

Fathers Network Scotland's Work in Primary Schools: Helping Dads to become more involved with their children's learning

Below is background information for participants in an Education Scotland's Improvement Collective (Lothians and Fife) meeting on 24 June 2021 about how Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) can support Family Learning (and Parental Engagement) outcomes in schools.

Key take homes:

- Family learning is more likely when dads are enthusiastic about and included in their children's learning.
- Schools can make small changes to significantly encourage Dads to engage in their children's learning, FNS work supports this.
- FNS has a Family Adventure campaign each week of the summer holidays, aimed at supporting Dads to have fun learning alongside their children in the outdoors with a focus on literacy.
- As a network organization, FNS needs support to deliver this impactful work - how can you help?

Why is FNS's schools work needed?

Home schooling and other covid changes are likely to have increased not only the attainment gap but also the gap in resilience, confidence, health, and wellbeing outcomes for children. We know that children do better at school when dads are involved and that an increasing number of fathers want to make a positive impact on their children's learning regardless of residency, custodial status, or socioeconomic status: we just need to create a more father inclusive culture to make this happen for more children. Family Learning, especially outdoors, is a key part of supporting dads to make this shift for themselves and their children.

Dads in Scotland are significantly less likely than mums to form positive partnerships with schools. 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. Dads reported feelings of being under-valued by schools at times or that communications did not include them easily such as when there are complicated living arrangements. Socio-economic status and the level of mothers' involvement gave an indication of fathers' involvement.

Year of Childhood & Family Learning

The Year of Childhood coincides with Scotland's second lockdown and a year of serious disruption to education which contributes to a significant deterioration in relationships between dads, their partners & children (details [HERE](#)). FNS's Family Adventure aims to help rebuild those important relationships during the 'Summer of Play'. FNS will promote family learning in two ways:

1) Family Adventure

A fun family adventure designed to encourage families to learn and play together in their local environments, with a focus on literacy. A series of seven weekly outdoor adventures developed around stories in books from Bookbug and Read and Count bags and from the Museum of Childhood. Each adventure has a guide and social media campaign. Schools will play a key part in promoting this family learning which is designed to be one adventure weekly over the summer holidays.

2) Family Learning Campaign

Building on the Family Adventure, an autumn campaign to support dads to continue sharing childcare and family learning activities, including by ensuring schools and services understand the importance of father inclusivity and modify their practice so whole families are engaged and supported.

- To encourage dads, father-figures and partners with children in early years and primary schools to understand the benefits of their involvement in family learning and to provide tips and resources to support this. This means creating and sharing case studies, videos, leaflets, guides and social media graphics.
- To support schools to actively include dads in family learning and improve home-school links by creating and sharing infographics, fact sheets and white papers.
- A press campaign in sectoral, local and national press.

Father Friendly Schools

To embed the positive impact of the Family Adventure and Family Learning Campaign, FNS will increase our ongoing offer to schools.

1) Understanding Dad

FNS's established and well evaluated training offer which supports professionals to make practice changes so that dads are more included.

- Face to face and interactive online training sessions for school teams.
- Introductory e-learning for individuals.
- A father inclusive whole-school audit with implementable recommendations.
- Schools become part of a growing community of professionals supporting each other to give Scotland's children the best chance through father inclusive culture. The online community will also offer resources, content, signposting to services, invitations to events and a space in which to develop local partnerships.

2) Father Inclusive Schools Guide

- A simplified version of our comprehensive guide, so that busy teachers can make small impactful changes.
- Modified versions for a) parent councils and b) family members.
- New case studies to inspire schools, parent councils and family members to be more father inclusive and to take action towards this improvement.

Call for Support

How can we work together? Some ideas:

- Both the Family Adventure and Father Friendly Schools work are currently underfunded. Could you connect FNS with people or organizations who may fund the Family Learning and Father Friendly Schools work? E.g., support applications to Pupil Equity Funding.
- Organize an awareness raising and promotional event.
- Add your logo to our Family Adventure promotions and disseminate it through your networks.