



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 play* 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 pre-school 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 pre-literacy 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 children^{16/17}.

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' interest**²³.



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 one-parent 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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