parents by serving as a resource. The setting/school provides access to resources identified by parents as important to families.

Resources - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Do staff link families to resources, especially if children are frequently absent due to illness or family issues?							
2. Is the school available for meetings of community groups?							
3. Can children have breakfast at school?							
4. Does the school have a uniform exchange?							
5. Do parents and staff agree on, and put into effect a plan of action to contain community problems such as traffic safety, drug dealing etc?							
6. Are schools working together to help parents as well as children with the transition from pre-school to primary and primary to secondary school?							
7. Are there links with other agencies that can support parents in their role as educators - for example, Libraries, Community Centres, Family Learning teams, Family Liaison Officer's, Parenting Support Advisors, Adult Literacy staff?							
8. Do parents know about and get access to the resources that are available, such as useful websites?							



Resources - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
9. Have parents been involved with teachers and other staff in developing the school prospectus and any other leaflets that are sent to parents?							
10. Is there practical support to help parents be involved? For example, on a parents' evening, does someone organise lifts for parents who don't have much time after getting home from work? Is there a babysitting circle or a crèche?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Offer local services close to where mothers, fathers and carers live and make sure these services are available at times that they are needed and in places where families feel comfortable.							

Resources - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Is the centre / setting available for meetings of community groups?							
2. Does the centre / setting link families to resources, especially if children are frequently absent due to illness or family issues?							
3. Can children have breakfast at the centre/setting?							
4. Are settings/centres working together to help parents as well as children with the transition from pre-school to primary?							
5. Is admission support provided for families?							
6. Are there links with other agencies that can support parents in their role as educators - for example, Libraries, Community Centres, Family							



Resources - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined		4. No
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
Learning teams, FLO's, Parenting Support Advisors, Adult Literacy staff, CFIS?							
7. Do parents know about and get access to the resources that are available, e.g. useful websites?							
8. Have parents been involved with staff in developing the settings/centres publications and any other leaflets that are sent to parents?							
9. Is there practical support to help parents be involved? E.g. parents forum training? Does someone organise taxis, walking partner or a crèche?							
10. Are settings/centres working together to help parents as well as children with the transition from Pre-school to Primary?							
11. Is Admission support provided for families?							
12. Are there links with other agencies that can support parents in their role as educators - for example, Libraries, Community Centres, Family Learning teams, FLO's, Parenting Support Advisors, Adult Literacy staff, CFIS?							
13. Do parents know about and get access to the resources that are available, e.g. useful websites?							
14. Have parents been involved with staff in developing the settings/centres publications and any other leaflets that are sent to parents?							
15. Is there practical support to help parents be involved? E.g. parents forum training? Does someone organise taxis, walking partner or a crèche?							
<b>Links to Parent Strategy:</b> Offer local services close to where mothers, fathers and carers live and make sure these services are available at times that they are needed and in places where families feel comfortable.							





## Parent decision makers (including checklist)

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### Parents as decision makers

An effective setting/school has access to financial resources and decisions are made by a team of administrators, staff, teachers and parents.

### What is a parent forum?

The membership of each parent forum is made up of parents who have a child of school age. As a member of the parent forum, each parent can expect to:

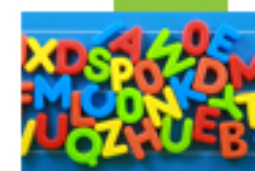
- receive information about the LCT and its activities
- hear more in future about what partnership with parents means in their district
- be invited to be involved in ways and times that suit them
- identify issues they want the LCT to work on
- be asked their opinion by the LCT on issues relating to the school and the education it provides
- work in partnership with staff
- It is important that all parents know about their parent forum.

### What is a parent council?

A parent council is a group of parents selected to represent all the parents of children at a school. Parent councils are very flexible groups. Parents might decide they want a representative from each year group in the school. They might want to include pupils, other teachers at the school or parents from a feeder primary or secondary school. This flexibility allows parents to choose a parent council which reflects their school and will encourage parents to get involved.

The type of things a parent council could get involved in includes:

- supporting the work of the school
- gathering and representing parents' views to the headteacher, education authority
- promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils, providers of nursery education and the local community
- supporting fundraising
- organising events
- being involved in the appointment of senior staff.



See Appendix 1 for sample terms of reference and steps to setting up a Parents Council.

## From involvement to participation

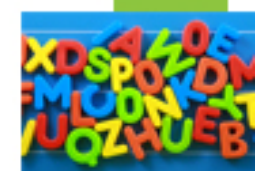
The terms participation and involvement are frequently used with regards to parents' relationships with their child's learning but can be interpreted quite differently.

Involvement is 'a range of processes designed to engage the support, understanding and contribution of parents in their child's learning and their commitment to doing so'.

Participation can be defined as 'a process of parental involvement designed to provide parents with the opportunity to influence and where appropriate, take part in decision making on matters which affect them and their child's learning'.

*"Parental interest and involvement in children's learning often increased following participation in family learning" 26.  
The Impact of Adults' Participation in Family Learning - a study based in Lancashire Jackie Horne and Jeanne Haggart, NIACE*

Checklists for parents and decision makers - schools					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes	2. Yes, but it needs to improve	
					3. Currently being examined	4. No	
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Do parents participate in review of school policies and curriculum as part of parent councils?							
2. Do parents participate on all decision making and parent councils / forum?							
3. Are meeting times convenient for parents?							
4. Can parents participate off site by using technology?							
5. Does the school provide parents with an understandable, well publicised process for influencing decisions, raising concerns, appealing decisions and resolving problems?							
6. Is training provided to staff and parents on shared decision making?							
Links to Parent Strategy:							



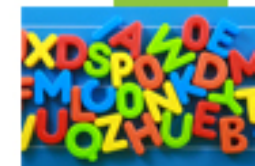
Checklists for parents and decision makers - children's centres/settings					Mothers, fathers and carers involvement in children's learning		
					1. Yes 2. Yes, but it needs to improve 3. Currently being examined 4. No		
Question:	1	2	3	4	Evidence	Action to be taken	Lead member of staff
1. Do parents participate in review of setting / centre policies and curriculum as part of parent councils?							
2. Do parents participate on all decision making and parent councils / centre steering group?							
3. Are meeting times convenient for parents?							
4. Can parents participate off site by using technology?							
5. Does the centre / setting provide parents with an understandable, well publicised process for influencing decisions, raising concerns, appealing decisions and resolving problems?							
6. Is training provided to staff and parents on shared decision making?							
Links to Parent Strategy:							

## Supporting Information

### Research: the benefits of parental involvement in children's learning

#### Research into the difference parental involvement makes to children's learning

Parental involvement comes in various forms and will differ as a child moves through primary and secondary school. Epstein's<sup>40</sup> (2002) classic six-types model captures the potential scope of parental involvement:



1. Basic obligations of parents as care-providers.
2. Schools communicating with parents about school programs.
3. Parent volunteering at school.
4. Parent involvement in home learning.
5. Parent as decision maker
6. Collaborating with the community.

Notably, Epstein's model also suggests a two-way partnership-schools supporting parents and parents supporting schools towards the common goal of improved student learning.

Research consistently demonstrates that where parents are involved with their children's education and learning (both at home and in partnership with the school/setting) children do better and achieve more. Benefits can be long-lasting and extend to better health, relationships and improved employment prospects.

*"Children who play with and are talked to by their parents when they are very young, learn much better and do better at school"<sup>28</sup> Family and Parenting Institute' Learning and Play'.*

The Government's strategy for securing parental involvement in England was first set out in 1997 in its White Paper, '*Excellence in Schools*'. It states that: "Parental involvement, especially in the form of parental values and aspirations modelled in the home, is a major force shaping pupils' achievement and adjustment."

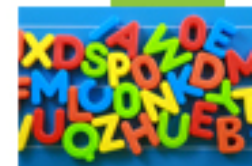
### ***Excellence in Schools* included three elements**

- Providing parents with information.
- Giving parents a voice.
- Encouraging parental partnerships with schools.

The Government also placed parents and carers at the centre of its strategy to improve children and young people's life opportunities by describing their contribution to the five 'outcomes' set out in Every Child Matters.

Proposals in the Government's 2009 White Paper<sup>15</sup> set out new pupil and parent guarantees. This acknowledges that parents make a critical contribution to their children's success at school and it is important that they have a strong voice at all levels of the system. Responsibility is placed on the local authority to ensure there is a pattern of high-quality provision, which meets local demands and aspirations.





To ensure schools work with mothers, fathers and other carers as full partners in their child's learning and wider development the following must happen:

- a. Every parent will have opportunities, information and support to exercise choice with and on behalf of their child.
- b. Every parent will have a home school agreement outlining their rights and responsibilities for their child's schooling.
- c. Every parent will have the opportunity, information and support they need to be involved and engaged in their child's learning and development.
- d. Every parent will have access to extended services including support and advice on parenting.

For information on 'Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system' visit:

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=Cm+7588&>

A summary of relevant research and key messages from a number of studies are set out at Appendix B. These studies include the impact and benefits of parental involvement in children's education and supporting parental involvement.



# Involving all parents: the barriers and involvement in curriculum and play

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## Involvement in children's learning and development

As the first educators of their children and as the people who have the best knowledge about them, mothers, fathers and carers have a vital role to play in their child's learning and development.

*"Parental involvement is a catch-all term for many different activities including 'at home' good parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, through to taking part in school governance.*

*'Excellence in Schools'. 1997*

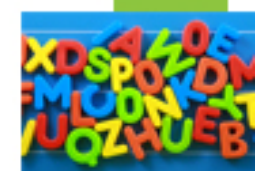
## Levels of involvement in curriculum and play.

The Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) programme is an early learning intervention programme. It aims to improve the life chances of children from birth to starting school. It has a structured curriculum for each age group that is based on specific curricular areas such as listening, talking, numeracy and self-esteem.

The Oxfordshire PEEP project has found that young children whose parents are involved in their early learning make "significantly more progress" than those whose parents aren't. They found that 3 - 5 year old children showed gains in vocabulary, language comprehension, understanding about books, and number concepts, as well as having higher self-esteem than comparable children whose parents did not take part in the project with children achieving 5% more in language comprehension and nearly 8% more in numeracy than their peers.

## PEEP programme aims

1. To promote parents' and carers' awareness of children's very early learning and development through making the most of everyday activities and interactions.
2. To support parents/carers in their relationships with their children, so that the children's self-esteem will be enhanced.
3. To affirm the crucial role of parents/carers as children's first educators.
4. To support parents/carers in the development of their children's literacy and numeracy.



5. To support parents/carers so that they can encourage the development of positive learning dispositions.
6. To promote and support parents' and carers' lifelong learning.

The effects of PEEP on Children's Developmental Progress is available from [www.dfes.gov.uk/research](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research), reference RR489. For more information about PEEP visit: [www.peep.org.uk](http://www.peep.org.uk)

Research also shows that when parents become involved standards that improve include: understanding the curriculum, knowing about their child's progress and helping with homework. Within schools this could be achieved through organising curriculum events for parents that:

- explain aspects of the curriculum, with each subject co-ordinator giving input
- present a new reading scheme and explain the 'big book' approach
- teach reading games that parents could play with their child at home
- explain aspects of mathematics at a workshop, followed up by putting better explanations on pupils' homework sheets
- help parents improve their understanding of their children's learning, for example through nurture groups and induction for new pupils, as well as encouraging them to attend play sessions at their local children's centre.

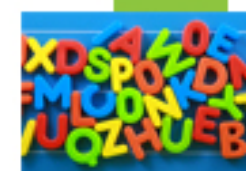
## Involving all parents

Because **all children** benefit from the interest and involvement of their parents it is important to make sure that **all parents** have opportunities to be involved in their children's learning and education. Every parent wants the best for their child but may have difficulty in participating in some activities. This does not mean that they are not interested or not doing what they can to support their child's learning but they may find it difficult to be involved in the school. The key is to ensure that as many opportunities as possible are available to parents.

*"Parents with additional support needs continue to face difficulties in accessing services that support family life. The separation between children's and adults' services has resulted in a fragmented approach to work with families and different views about whether the focus of support is on child protection or on supporting people with their parenting role."*

*Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2009*

Acknowledge and respect that every family is different but equal, and that we need to look at each families individual circumstances when we are working with them.



## Policy and strategy - links and guidance

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There is evidence that services which engage fathers make a significant difference to outcomes for children, mothers and fathers themselves. When fathers engage with services they are likely to:

- feel more confident as fathers
- understand more about child development
- spend more time with their children
- be more sensitive and positive with their children
- be more supportive of their children's education
- feel less isolated.

*Father Inclusive Parenting Services, Commissioning, planning and delivery, June 2009*

The Parents' Charter commitments to parents states that parents can expect to be involved and listened to:

- We commit to listen to their opinion and give ongoing feedback.

Parents can expect to have access to high quality staff and services. Mothers, fathers and carers can:

- get help when they need it
- get help from professionals quickly
- receive clear information about how to get help
- work with trained staff
- be given the same help as everyone else
- have one main point of contact.

Parents can expect respect and:

- be treated as an expert on their child
- have their responsibilities as a parent acknowledged
- be treated as an individual





- be treated with respect at all times
- for help and information to be available to extended family members.

In addition, mothers, fathers and carers should have:

- both structured and informal opportunities, with good information provided, to become involved in and contribute to discussions and planning about their child's learning and development
- skills, knowledge, experience and cultural diversity are recognised, valued and encouraged with appropriate support in promoting their own children's learning and development.

## Levels of parental involvement

The National Parent-Teacher Association suggests there are 6 levels of parent involvement, ranging from the simplest level of comfort with the school to the most complex level of parents as co-decision makers. The latter, in its fullest development, is a formulated approach to school reform.

Examples of possible activities in each of the following six levels will be outlined:

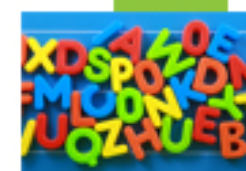
1. Preconditions for parent involvement, including:
  - a. Teacher attitudes and beliefs.
  - b. The school as a welcoming place for parents.
2. Communication between school and parents.
3. Partnership in pupil learning.
4. Parent volunteers.
5. The school as a resource for parents.
6. Parent decision makers.

Links to the Kent Children and Young Peoples Plan, Priority 3:

- To improve parenting by implementing Every Child Matters and developing more effective multi-agency support and early intervention for families experiencing problems.

Links to the Parenting Strategy:

- Offer a range of opportunities in each district for mothers, fathers and carers to be consulted and influence the way that local services and agencies work.



## Barriers to parental involvement in children's learning

This toolkit acknowledges there are factors that may act as barriers by discouraging or inhibiting parents' involvement in their children's education or contact with the school.

For example:

- Parents with negative experience of their own school education/learning.
- Mobile families.
- Absent parent.
- Parents whose child is looked after by Kent County Council.
- Fathers who are not primary carers.
- Parents whose first language is not English.
- Parents who have difficulties with written communication.
- Parents experiencing challenging family circumstances.
- Parents for whom domestic or care arrangements may make it difficult to come into the school/setting.

### Links to Parenting Strategy:

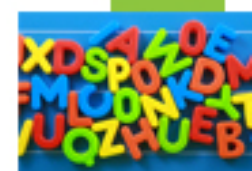
- Based on what parents have told us, do more to involve and support fathers and males carers, whether they live in the family home or not.

### Links to father inclusive parenting services, commissioning, planning and delivery, core features

All children's services should:

- respond to individual fathers' complex and challenging needs
- involve a mixture of universal and male-targeted services to meet fathers' different needs, circumstances and preferences
- be developed with different types of fathers in mind in order to engage effectively with fathers' diversity
- aim to promote positive parenting by men
- be positive and non stigmatising
- have an active partnership with local fathers - this means involving fathers throughout in the design and delivery of your service.

All agencies should ensure that the settings in which they deliver services do not alienate fathers.



### Some of the barriers to parental involvement

Time: parents are busy people, parents might be:

- working either full time or part time
- bringing up young children on their own
- caring for elderly parents
- caring for a disabled family member or be disabled themselves
- have more than one child attending different schools.

Family circumstances: families come in all shapes and sizes and have different needs. Parents may find it particularly difficult to attend meetings if they:

- have a child who is disabled
- have a baby or other caring responsibilities
- work shifts or work away from home
- have a complex family structure with parents who are separated
- might have new partners.

### Geography

The area parents live in can be a significant factor in how parents are able to be involved with school based activities. This includes:

- parents and pupils may have to travel some distance to the school and may have difficulty with transport or have to walk through unsafe areas
- where children are being educated some distance from their home and live in a hostel
- Cultural differences and experiences among BME groups.

### Lack of confidence

Parents may feel uncomfortable in school surroundings for a number of reasons:

- It may bring back unpleasant memories of their own school days.
- Some may feel that their own lack of knowledge or skills puts them at a disadvantage.
- Some parents may have difficulty themselves with reading or writing.
- Parents may feel that there is no place for them in the school or that the school is not welcoming.



- Some men may feel out of place and that they don't have a role because many activities held during the day are mainly attended by women and many of the practitioners are women.

### Unfamiliarity

Many parents feel that membership of a formal parent body is 'not for them'. They may perceive them to be 'closed', 'cliquey', 'elitist' or 'formal', or not see themselves as the right kind of person to be involved. These perceptions can be a real barrier to parents putting themselves forward.

### Barriers for teachers/practitioners

- Lack of funding and capacity.
- Lack of teacher/practitioner confidence and skills to work effectively with parents.
- Services not tailored to parents need, level of knowledge or circumstances.
- A lack of knowledge about the importance of parental involvement.
- Location of schools/settings, unwelcoming venues and poor access e.g. inadequate transport, lack of childcare facilities and inflexible timings of services.
- Staff teams that don't reflect the community they are trying to reach, for example low numbers of male role models in the workforce is a barrier to engaging fathers.
- Negative attitudes towards parents and poor communication on the part of the teachers/practitioners, such as behaving like the expert when talking to parents.

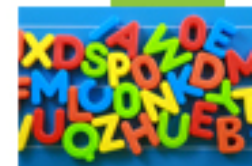
### Key Messages

- Allow enough time for focussed and persistent outreach to ensure that the vulnerable families in targeted areas of need are included.
- Take the service to the parent where necessary - support in the home is particularly helpful in reaching vulnerable parents.
- Provide services in responsive and flexible ways and at flexible times.
- Tailor activities to make them appealing to parents who make less use of early years and school provision: for instance fathers.
- Respond to the support needs of individual parents - other issues such as financial worries or depression may need to be addressed before or at the same time as helping parents to support their children as learners.
- Use the expertise of voluntary organisations that have links with the local community.

*(Family and Parenting Institute 2009)*

For further information, visit: [www.earlyhomelearning.org.uk/resources](http://www.earlyhomelearning.org.uk/resources)





# Ofsted

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## What does Ofsted say?

*“The positive involvement of parents has been commented upon in Ofsted reports, where the contribution of parents to their children’s education is consistently rated highly and much higher than in most other schools.”*

Under the Ofsted Framework for the Inspection of Schools inspectors assess the contribution that parents and other partners make to a school and the pupils’ learning. They consider whether the investment in partnerships is valuable, in the context of the school’s priorities.

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families has asked Ofsted to inspect and report on the effectiveness of each children’s centre in England. Parliament has passed a new act - the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. Inspections of children’s centres will begin in the summer term 2010.

The evaluation schedule sets out the judgments that inspectors will make and report on for children’s centres from April 2010:

Inspectors should also consider other evidence such as:

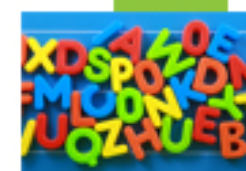
- the impact of opportunities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together
- the extent to which parents improve their skills and confidence to enable them to access further learning and help with their children’s learning.

Ofsted’s improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning document highlights:

The views of staff, parents, school improvement partners and agencies with which schools work can be usefully incorporated into SSE. Schools need to canvass their stakeholders selectively, canvassing different groups for specific purpose.

## Self Evaluation Framework

**Section 2: views of learners, their parents or carers, and other stakeholders** should relate back to the first section and forward to the others. For example, a school with a challenging local area might show how it seeks out the views of parents who are hard to reach, or a school where staff have identified a need to strengthen the curriculum for physical education might wish to show in later sections how its curriculum and/or its after school activities are responding to the needs and views of its pupils. Alternatively, where the children want an increase in after-school team games,



but the staff and governors decide that this is not viable; they will want to state in another section why the pupils' suggestions are not being followed up.

## Case study

The following case study shows how a big inner city primary school consults and works with its parents to develop additional support/extended provision.

### Context

The school has a large minority ethnic pupil population. It has developed a strong local reputation for helping children and their families to cope with difficult social circumstances and in many cases high levels of poverty. The school and local authority bid for funding to set up a Sure Start Children's Centre to operate on the school's site, in order to extend its support to younger families in the community. The bid was successful.

Senior staff identify that the school could be doing more to help parents to support their children's learning but want to find out what *parents* think they need.

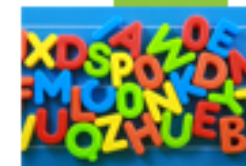
The deputy headteacher says:

*"It's not up to us to patronise our parents by telling them what help they need. They have their own ideas about what the school should do for them and they put their children's needs first. We have established a weekly 'pop-in' half-hour session where parents who are available can come and talk to us about how they feel their children are getting on and what help they feel we might arrange for them. Once a month we arrange the session in the evening just before the Sure Start Centre closes at 6.00pm so that parents who are not free during the day can come and talk to us."*

The school now regularly consults its parents, pupils and other key partners to find out whether it is providing the right levels of support for families and pupils. For example, it asks parents whether they need help to support their children's learning in literacy or parenting classes for the management of behaviour. As the school is already involved in local networks of schools through its Education Action Zone and Excellence Cluster Group it is able to bring in further expertise to support its families.

### Outcomes

The school is judged by the local authority and Ofsted inspectors to have developed outstanding procedures for helping parents to be better equipped to support their children, and for working jointly with parents to monitor pupils' personal development and academic performance. This, together with the school's strong links with outside agencies, ensures that pupils' well-being and academic learning are supported very effectively.



In addition, new links between the Sure Start Centre, schools and local secondary specialist sports colleges have extended opportunities in physical education and sport; the impact of this is being monitored.

### Impact on pupils

Standards have risen significantly in English, mathematics and science in Key Stages 1 and 2.

## Charter

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### Local education authorities should:

1. encourage all schools to plan more ways of involving parents
2. seek out examples of good practice in their schools, share information between schools and encourage them to emulate good practice.

### Early Years, Children's Centres and Schools should:

1. ensure that staff build positive relationships with parents by being visible and approachable in the school and the playground, particularly at the start and end of the school day
2. involve parents in initiatives to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour by making expectations and rules very clear, rewarding pupils who improve and including parents in celebrations of success
3. use parents as volunteers during the day and in after-school hours learning where appropriate
4. involve extended family members as volunteers, including grandparents who often have skills to share and time to spare
5. provide more information for parents, for example by making newsletters more attractive and accessible, by using simple and multilingual text, websites, email and text messaging, and including information about and written by pupils
6. provide parents with a full range of information that includes appropriate details about induction or when there are staff changes or absences
7. monitor and promote gender and ethnic balance on governing bodies and encourage fathers to become more involved
8. be imaginative and innovative in planning how they could involve parents more effectively, particularly parents who may need help to develop parenting skills.



# Appendix 1

## Steps to a parent council

The following is a quick guide to the processes involved in setting up a parent council.

**Step 1:** All parents should be informed by the school that there will be a school meeting to set up a **working group** which will be responsible for designing a **draft constitution** for the new parent council.

**Step 2:** Once the working party has been established, it will have to **draw up a draft constitution** which it will then put back to the parents at the school for approval.

The following should be discussed:

- Name
- Aims/purposes
- Membership and selection
- Other members
- Office bearers
- Meetings
- Annual general meeting
- Finances
- Changing the constitution
- Dissolving the parent council
- Code of conduct for members

**Step 3:** Once the working party has agreed on a constitution, then it has to **report this back to the parents for them to approve.**

**Step 4:** Finally, the constitution has to be reported back to the local authority who will send it to Parents for its approval, if this has not already been done.

School parent council sample terms of reference

Name:





This is the constitution for Anytown School Parent Council (or alternative name).

## The objectives of the parent council are:

- to work in partnership with the school to create a welcoming school which is inclusive for all parents
- to promote partnership between the school, its pupils and all its parents
- to develop and engage in activities which support the education and welfare of the pupils
- to identify and represent the views of parents on the education provided by the school and other matters affecting the education and welfare of the pupils.

## Membership:

- The definition of 'parent' is very wide and includes everyone who has a caring role for a child as well as absentee parents.
- The membership will be a minimum of three parents of children attending the school. The maximum size is *[insert a figure according to size of school and as agreed by members of the parent council]*.
- The parent council will be selected for a period of *[insert 1/2/3 year(s)]*, after which they may put themselves forward for reselection if they wish. All the parents of children at the school can take part in the selection by post, text or email.
- Parents will have *[insert figure agreed by Parent Council]* weeks to select their representatives.

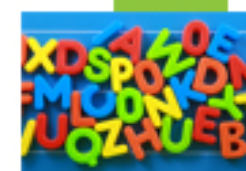
## Or

- Any parents of a child at the school can volunteer to be a member of the parent council. In the event that the number of volunteers exceeds the number of places set out in the constitution, members will be selected by *[insert chosen method of selection]*. Anyone not selected to be a member of the parent council may be offered the opportunity to be part of any sub-groups set up by the council.

## Or

- The parent council will be made up of two representatives from each year group who will be chosen by the parents of children in those year groups.
- The parent council may co-opt up to *[insert figure as agreed by members of the parent council\*]* to assist it with carrying out its functions.

\*Add in respect of a denominational school, "of which at least one must be a member of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school is conducted."



Or

- Two-thirds of the parent council will be made up of parent council members and one-third of the membership will be reserved for other co-opted members including teaching and support staff in the school.
- The number of parent members on the parent council must always be greater than co-opted members.
- Co-opted members will be invited to serve for a period of *[insert one/two/three year(s)]*, after which time the parent council will review and consider requirements for co-opted membership.

## Officers

- The chair, secretary and treasurer of the council will be agreed by the parent council members immediately following its formation.
- Office bearers will be re-selected by the parent council on an annual basis (at the annual meeting of the parent council).

Or

- If the parent forum decides to have a chair:
- The parent council will be chaired by a parent of a child attending *Anytown School*. If the child ceases to be a pupil, a new chair will be agreed at the next meeting.

Or

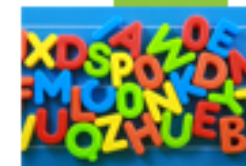
- If the child ceases to be a pupil, the role of the chair will be rotated around the parent members of the parent council until a new chair is appointed at the annual meeting.

## Meetings

- The parent council is accountable to the *Anytown School* and will make a report to it at least once each year on its activities on behalf of all the parents.
- If [x] number [or %] of members of the parent forum request a special general meeting to discuss issues falling within the council's remit, the parent council shall arrange this. The parent council shall give all members of the council at least *[2 weeks']* notice of the meeting and, at the same time, circulate notice of the matter, or matters, to be discussed at the meeting.
- The parent council will meet at least once in every school term.

Or

- The parent council will meet a minimum of eight times a year, including the annual general meeting.



- The quorum will be one quarter of the membership, providing that the number of co-opted members in the quorum does not exceed the number of members of the parent council.
- Should a vote be necessary to make a decision, each parent member at the meeting will have one vote, with the chair having a casting vote in the event of a tie.
- Any two members of the parent council can request that an additional meeting be held, and all members of the parent council will be given at least one week's notice of date, time and place of the meeting.
- Copies of the minutes of all meetings will be available to all parents of children at *Anytown School* and to all teachers at the school. Copies will be available from the secretary of the parent council/clerk to the parent council and from the school office. Minutes will be displayed in school and will be posted on the school website.
- Where possible, the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting should be distributed to all parent council members one week in advance of the next meeting.
- Meetings of the parent council shall be open to the public, unless the parent council is discussing an issue which it considers should be dealt with on a confidential basis. In such circumstances, only members of the parent council and the headteacher, or his or her representative, can attend.
- The headteacher, or his/her representative, has both a right and a duty to attend council meetings.
- If a parent council member acts in a way that is considered by other members to undermine the objectives of the parent council, their membership of the parent council shall be terminated if the majority of parent members agree. Termination of membership would be confirmed in writing to the member.

## Annual general meeting

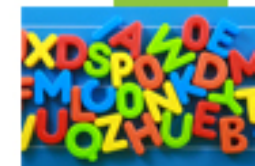
- The annual meeting will be held in April of each year. A notice of the meeting including date, time, and place will be sent to all members of the parent council at least 2 weeks in advance.

### The meeting will include:

- a report on the work of the parent council and its committee(s)
- selection of the new parent council
- discussion of issues that members of the parent council may wish to raise
- approval of the accounts and appointment of the auditor.

## Finances

- The treasurer will open a bank or building society account in the name of the parent council for all parent council funds. Withdrawals will require the signature of the treasurer and one other parent council member.



- The treasurer will keep an accurate record of all income and expenditure, and will provide a summary of this for each parent council meeting and a full account for the annual meeting.
- The parent council accounts will be audited by the auditor appointed at the previous annual meeting.
- The parent council may raise funds by any legal means, other than borrowing, and may spend these sums to carry out its functions at its discretion and in line with appropriate legislation.
- The parent council may receive gifts.
- The parent council shall be responsible for ensuring that all monies are used in accordance with the objectives of the parent council.

### Changing the constitution

- The parent council may change its constitution after obtaining consent from members of the parent council. Members of the parent council will be sent a copy of any proposed amendment and given reasonable time to respond to the proposal.

### Dissolving the parent council

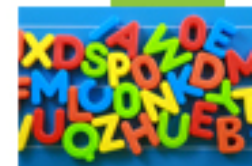
- Should the parent council cease to exist, any remaining funds will be passed to the education authority to be used for the benefit of the school (or schools), where this continues.

### Code of conduct

In order to become a member of the parent council, I will agree to:

- Uphold the constitution of *Anytown School* parent council
- Work in the interest of the parent council at all times
- Respect the views of others, allowing for a variety of opinion
- Direct all discussion through the parent council chair
- Work towards the agreed agenda and timings for meetings
- Resolve any disagreement as a member of the parent council not as an individual - this shall be done through discussion and voting.
- Ensure that my behaviour shall be appropriate to the meeting at all times.





## Appendix 2

### Research into the difference parental involvement makes to children's learning

A research report '*The Impact of Parental Involvement in Children's Education*' research report (DfES, 2008) concluded that:

- In the early years, parental involvement has a significant impact on children's cognitive development and literacy and number skills.
- Parental involvement in a child's schooling for a child between the ages of 7 and 16 is a more powerful force than family background, size of family and level of parental education.
- Parental involvement has a significant effect on pupil achievement throughout the years of schooling.
- Educational failure is increased by lack of parental interest in schooling.
- In particular, a father's interest in a child's schooling is strongly linked to educational outcomes for the child.
- Most parents believe that the responsibility for their child's education is shared between parents and the school.
- Many parents want to be involved in their children's education. In a recent study in England 72% of parents said that they wanted more involvement.

For information and to download a copy of '*The Impact of Parental Involvement in Children's Education*' visit:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-00924-2008.pdf>

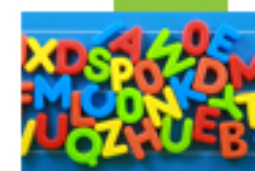
### What are the benefits of parents getting involved?

Research studies have indicated that: <sup>24</sup>

*"When parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child's education, research has shown that performance in schools where children are failing improves dramatically."*

The benefits for the children are:

- it is easier for children to learn when they are encouraged at home
- they will do better and achieve more when their parents are involved
- children get access to more activities in and out of school when there are more adults to help
- their concerns can be sorted out quicker when their parents have a positive relationship with school/setting staff
- they are happy when their parents are enjoying events in the school.



#### The benefits of involvement for parents are:

- their children do better when they are involved
- they are better able to help and encourage their children
- they have more information about their children's education/learning
- they can build their own confidence and skills
- where there is a positive relationship between parents and their child's school/setting there are benefits all round
- they get reassurance that their children are receiving a good education.

#### The benefits for the school are:

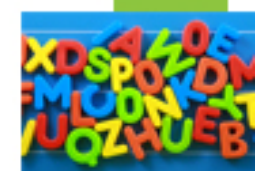
- parents bring skills which complement teachers' skills and expertise
- parents contribute their time, so together parents and teachers are able to do more activities with pupils than teachers can do on their own
- pupils' attainment and behaviour improve
- parents have ideas about how the school/setting can best support their children
- teachers have people with whom they can talk over ideas and get help when developing plans for the school
- parents can give advice and help around reaching other parents.

#### The benefits for the education authority are:

- the education authority gets information on how its policies and education provision are working in practice
- the education authority is able to discuss plans and ideas for education developments with a wide range of parents
- parents who are involved in other representative groups help make sure the education policies link well with the other policies and provision for people living in that area.

## Evidence for supporting parental involvement in children's learning

- Parents who take on a supportive role in their children's learning make a difference in improving achievement and behaviour. Their support can play a vital role at all stages of education.
- Children of parents who take an active interest in their schooling, progress 15% more in maths and reading between 11 and 16 years than other children.
- Gains in pupil achievement that stems from parental involvement tend to be permanent.
- In schools with matched intakes, those that do best have (among other things) strong links with parents and families. The reverse is also true.
- Family influences have a much more powerful effect upon children's attitudes and achievements than school or neighbourhood factors - even when these are added together.
- Much of the variation in achievement of 14 year olds in English, maths and science is related to home factors.

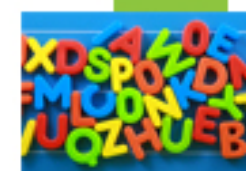


- When similar schools are compared, those with strong home-school links have consistently fewer problems related to pupil work and behaviour.
- Between the ages of 5 and 16, children spend only a small proportion (15%) of their lives in school.
- Research shows parental involvement in a child's schooling is a more powerful force than social class/racial background or level of parental education.
- Improving educational outcomes for one generation is a key factor in helping to break the cycle of deprivation.
- Parental involvement contributes to no less than 10% of variation in achievement.
- The involvement of parents in secondary education has an effect on continued development.
- Very high parental interest is associated with better exam results than for children whose parents show no interest.
- Literacy demonstration programmes and family numeracy programmes (lasting 12 weeks, run by the Basic Skills Agency for children aged 3-6 years and their parents (mostly mothers)) showed improvements in children's literacy and numeracy, parents' literacy and numeracy and parents' ability to help their children.
- The proportion whose low reading level would leave them struggling in school fell from 67% to 35%.
- The proportion whose even lower reading level would leave them severely disadvantaged for learning fell from 24% to 9%.
- Progress in number and mathematical language was statistically significant.
- Exhibit more positive attitudes as well as decreased alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behaviour.
- Parental involvement early in the educational process results in more powerful effects.<sup>25</sup>
- Benefits are not confined to the early years; there are significant gains at all ages and grade levels.
- When parents collaborate with the teacher, educators hold higher expectations of pupils and higher opinions of the parents; children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better because parents and professionals are bridging the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
- When parents are involved in full partnerships (i.e. decision making), pupil achievement for disadvantaged children not only improves, it can reach levels that are standard for middle-class children; the children who are farthest behind make the greatest gains.

## What happens when parents aren't involved?

Research evidence clearly states that children's progress can be hindered by lack of parental involvement. In a study designed to test whether the educational performance of children was influenced by parents, the research found that children were disadvantaged not by social class, but rather by lack of parents' interest<sup>12</sup>. The study found that children whose parents showed a high level of interest (regardless of social class), had higher test scores at age 8 and 11. The scores of those children whose parents showed little interest deteriorate, the children with interested parents pull ahead of the rest whatever their initial starting point.

In another study, childhood experience and parental factors were linked to a wide range of outcomes in adulthood<sup>12</sup>. Where there was no report of parental interest there was a high rate of not obtaining qualifications after 16.



Educational failure is increased by lack of parental interest in schooling. Father's lack of interest in schooling is a particularly powerful and progressive predictor of lack of qualifications.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) commissioned research with parents in 2001 in order to identify whether parents were involved, to what level and discover the perceived barriers to involvement <sup>13</sup>. This research found that:

- Approximately 1 in 3 parents (29%) feel very involved in their child's school life. Primary school parents were more likely to feel this way than secondary school parents. Mothers were more likely to say that they were 'very involved' than fathers.
- 72% of all parents agreed that they wanted more involvement.
- 58% of parents believed they had an equal responsibility with the school for their child's education.
- When asked about barriers to becoming involved, parents cited the competing demands in their lives such as work commitments, demands of other children, childcare difficulties and lack of time generally.
- Parents' difficulties with basic skills are also a barrier to being involved in their children's education.

Research conducted by the Basic Skills Agency <sup>13</sup> found that:

- 34% said they had difficulties reading from a children's book.
- 18% said they found it difficult to understand and recognise numbers.

In addition, it is well documented that parents who themselves didn't enjoy school, or had a bad experience at school, may have difficulties communicating with teachers, which may affect their level of involvement.

## How the age of a child impacts on parental involvement

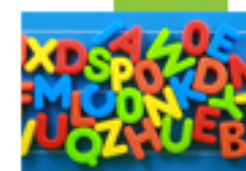
### Early Years Education

*"The quality of the relationship between a parent and a child during the first three years is fundamental to children's later success in school and their longer term development and wellbeing"*  
(Family and Parenting Institute 2009)

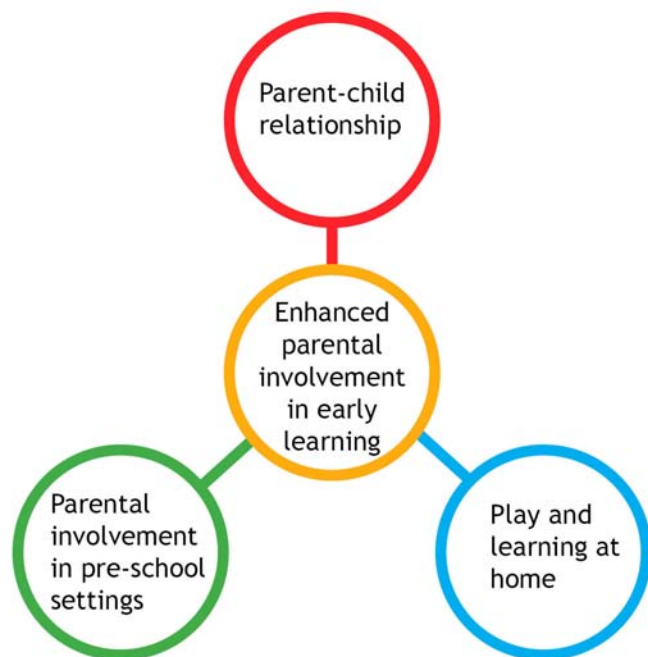
The important role played by parents is recognised in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which explicitly includes work with parents as partners in their children's learning and services to support early learning at home (Family and Parenting Institute 2009).

Research also indicates that Children's Centre Workers and health visitors have a key role to play in promoting parental involvement at all points on the continuum, but particularly hard to reach groups. (Schneider, Avis and Leighton 2007)





## The three elements of services to support early home learning (Reynolds, 2009)



Parental involvement in early intervention programmes has been found to equate with better outcomes for the child. Most effective interventions involve parents in (pre-school) children's cognitive development. Play and fun and scope for physical activity seem to produce most effective outcomes. Parents' self esteem is very important in determining long term outcomes for both themselves and their children. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project, is a large scale longitudinal study which monitors 2,800 children's progress across the range of preschool provision to entry to reception class. After controlling for the impact of parents' occupations and education, aspects of the home learning environment were found to have a significant impact on children's cognitive development both at age 3 years plus and again at school entry. The frequency with which the child plays with letters/numbers at home was linked with attainment in all measures. Parents drawing children's attention to sounds and letters was linked to literacy skills, early number skills and non-verbal attainment.

Involvement at this age seems characterised by fun and creativity, with parents helping children explore the world around them. Play is the way children learn new skills and make sense of the world and has been identified as having a marked impact in children's learning (Sylva et al 2004). Parents get involved in a variety of ways, including reading stories, doing arts & crafts activities, helping children to count, taking and accompanying children to extra-curricular activities (e.g. sports, music, drama), as well as taking them to and from setting/school and attending parent-teacher evenings when they can. At this stage in their child's development parents appear to have higher confidence. In general they find supporting

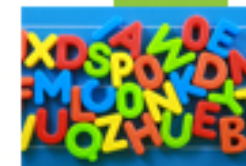
learning is a pleasurable experience, as learning is fun, often through play and games. However, some parents may be uncertain about how much help they should offer, they want to feel included, informed and involved in their child's learning/development. 14

## How Can Early Years Settings involve Parents?

- 'Getting' parents (enabling them to use the service in the first place).
- 'Keeping' parents (enabling them to attend sessions regularly or complete a course).
- 'Engaging' parents (making it possible for them to engage actively in what the service has to offer).

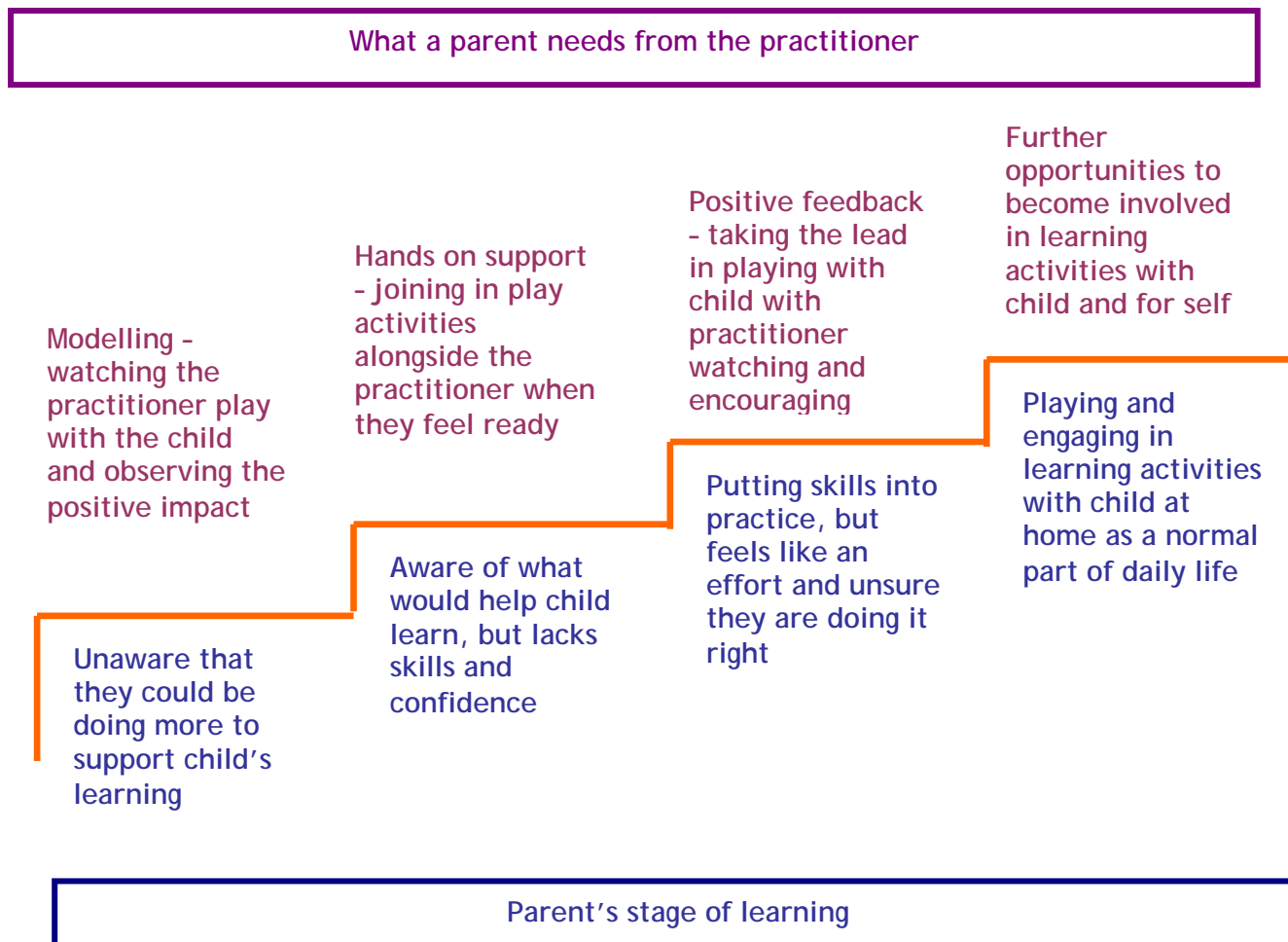
Moran et al 2004

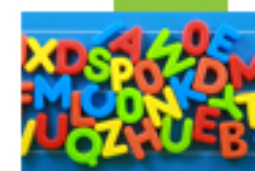




The learning stair: is an example of how a setting can help parents gain confidence in supporting their children's early learning.

Family and Parenting Institute 2009





## The role of the children's centre:

Children's centres play a key role in improving outcomes for all young children and reducing inequalities in outcomes for the most disadvantaged children. Children's centres are aimed at parents and carers with children under 5. They work closely with other initiatives such as Extended Schools to ensure that families have easy access to age appropriate services throughout childhood.

Children's centres provide a range of services depending on local need and parental choice. They aim to offer:

- information, advice and support to fathers, mothers and carers
- integrated childcare and early learning
- health services
- family support
- parental outreach
- employment advice.

The idea of children's centre is to focus on the local needs of the local area and particularly, to provide for children most in need. Resources will be targeted where there is most deprivation. Members of the local community are strongly encouraged to play an active role in the development and delivery of services in children's centres.

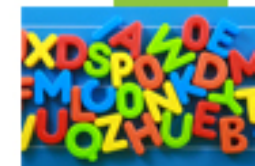
The role of Qualified Teacher Support (QTS) in children's centres was developed particularly as a result of the learning from the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education project:

*"Pre-school can be an effective intervention for the reduction of special educational needs (SEN), especially for the most disadvantage and vulnerable children. It was found that integrated centres (these are centres that fully combine education with care) and nursery schools tend to promote better intellectual outcomes for children. Having qualified trained teachers working with children in pre-school settings (for a substantial proportion of time, and most importantly as the pedagogical leader) had the greatest impact on quality, and was linked specifically with better outcomes in pre-reading and social development".*

*The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period.*

## Implications for children's centres

- Children's centre workers and other professionals have a key role to play in promoting parental involvement, particularly in engaging hard to reach groups, outreach is fundamental to engaging all members of the community.



- If the children's centre programme is committed to parental representation on boards, funding and strategic support for training and for dedicated parental involvement workers must be prioritised.
- Consultation with parents should be extended and alternate less formal models of consultation should be explored (*Schneider, Avis and Leighton 2007*).

## School age children

A study conducted in 1999<sup>10</sup> found that parental involvement has significant effects on achievement into adolescence. The study used analysis of data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) to explore the effect of parental involvement on attainment at age 16. It examined the impact of certain inputs on achievement (parental involvement, peer group influences, schooling inputs). Using attainment in reading and maths the research discovered that:

- parental involvement in a child's schooling was a more powerful force than other family background indicators such as class, family size and level of parental education and contributes to no less 10% of variation in achievement
- the involvement of parents in secondary education has an effect on continued development
- very high parental interest is associated with better exam results than for children whose parents show no interest, children with very interested parents progressed 15-17% more in mathematics and reading between ages 11-16.

Parents at this stage are involved in the day to day logistics such as getting their children ready in the mornings, transporting them to and from their extra-curricular activities. Parents also refer to talking to their children about their day and supervising homework. They are not likely to help children to complete their homework but rather see their role as making sure it is done. If there are problems with homework, some may seek advice from teaching staff, but many may tell their children to leave it and/or ask a teacher in the morning rather than being stressed. Most parents attend the parent-teacher evenings. However many parents express frustration in their lack of familiarity with school's teaching methods (e.g. maths and reading). This feeling can confuse and may alienate parents from offering further support. Parents in this sample begin to worry that children are being pressured to get good grades, which often goes against their values for their children's overall development and well-being. Added to this, some parents are beginning to feel redundant at this stage of their children's education, as they are unable to draw on their own knowledge.

By secondary school age parents can feel redundant, at worst they can feel stupid and unhelpful. They may not regard themselves as clever and they do not want to look foolish in front of their children or have arguments, as this increases stress in the household. Many parents are also unsure about how much help to give their children. Some believe that school work is not their problem and it is the role of the school to manage their difficulties. They tend to provide financial support (books, a computer and funding for school trips) and emotional support, which seems more passive than active, i.e. 'just being there' to listen and offer an opinion and stepping in when absolutely necessary. Parents also attend parents' evenings and other important meetings (options, transitions).<sup>15</sup>



## Hard to engage parents

The DCSF has published a qualitative research report 22, to understand how to best encourage those parents who seem less likely to engage with their children's learning and development. The DCSF had previously carried out attitudinal segmentation work, to help to understand which groups of parents are less likely to engage. For research purposes, these parents were identified as:

- Struggling Through
- Stepping Back
- Separate Lives

The research sample also included grandparents who support with childcare and non resident fathers.

The research project focused on 3 different areas:

- parental support for learning
- complaints systems in schools
- childcare.

The objective for focusing on parent support for learning was:

- to uncover motivations and barriers, particularly attitudinal, towards parents' involvement in their children's learning, including exploring the role of different support mechanisms
- to identify tangible ways on how to overcome obstacles to involvement and parental confidence.

The research found many parents describe their own experiences of school in very negative terms and some resistance to having their children undergo similar discomfort and stress. Some parents admit to being actively involved in their own children's learning and development on some level. Most parents feel unable to support their children's learning beyond practical terms such as buying them a computer, getting them ready in the mornings for school, making sure they get to the bus stop on time; especially as their academic capabilities are pushed to the limit once children reach secondary school. Each of the segments rationalises and compensates for any inadequacies in different ways. Grandparents do not feel that it is their role to help with formal learning, but want to support their grandchildren generally with life issues.

## Perception of role in children's learning

Parents involved in the research believe their role is to encourage a 'rounded' education. They want their children to enjoy school as both a social and learning, experience. They prioritise their children's emotional wellbeing, safety and creative play over pure study. They perceive that their responsibility is to teach children about life skills, which they see as fundamental to their success. Subsequently, they resist placing children under





too much pressure to succeed academically, they are opposed to excessive homework, testing and streaming policies. They feel proud of this attitude, their role and want to pass on these values to their children.

Their perceptions are largely borne out of their own experiences at school and the values instilled in them by their parents. Many also base their opinions on knowledge and experience of peers who may have better qualifications but are 'worse off' financially and personally. Undoubtedly, parents in this sample feel they **do** support their children's learning in a number of ways. They recognise that the nature of this support changes as children move through school, with much less academic support being offered in the latter years when it's more about giving emotional support. There is some evidence to suggest that by secondary years, parents feel the responsibility lies with schools to support learning.

The DCSF report made the following recommendations:

**Struggling through** parents need to be **reassured** they are doing the right thing for their children, as they easily feel they are letting them down particularly as they have little spare time. Therefore information requires an affirming and empowering tone, so parents feel able to join in with policy rather than excluded from it.

**Stepping back** parents need to feel **supported** in helping their children learn and develop, so that they feel they have made the appropriate decisions around their care and education and equipped their children with skills to be independent. These parents are open to learning and development themselves, but feel sensitive about the environment in which this is offered.

**Separate lives** appear the most confident of parents in this sample. They need to feel **informed** about their children's care and education but do not feel the need to be hands on. Any communication about their children and input required from them needs to feel effortless to encourage these parents to take part.

### Parental support for learning

- Parents need a flexible approach for contacting schools, for example: outside working hours or face to face with teachers.
- Parents would also like simple, one page handouts or a link through the school's website where they can receive clear, concise and up-to-date information on their child's progress and attendance.
- Emails and text messaging could work well as long as they are not overly intrusive. Communication from schools needs to have a welcoming, affirming and open tone of voice as these parents can feel sensitive and judged by more formal, authoritarian tones.
- Parents would like an opportunity to gain insight into current teaching methods (at primary level), e.g. a 'how to help your children' handout booklet or practical session could facilitate this. At secondary level they think a 'how to help your children' webpage or booklet would be useful.





- Parents would like an easy to read handout/website that they can access whenever they want; a regularly updated 'parent page' of the school website that displays current topics of focus and a school calendar and homework diaries to keep them up to speed.
- To engage dads and non-resident parents, a school-linked website that is easy to navigate and specific to their children would be appreciated. Whilst acknowledging the logistical difficulties, non-resident parents would like to be sent the same information as resident parents e.g. emails, letters, texts, so as to be kept informed of their child's education.

## Further research

### School-parent partnerships

Subtitled 'Emerging Strategies to Promote Innovation in Schools', this report by Anne Page with Shekhar Das, Wilma Mangabeira and Lara Natale published in March 2009 by the Family and Parenting Institute sells at £15.00.

*"Parents make a vital contribution to their children's education, and strong partnerships between schools and parents can enhance children's learning. This innovative report presents the views of primary and secondary school staff, parents and children. The report points the way forward and suggests key triggers for schools, including strong leadership and a culture of consultation with parents, children and school staff."*

Go to the web page: <http://www.familyandparenting.org/item/publication/59/1>

### Parents: Involved in Schooling and Engaged in Learning

More recent research is telling us that deeper forms of parent engagement with schooling are also needed to further enhance student achievement and outcomes, close achievement gaps and build social capital and social inclusion.

Read more at <http://www.familyschool.org.au/?p=760>

Morgan, A., Nutbrown, C. & Hannon, P. (2009). Fathers' involvement in young children's literacy development: Implications for family literacy programmes. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(2), 167-186.

This article reports fathers' involvement in a family literacy programme and their home literacy practices with their young children. The article provides a definition of family literacy and describes the context of the study, which was carried out in socio-economically disadvantaged communities in a northern English city. The data indicated that, while fathers' participation in the family literacy programme was not easily visible, almost all fathers were involved to some extent in home literacy events with their children. Data indicated that fathers who were not mentioned by mothers as having been involved in their children's literacy were significantly more likely to be on a low income than those who were reported as being engaged with their children in home literacy activities. Fathers in the study were involved in providing literacy opportunities, showing recognition of their children's achievements, interacting with their children around literacy and being a model of a literacy user. Although involved in all four of these key roles, fathers tended to be less involved in providing literacy opportunities than mothers. While fathers and sons engaged in what might be described as traditionally 'masculine' literacy activities, fathers were more often reported to be involved with their children in less

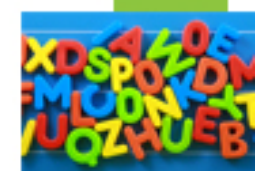


obviously gendered home literacy activities. The article concludes with discussion of the implications for involving fathers in future family literacy programmes.

To view an abstract of the article or to purchase the article in full visit:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content-db=all-content=a795346396-tab=content~order=page>

**Pre-school, School and Family Influences on Children's Development during Key Stage 2 (Age 7-11): Final Report from the Primary Phase**  
Bronfenbrenner (1986; 1994; 1998) has identified immediate and more distant factors that shape children's development. The child is located at the centre of a series of concentric circles, surrounded and influenced first by the family, then the community (including schools), and finally the national and cultural framework within which all families and schools are embedded. Six overarching domains of potential influence on children were identified including the home learning environment (HLE), i.e. learning opportunities in the home. The contribution of the family and the home learning environment (HLE). The early years home learning environment was found to have strong effects upon academic outcomes. For more information visit: <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk>



## Key documents

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18. Green Paper - Parental Separation: Children's needs and Parents' Responsibilities, July 2004.
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## Glossary of acronyms

CFIS	Children & Families Information Service
DFES	Department for Education and Schools
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
EPPE	Effective Provision of Preschool Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
FLO	Family Liaison Officer
LCT	Local Children's Trust
PEEP	Peers Early Education Partnership
PVI	Private Voluntary and Independent
PSA	Parent Support Adviser
NCDS	National Child Development Study
SEN	Special Educational Needs

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## Contacts

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This leaflet is available in alternative formats and can be explained in a range of languages. Please call Allison Esson, 07920 526545 for details.