



WHY FATHERS INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL MATTERS - A SUMMARY

The following summary highlights the difference father-inclusive practices makes on improving outcomes for children and what schools can do to involve dad.



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BACKGROUND

This 2020 report is a follow up to a parental engagement project started in 2016 when one dad asked his child's Head Teacher how the school had created such a father-inclusive culture.

To reduce gender inequality, Fathers Network Scotland collaborated with the University of Edinburgh to gather knowledge and father-inclusive practices from staff, dads workers, parents and children from an infant school in East Lothian. Their practices formed the basis of the **'How Father-Friendly Is Your School?'** guide which could be shared with other schools and communities to support family learning.

WHAT WE DID

Data was gathered from two of the schools who piloted the **'How Father-Friendly Is Your School?'** guide. A year after they started using the guide researchers from the University of Edinburgh interviewed:

16 - mums, dads, teachers, dad champions and staff

13 - P7 children in focus groups

55 - dads of P1 & P7 children completed a survey

Alongside this data from the long term study 'Growing Up in Scotland' was analysed. These **2824** interviews (mainly conducted with mums about their partners) helped us to understand the potential impact fathers involvement has on children's lives.

2824
Interviews
analysed



WHAT WE FOUND

INVOLVEMENT

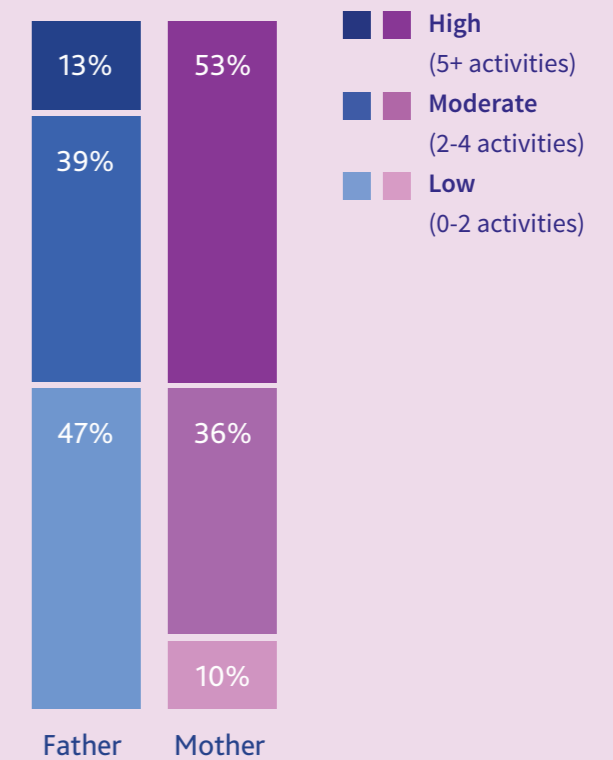
On average, dads participated in 2.7 out of 11 key school activities such as attendance at events and meetings or helping at school, while mothers participated in 5 of those activities.

Mums are involved more in schools so dads may need more support and encouragement to get involved.

When one parent is highly involved in their child's school (see figure 1), their partner also tends to be more involved in the school.

Figure 1 - Levels of involvement in school, by parent gender

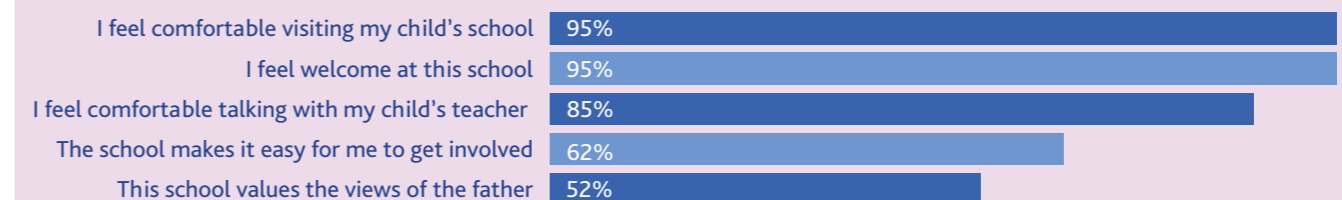
(GUS, bc1 sw7 weighted, n=2,824)



Most dads were comfortable with going into school, but they didn't always believe they were valued and that they were well communicated to (see figure 2).

Yet from the focus groups we learnt that **it is really important to children that dads get involved at school and see them doing well.**

Figure 2 - Percentage of fathers who strongly agree or agree with the following statements about their child's school (n=55)

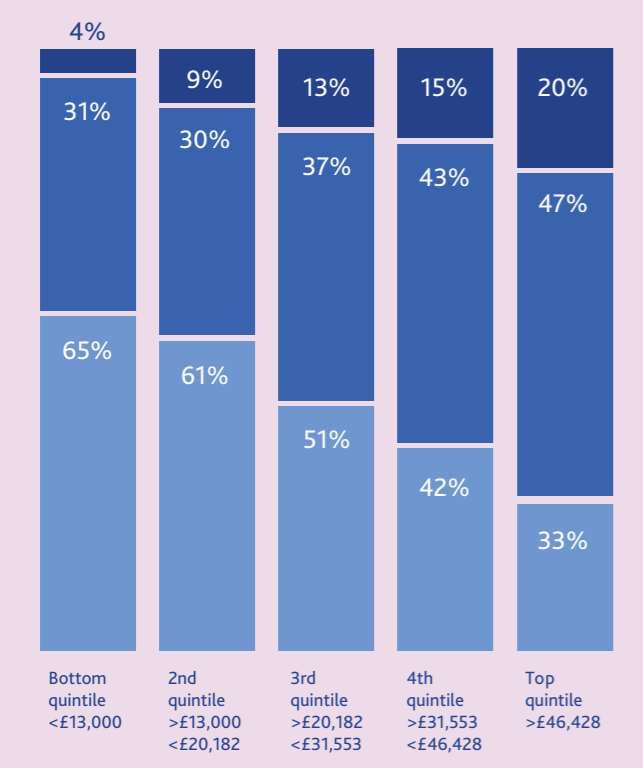


Dads often don't believe the school values their input or makes an effort to involve them. Some had complicated living arrangements which the school needed to take into account.



Dads need to know that their contribution is as important and valued as mums.

Figure 3 - Fathers' level of involvement by household's income (GUS, bc1 sw7, n=2,707)



Which parents are most and least likely to get involved?

Dads from less deprived areas and households with higher incomes tend to be more involved in their child's school (see figure 3). However, household income and deprivation alone do not predict how involved dads are in school. Parent education, job role and the level of mothers' involvement are better predictors of dads' involvement.

■ High (5 or more activities)
 ■ Moderate (2-4 activities)
 ■ Low (0-2 activities)

What impact does dads' involvement have on children?

Children are less likely to experience relationship and emotional difficulties if their mums and dads are involved at school. This positive effect of involvement in school on child's socio-emotional well-being is independent of the effect of socio-economic status. So regardless of how much parents earn and where they live, children benefit from better relationships and emotional well-being when dads and mums are involved in school.

What are the barriers to father involvement in school?

Societal factors	Individual parent and family factors	Child factors	Parent-teacher relationships and school-specific factors
Dads working long hours Mums being in charge of care for the family Access to policies at work like family-friendly working.	Dads from poorer backgrounds Dads having a poor experience of schools themselves Poor relationship with mum Proximity to school More than one family home Poor health and well-being	Child's age and gender Additional support needs Behavioural problems, gifts or talents	Non-inclusive implementation of policies and procedures Staff attitudes and language The quality and frequency of home-school communication

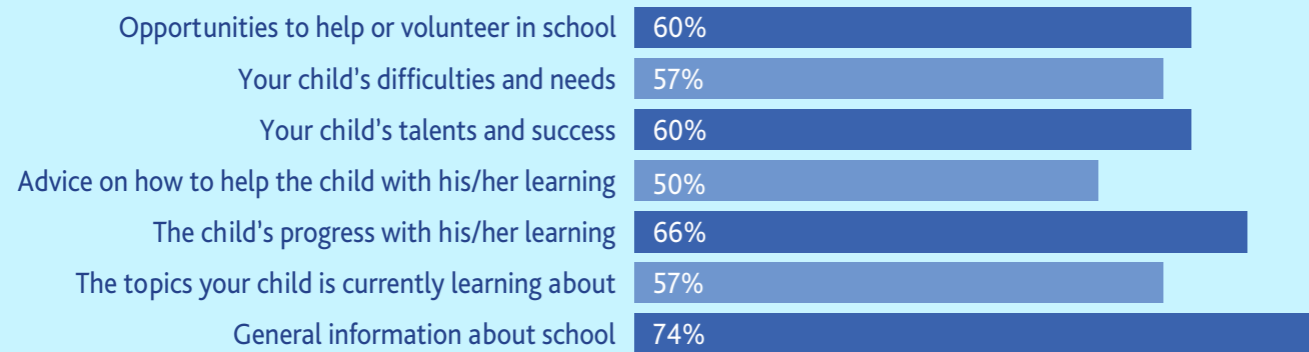
TIPS

- ✓ Ask children and mums what's the best way to get dad involved. What are his interests and talents, and what did he like at school?
- ✓ If dad works during school times, think what you could do to include him more.
- ✓ Dads need to know that they are expected to participate and contribute as much as mums.
- ✓ Have a separated families list and make a register so schools can ensure both parents attend events.
- ✓ Remember there is no such thing as a main carer because all carers are equally important.

COMMUNICATION

Dads were asked about the communication received from the schools. Figure 4 shows their response:

Figure 4 - Since the current school year started, did the school get in touch with you about the following things (n=55)



Dads and mums were concerned that they don't get clear and frequent enough communication. They said they would benefit from specific occasions to get involved in school.

Mums stated that they have the emotional burden of organising arrangements and are the decision-maker.



TIPS

- ✓ Communicate with dad directly in person or by letter addressed to dad.
- ✓ Replace the word parents with mums, dads and carers.
- ✓ Make sure both parents are signed up to everything so they can each choose to get involved.
- ✓ Tell dads that they matter as much as mums.
- ✓ Let dads know what they can do to get involved and the difference that this makes to their children.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Help fathers to understand their child's school experiences and how they can become effectively involved in their learning.
- ✓ Adopt a whole school approach led by the head teacher and allocate resources for father-friendly practice.
- ✓ Appoint a member of staff to champion these practices throughout your school.
- ✓ Set up or join a dedicated professional peer network focusing on inclusive practice (see link on back page).
- ✓ Seek external support from father inclusion specialists like Fathers Network Scotland and community organisations such as DadsWork.
- ✓ Create a welcoming environment for fathers in their child's school with positive images, activities and opportunities.
- ✓ Train staff on how to be inclusive.
- ✓ Involve children in shaping father inclusive activities.
- ✓ Use the father inclusion guide to inform school processes and procedures (see link on back page).

THANK YOU

There are many reasons why there is little research on school practices. This follow up study has been challenging to put together which make these findings even more valuable. This four year project would not have been possible without the patience and perseverance of the following individuals:

Craig Flunkert for sponsoring this work at Scottish Government; Head Teacher **Alison Cameron** who managed this while transitioning to a headship in three schools; **Kevin Young** at DadsWork who worked in the communities between the schools and families; **Gitit Kadar-Satat** who had the mission impossible task of collating data and making sense of it. Finally to all those unsung champions who continue to make this magic happen by what you do on a day to day basis.

Thank you from FNS team!

Find out more...

You can find our '**How Dad-Friendly is our School?**' guide to fathers-inclusive practice, the full report '**Why Fathers' Involvement in Primary Schools Matters**' and a host of additional content to help and- inspire you at: www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/education

Or contact us through the following channels:

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