



Leadership for parental engagement

Resource

Where child learning becomes family learning, and where educators understand that they cannot meet the needs of children and young people alone, true engagement and shared understanding are developed.

Foreword

From the moment of birth, the experiences of children and the opportunities they are offered shape their beliefs, attitudes and actions. Such influences often centre on the family, home and community with the impact of family life in all its complexity affecting every aspect of a child and young person's development and approach to learning.

A sustained commitment to building strong and positive relationships between home and school so that parents and educators can work together on an equal basis is not always straightforward, but as this publication shows, the rewards can be immense. Where child learning becomes family learning and where educators understand that they cannot meet the needs of children and young people alone, true engagement and shared understanding are developed.

As parents and educators, we all have important responsibilities to anticipate the very best from each child and young person, so sharing a vision for achieving this, as well as devising services together that make sense on the ground and respect home culture and context, is vital.

Many schools and children's centres have developed excellent open and trusting relationships with parents, yet recognise that this is ongoing work requiring energy and creativity in order to maximise outcomes and benefits. This publication provides practical support with the audit tool offering an easily accessible resource to create and shape an action plan for the future but beyond this I hope the publication offers inspiration and encouragement to reach out and advocate for children and young people with and alongside parents.

Sue Egersdorff

Operational Director

Extended and Integrated Leadership Team

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1: Introduction and key findings

Purpose

In early spring 2010, the National College undertook an enquiry project focused on the leadership of parental engagement. We wanted to discover more about the ways in which leaders of schools and children's centres engage parents in working towards improved life chances for children. How do leaders of schools, children's centres and clusters support and encourage others to lead on parental engagement? And what difference does the work they do make to the lives of children and their families?

There is a great deal already known and documented about parental engagement and the extent to which parents, more than any other single factor, influence the life chances of their children.

Charles Desforges (2003) states that:

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.

Desforges, 2003, p4/5

The Ofsted report *Learning Together* (Ofsted, 2010) similarly highlights the important work early years and primary settings are engaged in with respect to developing community cohesion – the picture is less positive at secondary level, something which this project also found overall, although there were some notable examples of significant engagement of parents in the secondary sector.

This report of the project findings represents a snapshot of the leadership of parental engagement in 10 extended services clusters across England. It should be noted that we refer throughout to parents and parental engagement for readability and flow. We acknowledge and ask readers to accept that included in the terminology are all those who have parental responsibility for children – mothers, fathers, grandparents, carers and all those who make up the diversity of families looking after and caring for children.

The primary audience for this report is leaders and senior managers in schools and children's centres, including governors, parent support workers and cluster co-ordinators. We believe there is much to be learned from the good practice and case studies that this report draws together. We hope it will enable leaders to consider and take on new and more effective ways of engaging parents in the shared goal of supporting and developing the learning of their children. We also believe the report has some important messages for directors and other senior leaders of children's services, policymakers, and other agencies and voluntary organisations working with children and families.

We recognise the wide range of good practice that currently exists in the area of parental engagement. We hope that this report will add to the growing knowledge and understanding of children's services professionals about what makes the leadership of parental engagement effective and how it makes a difference to the lives of children and families.

The findings of the project have led to the development of a practical toolkit which will help leaders of schools, children's centres and clusters to audit and evaluate their current practice in the leadership of parental engagement. The audit tool will enable its users to identify where they are now and where they might want to focus future development. There is also a series of links to other useful resources. This tool will be available in the future as an online application on the website.

Methodology

The 10 clusters taking part in the project represent a diversity of geography, location, size and context (Table 1). National College consultants spent time in each of the clusters talking to leaders, parents and other stakeholders, enquiring into the leadership and practice of parental engagement. This report represents the summary of their findings.

Clusters taking part in the project

Cluster	Location	Size	Context
Soho links	Birmingham	8 schools – 1 secondary, 7 primary, plus 2 children's centres	Natural geographical cluster in an area of high social deprivation. Significant numbers of newly arrived families and nearly 40% of pupils have English as a second language
Cheadle	Staffordshire	11 schools – 2 secondary, 9 primary, plus 2 children's centres	Rural area with a dispersed population. Small pockets of rural deprivation, but mainly affluent
Thanet Quartet	Kent	6 schools – 1 secondary, 4 primary, 1 special, plus 2 children's centres	Urban, high levels of deprivation. Significant numbers of recent arrivals
Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	7 schools – 6 primary, 1 special, plus 2 children's centres	Inner city, historically clustered
Aylsham	Norfolk	9 schools – 1 secondary, 6 primary, 2 nursery and infant, 1 pupil referral unit	Rural cluster surrounding the market town of Aylsham
Selly Oak	Birmingham	11 schools – 4 secondary, 5 primary, 1 nursery, 1 special	A mixed area where there are pockets of deprivation but since these are small patches overall the area rarely qualifies for additional funding. Many children come from outside the geographical area and many do not transition from the cluster primaries to the secondaries
Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative	Lambeth, London	5 schools – all primary, plus 3 children's centres	Inner city, area of high social deprivation and mobility, with many families speaking English as an additional language
Watercliffe Meadow	Sheffield	4 schools – 1 secondary academy, 3 primary	One of the three current primaries in the cluster is a new school arising from the closure of three other primaries in an area of high social deprivation
Horley Learning Partnership	Surrey	11 schools – 1 secondary, 9 primary, 1 special	Disadvantaged area featuring significant numbers of new arrivals
Sherwood	Nottingham	7 schools – 5 primary, 1 infant and nursery, 1 junior, plus 1 children's centre	Diverse geographical and social make-up spread across several Nottingham City wards. The percentage of pupils qualifying for free school meals (FSM) ranges from 15% to 60%

Key findings

The project identified a number of factors that contribute to the successful leadership of parental engagement and the development of strategies to meet the needs of local communities. Five key themes emerged which are explored in detail in section 2. Here we present a summary of findings as they relate to the themes that arose from the enquiry.

- 1. Vision, values, culture and strategic direction** form a core underpinning to successful practice. The schools, children's centres and clusters where these are strongly held and deeply embedded have developed parental engagement opportunities that are focused on meeting the needs *as perceived by parents*. Furthermore, staff focus on working with parents to support their children – both in terms of their learning in school and beyond – more effectively. They are driven by moral purpose and consistently believe that parents matter. The greater the involvement of parents in their children's education, the greater the impact. This is particularly evident in children's centres but is a growing strength in many schools and clusters. The critical shift for many of the clusters has been to create a culture that embeds collaboration – doing *with* rather than doing *to*. This is evidenced through detailed tracking, ie monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and listening to the perceptions of staff, parents and children. Creating a strong vision, underpinned by clear core values, enables schools, children's centres and clusters to develop strategy and practice that is sustainable and mainstream, not merely bolted on.
- 2. Leadership of parental engagement** is critical. It takes many forms and involves a wide range of personnel. It is almost always, however, driven by a key senior leader – often the headteacher but not exclusively so. There is a strong link between the effectiveness of the leadership and the vision and values that underpin the work. In many clusters the leadership is widely distributed with multiple opportunities for staff and parents to develop their leadership skills. Leadership is seen to operate at many different levels. Sometimes it rests almost exclusively with the headteacher but in other contexts it is evidenced by the trust and autonomy extended to parent workers on the ground or anywhere in between. The integrity, sense of purpose, commitment and passion displayed by leaders are, however, common throughout. Without such leadership this sometimes challenging but ultimately rewarding work is likely to be severely limited.
- 3. Parental engagement in practice** is as varied and as diverse as the clusters involved in the project. All of it, however, focuses on both bringing parents into school and on going out to meet them in the community. A critical factor is the degree to which parental engagement practice is outward facing and collaborative. Whilst parents often have a much stronger voice in children's centres, the extent to which parents are actively engaged as partners in decision-making and in shaping the extended services core offer would appear from these clusters to be growing. This is especially the case in primary schools, but with some strong examples coming from the secondary sector as well. Common practice includes creating opportunities for parents to gain skills and confidence themselves as adults and as learners as well as increasing their ability to support their children's learning more effectively. For some, the opportunity to help build social cohesion in areas of deprivation is seen as fundamental to raising aspirations for children and their families. For others it creates opportunities to combat isolation or offer enrichment. The critical thread here is the identification of local need, the creation of practice that is focused on solutions that fit the context and a strong sense of partnership – again, working with, not doing to.
- 4. Collaborative work beyond the school, centre and cluster** is almost a given. All the clusters involved in this project integrate the work of parental engagement with the wider picture around extended services provision and partnership working. Whether the partnerships are formal or informal, supported by the local authority through a clear communication of the strategy of the children's trust or created locally in response to the immediate context, none of the work seen in these 10 clusters isolated parental engagement activity

from wider integrated working practices. Many clusters have multi-agency-based steering groups or forums, with parent representatives sitting alongside representatives from a wide range of agencies and voluntary organisations whose work is focused on supporting children and families. Even where the cluster vision is less strong, individual schools and children's centres value and create collaborative partnerships with a wide range of partners with the aim of meeting the very specific needs of their local communities as they see them. The strongest practice develops collaborative relationships based on trust, integrity and commitment. These are seen as critical drivers in creating sustainable and effective partnerships that have a real impact on life chances of children and families.

5. Sustainability is a significant challenge, but one to which there appears to be real commitment across the clusters in this project. Commitment, passion and a sense of moral purpose are all more important than funding to most clusters and most leaders. And it is this that enhances the likelihood that clusters will find the means to sustain and develop their parental engagement work as part of the bigger picture of collaborative working. For some, formal routes to sustainability are the answer, either through social enterprise models or trusts. For others, less formal routes, through developing strong relationships through clusters or families of schools provide the key. Involving governors in supporting the work of parental engagement is also an important factor in developing sustainable practice.

Some common challenges

This work is not, however, without its challenges. The project identified a number of challenges the clusters faced as they developed this work and saw some creative and innovative ways in which leaders in the clusters have worked to overcome them.

For some, a mismatch between school and community with regard to expectations and aspirations had initially been an important factor which had kept the two at a distance. Children's centres have contributed significantly to current understanding by modelling a different way of working. Many schools have had to work hard to overcome staff perceptions that parental engagement should be exclusively focused on pupils' attainment and schoolwork. An important cultural shift appears to have occurred as schools increasingly accept that they need to go out to meet parents in the community rather than expect them only to come in to school; that they need to take as their starting point the reality of parents' contexts and work to develop genuine partnerships. Many have built on the practice of children's centres with which they have forged formal or informal partnerships.

The solutions can sometimes be small but of great significance, such as the use of SMS messaging by Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative and Soho Links to communicate with parents who may not otherwise read letters or access more complex online media. Everyone uses their phone and accesses their texts – it is instant and engaging and speaks to the parents in an arena where they feel confident and comfortable.

Another significant challenge for many of the clusters has been reaching parents who have chosen, for whatever reason, not to engage with the school or children's centre. An important strategy in tackling this issue has been to draw on resources that are already deeply embedded in the community. One example is parent support workers who live within and know the community well and can gain the trust of parents who feel challenged by direct engagement with schools at least in the first instance. Although based in schools or children's centres, many of these workers spend a high proportion of their time out visiting, talking to parents in their homes and out shopping – going to where the parents are, not expecting them to come to the school or children's centre, as a first step.

At Watercliffe Meadow, a café has been set up in school which is open during the school day and provides a comfortable place for parents to meet and opportunities for informal engagement. It helps to bridge the gap for parents who might otherwise be reluctant to come into the school building. The concept of the café approach and the range and type of food available were generated at the planning stage for the new school by consulting parents on what they wanted.

Finding ways to identify what parents want - what it would take to engage them in dialogue and partnership - is also challenging. Questionnaires and parental surveys may have a role but for almost all the schools, children's centres and clusters involved in the project, it is the power of face-to-face conversation, building relationships based on trust and integrity, that makes the biggest difference. All of this takes time, commitment and patience. Real and deep listening, responding to what parents say and keeping promises are key factors in building the trust that seems to underpin a genuine partnership.

Implications for leadership of parental engagement

So what are some of the implications arising from this for the leadership of parental engagement?

First, and perhaps foremost, is the need for the leadership to be **outward facing**. There is a strong sense among the schools, children's centres and clusters involved in this project that children's best interests are served by the school working collaboratively and in partnership with parents. Whether this is focused on developing community cohesion in areas of deprivation or isolation or whether it is focused on involving parents more directly in decision-making and direction-setting depends largely on a clear identification of the needs of the community and a recognition of the importance of starting from where the parents are, not from where the school or children's centre thinks they should be.

Second, it would appear critical that leaders are directly engaged in **modelling, monitoring and dialogue**. This means they model the behaviours that create effective relationships, such as listening and talking *with* rather than *to* parents, supporting and encouraging staff to work effectively with parents, and monitoring the impact of the work. It is equally important to ensure that a range of measures is in place to track progress, collect evidence and analyse outcomes that enable the organisation to be clear about the difference such work makes. This work involves engaging directly in dialogue with a range of partners involved in supporting children and parents, including the children and parents themselves and other agencies that work with children and families.

Third, the most powerful examples of effective parental engagement work indicate that **distributing the leadership** and enabling others to develop leadership skills make a real difference. Parent support workers who work with skill and authority make a significant difference to the lives of individual children and families on a daily basis. Creating opportunities for them to grow and develop in the role is something that needs careful planning and consideration of continuing professional development (CPD), including supervision, which for some is a key means of support but for others is as yet embryonic.

Finally, **developing a clear vision** for parental engagement underpinned by a core belief that parents and children matter creates a powerful motive for gaining the commitment of staff, parents and the community. Communication is key, and ensuring the vision is embedded throughout the culture of the school, children's centre or cluster is critical for sustainability. However, this takes time and parental engagement work often starts with the individual parents and families who are struggling most. Here, although the work focuses on helping them to support their child's learning, it may begin by addressing the specific needs of the parents themselves. It is here where some important quick wins can occur. As some of the case studies included here illustrate, first steps are often focused on the detail, the small example of individual need or the gentle pushing open of a door that is ajar. It is not surprising therefore that work that engages parents at a strategic, decision-making level will often have to wait until the work with individual families is set up and running smoothly and until some of these families feel confident in contributing to the design of new services.

2: Findings in detail

With these overarching implications for leadership in mind, let us look now at the detail of what has emerged from this project. This section seeks to explore the five key themes as they have been illustrated by the work of the schools, children's centres and clusters involved in the project. Alongside the narrative are case studies which help evidence the findings. They provide a strong sense of the reality of the leadership and practice of parental engagement and illustrate the diversity of approach that is present in successful work.

Vision, values, culture and strategic direction

The degree to which parental engagement is embedded in the vision and strategic direction of clusters varied across the project. In the Cheadle and Thanet clusters, for example, it was the strong lead from the local authority's children's services and its commitment to and support for parental engagement that was a powerful external driver for the development of the vision. This resulted in parental engagement being strongly embedded into strategic and operational planning in these clusters.

Case study 1: Cheadle Embracing the local authority's vision

Parental engagement is an integral part of Staffordshire local authority's children's and young people's plan. The county parenting strategy sets out its commitment to parents to provide public services that meet parents' needs. It commits to empowering parents to influence and shape the services and to ensuring that staff are skilled at working with and communicating with parents.

It has developed eight district children's trusts, each of which has five key objectives to:

- enhance communication with and improve access to information for parents
- improve parents' access to services
- improve parent participation and engagement to deliver the Every Child Matters outcomes for children in partnership with parents
- improve joint and joined-up working between parenting support workers and ensure there is a clear continuum of support which is well organised and co-ordinated

- enhance services to support parents in their parenting role, especially as children enter the teenage years and make the transition to adulthood

The operational plan and delivery of these objectives is carried out with the active involvement of all the agencies involved and the local community, including parents. The Cheadle cluster is strongly committed to the objectives and the local authority's vision for joined-up working. It has set up, with Staffordshire's support, a social enterprise business model to ensure the locality maintains control of its own delivery in a sustainable way.

(See p26 for more about social enterprise.)

The Soho Links, Aylsham and Watercliffe Meadow clusters all have a well-defined vision which is deeply embedded in the cultures of the organisations and drives strategic direction. Here the approaches to parental engagement have been created independently by the clusters within a supportive framework provided by the local authority. Engagement with the local authority provides these clusters with an important link to the wider context in which they operate.

Case study 2: Soho Links

From consultation to decision-making

The Soho Links cluster sees its strategy not only in terms of the here and now but builds the future into its planning. It sees its work with parents in terms of involvement rather than engagement – an active role going beyond consultation to direct involvement in decision-making.

The Soho Links cluster team (made up of the cluster co-ordinator, parent support adviser and information co-ordinator) produces a monthly newsletter giving information about cluster services for parents and children and signposting other services.

Rather than the more traditional parent-teacher association (PTA), the cluster has developed a parents' forum that is based in individual schools and children's centres. Meetings operate as informal coffee mornings with a focus on sharing information and consultation about the services on offer and ideas for improvement. Parents' forums are facilitated by a parent worker or other identified member of staff.

The strategic plan states that the forums will feed in to a cluster-wide Soho Links parent parliament. This will build on the existing parent parliament based at the children's centre. The vision for the cluster-wide Soho Links parent parliament is an innovative governance model for encouraging greater parental involvement in decision-making and service development.

There is an emphasis on identifying parents who are ready for the next step by taking on a more representative role for their school or centre in a wider forum, or in other roles such as parent governor. The cluster team is offering support and training to empower parents to develop the confidence and skills to participate effectively in decision-making.

The possibility of developing a wider parent parliament structure across the city is under discussion.

Case study 3: Watercliffe Meadow

A new school driven by the headteacher's vision

During the academic year 2007/08, Linda Kingdon was appointed as headteacher at Shirecliffe Junior School to prepare it and two other local schools for closure and to plan the opening of a new school, to be called Watercliffe Meadow.

Her vision, supported by the temporary governors and the newly appointed deputy headteacher, was to embrace parental engagement and adult learning as key concepts of the new school in order to raise aspirations and develop social capital, social cohesion and regeneration in a deprived area in north-east Sheffield which the school was to serve.

Two strands of parental engagement were planned and developed alongside each other. The first focused on supporting parents to help their own children's learning and the second focused on providing parent/adult learning opportunities, often

by responding to parents' requests for particular courses.

Parental engagement is now an integral part of the school's life – indeed, Watercliffe Meadow calls itself a place for learning rather than a school, reflecting this vision and the strategic direction in which it is travelling.

An example of how integral the strategy has already become is the way in which the concept of community engagement underpins the process of recruitment and selection of all staff – job descriptions of all staff include community engagement as part of their duties. Parental engagement is devolved to every member of staff, enabling it to become part of the culture and life-blood of the school.

In others, the vision and strategic direction have been shaped very much by the schools and centres themselves. In Sherwood, and Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative, for example, the schools have carved out a path that has been driven by the needs of the community as perceived very directly by the schools and centres. The critical factor in these clusters has been the high level of commitment on the part of the school and centre leaders involved to creating a real partnership, both reaching out to parents and drawing them in. They have a strong sense of their own identity as schools, children's centres and clusters and have used this strong sense of identity to negotiate and gain the support of the local authority for the direction they are taking.

Case study 4: Sherwood

An early strategic decision lays the foundations for effective working

As early as 2007, the Sherwood cluster made parental engagement a priority through its education improvement partnership and decided to spend resources on recruiting a parent liaison worker for each school to work initially seven hours a week, rather than recruiting a cluster manager.

It recognised that each school had different needs and each needed to be able to develop its own solutions. It is an investment and a strategy that is highly valued by the schools and the parents.

The parent liaison workers are all managed by their own headteacher but the roles are now co-ordinated

by an extended services co-ordinator who has been in post since September 2008. This arrangement enables the parent liaison workers to link to other clusters and access training and links to other services, producing a joined-up approach with a strong local focus.

Such is the commitment of the schools to this approach that funding, initially through the education improvement partnership and then through extended services funding, is now moving in some schools to internal resources in order to extend the posts with an eye to future sustainability.

Case study 5: Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative

Headteachers drive a collaborative vision

Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative was started by the headteachers of five local primary schools who were keen to use financial resources available to them to develop services for children and families within their community.

The management structure has evolved over time. Currently one headteacher provides the key strategic lead and line manages the partnership and extended services manager (PESM). These two people have specific expertise in successful bid writing, which has supported the expansion of services provided across the collaborative.

There is a shared vision across this collaborative, with all partners striving for excellence in all aspects of their provision for their community. There is a flexible

approach on how partners' perceived needs are addressed, for example:

- Funding can provide for specific projects for a children's centre or school, eg stay and play staff or a reading recovery teacher.
- Funding can provide a central course that all can have access to on a pro-rata basis, eg for a gifted and talented project.

The collaborative has systems and structures in place that allow all partners to be formally consulted on a regular cycle. This ensures that high-quality provision, as perceived by the users of the services, is delivered.

All these clusters, and others within the project, have developed a vision that is disseminated and understood by stakeholders at a variety of levels. This was evidenced by the way in which parents, parental support workers and more strategic leaders talked about the common goals towards which they all worked.

For some clusters, the vision is less well established. In Selly Oak, for example, the driver is a strong cluster co-ordinator, employed by the cluster with funding from the local authority, depended upon by the schools, with many opportunities offered for engagement at a practical and operational level. The work is valued by the schools and by the community the schools serve and a growing sense of strategy is emerging as the local authority has encouraged all its clusters to prioritise parental engagement in their action plans for 2009/10. At co-ordinator training days, the local authority has used Hart's ladder of participation to encourage co-ordinators to think of the various steps of engagement with both children and young people and also with parents.

In Middlesbrough, a different picture emerges with high levels of commitment to parental engagement within each school but an embryonic sense as yet of this being part of a cluster vision.

Case study 6: Middlesbrough Schools focused on their communities

In Middlesbrough, although operating as a cluster, the schools' sense of a shared vision is still developing. Each school and children's centre shares very similar values and practice and endeavours to be seen as the hub of the community with the aim of overcoming barriers to engagement felt by parents.

Headteachers and governors have set a vision for each of their schools which involves them in modelling a culture of openness and respect with an open-door policy that all staff are encouraged to adopt. Although this has presented them with some challenges with regard to safeguarding, the schools feel strongly that the benefits outweigh the risks. In all the schools,

parents are encouraged to approach any member of staff and each member of staff acts as appropriate depending on the issue.

The faith ethos of one school was felt to have a bearing on positive parental perceptions of the school.

Another school operates an open-site policy where the school gates are not locked and children use the premises in the evenings and at weekends. The school believes it is important for the premises to be as open as possible and be part of the back-yard of the community.

So what have we learned about what difference a clear strategic direction, arising out of strong vision and values, makes to the lives of young people and their families?

There is no one-size-fits-all vision for what a parental engagement strategy should look like. The vision is as diverse as the schools and the communities they serve. However, some common elements emerged through this project which seem to be critical:

- a strong leader who drives the vision – often, but not exclusively, the headteacher
- a clear underpinning belief that engaging parents will make a difference to the achievement and learning of the children – a strong sense of purpose
- a vision shared and committed to by all staff if it is to be trusted by the community
- trust and strong relationships for successful implementation of the vision
- valuing and having a passion for helping parents grow as well as their children
- a focus on evaluating impact – what difference are we making?

- involvement of parents in decision-making about school development planning, provision and shaping future services, not just in consultation
- a focus on developing leadership at all levels
- external links strengthening the partnerships, with, for example, children's trusts and local authority partnerships

Although some schools and clusters have independently developed a clear vision and strategic direction, mutual commitment and alignment between the local authority strategy and the school or cluster strategy can clearly create some very powerful ways of working, as case study 1 shows.

The critical difference an embedded vision makes is both qualitative and quantitative. Perceptions matter:

The purpose is to bridge the gap between home and school. The role came from a commitment to Every Child Matters. It's about broadening parents' horizons and aspirations and developing their skills... It's about better relationships and building trust... It's about improving parents' and children's lives.

Parent liaison worker, Sherwood

That appears to translate into recognisable improvements in the quality of children's learning through better attendance, improved behaviour and greater educational achievement.

In Soho Links, where the partnership focus is on helping children achieve more through the extended services core offer, the partnership vision is 'Passionate about making a difference to our families'.

In Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative, tracking indicated that pupils had moved up two or three national curriculum sub-levels in one year and this was linked to increased collaboration with parents. Further examples of impact and use of data can be seen below.

Leadership of parental engagement

Effective leadership of parental engagement sits at the heart of effective practice. This was seen consistently across all 10 clusters involved in this enquiry. What varied considerably however was the nature of that leadership, the range of people playing critical leadership roles and the breadth and depth of their remit.

In some clusters, leadership sits very clearly with the headteachers. Middlesbrough exemplifies this, where the headteachers of each school have established the vision independently and developed practice according to the needs they have identified for their particular school communities. However, across the cluster, there can be seen significant consistencies in the vision and values that underpin the work and the beginnings of a more distributed approach as they encourage staff and parent support workers to take greater responsibility for developing parental involvement.

In other clusters, strong middle leadership of parental engagement work can be seen as clusters engage effective teams of parent support workers, family liaison officers or parent support advisers, who work directly with parents and families. These teams are frequently led by highly effective people who co-ordinate and lead the work across the whole cluster. In Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative the partnership and extended services manager for the collaborative works closely with the children's centre managers to support a team ranging from outreach and crèche workers to those who have been brought into the schools from the community to create close links between the schools and the community. One example is a parent who, following her own experience of postnatal depression, was running a support group from a local café. She was invited to come into one of the children's centres to do this and is now a committed and effective community leader operating within the collaborative.

The way in which leadership has been structured is a key indicator of where the leadership lies, how distributed it is and the extent to which the work is embedded as a core part of the work of leaders. The quartet steering group in Thanet has a strategic overview of the work of the cluster but the levels of leadership that sit beneath this help to ensure the work with parents is coherent, focused and closely aligned with Kent's family support model which provides a holistic framework for support, through to intervention at four levels, for the whole family.

At Watercliffe Meadow, the engagement team is one of three core leadership teams and has as its remit responsibility for the engagement of all children and families, 8am-6pm and in the holidays.

Case study 7: Thanet **Family liaison officers underpin the strategy**

Within Kent, there are 16 senior family liaison officers who hold a middle management role and, currently, 260 family liaison officers and parent support advisers based in schools.

Each school in the cluster has a family liaison officer who is directly responsible to the headteacher. There is also a senior family liaison officer based at one of the primary schools. Her role is to provide support to the family liaison officers and headteachers. She is responsible in the quartet cluster for 12 family liaison officers, including two secondary family liaison officers, and two parent support advisers. She provides group supervision and networking opportunities. She is also involved in recruitment and appointments.

The strength of the team lies in the very capable leaders, at all levels within the cluster, who have a wide range of professional experience. They are passionate about their work and deeply committed.

They state that they will do whatever it takes to provide the levels of support needed.

A number of factors support them:

- They have a significant degree of autonomy in the way they work, supported by the senior family liaison worker and the headteachers.
- There are regular network meetings for family liaison workers and parent support advisers.
- There is regular group supervision for family liaison workers.
- The network holds regular meetings for practitioners and volunteers working with families in the cluster.
- Effective communication structures cover all services that engage with families.

Case study 8: Watercliffe Meadow **A model of distributed leadership**

Although parental engagement runs through the structures, processes and culture of Watercliffe Meadow like the words in a stick of rock, parental engagement work is specifically led within the school by an engagement team. One of three core leadership teams, the engagement team comprises the deputy headteacher, one of three assistant headteachers (early years), learning mentors, an early intervention manager, the community learning co-ordinator and front-of-house staff. It reflects the large and distributed leadership structure within the

school. Although all three core leadership teams have responsibility for parental work, this work is led by the engagement team.

Roles within the team extend both across the school and beyond it. For example, the community learning co-ordinator is an associate governor in the three primary schools and secondary academy within the cluster. She co-ordinates adult learning across the family of schools, co-delivers with other staff in the school the five workshops for parents of children in

reception, together with the assistant head for early years, and encourages and responds to parents' requests for learning. In addition she is a key link for parents and sees an important aspect of her work as befriending parents and being available as someone they can speak to at any time.

One of the most important, consistent messages that has come from the enquiry is that the most effective leadership is well distributed within a clear strategic direction driven by a strong leader who shapes and reshapes the vision as the work progresses. These leaders range from headteachers to a cluster strategy manager employed by the high school and sitting at leadership level, to cluster co-ordinators employed by the local authority. The following case studies give a flavour of how these roles play out.

Case study 9: Selly Oak **A cluster co-ordinator creates coherence for schools and families**

The cluster co-ordinator is the driving force for all development within the Selly Oak cluster, including parental engagement. She is actively supported by most of the headteachers and by the steering group – a selection of representatives from the schools and partner agencies within the cluster – to whom she is responsible.

She manages three part-time parent support advisers who come from a range of community development backgrounds. They provide direct support to individual families under stress and point them to specialist agencies where required. They build bridges between families and schools which influence attendance and learning. They liaise with other agencies and organise targeted learning courses for parents within the cluster.

The cluster co-ordinator holds a number of critical leadership qualities which stand out:

- She has the ability to develop trust, actively listens and is able to offer practical support in the front-line of work.
- She liaises both with schools and other agencies, understanding concerns on all sides and helping them to be clear about their priorities and where their work overlaps.
- She is persuasive: she has the ability both to recruit insecure parents and to keep teachers on board in the face of other pressing issues. She is able to quote research that links parental engagement directly with attainment, thus helping teachers to see the benefits.
- She is focused on impact, plans ahead with staff and resources and is willing to reflect on practice and make changes where the need arises as a result of monitoring and evaluation.

Case study 10: Aylsham A strategy manager in the driving seat

Parental engagement has a high profile in the Aylsham cluster. It is led by the cluster strategy manager who is employed by the high school and sits on the school's senior leadership team. She leads on the strategy for extended services and has strategic oversight of the parental engagement work. She is a lead professional for community engagement and plays a role in the Specialist Schools and Academies' Trust working with other schools on parental engagement. The local authority recognises the quality of work the cluster is doing in this area and puts others schools in touch with her.

The strategy manager line manages a family learning co-ordinator who works across the cluster together with a parent support adviser. These key workers have

been in post for 3-4 years and have developed a strong relationship with families in the cluster. They are well supported by the strategy manager, both in the work they do – 'I know she will give me 100 per cent support', 'She has total confidence in what I do'; and through the professional development opportunities they access. For example, the family learning co-ordinator is about to enrol on an NVQ Level 3 in working with families in early years settings, and plans to progress to Level 4 with a view to applying for a children's centre co-ordinator post.

These workers have developed wide-ranging collaborative links, all encouraged and supported by the cluster strategy manager

In all the examples of effective leaders seen within this project, a number of common attributes emerged. The leaders are:

- driven by a strong sense of moral purpose – children and families matter
- people focused – they know how to develop relationships built on trust and integrity
- effective role models – they do what they say and set the standard for others through their behaviour
- passionate about what they do
- focused on outcomes – impact matters
- highly effective networkers who engage support and commitment from and to a wide range of stakeholders within and beyond the cluster

Thus the requirements of effective leadership of parental engagement are not, after all, very different from the requirements of effective leadership in any context. But if this work is to make a real difference, the importance of leadership cannot be overstated. It is the glue that holds the provision together. It keeps the focus on impacts and outcomes. It creates coherence and meaning for those involved in both development and delivery. It ensures practice has real purpose and brings real benefits.

Parental engagement in practice

So what does the practice of parental engagement look like? The organisation and practice of engaging parents are, again, wide-ranging and diverse but with some common themes emerging through the project on what makes for successful practice and what some of the challenges are for schools and centres embarking on this work.

In terms of organisation and structure, the critical factor, whether formal or informal, is clarity of roles. Where leadership and operational roles are clear and well understood by staff, parents and members of the community, the structure would seem to support the development of trusting relationships leading to greater impact for parents and children. Two contrasting examples illustrate this: in Cheadle, the structures and organisation are firmly rooted in the local authority's vision for engaging parents, but are developed locally as a social enterprise in a tight, formal business model designed to ensure the sustainability of services valued by the cluster. (See p26 for more information on social enterprise.)

Case study 11: Cheadle Developing a relationship built on trust

In Cheadle a grandfather who was caring for his grandson had experienced significant problems with the boy's behaviour. The grandfather felt very strongly that communications between the school and home had completely broken down and needed a third party who could bridge the gap.

The parent support worker began working with him and his grandson. She established a relationship with the grandfather built on trust, respect and

co-operation. He later described her as a 'lifesaver' and acknowledged that were it not for the parent support worker he would not have survived the stress and anxiety and his grandson would have been taken into care.

Building such a relationship re-established confidence in the service provision and integrated the child back into school.

On the other hand, the work of the Sherwood cluster is much more loosely organised with each school directing the focus of the parental engagement work of its parent liaison worker according to the needs identified for each school community. This operates within the broader umbrella of the cluster, co-ordinated by the extended services co-ordinator.

Many of the clusters have in place some form of parents' forum or steering group with a remit ranging from the formal to the informal. In Selly Oak, the parents' forum feeds directly into the heads' forum and also into the cluster steering group, a multi-agency, strategic body. In Thanet, each school's and centre's parent forum is designed to feed views into the cluster network relatively informally through the family liaison officer. Each of the three children's centres within Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative has its own parents' forum, called 'brightstart partnerships' which follow Lambeth Council good practice guidance. Parents and children's centre staff have attended Lambeth Council's brightstart partnership training, so they know how to organise and chair meetings, take minutes, agree actions, and help to plan and shape children's centre services so that they meet the needs of parents in the five schools and the broader community. Others, such as Aylsham, have no formal parent representation, although parental engagement has a high profile within the area with significant involvement of parents across a wide range of activities.

Case study 12: Aylsham **Helping parents to access critical services**

The family of a child diagnosed with eye disease was sent a letter advising her parents of the need to make an appointment for a specialised eyesight test. The parent support adviser went to the home to make sure the parents were able to understand the letter and would act on it.

It was apparent that the parents had literacy problems and the very large format telephone suggested there was also a disability in the family.

They had not understood the letter and did not have the confidence to make the call. The parent support adviser explained the letter and assisted the father in making the call for an appointment.

The high school funded the £200 required for the specialist eyesight test. The child can now see in class and stopped the parent support adviser in the corridor to say, 'Thank you for my glasses'.

The practice of parental engagement across these 10 clusters is a rich tapestry of activity which the case studies below illustrate. The critical thread weaving through all of these is the importance of listening – and attending – to the parent voice. Soho Links' mantra, taken from the Leading Parent Partnership Award (LPPA, see p25 for more details), of 'We asked, you said, we did' could easily be applied to much of the practice of parental engagement that this project discovered in its enquiry.

Case study 13: Soho Links **The practice of positive encouragement**

The Soho Links cluster has produced guidance for parents on attendance and punctuality. This policy, implemented in collaboration with the city's education social work service, is supported by regular feedback to parents on their child's achievements. The importance of parental involvement in their child's learning – ensuring homework diaries are completed, reading with children and focusing on consistent attendance – are emphasised with offers of both one-to-one support and learning opportunities for parents. Repercussions of unauthorised absence – loss of a school place – are made clear.

Success is acknowledged and rewarded. A series of cluster-wide one-day celebratory circus skills workshops for good attendance, and before- and after-school sessions for poor attendees who are

making progress, reflect the practice of positive encouragement that characterises the Soho Links approach. After-school yoga sessions, designed to raise self-esteem and improve concentration and relationships, are delivered in 10 locations across the cluster, with sessions targeted at specific year groups. Voluntary and other agencies delivering extended services activities are given a providers' pack which ensures that standards and expectations, from child protection to attendance, are consistent across all provision.

Similarly, in developing and delivering courses for parents, and in family enrichment sessions, the Soho Links cluster team clearly sets out the standards and expectations of course attendance and punctuality for parents. Their success is acknowledged and rewarded with certificates and celebratory events.

There have been a number of challenges with regard to practice that schools and clusters have had to work through. Many of these will be familiar to those engaged in work with parents and families, but the solutions these schools, centres and clusters have found have been local and specific to the individual context.

For some school staff, it can be difficult to accept that some parents are reluctant to engage in school activities such as maths evenings or science fairs or even reading workshops. There may be a variety of reasons for this, not least a negative, or maybe limited, experience in their own schooling. Finding a different route may be necessary. Parents may not always be willing or experienced learners, and teachers may not always tune into their adult learning context.

Many headteachers have recognised this and have worked hard with parents and staff to create easier, less stressful and more engaging relationships. For many of the clusters involved in this project, the key starting point has been to make connections with parents on their terms, not on the school's terms. In Selly Oak, for example, the girls' secondary school is running a small class with Muslim mothers. It is facilitated by a parent support adviser and the plans and topics for the session are taken directly from the wishes of the members of the group. It has taken considerable time and effort to bring the eight mothers together in school and the topics of dressmaking and relaxation, whilst perhaps not the preferred choice of some school staff, are seen by the mothers as a real opportunity to enable them to build their confidence as learners and to build links with more formal learning which they may choose to access later.

In Middlesbrough, the range of services one school sought to help parents access, in order to meet them where they were starting from, included micro chipping for dogs.

Recruitment, training and CPD for those involved in parental engagement work can be another challenge for schools, centres and clusters. A focus on parental engagement is central to the recruitment processes, for example, for every member of staff, regardless of role, at Watercliffe Meadow. For staff directly engaged in parent support work, initial and ongoing training and CPD are important. In Sherwood, parent liaison workers have access to the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) induction training modules for children's workforce practitioners as well as role-specific training, including safeguarding developed and offered by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). Some have accessed additional qualifications and undertaken further training in basic skills teaching and facilitator courses for running parenting groups.

Supervision of parental support workers is another challenge for schools, centres and clusters with an inconsistent picture across the projects. For some clusters, regular networking meetings provide support and a forum for sharing practice, formally and informally. Others have regular, formal supervision on a group basis, as for example in Thanet, where this occurs monthly. The emotional, social and legal complexity that may be involved in parental support work means the opportunity to access the support and guidance that effective supervision offers can be key to its success and sustainability. It is also critical for ensuring quality and ongoing development for those involved. But in general, it would seem to be embryonic. A common theme emerging from parent support workers is that they would like to see this developed further, particularly in terms of clinical supervision and support. CWDC has recently published a guide to developing an integrated approach to supervision in children's trusts (CWDC, 2010) and TDA published *Parent support advisers - practice and impact* in spring 2010.

For some, challenges are physical, with communities and parents spread out across wide rural areas, such as in Norfolk with the Aylsham cluster. Here the schools have worked hard to go out to parents as well as to bring them in to the local schools rather than everything going through one central hub.

Working parents present another common challenge. Some schools, such as those in the Middlesbrough cluster, and many children's centres, operate a deliberate open-door policy in order to increase accessibility. Others ensure they offer a range of daytime and evening appointment and meeting times so that no parent need be excluded because of personal or work commitments.

Many clusters set out specifically to raise the qualifications and job opportunity profile for parents, underpinned by a belief that parents engaged in learning, achieving and gaining employment provide strong role models for their children, particularly in areas where low aspirations for themselves and their children are prevalent. Examples from Watercliffe Meadow, Horley Learning Partnership, Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative, and Aylsham all illustrate this commitment.

Case study 14: Watercliffe Meadow **Engaging parents in their own learning**

The 'Engage' programme was initially the joint initiative of the headteachers of Watercliffe Meadow and Parkwood Academy. It was a response to the need to raise community aspirations and received backing from the local authority's director of life-long learning and the DCSF Innovation Unit in summer 2007. The heads had identified groups of schools working holistically to engage families. The programme is now managed by a local external agency, Southey and Owlerton Area Regeneration (SOAR). Funding for the project manager's post came jointly from the local sector skills council, the local authority and SOAR. All the schools in the cluster (and increasing numbers from other local clusters in the north of the city and beyond) now participate in the Engage programme.

Launched in January 2009, Engage identifies and develops parents who can become volunteers in their local schools in a range of occupations other than teaching. There is a formalised, accredited training programme. When parents and other adults complete the training programme they are presented with certificates at an awards ceremony to their children are invited.

The schools involved then give priority consideration in their recruitment and selection processes to Engage participants. Over the past year, 13 parents have been involved in placements at Watercliffe Meadow and 4 have gone on to employment in the school as a result.

Case study 15: Horley Learning Partnership **Helping parents support their children's learning**

The cluster employs a strategic manager who is based at The Bungalow, which also houses a Sure Start centre offering a variety of services for young children and their families. The Bungalow is the venue for a number of activities aimed at ensuring maximum involvement and support for parents and children. Meetings and training seminars for staff and parents all take place there as it is well known to parents and viewed in a positive light.

One example of the type of support offered to parents by the cluster is 'Parenting puzzle', a 10-week course that encourages parents and carers to enjoy bringing up their children and get the best

out of family life. It offers positive and practical ways of guiding children so they learn how to handle both their feelings and their behaviour. The courses are offered as morning and evening sessions in order to ensure maximum access.

Parenting puzzle reflects the cluster's philosophy of supporting parents in as many ways as possible. It is delivered in an informal way and ensures that the parents and carers involved are supported in positive, practical and fun ways. An important element throughout focuses on boosting the confidence of all participants.

Case study 16: Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative Tapping into funding opportunities

In an area where there are high levels of social deprivation and unemployment, Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative has taken an innovative approach to engaging parents in their own learning. If parents access and attend a 12-week course on child development delivered as one session a week and run through the children's centre, they receive a government grant of £200 on completion.

If they then go on to undertake a community development course and come up with an idea for a community project that is accepted and run for the local community, they receive £500.

Case study 17: Aylsham Family learning focused and connected

In the Aylsham cluster, there is a strong belief that family learning provided by external agencies as one-off events with no connection with the schools or community is less effective. Family learning is therefore central to the cluster's work and there is a wide range of opportunities offered both across the cluster by the family learning co-ordinator and by individual schools. Many of these involve close partnerships with local agencies. Family learning in the Aylsham cluster generally falls into three distinct strands:

- There are curriculum information sessions for parents, offering for example a basic introduction to maths at primary and secondary levels, and a series of three sessions on transition to the high school, supported by a DVD. The latter has a 40 per cent take-up among parents of Year 6 pupils. In another school, 90 per cent of parents attend family learning events.

- Behaviour support is provided through a contract with a mental health nurse who runs courses on basic behaviour management: for example, 'What to do if a child has tantrums'; 'How to deal with teenagers'; 'How to deal with a first boy-or girlfriend'; and 'Coping with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)'. She also provides social and behaviour support in the high school.
- Parents can sign up for adult learning courses to improve their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and knowledge of internet safety. They are supported in developing a CV and work skills. Courses on offer include 'How our babies learn' and a 10-week accredited course 'How our children learn'. All these programmes are delivered locally in the schools within the cluster.

The real driver for engaging parents is, for all the clusters involved, a desire to improve the life chances of the children in their schools and centres. Many parental engagement practices may begin with the kind of activities that will draw in reluctant or hard-to-reach parents, such as the dressmaking at Selly Oak, jewellery making (Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative, and Middlesbrough) or salsa (Sherwood) but the ultimate aim is to help parents support their children's learning and achievement in school and beyond.

So what difference does the practice of parental engagement make? How have the clusters measured and tracked impact? How is the work received and perceived by parents?

Evidence emerging from this small enquiry project involving just 10 clusters across the country is surprisingly consistent. Many schools and centres recognise that the most powerful relationships are built on a sense of mutual respect and trust. The impact of this is felt and expressed by staff, parents and children – qualitative, perceptual data - but can also be measured in concrete terms with a whole range of quantitative data.

Some quotes from the clusters illustrate the qualitative, felt sense of achievement:

One of the mums on the family [social and emotional aspects of learning] SEAL course said ‘thank you for changing my life’ when her daughter had turned to her and said ‘I love you’.

Sherwood

For my session they provide a crèche, so it is real parental engagement – not having to think about the babies, just concentrate on myself.

Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative

Mothers are less stressed. Children play with other children and there are well-trained staff. This is my third child and I am receiving so much better support this time around.

Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative

[The parent liaison worker] has been a shoulder to cry on to a parent whose partner was in prison. Her support for the parent helped to keep the children in school.

Headteacher, Sherwood

On the quantitative side, hard data is being collected with a considerable degree of consistency across the clusters, especially around factors such as attendance, behaviour, access to free school meals and take-up of extended services provision. It is also in some clusters being analysed and used to develop further provision and build the trust of parents as they become involved in decision-making about provision. External influences such as Ofsted create a strong imperative for schools and centres to collect data on everything that they do. But where data is used most effectively, there would appear to be an even stronger internal imperative. This drives not only the work but the analysis of impact in order to sustain and constantly improve the service. This happens best where it is clearly embedded and threaded through the life and work of the school, children’s centre or cluster. Committed internal accountability seems to go hand in hand with the most effective practice, and it is focused primarily on outcomes rather than on provision.

Case study 18: Soho Links **Using data to target and to celebrate**

The Soho Links cluster uses its data collection and evaluation to establish baselines and agree targets for parental involvement. Monitoring includes data about parents’ completion of homework records

and regular attendance at their child’s review meetings through to consultation events, volunteer activities and participation in family and life-long learning events. The cluster’s current involvement

in the Leading Parent Partnership Award supports an increasingly robust approach to data collection and analysis.

This information enables staff to identify strengths and gaps and skilfully support the development of parents' leadership capacity at all levels, from being a positive role model for their own child to being involved in consultation and decision-making about wider school arrangements, including the development and delivery of the extended services core offer as well as developing and accessing further education and training opportunities for themselves.

Not only does data enable the cluster to identify gaps and target its work more effectively, it also enables impact to be identified and celebrated. Impact on pupil outcomes includes:

- improved attendance
- improved behaviour in school

- raised achievement
- better completion of homework
- more confident transition both into primary and on into secondary

Impact on parental outcomes includes:

- improved parenting skills and a good effect on children's attendance and behaviour
- improved rates of parents moving into paid employment
- increased parental confidence with more parents standing for governor positions
- increased parental attainment, for example gaining qualifications and going on to the next level

Case study 19: Sherwood Using data to bridge achievement gaps

In the Sherwood cluster, the extended services co-ordinator provides leadership on gathering and collecting data and evidence of impact, particularly through the cluster network. This is then used to target and support vulnerable groups of children, identified and nominated by each school.

For example, one school has identified eight girls at Key Stage 2. The parent support worker for the school works with the girls and their mothers to raise aspirations. The school provides baseline data and the extended services co-ordinator tracks progress and gathers feedback from staff, the girls and their parents.

There are different underachieving groups in each school and each has developed good knowledge of their parent community. In another school, data has been used to target an intervention project for mothers and daughters focused on maths.

Another targeted project for Year 2 maths includes after-school activities for families, using food to gain and sustain interest. The self-esteem of children and parents was seen to grow enormously and measurement included both feedback by questionnaires and quantitative data gathered from classroom activities.

In-depth tracking in one school revealed a correlation between children making insufficient progress with parents not coming in to school. Initial work began with salsa dance and self-defence classes. Now the work is more directly focused on supporting children's learning and includes SEAL and Mad Science. Attainment has gone up significantly and the headteacher believes this is a direct result of increased parental engagement.

The collection and use of data are important not only to evaluate and plan effective services at a strategic level but also for monitoring the progress of individual children and families. The common assessment framework was consistently used across the clusters as a key means of ensuring that individual children and families do not fall off the radar and that data is shared as necessary and appropriate with a wide range of partner agencies. In many clusters, those who lead on parental engagement also take a lead here.

Collaborative work beyond the school, centre and cluster

Working to engage parents almost inevitably leads to collaborative work beyond the school. The practice seen across the 10 clusters involved in this project would certainly seem to bear this out. The life of the whole child has become increasingly central to the work of schools. The encouragement of partnership working in a wide range of contexts, arising directly from government policy over the past few years, has led to many schools developing relationships with external agencies that have altered the landscape in which they – and in particular, the leaders – work.

With the advent of children's trusts, the landscape is likely to shift again. As yet, the impact of this among the 10 clusters involved in this enquiry appears to be minimal. Headteachers in Middlesbrough said they were uncertain how the role of the children's trust played out in relation to their day-to-day work in schools and in relation to parental engagement work. This view seems to be widespread across these 10 clusters. In only a small number of clusters was the work explicitly linked to the work of the children's trust.

For Cheadle, the Staffordshire children's and young people's plan sets out what children's trust partners need to do to promote the development of services for parents as well as their involvement in shaping the services. The local authority has, ahead of the September 2011 deadline, appointed a commissioner for parents who has been in post since November 2008. The role of the commissioner is to be a voice for parents at key meetings, influencing decision-makers and making sure parents' views are represented. There are clear lines of accountability, with parent support workers on the ground feeding up to and line managed by community and learning partnership co-ordinators who are seen as key players in implementing the objectives of the children's trust parenting strategy in their area through the district children's trusts.

In Kent, the children's trust strategy for parents was commissioned by the Kent children's trust in 2008. This has underpinned the way in which Kent local authority has developed services for children, young people and their families. Whilst this is likely to be a picture replicated across most local authorities, the degree to which headteachers and other leaders of parental engagement work see where what they do fits into a bigger picture is highly variable.

This would appear to be an area for further work at all levels of collaborative leadership within schools, children's centres and local authorities.

However, what has emerged is that the clusters involved in this project are engaged with a wide range of partners beyond the schools and children's centres. They share data through a variety of structures such as steering groups, boards and forums and with a range of partners as diverse as police, housing, social services and the voluntary sector. They draw increasingly on the expertise of other agencies such as mental health, nursing and community development bodies to support parents and children and young people. They are employing staff in key positions who have expertise other than as teachers, for example as cluster co-ordinators, learning mentors, counsellors, and parent or community support workers.

This is changing the way leadership in some schools and centres is structured. Watercliffe Meadow had constructed a large and distributed leadership team incorporating engagement as one of its three core strategies (see Case study 8). Aylsham has employed a cluster strategy manager whose role encompasses parental engagement and partnership working as a member of the senior leadership team of the high school (see Case study 10). Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative has an extensive outreach programme led by the partnership and extended services

manager who has a strategic lead for the whole cluster. Much of his role is outward facing and includes seeking funding and preparing bids, which requires collaboration with a range of external partners.

Two clusters are engaging with external structures or programmes which are underpinned by collaborative partnerships beyond the schools and centres. Soho Links is piloting a national Leading Parent Partnership Award (LPPA). Signing up to the LPPA audit process adds a robust framework based on 10 national objectives and ensures that attention is given to involving all stakeholders, thus extending the leadership base. Collaborative working beyond the school is therefore built into the work it is doing on parental engagement. Case study 20 outlines briefly what the LPPA involves.

In Cheadle, the cluster is engaged in setting up a social enterprise business model. This involves a range of partners creating a formal business organisation focused on supporting the community. Supported by Staffordshire local authority, the cluster sees this as a critical means of ensuring the sustainability of all its extended services work, including that of parental engagement.

Case study 20 Leading Parent Partnership Award

The Leading Parent Partnership Award (LPPA), which is recognised by DfE, provides a framework to enable schools to strengthen their partnership with parents and carers. It is a developmental process which, through the involvement of parents, aims to enhance children's life chances at all stages from nursery to secondary.

The LPPA consists of 10 evidence-based objectives:

1. The school demonstrates a commitment to work towards the LPPA.
2. The school makes and implements effective plans to achieve and maintain the LPPA.
3. The school is a welcoming and friendly place for parents.
4. The school promotes an awareness of and participation in life-long learning opportunities available in school and in the community to *all* groups of parents.
5. The school holds and actively promotes enrichment opportunities or events for *joint* parent and child participation.

6. The school provides good induction procedures for all new parents.
7. The school provides parents with relevant and user-friendly guidance and information to help them support their children's learning.
8. The school produces and implements parent-friendly policies to establish effective home-school links and improve pupil/student attendance, punctuality, behaviour and progress and to encourage positive participation in school.
9. The school provides good support for transition for parents when their children leave the school.
10. The school evaluates performance against the LPPA.

The process of engaging with LPPA involves an initial audit of practice, an action plan and support from an LPPA adviser in implementing this before a final assessment by an independent adviser against the objectives, leading to the award, which is valid for three years.

Social enterprise models

The government defines social enterprises as businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.

What that essentially means is that they are businesses driven by social and environmental objectives. Many commercial businesses would consider themselves to have social objectives, but social enterprises are distinctive because their social or environmental purpose is central to what they do. Rather than maximising shareholder value, their main aim is to generate profit to further their social and environmental goals.

Well known examples of social enterprises include *The Big Issue*, Jamie Oliver's restaurant Fifteen, and the fair-trade chocolate company Divine Chocolate.

The social enterprise movement is inclusive and extremely diverse, encompassing organisations

such as development trusts, community enterprises, co-operatives, housing associations, social firms and leisure trusts, among others.

These businesses are operating across an incredibly wide range of industries and sectors from health and social care, to renewable energy, recycling and fair trade.

Source: Social Enterprise Coalition
www.socialenterprise.org.uk

What this means for collaborative leadership of extended services across clusters of schools is the opportunity to develop a financially sustainable approach to extended services provision and to control the employment and decision-making processes directly. As a business structure it ensures high levels of accountability as well as autonomy.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a critical issue and one that presents an uneasy challenge for many of the clusters involved in this project. With a finite lifespan, funding for key workers, such as parental support workers or cluster co-ordinators, is particularly vulnerable. Much of the good practice in clusters depends on the day-to-day work these skilled and dedicated staff carry out directly with parents.

However, the picture across the project is one of creativity and determination in finding ways and means of embedding the work so that it becomes less dependent on external, limited-life funding. The social enterprise Cheadle is in the process of constructing a highly formalised way of ensuring sustainability (see case study 11). The schools in the Aylsham cluster have, for a number of years, pooled their funding for extended services and the high school has made a substantial financial contribution to cluster working. The schools are committed to long-term provision of services such as support for parental engagement and the cluster is in the process of becoming a trust to ensure sustainability.

The degree of commitment to parental engagement work across the clusters is a key determining factor. Commitment and passion are the drivers for creating sustainable structures. They are more important than funding and lead to creative ways to meet the funding challenge.

At Watercliffe Meadow and Soho Links, for example, the vision that has been created has community, and in particular, parental, engagement at its core. Parents matter, as do their children, and as a result, community development practices are being mainstreamed rather than added on. The work occurs at grassroots level but is a

core element of the strategic vision created and led by the headteachers but distributed and practised throughout the organisation. Staffing and job descriptions have evolved in these clusters so that parental engagement has become a central part of everyone's role.

The Soho Links cluster also has a strong commitment to the importance of reinforcing and supporting the capacity and sustainability of its third-sector partners. Attention is given to not undercutting voluntary organisations by providing similar services without charge. As trust in the schools and children's centres has increased, and the benefits and quality of provision have become evident, parents have shown they are increasingly willing to contribute to the cost of extended services and training courses.

In Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative, seeking out external funding streams is part of the core strategic work of the partnership and extended services manager. This aspect of the cluster's work has been critical to enabling it to grow the provision. In Horley Learning Partnership, the project manager has a similar role.

The involvement of governors is another key aspect. Where parental engagement is supported, recognised and monitored by governors, this helps to ensure the commitment is strong and this supports sustainability. Middlesbrough, Horley Learning Partnership and Selly Oak are among the many clusters that have clear and direct involvement of governors, linked particularly to reporting and monitoring.

Conclusion

What we have sought to do with this project and this report is to capture and illustrate some of the practice, particularly around leadership, that is a daily reality for schools, children's centres and clusters. The work and, in particular, the leadership of parental engagement, is rich and varied across the 10 clusters. Evidence from the work of these clusters would indicate that a clear vision, underpinned by strong moral purpose, and driven by leaders who are able to build relationships based on trust and integrity, is the critical factor in developing effective practice in parental engagement which is collaborative and sustainable. The single core belief that threads through all the work illustrated here is that the best way to improve the engagement of young people in maximising their opportunities for the future is to work in meaningful and collaborative partnership with their parents.

We would like to thank all the individuals in schools, children's centres and clusters and local authorities and other agencies who have contributed to this project.

Further resources and information can be accessed via the internet from a wide range of organisations both within and beyond the education sector. What follows is just a starting point for those who feel inspired to begin or continue their journey from wherever they are currently placed. We wish you well.

Resources

Publications

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Websites

National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services: www.nationalcollege.org.uk

Training and Development Agency for Schools: www.tda.gov.uk

Children's Workforce and Development Council: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Social Enterprise Coalition: www.socialenterprise.org.uk

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