
THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, PARENTAL SUPPORT AND FAMILY EDUCATION ON PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT AND ADJUSTMENT: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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Introduction

It is widely recognised that if pupils are to maximise their potential from schooling they will need the full support of their parents. Attempts to enhance parental involvement in education occupy governments, administrators, educators and parents' organisations across North America, Australasia, continental Europe, Scandinavia and the UK. It is anticipated that parents should play a role not only in the promotion of their own children's achievements but more broadly in school improvement and the democratisation of school governance. The European Commission, for example, holds that the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling.

A review of English language literature was conducted to establish research findings on the relationship between parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment in schools.

Key Findings

The literature consistently shows that

- Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance.
- The extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree, by family ethnicity.
- The extent of parental involvement diminishes as the child gets older and is strongly influenced at all ages by the child characteristically taking a very active mediating role.
- Parental involvement is strongly positively influenced by the child's level of attainment: the higher the level of attainment, the more parents get involved.
- The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.
- Other forms of parental involvement do not appear to contribute to the scale of the impact of 'at-home' parenting.
- Differences between parents in their level of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health, and also with parental perception of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it. Some parents are put off by feeling put down by schools and teachers.
- Research affords a clear model of how parental involvement works. This model is described in the report. In essence parenting has its influence indirectly through shaping the child's self concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations.

Background

In England, the Government's strategy for securing parental involvement was first set out in the 1997 White Paper, 'Excellence in Schools'. The strategy described there included three elements (a) providing parents with information, (b) giving parents a voice and (c) encouraging parental partnerships with schools. This strategy has since been played out through a wide range of activities including

- the enhancement of parent governor roles
- involvement in inspection processes
- provision of annual reports and prospectuses
- the requirement for home-school agreements
- the provision of increasing amounts of information about the curriculum and school performance for example

Regardless of government policies, some parents have always been actively involved in enhancing their children's development and educational progress. This spontaneous activity has taken a number of forms including 'good parenting' in the home pre-school (which provides a good foundation of skills, values, attitudes and self concept); visits to school to gather relevant information and establish good relationships; discussions with teachers to keep abreast of the child's progress or to discuss emergent problems; and assisting more broadly in the practical activities and governance of the school.

This spontaneous activity of many parents has been seen as a valuable contribution to children's educational progress and attempts to enhance the involvement of all parents are now widespread. Provision is extensive and involves large numbers of voluntary bodies, research organisations, national initiatives, LEA initiatives and vast numbers of one-school projects.

This work is proceeding in parallel with a significant number of educational strategies installed since 1997 and brought to bear on the reform of school organisation, administration, management and finance, the curriculum, examinations and qualifications and on teaching and learning. The overwhelming strategy is guided by the standards

and inclusion agenda. The aim is to increase levels of attainment broadly conceived to include the acquisition of skills, concepts and bodies of knowledge in the curriculum subjects together with attitudes and values conducive to self-fulfilment and good citizenship.

Whilst standards of attainment in academic subjects have increased notably there remains a significant gap in the relative levels of attainment between children in different social classes. The gap is associated with different levels of parental involvement broadly conceived. This literature review was commissioned and funded by the Department for Education and Skills in the light of the above considerations and with particular regard to informing the development of policy intended to close the social class gap in achievement.

Methodology

The main aim of the project was to produce a comprehensive literature review of reliable research evidence on the relationship between parents/parenting and pupil achievement/engagement

The review investigates the impact of:

- parental support (e.g. the provision of parenting skills training, advice and guidance for parents) on pupil achievement/engagement;
- family learning (i.e. as a Parent Governor, reading to children, encouragement and help with homework) on pupil achievement/engagement; and
- parents' level of education, e.g. the impact of parents with university-level education on children's achievement.

Two distinct bodies of literature were discerned. One focussed on describing and understanding the nature, extent, determinants and impact of spontaneously occurring parental involvement on children's educational outcomes. The second body of work is concerned with describing and evaluating attempts to intervene to enhance spontaneous levels of involvement.

Recent research on spontaneous levels of parental involvement is generally of a very high quality using advanced statistical techniques to describe the scope and scale of involvement and to discern its unique impact on pupil achievement

Research on interventions to promote parental involvement reveals a large number of approaches ranging from parent training programmes, through initiatives to enhance home school links and on to programmes of family and community education.

Evaluations of this very extensive activity reveal

- There is a perceived increased need and an evident increase in demand for such support
- High levels of creativity and commitment are evident amongst providers and high levels of appreciation are recorded by clients.

The review concludes by arguing that

- We have a good enough knowledge base to understand how spontaneous parental involvement works in promoting achievement.
- Current interventions, whilst promising, have yet to deliver convincingly the achievement bonus that might be expected.
- The achievement of working class pupils could be significantly enhanced if we systematically apply all that is known about parental involvement. A programme of parental involvement development initiatives taking the form of multi dimensional intervention programmes, targeted on selected post code areas and steered by a design research process is implicated.

Copies of the full report (RR433) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

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