

Title

Evaluating dimensions of parental engagement: The development of a Renfrewshire toolkit

What did we ask? (Research Questions)

- 1) What does current practice for parental engagement look like across Renfrewshire?
- 2) Do schools have tools to evaluate parental engagement?
- 3) What is required in a parental engagement toolkit to support schools in Renfrewshire to implement and evaluate approaches to parental engagement?

What is the evidence base? (link to your definition of the poverty gap)

The strategy for tackling poverty in Renfrewshire has six key strands, including attainment. It uses the Joseph Rowntree Foundation definition: “When a person’s resources [mainly their material resources] are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs [including social participation]” (Goulden & D’Arcy, 2014, p. 3). The strategy takes a wider view of poverty than just income and acknowledges the varied SIMD communities across Renfrewshire. Overall, over 27 percent of children in Renfrewshire live in SIMD 1 and 2 (Education Scotland, 2019).

Research indicates that “parental involvement makes a significant contribution to closing the attainment gap” (Sosu & Ellis, 2014, p. 24). Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) report that school-home links, support and training for parents and families, and community-based interventions help to narrow the attainment gap for disadvantaged groups. Six dimensions of engagement have been identified (Epstein et al., 2002). These are: parenting, collaboration with the community, volunteering, learning at home, communication, and decision-making.

Parental engagement approaches where parents support pupil learning at home may be most effective for raising attainment. Where parents and teachers work together to improve learning, the gains in achievement are substantial. Parental engagement is shown to be more effective when engagement relates to learning in the home rather than attendance at school activities (Harris & Goodall, 2008). In primary school-aged children greater levels of parental engagement have a larger impact on pupil outcomes than the quality of the school (Desforages & Abouchaar, 2003). Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart (2004) also report that the quality of learning opportunities at home has a greater effect on cognitive and social skills than family demographics.

What did we do? 200 words

An audit of existing parental engagement approaches across Renfrewshire's 49 primary schools was completed. Based on the definition and spread of poverty in Renfrewshire, this project included all communities. Senior staff from 23 primary schools completed an initial online questionnaire. A comparison of the mean, standard deviation, and distribution of pupils living in SIMD 1 and 2 revealed that the sample of schools responding to the questionnaire was similar to the SIMD 1 and 2 distribution across all Renfrewshire primary schools (see Figure 1).

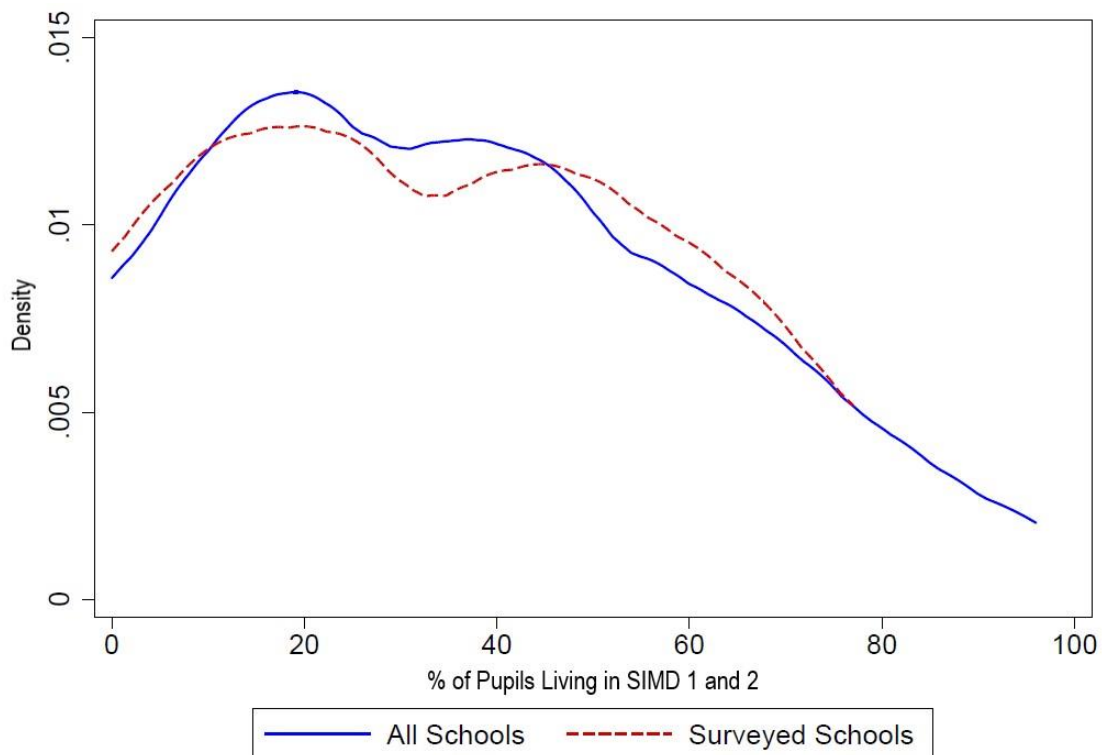


Figure 1: Density Plot Comparing % SIMD 1 and 2 in Survey Schools to All Renfrewshire Primary Schools

The online questionnaire asked schools to: rank the importance of dimensions of parental engagement; evaluate how well the school supports parental engagement in P1-P3 and P4-P7; rate their confidence in measuring parental engagement approaches; and give examples of good practice and evaluation approaches. Respondents also indicated if they would like to be further involved in the development of a Parental Engagement Toolkit. Four schools indicated that they had examples of good practice and/or measurement and were invited to contribute case study examples, carried out via semi-structured interviews, to demonstrate good practice. The schools that provided case studies included a range of less than 5% of families living in the most deprived areas (i.e., SIMD 1 and 2) to over 75% living in the most deprived areas.

Educational Psychologists and Research Assistants conducted a literature review of parental engagement approaches that looked at the dimensions of parental engagement, evidence-based parental engagement approaches, and tools to measure the impact of approaches. The team

sought advice and consultation from Dr Janet Goodall, Lecturer in Education at the University of Bath.

What have we found? 200 words

Survey respondents rated parenting (supporting parents to develop their parenting practices and the home environment), communication (developing effective home-to-school and school-to-home communication) and family learning (advice and strategies to support children with learning at home) as being the most important dimensions of parental engagement.

Staff identified specific parental engagement practices their schools have already embedded. Overall, schools reported engaging in more activities for P1-P3 than P4-P7. In addition, more schools reported that they agree or strongly agree that their school supports parental engagement well for the P1-P3 stages than for the P4-P7 stages. The engagement practices happening within schools represented the dimensions of engagement rated as most important.

Respondents were also asked how comfortable they feel measuring the impact of parental engagement approaches. Although several schools reported engaging in good practice, most respondents indicated that they were unsure how to evaluate activities. Schools reported using the following to measure parental engagement: surveys, face-to-face feedback, event attendance, parent council, comments, focus groups, and anecdotal evidence.

The evidence gathered through the survey demonstrated that schools would benefit from further guidance on measuring parental engagement. The case studies provide examples of innovative practice and effective measurement, which will be highlighted in the final toolkit. Examples of good practice included:

- Pizza Reading and Maths Clubs to encourage families to engage in literacy and numeracy activities, leading to increase parental confidence and raised aspirations for their children;
- Regular learning target meetings between the teacher and parent, replacing 'traditional' parents' nights, with higher attendance rates;
- Purposeful Play sessions in P1 to encourage parents to use play as part of home learning, this supported a change in parental mindsets towards different methods of learning and increased use of these approaches at home;
- Homework challenges that require the parent and child to work jointly to achieve success;
- Bedtime Story Clubs to encourage a bedtime routine and build literacy skills; and
- Mini-Mathematicians' Club which provides opportunities for children to lead their parents' learning by teaching their own approaches to maths and promoting a growth mindset, leading to an increase in positive parental attitudes towards numeracy.

What do we plan to do next? 100 words

Based on the findings, a Parental Engagement Toolkit is being developed for use in Renfrewshire schools. This toolkit will include evidence-based approaches from international research, examples of good practice across the local authority, and a measurement guide that will enable schools to engage in ongoing planning and evaluation of parental engagement approaches. Schools that volunteered to be further involved in the project will be invited to pilot the toolkit next session. Following ongoing work and consultation with the local authority and pilot schools, this will be available for all Renfrewshire schools to use.

References

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