

SUPPORTING THE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Parents play a critical role in promoting academic success through parent-school involvement, stimulation of cognitive growth at home, and promotion of values consistent with academic achievement, and this is another area where the gap between the most and least advantaged may be obvious.

This exemplar will increase the knowledge, skills and understanding of practitioners working with vulnerable families. It will be most relevant for practitioners delivering family learning and parental engagement outcomes such as those working in schools, CLD, The Third Sector, early years etc.

What does the evidence say?

Mealtime conversations about a child's day at school or a specific activity can have a positive impact on their educational attainment, and regular interactive learning within the home can be both in conjunction with and independent from the formal school system. Children from less advantaged households are less likely to experience a wide range of 'home learning' activities than children from more advantaged households (Bradshaw et al 2012). Efforts to improve effective communication between all parents and school, creating shared goals and strategies with parents to reinforce children's out-of-school learning can be ways of addressing the attainment gap.

Parental engagement in their children's learning in the home has a greater effect on their achievement than parental involvement in school-based activities (Goodall 2013; Altschul 2011). Maximising children's learning is best facilitated by parents engaging in learning activities in the home in tandem with similar critical instructions being received at school (Crosnoe 2012). The likelihood of educational attainment increases when the child perceives continuity of values between school and family (Blanch et al 2013).

School initiated engagement can make up some of the disadvantage faced by children of less engaged parents by facilitating the flow of school-related information (about protocols, practices, norms, expectations) to those parents (Crosnoe 2012). Providing information relating to children's educational process and learning journey to parents can help improve the home-school relationship (Crosnoe 2012). To raise achievement, dialogue between parents and their children is extremely important, and this dialogue is best facilitated when the parent is informed about the curriculum, activities, and expectations in the child's school (Goodall 2013; Goodall and Vorhaus 2011).

Communications between parents and teachers helps teachers to understand their needs, which can be quite varied (Egbert and Salsbury 2009). Two-directional communication helps to solidify both teachers' and parents' understanding of context; this is especially important for teachers and school staff as they need to be

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sensitive to the various status and family characteristics of their pupils and the pupils' families (Reschly and Christenson 2012).

The more regular and frequent the communication between schools and families, the more likely it is that parents will be viewed as a willing contributor to their children's learning (Reglin et al 2012; Harris and Goodall 2009).

Parental engagement with their children is particularly important at times of transition (Goodall 2013; Harris and Goodall 2009). Evidence has shown that concerted efforts for parental engagement during periods of transition, especially the transition from primary to secondary school, prevent any gains in achievement prior to a transition from being lost (Harris and Goodall 2009). With effective partnership working between families and schools, the likelihood of truancy, exclusion, or disengagement is lessened (Harris and Goodall 2009).

Despite adolescents' growing need for autonomy, parental engagement in secondary school pupils' learning remains a strong predictor of academic achievement (Grayson 2013; Patrikakou 2008). Parents often feel that they are more welcome to engage in their children's learning during primary school compared to the complexity and size of secondary school (Goodall 2013; DCSF 2008; Harris and Goodall 2008).

Encouraging more parental engagement within home in the form of supporting children's educational aspirations and goals is important as children mature and become more independent (Goodall 2013; Patall et al 2008). Help with homework is something many parents feel they cannot assist with once pupils progress in school and their studies become more specialised (different content and methods of teaching) (Goodall 2013).

Lastly, when secondary schools do not maintain the levels of communication and engagement often found in primary schools, parents reported lower levels of trust (Reschly and Christenson 2012).

Parents become involved in schools in different ways – the degree to which families match the culture of the school can go some way to explaining these differences (Goodall 2013; Kim 2009).

Parental engagement with homework can be both positively and negatively associated with achievement (Altschul 2011; Van Voorhis 2011; Xu et al 2009). The reasons why a parent participates can affect the association, for instance, if it is only to hasten the completion of the task or if it is used as an opportunity to interact and talk with the child (Van Voorhis 2011). One review found that parental support for children's autonomy in homework was associated with higher scores, however, their direct involvement with assignments that are not meant to be interactive or collaborative – particularly when the child is struggling – is associated with lower scores (DCSF 2008).

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What seems to be working?

Building parents' confidence in supporting children's learning in the home (Blanch et al 2013; Goodall 2013). In a Spanish paired reading intervention study, the findings suggested that families successfully followed the programme's recommendations because of their increased confidence. This had come as a result of the teachers and school helping families to support and mediate the pupils' learning (Blanch et al 2013).

Collaborative working between parents and children that is mediated or facilitated by teachers and schools (Crosnoe 2012; Scanlan 2012).

Part of the Home-School Knowledge Project in the South-west of England devised a method of parents and pupils collaboratively selecting and talking about artifacts in the home to help inspire and improve pupils' creative writing skills (Scanlon 2012). This type of partnership working allows parents' knowledge and experience to become relevant to the educational process, and schools can build on knowledge from the home with the child acting as a key agent of this process (Scanlon 2012).

Similarly, homework designed or sourced by teachers that is interactive and interesting can foster positive communications between home and school (Van Voorhis 2011).

Schools should tailor their school-family practices to the level of school and the pupils' developmental stages (Reschly and Christenson 2012).

Partnerships for younger students may focus on transition, mastery of basic skills, and motivation; partnerships for older pupils may want to focus on facilitating transitions, pupils' growing need for autonomy, and decision-making (Reschly and Christenson 2012).

Using a range of activities and communication styles can support the home learning environment (Ofsted 2011). Input directly from parents should be incorporated into setting pupils' academic targets, and explaining plainly what each academic and subject level meant in practice to parents helped them to visualise where their support was most beneficial (Ofsted 2011). One primary school had parents come to school for part of an afternoon once a week to learn the strategies and methods that were being used in school (Ofsted 2011).

For literacy and tutoring interventions, a highly structured format helps family members to feel knowledgeable and able (Blanch et al 2013; Egbert and Salsbury 2009). A literacy programme in the US focused on involving parents in interactive homework assignments in which they had a small but crucial role. Feedback suggested that parents were eager to participate because they did not have to invent new activities but simply share their lives, interests, and values with their children (Egbert and Salsbury 2009). Another study found that practical, easy-to-implement

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ideas with printed and emailed instructions were successful for engaging parents in at-home education (Doyle and Zhang 2011).

What is the impact?

One study found that schools with strong family engagement were four times more likely to improve student reading over time, and ten times more likely to improve student learning gains in mathematics (Bryk et al 2010 in Emerson et al 2012). Another Australian study found that children aged 9-13 whose homes offered a more stimulating learning environment (measured at age 8) had a higher intrinsic motivation for academic studies – suggesting the long-reaching effects of effective home learning (Duckworth et al 2009 in Emerson et al 2012).

National Child Development Study data found that parental engagement in children's education at age 7 could independently predict educational attainment at age 20 (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011). A meta-analysis of 51 studies shows that initiatives involving parents and children reading together, interactive homework, and regular parent-teacher communication all have a noteworthy relationship with academic outcomes (Jeynes 2010).

A US-based intervention study examined the effectiveness of a Parent Support Reading (PSR) intervention to increase the reading comprehension scores of seventh grade pupils (Reglin et al 2012). Parents participated in PSR workshops twice a week or once a week for 24 weeks and were encouraged to help their children with reading homework in the evening. The PSR activities resulted in a statistically significant increase in the intervention group's end-of-grade reading comprehension scores.

Another intervention study in the US focused on the Teachers Include Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) interactive mathematics programme (Van Voorhis 2011). TIPS homework assignments are interactive and include clear objectives for learning, instructions for completion, and explicitly state that pupils are to involve family members. TIPS is teacher-led and it is incorporated into the overall curriculum, ideally for a minimum of one year (some pupils were enrolled in the programme for two years in this study). According to family and pupil surveys, being in the TIPS group positively predicted pupil and family attitudes about the maths homework experience, and pupils in TIPS had significantly higher standardised mathematics achievement scores than control pupils. TIPS students and families also reported higher levels of family engagement in maths homework than did control pupils and families (Van Voorhis 2011).

Case Study

The Oceans Mathematics Project aims to help pupils in disadvantaged areas of England to address underachievement in mathematics by changing attitudes and practices of schools, parents, and children specifically through involving their parents

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in the children's maths learning process. Children in Years 1-9 can participate and families are encouraged to have more than one member participate – either both parents, grandparents, or siblings.

Workshops are run from schools with family members to help teach mathematics learning strategies, how children are being taught mathematics today, and to improve family members' understanding of mathematics. These are led by maths teachers, who also make assignments that require family participation are also given, and maths based games are distributed.

Not every school who has implemented the Oceans Mathematics Project demonstrates statistically significant positive impacts, but two schools who originally implemented the intervention perhaps best demonstrate the impact that is possible. Before the project, Ofsted reported that both schools had minimal to non-existent parental engagement.; In their latest reports, Ofsted praised both schools for their parental engagement efforts. In terms of improvements in the standards in mathematics, one school increased its number of KS3 pupils achieving level 5 or above by nearly 20% and moved from being in 'special measures' to being a Maths and Computing Specialist College (Bernie and Lall 2008).

Using these reflective questions will support you to consider your own approach to engaging and supporting children and their families:

- Do we begin any specific targeting for parental engagement from day one of (primary, secondary) school or do we wait until there appears to be a problem or struggle with the student's achievements?
- How effectively do we use current available data about levels of poverty in our community to help us target our interventions?
- How effectively do you encourage parents to support their child's learning in literacy? In what ways could this be developed further?
- How effectively do you encourage parents to support their child's learning in numeracy? In what ways could this be developed further?
- To what extent do staff understand GIRFEC, the wellbeing indicators and how these can have a positive impact on children and families?
- How effectively do we monitor programmes?
- What evidence do we have that family learning is improving the life chances of the families involved?
- Are outcomes for children improving as a result of their participation in family learning? How do we know?

Documents: -

How Good is Our Third Sector (2015)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/frwk3hgiothirdsector.aspx>

How Good is Our Schools 4 (2015)

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<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/frwk2hgios.aspx>

How good is the learning and development in our community? (2016)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/frwk4hgiocommunitylearning.aspx>