

Review of Learning at Home

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FOREWORD

'Parents are the first and on-going educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home, in the community and at school'.

(Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006, Guidance)



This review provides the first Scottish definition of 'Learning at Home'. Our objective was to produce an easily accessible and understandable definition of learning at home and to provide clarity for practitioners and parents.

Children learn from the moment they are born - they begin to absorb information and make sense of their world. As well as providing the cornerstones for growth and development: food, comfort and security, parents also provide stimulation naturally through family life, everyday activities, games, rhymes and language that help a child to learn. Many of these activities are part of everyday life and include preparing and eating meals together, doing the washing, shopping, watching television

and visiting family and friends. For younger children all these activities are opportunities for exploring and learning.

Parents have an important role to play in helping their child's learning and development at home. However, once a child starts school, it is not always easy to know how best to help them. Thereafter, as children get older it can be easy to forget the strong influence that the home and community still have on their learning and development.

Learning at home recognises the vital role that parents, family members, peers and practitioners play in children's learning and development. This document contains a literature review, references to policy and legislation as well as links to case studies on the National Improvement Hub about how learning at home can look in practice.

Gayle Gorman
Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Scottish Government's [Programme for Scotland](#) identifies a number of priorities which include: empowering parents, teachers and children to make key decisions about the life of their school; an education system that will give children and young people the skills, support and experiences they need to fulfil their ambitions; building strong and safe communities; closing the attainment gap; raising attainment for all; and improving the life chances of children and young people in Scotland.

Why learning at home?

Children in Scotland only spend around 15 per cent of their waking hours in school. The remaining 85 per cent of their time is spent at home or in their community and this presents a significant opportunity for learning (OECD, 2014). What parents do with their children at home is more important than their socio-economic status. A stimulating learning environment outwith school can therefore be fundamental to their attainment and achievement.

Providing clarity and the first ever Scottish definition of learning at home is vital to help practitioners and parents take this forward. This review takes account of the available evidence on: developing a home learning environment; effectiveness of learning at home; supporting parents to help their children learn at home; a family learning approach; and barriers to learning at home.

Scottish definition of learning at home

'Learning at home is the learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. It can take place through everyday activities that families already do and can overlap with aspects of organised or active learning activities'.

(Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network, 2018)

Approach to the task

In producing this review, Education Scotland considered national and international research evidence and gathered case studies from practitioners across Scotland. Additionally, consultation events took place with practitioners on developing the definition of learning at home. Practitioners across Scotland engaged with and receptively supported the development of the review.

Conclusions

There are a range of key messages and recommendations for policymakers, local authorities and practitioners from this review. Research shows that learning at home can have significant immediate and longer term impacts on children in different ways. These include a child's early learning, later achievements, nurture, resilience, wellbeing, social mobility and skills for life. Furthermore, early linguistic and cognitive development in children is linked with parental investment in learning at home. However, some parents and families may require support (Kluczniok et al, 2013; Hunt et al, 2011; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011). Settings/schools may wish to consider a family learning approach to help give parents, families and children the tools from which they can continue to learn at home together. Supporting parents to help them with their child's learning at home is therefore 'a vital part of improving outcomes for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds' (Hunt et al, 2011). Given that there can be different understandings amongst practitioners and parents about what learning at home is, this review will help to provide clarity. Reminding practitioners and parents of the importance and influence that learning at home has on a child's development, is key to raising attainment and improving outcomes (Hunt et al, 2011; Kluczniok et al, 2013).

Moving Forward

‘Improvement activity is at the heart of securing better outcomes for our children’.

(National Improvement Framework, 2017, p19)

Improving outcomes for children and families remains a key focus for all. The key messages and recommendations from this review require to be taken forward by relevant stakeholders. Education Scotland, Scottish Government, local authorities, third sector organisations, practitioners, researchers and others involved in learning at home will continue to work in close partnership to progress these. Potential actions for strategic leaders, practitioners and researchers from the key recommendations in Section 5, are listed below.

Strategic

- Learning at home requires to be strengthened as outlined in the Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act (2006).
- Practitioners and parents can have different understandings about what learning at home is. Work should be undertaken in partnership to ensure clarity and a shared understanding. Cultural change is also required to move away from common assumptions that learning at home is confined to homework.

Operational

- Practitioners working with families should consider career-long professional learning in family learning approaches, adult learning approaches, engaging parents or other relevant training. Consideration should also be given to improving staff awareness of the importance of engaging with parents regarding learning at home. Staff should be confident in providing information and advice on learning at home.
- Interventions with parents and families to help them engage in the child’s learning should be multi-layered and remain as a key priority.
- Schools should develop and regularly review their learning at home policy in consultation with parents, pupils and the community.
- Practitioners should continually reinforce the message to parents and families about the importance of learning at home. An explanation of the range and variety of learning at home activities at different ages and stages should be provided to parents and families.
- Practitioners should work with relevant partner organisations to help remove barriers to learning at home.
- Parents and families should be provided with information and/or resources to help them support their child’s learning at home. They should be supported to understand the curriculum and the learning taking place in the setting/school to enable them to provide more support at home.
- Settings/schools and parents should regularly share children’s learning to encourage learning at home, support home-school partnerships and build a holistic picture of a child’s progress and achievements. These should be gathered and used to identify any gaps in a child’s learning and development as well as to celebrate their achievements.
- Parental Involvement Strategies at a regional, local or school level should include learning at home.
- Settings/schools may wish to consider a family learning approach to support children to achieve the highest standards, reduce inequity and close the attainment gap.

Research

- Further research is required on the longitudinal impact of learning at home across Scotland. This would include wider community outcomes.
- Additional research is required to gather evidence on learning at home through consultation with practitioners, parents, families, children and young people.