The Impact of Parental Involvement on

Children’s Education

**Key research**

In the early years, parental involvement has a significant

impact on children’s cognitive development and literacy and

number skills1.

Parental involvement in a child’s schooling for a child between

the ages of 7 and 16 is a more powerful force than family

background, size of family and level of parental education2.

Parental involvement has a significant effect on pupil

achievement throughout the years of schooling3.

Educational failure is increased by lack of parental interest in

schooling4.

In particular, a father’s interest in a child’s schooling is strongly

linked to educational outcomes for the child5.

Most parents believe that the responsibility for their child’s

education is shared between parents and the school6.

Many parents want to be involved in their children’s education.

In a recent study in England 72% of parents said that they

wanted more involvement7.

This leaflet draws on evidence from research

to highlight the importance of involvement of

parents in their children’s education.Overall,

research has shown conclusively that parental

involvement does make a difference to pupils’

engagement and their achievement and the

evidence indicates that parental involvement

benefits students, parents teachers and

schools.This leaflet provides an insight into

some of that evidence.

**What is parental involvement?**

Children have two main educators in their

lives – their parents and their teachers. Parents

are the prime educators until the child attends

nursery or starts school and remain a major

influence on their children’s learning through

school and beyond.There is no clear line to

show where the parents’ input stops and the

teachers’ input begins. The school and the

parents all have crucial roles to play8 and the

impact is greater if parents and schools work

in partnership.

There is no universal agreement on what

parental involvement is, however there are

two broad strands.

Parents’ involvement in the life of the

school.

Their involvement in support of the

individual child at home and at school.

**Interested?**

Find out more about helping parents to help

children fulfil their potential – send for the

‘Involving Parents, Raising Achievement’ pack

for schools on working with parents by

ringing 0845 602 2260.

Or go to www.teachernet.gov.uk to the

Working With Parents area where there is a

downloadable copy of the pack.

Have a look at www.parentcentre.gov.uk

under ‘School Life – help your child to learn’

for leaflets to support parents.

**What is the impact of parental**

**involvement on children’s**

**learning?**

**Early Years Education**

Parental involvement in early intervention

programmes has been found to equate with

better outcomes for the child. Most effective

interventions involve parents in (pre-school)

children’s cognitive development. Play and fun

and scope for physical activity seem to

produce most effective outcomes. Parents’ self

esteem is very important in determining long

term outcomes for both themselves and their

children.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School

Education (EPPE) Project9 is a large scale

longitudinal study which monitors 2,800

children's progress across the range of preschool

provision to entry to reception class.

After controlling for the impact of parents'

occupations and education, aspects of the

home learning environment were found to

have a significant impact on children's

cognitive development both at age 3 years

plus and again at school entry.

The frequency with which the child plays

with letters/numbers at home was linked

with attainment in all measures.

Parents’ drawing children’s attention to

sounds and letters was linked to literacy

skills, early number skills and non-verbal

attainment.

**School age children**

A study conducted in 199910 found that

parental involvement has significant effects on

achievement into adolescence. The study used

analysis of data from the National Child

Development Study (NCDS) to explore the

effect of parents’ involvement on attainment

at age 16. It examined the impact of certain

inputs (parental involvement, peer group

influences, schooling inputs) on achievement.

Using attainment in reading and maths it

discovered that:

parental involvement in a child’s schooling

was a more powerful force than other

family background indicators such as social

class, family size and level of parental

education and contributes to no less than

10% of variation in achievement

the involvement of parents in secondary

education has an effect on continued

development

very high parental interest is associated

with better exam results, than for children

whose parents show no interest

children with very interested parents

progressed 15-17% more in mathematics

and reading between ages 11-16.

**What is the impact of home**

**learning on children’s**

**achievement?**

Many parents are already involved in their

children’s education. The time British parents

spend doing homework or reading with their

children has increased four times during the

past 35 years11.

**Reading**

In an experiment designed to assess the

effects of parental involvement in the

teaching of reading, research found that

reading attainment was positively affected

by parental support12.

The research was conducted using a group of

children who were helped with their reading

at home by their parents.Their results were

measured against children who did not

receive parental help with reading, and those

of children who were given extra reading

tuition by a qualified teacher in school, rather

than by parents at home.

The findings of the study were:

a highly significant improvement by

children who received practice at home,

but there was no comparable improvement

by children who received extra help at

school

the parents involved in the study

expressed great satisfaction in being

involved and teachers reported that the

children of these parents showed an

increased keenness for learning and were

better behaved at school

the collaboration between teachers and

parents was effective for children of all

initial levels of performance, including those

who at the beginning of the study were

failing to learn to read

some children who were reading to their

parents who could not themselves read

English, or who, in a few cases, could not

read at all, still showed improvement in

their reading and their parents remained

willing to collaborate with the school.

**Leisure time activities**

Research has indicated that **no matter**

**what the social class** of their parents,

participation in such things as visiting

museums and going to the theatre and

opera, when teenagers, has a positive

effect on their earnings potential,

educational attainments and civic

engagement in later life.

This information stems from analysis of the

British Cohort Study, which collects

information at regular intervals from people

born in Britain during one week in April 1970.

Members of the cohort were all given leisure

diaries when they were 16 years old, in which

to record their activities.They have

subsequently been surveyed at age 29 and

this research pinpoints that participating in

high culture activities during youth has

positive outcomes in adulthood.

The research finds that engaging in leisure

activities such as:

artistic and music-related leisure

reading for pleasure

writing for pleasure.

all have positive effects. Each of them

increases the likelihood of getting a first

degree, taking a course in adult education and

being a member of a voluntary organisation.

They also raise earnings potential in later life13.

**Homework**

Research indicates that pupils and parents

consider homework and home learning to

be an important part of school life, and the

evidence shows a positive relationship

between time spent on homework and

achievement at secondary school level14.

On the whole, pupils have positive attitudes

towards homework and feel that it is

important to help them do well at school.

Positive attitudes to homework are associated

with positive attitudes at school.

The research suggests that parents are more

directly involved in homework when their

children are younger.

The evidence further confirms that parents

play an important role encouraging their

children to spend time on homework and

eliminating distractions such as watching

television.

**What is the impact of family**

**learning on children’s**

**achievement?**

OFSTED (2000)15 reported that successful

programmes of family learning resulted in the

following benefits:

For children:

accelerated development of oracy and preliteracy

skills

improved standards in numeracy and

literacy

positive behavioural and attitudinal

changes

enhanced confidence and self-esteem

awareness that learning is a normal activity

throughout life

pleasure from collaborative learning.

For parents:

improved competence in literacy and

numeracy

progression for over 50% of participants to

FE and training or more challenging jobs

increased confidence in contacts with

schools, teachers, and the education system,

leading to becoming more active partners

with schools

a greater understanding of child

development and of the strategies that can

be used to help children to learn at key

points in development, improved parenting

better relationships with children.

**Family literacy and numeracy**

**demonstration programmes**

Literacy demonstration programmes and

family numeracy programmes lasting 12

weeks, run by the Basic Skills Agency for

children aged 3-6 years and their parents

(mostly mothers) showed improvements in

children’s literacy and numeracy, parents’

literacy and numeracy and parents’ ability to

help their children16/17.

For the children:

the proportion whose low reading level

would leave them struggling in school fell

from 67% to 35%

the proportion whose even lower reading

level would leave them severely

disadvantaged for learning fell from 24% to 9%

progress in number and mathematical

language was statistically significant.

For the parents:

the number of parents actively involved

in their children’s schools increased

significantly

by the end of the course parents increased

their contact with their children’s school in

various ways such as involving themselves

in school activities and providing support

in class.

**What about fathers and their**

**involvement in their children’s**

**education?**

Fathers play an extremely important role in

their children’s lives and a plethora of research

indicates that father involvement is

significantly related to positive child outcomes

We know that fathers are often very involved

in their children’s lives. For example, fathers are

often the main carers for children while

mothers are working. Research states that, in

36% of dual earner families, after the mother it

is the father, more than any other individual,

who cares for children18.

Research evidence relating to fathers tells us

that:

fathers who devote time to their sons are

giving them a greater chance to grow up as

confident adults. Boys who feel that their

fathers devote time, especially to talk to

them about their worries, school work and

social lives, almost all emerge as motivated

and optimistic men19

father involvement in children’s education

at age 7 predicts higher educational

attainment by age 20, in both boys

and girls20

for boys, early father involvement protects

against delinquency in later life21

the involvement of fathers exerts an

influence on children’s positive attitudes

to school22.

**What happens when parents**

**aren’t involved?**

Research evidence clearly states that children’s

progress can be hindered by lack of parental

involvement.

In a study designed to test whether the

educational performance of children was

influenced by parents the research found

that children were disadvantaged **not by**

**social class**, but rather by lack of parents’

interest23.

The key findings of the study were:

children whose parents showed a high level

of interest (regardless of social class), had

higher test scores at age 8 and 11

the scores of those children whose parents

showed little interest deteriorate

the children with interested parents pull

ahead of the rest whatever their initial

starting point.

In another study, childhood experience and

parental factors were tested linked to a wide

range of outcomes in adulthood24.

Where there was no report of parental

interest there was a high rate of not

obtaining qualifications after 16.

Educational failure is increased by lack of

parental interest in schooling.

Father’s lack of interest in schooling is a

particularly powerful and progressive

predictor of lack of qualifications.

**What are the challenges to**

**parents becoming involved?**

We know that many parents are already

involved in their children’s education.

However, some parents face challenges to

being involved.

The Department for Education and Skills

(DfES) commissioned research with parents in

2001 in order to identify whether parents were

involved, to what level and discover the

perceived barriers to involvement25.

Key findings from our research are:

approximately 1 in 3 parents (29%) feel very

involved in their child’s school life. Primary

school parents were more likely to feel this

way than secondary school parents.

Mothers were more likely to say that they

were ‘very involved’ than fathers

72% of all parents agreed that they

wanted more involvement

58% of parents believed they had an

equal responsibility with the school for

their child’s education

when asked about barriers to becoming

involved, parents cited the competing

demands in their lives such as work

commitments, demand of other children,

childcare difficulties and lack of time

generally.

Parents’ difficulties with basic skills are also a

barrier to being involved in their children’s

education. Research conducted by the Basic

Skills Agency26 found that:

34% said they had difficulties reading from

a children’s book.

18% said they found it difficult to

understand and recognise numbers.

In addition, it is well documented that parents

who themselves didn’t enjoy school, or had

a bad experience at school, may have

difficulties communicating with teachers,

which may affect their level of involvement.

**What difference do families**

**make to children’s**

**achievement?**

The term parents is used here to refer to the

wide-ranging arrangements adults have for

looking after children. The past 30 years have

seen rapid changes in family structures.

There are 1.7 million dependent children in

England and Wales27.

Nearly one in four (22.9%), live in oneparent

families28.

More than one in 10 dependent children

live in a step family29.

Two out of three mothers with dependent

children either have jobs or are actively

seeking work compared with fewer than

half 20 years ago30.

Many children live in workless households,

with over two million (17.6%) in households

where there are no adults in work31.

Experience of life in a single parent family

or with jobless parents during childhood

are usually associated with disadvantaged

outcomes for young adults32.

The effect of the disruption of a family

structure is more pronounced on

educational outcomes than the experience

of parental unemployment33.

Poor educational attainment can be

transmitted down generations. A key

influence in a child’s educational attainment

is the attainment of their parents, along

with the interest that a parent or carer

shows in their child’s education. Improving

educational outcomes for one generation

is a key factor in helping to break this

cycle of deprivation34.

**What is children’s**

**understanding of parental**

**involvement?**

Research has highlighted that children are

often mediators in the link between home

and school.

A research study conducted in 200135, focused

on children’s experiences and perspectives on

parental involvement, at home and at school,

in their education. Interviews were carried out

with 70 children aged 10 and 14 years from a

variety of backgrounds.

Many children interviewed had a strong

sense of privacy over their home lives and

felt that schools should not be informed

about personal details unless they seriously

affect their education. Furthermore, home

and school were perceived as contrasting

experiences, with different sets of values. For

example, home is equated with support and

relaxation and school with rules, timetables

and mixing with peers.

**Parents and Information and**

**Communication Technology**

**(ICT)**

Information and communication technology

(ICT) is becoming a vital tool for parents’

involvement in children’s education.

Research relating to use of ICT by parents and

children indicates that:

the attitudes of both parents and children

towards computers were generally positive.

Among parents with access to a computer

at home, 41% felt that this helped their

children achieve better results at school36

looking at the use of computers for

children’s learning and development, in a

study conducted in 200137 around 30% of

adults in households with children under

16, said they used computers for helping

with their children’s schoolwork, general

knowledge and for developing their

computer skills. In terms of general

knowledge/learning and computer skills, it

is the households with children aged

between 6 and 10 where usage of

computers for these tasks is highest.

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If you have any feedback on this document or want to know

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