

# Supporting parents with their children's 'at home' learning and development

A guide for practitioners

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd in partnership with the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education and JB Associates.



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### **The project local authorities**

- Northampton Excellence Cluster
- Tower Hamlets Children's Services
- Sefton FAST
- Sefton Extended Services
- Rochdale Family Learning Service
- Isle of Wight Council
- Nottingham Family Learning Service

### **The project schools**

- Our Lady Queen of Peace School
- Farnborough Road Junior School
- Crosby High School
- Forefield Junior School
- St James Primary School
- Delapre Primary School
- South Street Nursery
- Howard Street Nursery
- Thomas Buxton Infants School
- Bonner Primary School
- Brocklewood Junior School
- Springfield Primary School

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## Glossary of terms

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| BIP   | Behaviour Improvement Plan                        |
| CAL   | Community Arts and Literacy                       |
| CALC  | Community Arts Learning Centre                    |
| CRB   | Criminal Records Bureau                           |
| CV    | Curriculum Vitae                                  |
| DCSF  | Department for Children, Schools and Families     |
| EAL   | English as an Additional Language                 |
| EC    | Excellence Cluster                                |
| ECM   | Every Child Matters                               |
| FAST  | Families and Schools Together                     |
| FLIF  | Family Learning Impact Fund                       |
| ITT   | Initial Teacher Training                          |
| ICT   | Information and Communication Technology          |
| KS    | Key Stage   |
| NRF   | Neighbourhood Renewal Fund                        |
| NIACE | National Institute for Adult Continuing Education |
| OCN   | Open College Network                              |
| PASS  | Pupil Assessment of Self and School               |
| PSA   | Parent Support Adviser                            |
| ROA   | Record of Achievement                             |
| SEAL  | Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning          |
| NVQ   | National Vocational Qualification                 |
| UFA   | University of the First Age                       |
| WFL   | Wider Family Learning                             |
| YOT   | Youth Offending Team                              |

## 1.0 About this guide

This guide is intended for practitioners in schools, Sure Start Children's Centres or local authorities who are looking for new ideas about how to support parents with their children's 'at home' learning. The guide is based on the findings from an action research project, which was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) from 2008-09 to examine the effectiveness of different approaches for working with parents.

The guide is structured as follows:

- sections two to six examine six different types of schemes for supporting parents with their children's learning. The benefits and drawbacks of each scheme are considered, with reference to case study examples, and step-by-step guidance is provided for how to go about replicating a similar approach elsewhere; and,
- section seven draws together the evidence from the project to present some overall learning points about supporting parents with their children's 'at home' learning, and provides a checklist of key considerations for introducing new schemes.

A separate research report is also available from the action research project, which considers the effectiveness and outcomes from the different schemes in further detail. The report is published as part of the DCSF Research Series.

## 2.0 Educational home visits

### 2.1 Scheme description

Educational home visits engage the parent and child together at home, to build the parents' confidence in supporting their child to learn, and to develop the child's communication, language, literacy, and communication skills. The approach is particularly suitable for parents who might otherwise lack the confidence to engage with their local nursery, school or Sure Start Children's Centre, although the scheme can also operate as a universal service for any families who might benefit from extra support.

The example of educational visits featured within the action research project was the Sefton Families and Schools Together (FAST) scheme. The following case study provides an overview of this scheme.

#### **Case study: educational home visits** Sefton Families and Schools Together (FAST)

The **Sefton FAST service** started in 1993 as a local project for raising attainment and literacy for 0-4 year olds and their families, run by the Family Learning Service and funded by City Challenge. The service has since been rolled-out to 27 schools across the Borough, supported with Children's Services and Sure Start funding. It has a core team of eight staff and a well-established referral network, including health visitors and speech and language therapists.

The key elements of the scheme are as follows:

- Educational home visits - a set of four visits delivered by FAST Outreach Workers, lasting between 1 and 1.5 hours to engage child and parent or carer together in their home. The visits offer developmentally appropriate literacy and numeracy through play;
- An Early Record of Achievement - after completing the set of four visits, each family is provided with booklet detailing all of the child's achievements; and,
- Progression routes - the parents are invited to participate in Start Right Family Learning Groups at local schools or Sure Start Children's Centres, to build relationships with staff and continue their own learning journey.

The scheme is offered on both a universal and targeted basis, by drawing upon different funding streams. This enables the scheme to achieve a wide reach and for parents who are in need of support but not within a priority target area to benefit from the service.

### 2.2 Role and value of the scheme

The main benefits of the scheme are to provide a means of engaging parents to support their children's learning during the child's early years, and to build the confidence of parent and child prior to the transition to school or nursery. There is also some evidence that the scheme has proven effective in engaging fathers, grandparents and wider family members within the home environment. The scheme might therefore be appropriate for nurseries or Sure Start Children's Centres that lack a robust outreach model for supporting the parents of younger

children, or to provide extra 'reach' into local communities where links with the school or nursery are underdeveloped

The Sefton FAST scheme has not been formally evaluated in the original setting, although a variety of data are collected by the team, including data from local Sure Start Children's Centres to track progression, FAST forms from parents requesting a visit, records of the visits and feedback from partner organisations. These data indicate the following:

- the **retention** on the scheme and **progression** rates to other short family learning courses at schools and Sure Start Children's Centres are consistently high;
- where the scheme has been established for a period of years, some **parents have self-referred to the service** when their second or third child is born
- feedback from health visitors shows that the scheme provides an **earlier identification of developmental delay** than would be possible from a health visit alone;
- the scheme has consistently resulted in **improvements to children's language, literacy and communication skills** development, assessed by FAST outreach workers and using the early years curriculum framework<sup>1</sup>; and,
- the scheme has consistently resulted in **improvements to parents confidence for supporting their child to learn**, and **reduced their levels of anxiety**.

The interviews from the action research project further identify that the home visits often resulted in parents having a **better understanding of how their child learns**.

## 2.3 Implementing the scheme

The following provides a number of key considerations when seeking to develop educational home visits that adopt a similar approach to the Sefton FAST model.

### Establishing the scheme

- The scheme aims to offer progression from the initial outreach visits to **engage parents effectively** with local Sure Start Children's Centres, schools or nurseries, so it is important to establish these networks from the outset. The link is most appropriately made at head-teacher or centre manager level. This helps to provide strategic backing for the scheme, so that it is easier to negotiate staff time to support the visits.
- The specific focus on early literacy and communication skills offers a unique selling point for the scheme, which can help to make the case for introducing it alongside the variety of other early years' services. The scheme offers quite a distinct approach in that service **delivery takes place within the home**, rather than providing information and support to access other services, as is the case for some outreach roles.
- It is important to promote the scheme widely, to engage a wider range of **referral agencies and partners** who might be well placed to engage families who are not in contact with schools or Sure Start Children's Centres. This is best achieved by linking with other early years' professionals who come into contact with families in their homes. This might include Health Visitors or Speech and Language Therapists.

<sup>1</sup> The framework used by the FAST team is based on the six developmental stages for 0-3 year olds, which are: 1) sensory, 2) exploratory, 3) relational, 4) symbolic, 5) imaginative, and 6) role play.

Broadly speaking - the wider the referral network, the more effective the scheme will be in raising awareness with families at a time that is suitable for them.

### Staffing considerations

- The scheme requires practitioners who have a mix of **child development knowledge** and **interpersonal skills** to engage with adults and children together. The scheme involves continuous feedback to the parent about the process the child is making, and the practitioner must therefore be able to identify and report back early signs of literacy and communication skills development in the child. If an early years' scheme is to be offered, a background in Health Visiting or Portage provides staff with a good starting point. The visiting staff can either be based at the school or Sure Start Children's Centre, or managed centrally from within a local authority team.
- It is also necessary to identify staff in each Sure Start Children's Centre or school who will act as a lead point of contact to manage referrals and assist with setting-up the family learning groups. This model has the advantage of building schools' capacity to run their own groups. It is possible to embed the scheme across a whole local area in this way.

### Training and development

- The scheme is characterised by the one-to-one format with individual families and the requirement for child development expertise. This makes the underpinning **training and professional development** particularly important. In Sefton, the training programme for the FAST service lasts for a full year, involving an induction, visit observations, work shadowing and mentoring. A reduced programme might be used if the scheme has a greater focus on early engagement and a lesser one on reinforcing child development.
- The training starts at the upper end of the age range initially (2-4 year olds), before moving on to the toddlers (1-2 year olds), and finally the babies (0-1 year olds). This is because the signs of very early language development can be the most difficult to identify. It is appropriate for practitioners to gain experience of shadowing outreach visits with the older children, before progressing to the more challenging visits to new parents that sometimes require a higher level of skill.

### Resources and learning materials

- The visits require a **suitable range of books and toys**, to enable the home visitor to engage the child in play at a level that is developmentally appropriate for them. The visits are then conducted using 'story sacks', which enable the practitioner to select from the resources within the families' home. A useful starting point is to conduct an **audit of existing resources** held by the local authority team, Sure Start Children's Centre or school. This can help to identify what is already available before purchasing new resources.
- The visits also require a **record keeping system**. The FAST scheme uses an 'open' record, so that parents have full access to the practitioners' notes and observations. This approach further helps to validate the child's progress during the course of the visit, and is in keeping with the wealth model that aims to empower the parent to take a lead.

- There is a need to develop a tailored early **Record of Achievement (ROA)**. This might incorporate examples of the child's drawing or word formation, practitioner notes documenting the child's progress and any photographs that have been taken. The ROA also has the advantage of providing details of the child's progress for Sure Start Children's Centre or school staff if the parent consents to sharing the information in this way, and is essentially a first educational record.

### **Scheme delivery**

- The scheme can be offered as **a set of home visits**, to build-up parents' confidence prior to engaging with the school or Sure Start Children's Centre. A visit length of around 1.5 hours is appropriate to establish a relationship with the individual family and to facilitate the parent to observe learning outcomes for their child. In Sefton, the FAST scheme offers a model of four such visits over consecutive weeks, to reinforce these outcomes.
- It is worthwhile for referral partners to raise awareness of the scheme on a continuous basis, but parents need to decide when to take up the offer of support at a time they feel is right for them and their child. This process of **voluntary referral** helps to ensure that the parents are actively engaged, and helps to make a distinction from therapeutic or social care outreach, where the visit is often to address a 'problem' issue.
- The visits take the **parent's existing style of interaction** with their child as a starting point, and build on this by working with the parent and child to model effective play techniques such as role plays, drawing and reading together. This means that the practitioner must be able to respond quite rapidly to the individual family situation, using the story sack to gain the child's interest and engage the parent. Sometimes it might be possible to draw-in wider family members including fathers, grandparents or siblings, but it is important to ensure that the visit remains focussed on the intended child.
- The **progression to family learning groups** at the child's school or nursery can help to make the outcomes sustainable. The visits can either piggy-back on existing groups, or it might be necessary to introduce these from scratch where they are not in place. Linking the scheme to group activities at the school or Sure Start Children's Centre has the further benefit of enabling staff to observe the outcomes, and therefore to generate more referrals.
- The Sefton 'Right' groups offer a suitable progression model, because they continue the same principles of 'learning through play' that are modelled at the initial home visits. This is achieved by giving each parent and child one-to-one time to play together within the group format, and by ensuring continuity in the staffing. A group size of 10-12 parents and a session length of 1.5 hours are conducive to this approach.

## 2.4 Costs

The following indicative costs / resources are required to plan and deliver educational home visits on a small scale:

- time from a local authority service manager to identify appropriate staff to received training for delivering the visits;
- time from at least two practitioners to liaise with local schools, nurseries and / or Sure Start Children's Centres, and to link with health visitors and other early years professionals to raise awareness of the scheme;
- training costs - whether delivered by the local authority or in-sourced as required, and to include additional staff time;
- resource costs - to re-stock the story sacks and cover the materials costs of any family learning group activities that might take place at the Sure Start Children's Centre or school (c. £600 depending on the existing level of resources); and,
- travel, postage and printing costs

As an indication, around 22 days of staff time is likely to be required to plan and deliver a small scale version of the scheme, with progression to suitable family learning workshops at each school or nursery. This breaks down as follows:

- 5 days of time at service manager level to oversee the initial planning meetings; training and de-briefing for staff; and ongoing supervision.
- 3 days of time per outreach worker to attend the initial planning and training meetings;
- 12 days of time per outreach worker to liaise with each nursery or children's centre to raise awareness with staff and recruit parents, and deliver 1.5 hour visits to 10 families;
- 0.5 days of head teacher or centre manager time to attend the initial planning meetings, agree the targeting strategy; timetable the visits and ensure the availability of staff; and,
- 1.5 days of time for teachers or learning support assistants to support recruitment, and to support the delivery of a family learning workshop following the visits.

The time and resource inputs would, of course, be reduced for any subsequent delivery of the home visits, having undertaken the initial work to identify and engage the schools and referral partners and to offer initial training for staff. There would, however, be a requirement for ongoing supervision and training of the outreach workers.

The Sefton FAST scheme that was studied for the action research project has a rather different cost profile, because it has grown into an established service. The annual budget is c. £553,000. This covers the salaries of staff within Children's Services who manage and coordinate the project, the salaries of the outreach workers, and all training and materials costs. The funding is drawn from a number of sources, including core funding and the Sure Start Children's Centres. This model currently services 48 schools and Sure Start Children's Centres.

## 2.5 Addressing the main challenges

A number of challenges must be taken into account when seeking to develop educational home visits effectively. These include the following:

- **Addressing health and safety issues** - the outreach model requires staff to visit families in their homes, and it is important to ensure that this work is underpinned by appropriate policies for health and safety. The visits are most effective where a single member of staff is able to engage with the parent and child on a one-to-one basis, as having two staff attend creates a very different atmosphere for the family. However, it might sometimes be necessary for staff to 'double-up' when out in the community.
- **Avoiding dilution of the scheme aims and purpose** - the scheme is based on the concept of 'curriculum from birth' to support early language and literacy development. Whilst it is possible to offer play-based home visits without this expertise, the approach is likely to be focussed more on developing relationships with parents and raising awareness of the Sure Start Children's Centre of nursery, rather than the child's skills development. Each approach has different training implications that must be considered from the start.
- **Managing the home learning environment effectively** - the experiences of staff who have delivered the scheme show that it is important to avoid commenting or making judgements about the home environment, due to the risk of stigma for the parents concerned. Whilst it is appropriate for parents to suggest toys or games to incorporate into the session, the outreach worker should not expect them to do this. Parents might be sensitive about the resources that they have available to them within the home, or take offence at any comments made by staff.
- **Meeting the needs of speakers of English as an Additional Language (EAL)** - the scheme offers good potential for engaging with parents whose first language is not English, because the play-based approach places a lot of emphasis on non-verbal communication. This is achieved through the use of role plays; eye contact and modelling of play techniques. It is appropriate for bi-lingual staff to conduct the visits in local areas where there are a high proportion of EAL families. This approach has the advantage of engaging wider family members who might speak little or no English.

## 3.0 Curriculum workshops

### 3.1 Scheme description

Curriculum workshops offer a potential method for engaging parents in their children's learning, whilst raising parents' awareness of the curriculum and building positive home-school relationships. This is achieved by parental engagement and teaching staff supporting groups of parents to engage in discussion and learning about curriculum topics at their child's school. The approach might also involve parents working alongside their children, to undertake family learning activities based around the curriculum topics.

The action research project included an example of a curriculum workshops scheme that has been developed by the Tower Hamlets Parental Engagement Team.

#### **Case study: curriculum workshops** Tower Hamlets Parental Engagement Team

The curriculum workshops scheme was developed by the **Tower Hamlets Parental Engagement Team**, with support from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). It has since been mainstreamed as a core service for parents. The workshops last around one hour and are delivered and supported through the team, some of whom also have training in adult and family learning, alongside a variety of parent support workers based in each of the borough's schools.

The workshops are not off-the-shelf packages, but some of the key elements are:

- curriculum workshop resource packs - the KS1 numeracy package includes guidance, recipe cards and compact discs, and has proven to be in high demand with local schools;
- a staff training programme - this covers 'the welcoming school' and parental engagement. This can be offered to a range of staff; and,
- out-of-school activities - such as Family Learning Days Out and Oyster Card Saturday clubs.

The workshop facilitators link-in to both primary and secondary schools, with a major focus on parents who would not usually engage. The KS2 package has proven particularly successful in engaging parents in year seven, and giving schools a level to sustain that engagement

### 3.2 Role and value of the scheme

The main benefits of the scheme are to provide a supportive environment for addressing curriculum issues with parents directly on a face-to-face basis, alongside written information or resources that are sent home with the child. This approach might be suitable where a school has already undertaken some initial groundwork to build positive relationships and trust with parents, or where there has been a high level of demand for curriculum information from parents themselves. The scheme might also be effective as a way to engage parents and children in reading and creative activities together at key transition points. One example is the start of foundation stage, when parents are more likely to be receptive to support around their child's literacy or numeracy skills.

The project has only developed within the past two years in Tower Hamlets, but some evidence has been collected to demonstrate the effectiveness of the scheme from records kept by Parental Engagement staff, and self-evaluation. These data illustrate that:

- the **take-up amongst parents** has grown substantially, as the scheme was rolled-out;
- parents have commonly reported an increased level of **knowledge and awareness of the curriculum** back to project staff;
- parents have anecdotally identified pupils being more interested in **reading and writing with their parents at home** as a result of the workshop activities; and,
- the format has proven effective in **supporting language skills development**, especially for families where English is an additional language and where pupils have an important role to play in raising levels of awareness of English language teaching within the home.
- The interviews from the action research project further identify that the curriculum workshops often resulted in parents having a **better understanding of how their child learns**, and sometimes led to **closer relationships with teaching and support staff** at the school as a result of having attended the workshops.

### 3.3 Implementing the scheme

The following provides a number of key considerations when seeking to develop curriculum workshops in a similar vein to those developed in Tower Hamlets.

#### Establishing the scheme

- It is important to first take some key decisions about the **scale** at which the workshops are to be offered. Some schools might be in a position to develop an individual school-level approach. There are also benefits from offering workshops to schools across a whole local area, by developing resources that are adaptable to different schools. The local authority will have an important coordinating role to play in this latter scenario.
- The timing and format to be taken for the workshop is best guided by each school's **existing parental engagement work**. The school's extended services audit is an appropriate starting point, and it is beneficial to review parental feedback from other family learning courses that parents have attended to understand where the priorities lie.

#### Staffing considerations

- The scheme requires development time from staff with a professional background in parental engagement, including **adult and family learning**. The subsequent delivery of the workshops can be undertaken by a variety of different **school-based staff**, including home school liaison workers, learning support assistants, and teachers. It is also beneficial for curriculum managers to be involved with the planning, so that the workshop resources are aligned with the school's curricula.
- It is important to identify at least two members of delivery staff per school, to provide capacity for delivering the workshops to groups of parents and children, and to help ensure that the scheme is sustainable in the event of staff turnover.

## Training and development

- A key feature of the scheme is to **build the capacity of the school** to plan and run workshops on a sustainable basis. This requires training and guidance for leaders and managers, to help align the curriculum workshops to specific school level priorities, and to ensure that there is strategic level buy-in. A school might decide to run workshops to complement their Behaviour Improvement Plan (BIP), for example, by focussing on the benefits of parent partnership in raising pupils' motivation for learning at school.
- The scheme also requires the development of a programme of **core and additional training** for practitioners to deliver the workshops. The core training might cover the processes that are involved for planning individual workshops, making appropriate use of curriculum resources, and supporting the engagement between parents and children.
- The additional training has the advantage of offering **progression for staff**, and encouraging them to see parental engagement as an area of expertise that requires continuous improvement and updating of skills. A suitable example of additional training might be to offer a home-school relations course at National Open College Network (OCN) Level 2/3, so that the staff can 'mainstream' the workshops within home-school development across the school.

## Resources and learning materials

- The workshops can be offered on a **stand-alone** basis, based on a literacy or numeracy theme, and involving the appropriate school staff in preparing the materials. A literacy workshop might be based on a text drawn from the appropriate Key Stage in the child's schooling, for example, but with specific activities designed to engage the parent as adult learner, and parents and children together. Similarly, a numeracy text might be based around a game or family problem-solving exercise that draws upon skills from the appropriate Key Stage, but presented in an accessible and informal way.
- The format might involve **discussion-based activities** for parents, with a focus on how they support their children's reading or numeracy development at home, and **creative activities** for parents and children to do together. Examples could include puppet-making of board games linked to the workshop themes. The resources might also include 'take home' materials, such as recipe cards or informational compact discs.
- It is beneficial to develop a **bank of resources**, mapped to different Key Stages. This has the advantage of offering greater choice and flexibility to individual schools or cohorts of parents, and therefore maximising their level of interest and engagement in the scheme. The approach is also an efficient way to sustain the scheme, by minimising the amount of time that is required to plan and deliver new workshops 'from scratch'.

## Workshop recruitment and delivery

- The **publicity and recruitment** for the workshops is best undertaken using a mix of information flyers, word-of-mouth awareness raising with individual parents, and awareness-raising with pupils via assemblies. The school might also wish to undertake some targeted recruitment of parents who would not usually engage in school-based activities and to ensure that their support needs are understood and met.

- Parents are often more receptive to support with their child's learning at key **transition points**, and an appropriate strategy is sometimes to offer the workshops to the whole year group at Foundation stage. This also has the advantage of aligning the 'learning' agenda of the workshops with a wider 'welcoming school' message to parents.
- A suitable approach to the workshops is to deliver them **during school hours**, when the workshop can be timetabled to allow for parent-to-parent interaction during scheduled lesson time for the pupils, followed by time for the parents and children to learn together. The provision of crèche and childcare facilities should be considered.
- Where successful, it should be anticipated that the workshop will result in a **demand for further activities**, and the school should have in place a strategy for managing parents' expectations. This might include the provision of further workshops, or using the springboard of the initial workshop to engage parents in other activities such as family learning days out or adult learning courses as appropriate.

### 3.4 Costs

The scheme requires a mix of staff time and resource costs to plan and deliver the workshops, and some initial funding is required from the school or local authority to develop appropriate workshop materials. Once established, the schemes can be replicated cost effectively by drawing upon and adapting these materials.

A typical cost / resource breakdown includes the following:

- development time from parental engagement staff to lead on developing the scheme materials and training programme, and to liaise with the individual schools;
- time from teaching, support staff and curriculum managers to support the planning of the scheme and to guide the selection of curriculum resources to be used;
- a budget for producing flyers and publicity to raise awareness with parents; and,
- a budget for producing resource packs and 'take home' materials, such as recipe cards, instructional CDs, and games for parents to play with their children at home.

These resources are best developed gradually, and in proportion to the scale at which the workshops are to be offered. It might also be possible to incorporate existing resources.

As an indication, around 6 days of staff time is likely to be required to plan and deliver a basic version of the curriculum workshops scheme. This breaks down as follows:

- 2 days for parental engagement staff per school to liaise with school staff and jointly plan the workshops, including the session plan and selection of learning materials;
- 1 day for parental engagement staff per school for workshop delivery, based on two half day or evening sessions; and,
- 3 days per school for school staff to support the planning and delivery, conducting self-evaluation, and managing any follow-up from parents; by referring onwards to other provision at the school, for example.

The unit costs would, of course, be much reduced for any subsequent delivery of the sessions, having trained the school staff and developed resources.

In Tower Hamlets the scheme forms part of the wider parental involvement work across the authority, and has been developed to service clusters of schools. This required coordination, management training and delivery in the initial set up phase, which was supported with NRF project funding; with lighter touch support once up and running. The approximate costs of sustaining the scheme at this scale once established are £38,000 per annum, which breaks down as follows:

- training costs for 6 courses x 3 sessions @ £220 per session = £3,960
- project co-ordinator post (publicity, recruitment, distribution of resources, monitoring, support for evaluation) = .5 PO3<sup>1</sup> x 12 months (£20,157)
- production of parent packs - 1,000 packs in translation @ £8 = £8,000
- stationery, photocopying - £1,000
- hospitality/ celebration event/publicity - £1,000
- project evaluation - 10 days of consultant's time @ £400 = £4,000

### 3.5 Addressing the main challenges

A number of challenges need to be taken into account when seeking to develop curriculum workshops effectively. These include the following:

- **Building relationships between parental engagement and teaching staff** - the strong 'curriculum' focus of the workshops makes it important to ensure the active engagement of teaching staff from the outset. Running the workshops without this input risks losing their specific focus and resulting in more generic parent discussion groups.
- **Overcoming some parents' anxiety about the 'classroom' situation** - some parents have mainly negative experiences of their own schooling, and the prospect of speaking out in a group situation within the classroom is highly intimidating. It is important for the workshops to be delivered by facilitators who are skilled in putting parents at ease and supporting their engagement. This will usually require adult learning expertise.
- **Accommodating a wide range of basic skills levels** - offering curriculum workshops to whole year groups is likely to result in very wide-ranging basic skills needs, whilst some parents and children will have additional support needs. This makes it important to approach the curriculum topics using methods such as role play or creative activities, to avoid exposing parents with low levels of basic skills and risking stigma.
- **Achieving two-way interaction** - parents have diverse perspectives of their role in supporting their children's learning, and will not always respond well to the school taking a wholly 'instructional' approach. Effective workshops include a mix of information about the curriculum, and opportunities for parents to share their own ideas and experiences about learning with their children at home.

<sup>1</sup> based on National pay scales (National Joint Council for Local Government Services)

## 4.0 Community arts and literacy

### 4.1 Scheme description

The use of creative arts is another method for supporting parents with their children's learning. The approach often involves the use of 'embedded' literacy<sup>1</sup>, so that there is a less explicit focus on formal learning within the school curriculum. This is particularly well suited to engaging with children or adults who have additional learning needs. It also has benefits for the development of children's creative, social and emotional skills.

The action research project included an example of a Community Arts and Learning scheme that was developed in Rochdale with a particular focus on supporting transition to secondary school. The following provides an overview:

#### Case study: community arts and literacy Rochdale Partnership Education Service

In 2004 the Government chose Rochdale's bid to be part of the Test Bed Learning Communities Initiative (DfES 2003). Rochdale's bid centred on an approach of fusing new media, the arts, and family learning, as a method for 'embedding' basic skills and engaging non-traditional learners.

One of the schemes, the **Community Arts Learning Centre (CALC)**, embeds literacy into arts and family learning programmes, and supports the MIND 'Partners in Art' initiative for learners with mental health issues. The Centre, which is on Falinge Park High School site offers support to pupils and their families around the GCSE curriculum. Key features of the scheme include:

- having a dedicated facility and community artist in residence, to support local schools;
- an emphasis on creative activities, such as storytelling: screen printing, as key element for literacy development for both adults and children, and a form of self expression; and,
- effective partnerships between education and museums, libraries and art galleries.

The CALC has been used as a base to support year six children and their families through transition from primary to secondary school, using a five-week course to engage parents and children together in crafts and poetry; culminating in a framed copy of their work to take home. The scheme has proven successful in engaging a wide range of families in creative learning.

### 4.2 Role and value of the scheme

The main benefit of the scheme is that it most closely relates to the informal and creative activities that parents and children often do together at home already, and demonstrates how these activities can be used as a tool for literacy development. This has the advantage of gaining the child's interest and accommodating the needs of parents and children who do not have a high level of confidence in their basic skills. The multi-agency aspect to the scheme also means that there is a greater opportunity to design the workshop around the individual

<sup>1</sup> See for example: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus/raisingstandards/embeddedlearning/introduction/>

group. This might be achieved by the community artist, adult learning tutor and learners working together to exchange ideas and information during the session.

The Rochdale Parent Partnership Service collects a wide range of evidence of impact and effectiveness about their CAL scheme. This includes numeric data about costs, participation, retention and progression; regular feedback from participants; and quotes from staff and parents. Some of the key findings are as follows:

- parents' feedback to staff shows that the project has helped to **engage non-traditional learners**, with 183 parents engaging during the first ten months;
- the same feedback indicates that **parents' confidence, self esteem and creative skills** were given an uplift from the project; and,
- the embedded literacy sometimes had practical benefits, by enabling parents to **write and illustrate books with their children**, write their own CV, or joining a co-operative.

The interviews from the project further identify that the parents sometimes gained a **better understanding of the role of creative activities and play** in relation to their children's learning and were able to incorporate these methods into their home routines.

### 4.3 Implementing the scheme

The following provides a number of key considerations when seeking to plan and deliver arts and literacy activities.

#### Establishing the scheme

- The scheme requires expertise for delivering **arts and creative learning** activities with both parents and children. This will usually require the involvement of staff who have experience of working with adult learners. The local authority Arts Development Team might be an initial point of contact if this expertise is not available within the staff, or the school might be able to draw upon third sector contacts.
- Consideration of the desired format and duration of the activities is needed. A starting point might be to deliver community arts and literacy **workshops** as a 'taster', to engage parents in the subject area. This will require a suitable space to be identified, whether in the school hall or arts and drama department, and to timetable the activities accordingly.
- A more permanent base might be needed if the activities are to be delivered as a **longer course** or on a repeat basis to different groups of parents. In Rochdale, the local authority has funded the development of a **Community Arts and Learning Centre** in a former caretaker's buildings. An arts practitioner is based at the Centre for two days per week. This enables arts workshops to be timetabled flexibly, serving the needs of a number of different schools within the local area.
- A further alternative is to deliver the activities off-site, at **community locations**. This has the advantage of raising awareness of other local services, such as libraries, health centres, or third sector arts projects.

## Staffing, training and development

- Developing links with a wider range of partner organisations can help to offer a **more targeted service**. In Rochdale, the local authority has linked with the MIND 'Partners in Art' scheme, which provides additional support for families with mental health problems.
- The role of for school staff is usually more of a linking one, to help **guide the themes of the workshop** and make them relevant to the school curriculum. This should not require additional training. The actual workshop is best delivered by the community artists and poets, who have more experience of using the arts in this context.

## Resources and learning materials

- The **combination of different media** can be an effective way to make the activities engaging for parents and pupils, and to cater for a range of learning styles. The CAL scheme in Sefton was structured so that parents and children took part in poetry activities in the morning based on group reading and word games, and then used the poetry as a basis for visual art and performance in the afternoon. The community poet and artist planned the session together so that the two parts of the day were joined-up.

## Recruitment and delivering activities with parents

- The **recruitment** is best guided by the issues facing the individual school, as with other school-based workshops or courses. For schools with a high proportion of working parents, the priority might be to provide advance notice of the session to maximise the numbers of parents who can attend. For other schools, flyers sent home with the children and reminders in school assemblies can sometimes be effective.
- The use of visual arts and drama provides an opportunity to make the event into a **special occasion** that stands out from more routine meetings or events at the school. Small gestures such as allowing children into the staff room, and teachers dressing-up can help to break down barriers between home and school and send a message that the school is making an effort to engage families on their own terms. This can help to put parents at ease and help to create an informal atmosphere for learning.
- Making a **record of the activities** can help to remind parents and school staff about the learning that took place, and to capture parents' aspirations for their children's learning. This can be done in various ways, which might include taking photographs and framing copies of the families' artwork. In Sefton, a community artist took **pictorial minutes** while the parents and children acted out the poetry they had created together. This formed the basis of a permanent display within each school, to generate discussion.
- Holding a **celebration event for parents** can be an effective way to share the learning from the workshops and to raise awareness amongst staff and parents. The celebration event might be planned to coincide with a school assembly, so that parents and pupils are able to showcase their work and talk about their work. This can be an effective method of boost attendance at subsequent workshops, and keeping the momentum.

## 4.4 Costs

The scheme can be planned and managed by the schools, or by a central local authority team such as Extended Schools. This will affect the balance of time inputs for planning the scheme. A nominal budget of around £1,000 per school plus in kind support from school staff and local authority staff is likely to be required to establish community arts and literacy workshops. The main cost headings are as follows:

- planning time from the head-teacher or deputy, pre and post event and a nominated representative;
- planning time from local authority staff for delivery support, administration and support any celebration event;
- sessional costs for community artists, poets, and / or an adult learning tutor;
- the purchase of refreshments; and,
- the framing and display of poetry and art work

As an indication, 6 days of staff time is likely to be required to plan and deliver the scheme, including the engagement of community partners; and with a follow-up assembly or celebration event for pupils and parents. This breaks down as follows:

- 0.5 days of time at service manager level to plan the scheme alongside other extended schools provision over the time period;
- 3 days of time for a development worker to identify school(s) to participate, liaise with the head-teacher, community artists or other external delivery partners as appropriate, and support the organisation for the workshop.
- 0.5 days of head-teacher time per school, to ensure that the scheme is linked to existing school-wide parental engagement activities; to identify school-level staff to lead on the organisation, and to attend the workshop / celebration day; and,
- 2 days of time per school for teachers or support staff to lead on the practical organisation of the workshops, including negotiation of a room for the session; catering, crèche and other support arrangements; managing the publicity and recruitment of parents, and support at the workshops. This also includes some time to plan a follow-up assembly.

Any subsequent delivery of the sessions would be more cost effective; having developed a framework that can be rolled out to a larger number of schools. In Sefton, for example, the scheme has effectively been 'mainstreamed' by the Extended Schools team as a result of the action research project. An allocation of 45 days (for 15 schools) of development worker time per annum has been allocated. The model has been taken up enthusiastically, with one school planning to self-finance at least one session per year.

## 4.5 Addressing the main challenges

A number of challenges need to be taken into account when seeking to develop community arts and literacy activities. These include the following;

- **Adding value to existing creative activities at home** - parents and children often already participate in games and creative activities together at home, so it is important that the scheme offers something additional to encourage them to engage. Involving external poets and artists, and an emphasis on theatre or performance can help to gain parents' curiosity. The scheme is also likely to appeal if it provides an opportunity for parents and children to spend 'quality time' together outside of usual routines at home.
- **Catering for a range of basic skills levels and support needs** - although the scheme uses creative and informal learning to make it as inclusive as possible, it is important to consult with staff who have more regular contact with the parents to identify whether there are any parents with more specialist needs. This is a particular issue if the scheme is to be planned and run mainly by external family learning staff that might not be familiar with the school, and will help to plan the appropriate levels of support time.
- **Empowering parents and children to take decisions** - the approach of delivering arts and poetry activities over a structured day can place high demands on parents' concentration skills and pupils' behaviour. A mix of different types of activities or media; and an emphasis on supporting parents and children to take the lead is one way to avoid losing their interest. This might include
  - children identifying their own themes for the poetry, based on their interests at home;
  - facilitating peer group discussion amongst the parents, and
  - supporting parents to 'perform' their poems in front of the children.

## 5.0 Citizenship and youth justice awareness

### 5.1 Scheme description

Alongside curriculum-led approaches, other schemes aim to engage parents in their children's learning by focussing on wider personal and social development topics such as crime, citizenship and community participation. This approach is concerned more with the role that schools can play in supporting families to feel safe and informed about crime issues within their local area, and to encourage discussion and debate within the family home. The approach is suitable for empowering parents to support their children's behaviour and attitudes towards learning, and to build partnerships with crime and community safety partners such as Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and the police.

An example of a law and citizenship education scheme was included within the action research project, to explore this wider dimension of engaging parents in their children's learning and development. The following provides an overview of the selected scheme.

#### Case study: citizenship and youth justice awareness Law and Order OCN scheme

The **Law and Order scheme** was developed by the Isle of Wight Family Learning Service. It is a thirty-hour family learning course, offering National Open College Network (NOCN) accreditation at Levels 1 and 2. The scheme explores issues around community safety, taking responsibility for behaviour and the implications of criminal and anti-social actions. It also aims to raise parents' and pupils' awareness and understanding of different services and professional roles within the youth justice system.

The format comprises a portfolio-based accredited course for parents, or parents and children together, plus a trainer-training scheme for school staff. The sessions include a mix of instruction, group activities, talks from visiting professionals and out-of-school trips to visit youth justice settings. The scheme is designed to prompt further discussion within the family at home.

The scheme has proven highly effective on the Isle of Wight, where it is offered to primary and secondary schools and has recently been expanded with a successful bid to the Family Learning Impact Fund (FLIF).

### 5.2 Role and value of the scheme

The scheme is appropriate where a school aims to develop stronger links with the local community and tackle issues relating to crime or community safety in a constructive way. It might also be considered by schools that have already developed a base of adult learning provision, but would like to offer additional progression opportunities for the parents or to encourage a wider uptake, and to develop a more family-centred approach.

The Law and Order scheme highlights a number of positive outcomes for parents and pupils that might be anticipated for other schools that aim to develop a similar approach. These outcomes can be summarised as follows:

- parents often reported feeling more **confident and informed** about issues relating to crime and community safety in their local area and had routinely engaged their children and wider family members in discussion within the home;

- they commonly reported having gained an improved ***insight into their child's values and aspirations*** as a result of doing so; and,
- they sometimes felt better equipped to ***deal with their children's behaviour***, because of understanding the issues affecting their child inside and outside of school.

The role of the course in raising parents' awareness about different crime and youth justice settings inspired some parents who participated in the project:

- to enrol for ***training within the sector***;
- to progress to higher level ***adult learning*** opportunities; or,
- to take up ***volunteering opportunities*** within their local school or community.

### 5.3 Implementing the scheme

The following provides a number of key considerations when seeking to develop a law and citizenship scheme that adopts a similar approach to the Isle of Wight model.

#### Establishing the scheme

- The development of a ***multi-agency partnership*** is a core aspect of the scheme. The family learning tutor works with each school to broker access to local justice organisations such as police, Youth Offending Teams, courts and the Fire Service to present during the course and offer visits. This should be as a gradual process, with realistic targets set for multi-agency working in the first year of delivering the scheme.
- A starting point for developing the multi agency work is for the school and the adult learning tutor to ***pool their existing contacts***. Having a named individual such as a police officer can be a good way to find guest speakers for the course. The local ***Crime and Disorder Audit*** is also a useful reference point to identify who the relevant organisations are, and their service targets. If this information is gathered in advance, it should be possible to make a stronger case for their involvement, because the scheme can be made relevant to each organisation's own priorities.
- The scheme also requires staff time to ***maintain the partnerships*** with the appropriate organisations; to ensure speakers understand the course content and what part they play in the delivery of the scheme. This can be assisted by asking partners to 'sign up' to an agreed amount of time that they are able to offer over the course of the year, and through occasional telephone or face to face contact so that the relationship is not lost.

#### Staffing considerations

- The scheme requires a ***link person*** to be identified in participating schools, to help promote the course, raise awareness amongst the school staff about the aims of the scheme, recruit families, and support with the delivery. This person might be a teacher or pastoral member of staff, but they should be in a position to ensure that the activities can be built into the school timetable. One or more ***classroom assistants*** should also be identified to support the delivery if pupils are to be involved.

- The scheme requires practitioners who have a mix of **knowledge of the school curriculum** and **qualifications and experience of teaching adults**. A suitable approach is for a family learning tutor and school link person to work closely together to plan the course, including the design of classroom-based work and activities, organising speakers and visits to other settings such as prisons and police stations.

### Training and development

- The work with parents on a stand-alone basis during the scheme can be managed effectively by a suitably qualified **adult learning tutor**, and it should not be expected that teaching staff take on this role unless they have an appropriate qualification. If pupils are also to be included for parts of the scheme then this will require a tutor with **family learning** expertise. Family learning tutors are qualified to train adults, but also have qualifications relating to children's learning and often have teaching experience.
- It will assist with the delivery of the scheme to provide **joint training for family learning tutors and school staff**. This might include reviewing the Law and Order course documentation together, alongside wider training to help sustain the relationship for future courses. Attending family learning courses or workshops together is an effective way of achieving this.

### Resources and learning materials

- The Law and Order scheme follows a **National Open College Network (OCN) assessment framework**, so it is necessary to access the course documentation and ensure that the learning objectives are covered if this is to be used. An eight-to-ten week course structure might then be built up around this, to cover the course themes and allow for a mix of presentations, group discussion and off-site visits.
- The framework allows sufficient flexibility to draw upon other **off-the shelf** activities (such as?) and fact sheets, and the process of school and family learning staff working together to plan the course should help to identify activities that are appropriate for both parents and pupils. Sharing examples of schemes of work, session plans, activities and learner portfolios is very useful as a starting point, in addition to preparing and planning a range of quizzes, games and activities.
- The use of **internet-based resources** is also a good way to vary the course format, but access to ICT equipment must be agreed with the school. This is likely to involve timetabling the use of a computer room.
- The feedback from parents who have completed the course previously shows that **locally specific information** is often the most effective (do you mean has the most influence?, because it helps to relate the course to the individual school and the issues that affect the local area. This will require some 'research' by the staff who are planning the course, to download fact-sheets and consult with parents and school staff about key topics. In Nottingham, the Law and Order course included a monopoly style game that was based on a map of the local area. This proved effective in engaging parents and pupils in discussion.

## Scheme recruitment and delivery

- Planning appropriate **recruitment** strategies for the course is important. This might be achieved by producing flyers and posters to go to families, placing information in school newsletters, and linking with already established groups of parents within the school for whom the course might be offered as a progression from adult learning provision.
- Although issues such as crime and community safety are potentially sensitive, the past experiences of delivering the course show that parents are often receptive to attend if the message is one of **finding out about crime in their local area**, and finding out about **children and the law**. Parents are often keen to know about the legal ages at which their children can do certain things, such as staying at home alone or drinking alcohol. These messages can help to gain parents' curiosity to take part.
- It is important to ensure that parents are fully aware of the terms of **confidentiality** that underpin the course. Any discussions about crime and law breaking risk the disclosure of information that might require further action to be taken by the school or youth justice staff that are present. The initial session must be used to explain the ground rules and avoid the risk of disclosing information that could lead to parents being prosecuted.
- The scheme can be offered either to parents as an **adult learning model** with 'take home' activities to share with the family; or as an **intergenerational model** with adults and children together. The advantage of an adult learning model is that it sometimes enables for a faster progression through the course content and for parents to gain a higher level of accreditation. The approach might also be selected where certain topics, such as pupil behaviour, are thought best covered without the pupils present. The drawback is that the approach offers a less direct link with learning at home. In contrast, running the course with children present enables the tutor to reinforce the pupils' learning outcomes and has the benefits of a family learning model.
- The involvement of guest speakers from partner organisations has the advantage of drawing upon their **detailed subject knowledge** of the justice system and how organisations and procedures work in practice. This can help to bring to life the course topics, encourage families to ask direct questions, and provide insight into the different roles and responsibilities that youth justice professionals have. This is often an effective way of counteracting the stigma that might be attached to such occupations.
- The scheme offers the opportunity for adults to gain **accreditation**. The OCN format requires participants to put together a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate understanding against the assessment criteria. Each participant has an individual learning plan, based on their individual requirements and sessions are planned to meet the differentiated needs of adults and children. The tutor will need to support the parents to complete the documentation at key points during the course.
- When delivering the course, it is often helpful to explore the **progression routes** that might be offered to parents who take part. Where the scheme has been delivered previously, there are numerous examples of parents progressing to volunteering; re-training for mental health or youth offending professions, or going on to become tutors. Planning to meet the needs of all the participants and planning for progression is an essential part of the scheme, helping people identify opportunities for further study.

- Finally, it is important to consider a suitable **'handover' process** to the school, thereby enabling them to sustain the partner contacts. This might include contact information and materials fathered ?prepared by the tutor, along with copies of the course evaluations so that it is clear what the learning outcomes were. To support the handover, a school representative might come and talk to the parents towards the end of the scheme, to present the other opportunities that are available to them.

## 5.4 Costs

The scheme requires time inputs from family learning staff, and from the school to timetable the programme and ensure that there is adequate pupil support for any parts of the course that are delivered with adults and children together. As the scheme adopts an adult learning / family learning model, there is less of an emphasis on school staff to undertake direct delivery, although some schools might favour this model to help make the scheme sustainable.

As an indication, 8.5 days of staff time is likely to be required to plan and deliver the programme. This breaks down as follows:

- 2 days of time at service manager level to plan the scheme as part of an agreed programme of family learning provision, to secure tutor time, support development, accreditation and quality assure the course
- 4 days of time per school for the family learning tutor to develop schemes of work for an 8-10 week course; to make contacts with local community justice organisations, and to deliver and evaluate the course;
- 0.5 days of head-teacher time per school, to secure backing for the scheme and make available staff to support the delivery; and,
- 2 days of time for a classroom assistant, to support pupils at 8-10 family learning sessions at around 1.5 hours per session.

An overall resource budget of c. £2,300 might be anticipated per school. The resource costs of the scheme include: purchasing NOCN course materials, portfolios and accreditation, and printing and photocopying for fact sheets and quizzes and celebration event It is also necessary to consider transport costs if the scheme includes visits to local youth justice settings, which might include mini-bus hire.

These costs are highly variable depending upon the scale and scope of the scheme when it is first run at the school. The costs might be met through a combination of local authority family learning budgets, such as Wider Family Learning (WFL) or Family Learning Impact Funding (FLIF), alongside contributions from the school and/or Extended Schools budgets.

## 5.5 Addressing the main challenges

A number of challenges must be taken into account when seeking to develop law and citizenship effectively. These include the following:

- **Establishing and maintaining partnerships** - this scheme requires a multi- agency partnership approach with visiting speakers from a range of organisations and visits to relevant venues. These partnerships are most effective when all those involved clearly understand the aims of the course, the principles and practice of family learning and their commitment, with plans in place, ideally over a year. Establishing a strategic partnership as well as at an operational level is important for sustaining the work.
- **Staff training and support** - this scheme requires family learning and school staff to feel confident about the course content as well as teaching adults and children in a family learning context. It is important that staff do not feel they have to be the experts and that they have the information to be able to signpost to the appropriate organisation. There needs to be training and support for tutors both in contextualising the course to their locality and to meet the needs of their specific participants.
- Developing **signposting information** to appropriate organisations and helplines gives additional support for participants and staff, it is important to keep this information up to date. This can be a resource produced by the staff or as an activity on the course where participants produce their own information sheets of useful contacts.
- Offering **progression opportunities and reaching new audiences** - this scheme has been used both to engage new families in learning and to provide progression opportunities on from other courses and activities, for example from parenting skills schemes.
- **Marketing and publicity** - the way in which the scheme is marketed needs to be considered carefully, contextualising the title and publicity materials to meet the diverse needs of families and to appeal to them. This requires developing partnerships with other organisations already working with or who have a good understanding of the needs of the families. Publicity needs to be culturally relevant and non-judgemental.

## 6.0 'Whole school' approaches

### 6.1 Scheme description

A contrasting approach to delivering workshops or focussed interventions with parents is to develop a 'whole school' strategy, which aims to bring around a step change in the relationship between the school and parents. The rationale for this kind of approach is that it maximises the opportunities for parents to engage in different aspects of the life and work of the school, and empowers parents as advocates to decide how resources are spent. This might include lobbying to access family learning provision, for example.

The Northampton 'Working with Families' model is one such example of a whole school capacity building scheme, which was included within the action research project. The following case study explains the background to the scheme and how it operates.

#### Case study: 'whole school' approaches

Northamptonshire Excellence Cluster: 'Working with Families' strand

Northamptonshire County Council developed a tailored '**Working with Families**' strand as part of their Excellence Cluster (EC) funding across 36 local schools. The strand aims to build schools' capacity to work with parents in a coordinated way, thereby improving home-school communication, raising parents' confidence and aspirations, and engaging parents in their children's learning. The scheme is coordinated by a central team within the local authority.

The centrally managed aspects of the scheme within the local authority include:

- Support for a team of **family support workers** to liaise between schools and parents. The role is an holistic one in Northampton, to support parent's involvement with their child and the school, whilst furthering their own learning (a 'family one stop shop'). This is achieved by building relationships over time, and brokering access to family learning and other external support. For most schools, the family support worker is paired with the learning mentor role to make up full time posts.. The training is accredited with an NVQ3/A1 Assessors Award.
- Support for parents to **make their own decisions about training and resources**, such as volunteer schemes, accredited training, guest speakers and visits from local services; and,
- Annual **parent-led conferences** to consult on priorities for the school; whether around pupil's behaviour or learning, or more widely in terms relationships with the local community.

At individual school level, the scheme has been successful in developing a 'welcoming schools' agenda and driving-up parental engagement. Over time, there has been an increased uptake for adult learning, and parents are more confident about supporting their children's learning.

## 6.2 Role and value of the scheme

The main benefits of the scheme are to help bring around a step change in the school's way of working with parents, and to build parents' own capacity to access adult and family learning opportunities. The scheme might therefore be appropriate for schools that have experienced difficulties in engaging parents through the use of one-off workshops or courses, and where particular sections of the local community are thought not to have been effectively engaged. The drawback of the scheme is the timescale associated with bringing around this type of change, and the initial costs that might be necessary to refurbish the school premises to make provision for parent support groups, and to introduce closer training and supervisory structures for learning mentors and parental engagement workers.

The Working with Families scheme has been independently evaluated<sup>1</sup>, in addition to the Excellence Cluster staff undertaking their own internal evaluations of the activities and logging feedback from parents on a more informal basis. These data indicate the following:

- parent feedback highlights the success of the scheme in encouraging **additional time spent in the home with their child**, and the **creation of (parent) peer networks**. This was reported to have overcome isolation for some parents; especially lone parents,
- the conference feedback includes examples of parents reporting that they **feel valued by their school**; have an improved **understanding of their roles** in supporting their child's learning, and have gained confidence to participate in school life;
- schools in the cluster have reported an improved regular presence by parents, **higher attendance** at parents' evenings; and,
- numerous case studies have been documented of parents taking steps to further their own learning, and **progressing onto courses or accreditation**. There were also examples of parents with very low basic skills being supported to the point where they were able to **read with their child** in the home for the first time.

## 6.3 Implementing the scheme

The following provides a number of key considerations when seeking to develop a whole school approach to engaging parents in their children's learning, modelled on the Northampton approach.

### Establishing the scheme

- Any whole school approach will need to attend to existing **strategic priorities**, so that the work is not delivered in isolation. This might entail an initial mapping exercise to establish how the scheme is best developed to complement the Local Area Agreement, Every Child Matters outcomes framework, and schools' performance targets.
- The scheme aims to empower parents to make their own decisions about accessing training and resources. Having a physical **space for parents to use** within the school can help to support this process. This is likely to require negotiation between parental engagement staff and teachers, to gain access during the school day. Where there is more space available, it might be possible to create a parents' room.

<sup>1</sup> Bastiani, J. (2007) Evaluation of the Northampton Excellence Cluster Learning Mentor and Working with Families strands (unpublished).

- It is likely that the level of access for parents will need to be **built-up over time**, as part of a ‘welcoming school’ programme. This might start with coffee mornings for parents, and be extended to include family learning courses, employment opportunities for parents at the school, and parent-led conferences. Aspiring towards to an **open doors policy** can benefit children’s learning at home, by breaking down barriers between home and school and making parents more receptive to educational messages.

### Staffing, training and development

- The Family Support Worker role requires the skills for **working with adults**, whilst also having a good understanding of **pupil’s support needs**, to offer a “family one-stop-shop”. These skill-sets are rarely combined within a single post in schools, so it is likely that additional training will be required for staff to make the crossover. One approach might be for the school to extend their existing Parent Support Adviser (PSA) training.
- An approach that has proven effective in Northampton is to undertake a skills audit and joint training for learning mentors and family support workers, who also meet within a **shared supervisory structure**. This has the benefit of ensuring parity of pay and status for adult and child-facing work, and developing a shared understanding of different roles. The training package might be underpinned by an NVQ3/A1 Assessor’s Award.
- The scheme also aims to provide **training opportunities for parents** within the school, to increase their skills and confidence. Examples might include offering parents training to run breakfast clubs, fruit and vegetable schemes, or to supervise sports activities, with CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks provided. This approach forms part of a wider strategy for raising aspirations for learning for both parents and children. It can also help to demonstrate that the school is committed to supporting the whole family.
- Parents often value the opportunity to gain **accreditation** with support from the school, which can help to validate their skills; especially so for parents who have a low level of prior qualifications. There are also benefits for pupils from seeing their parents taking steps to further their own qualifications, and this can have a positive effect on their schoolwork. Examples of accreditation offered to parents via Northampton Working with Families include NVQ L1 /2 Food and Hygiene, First Aid, and National Learning Mentor training at L3. Consulting with parents directly is the best way to develop this offer.

### Resources and learning materials

- A wide variety of resources and materials are included within the Working with Families model, and the best approach is often to build-up a **mix of provision** for adults, pupils and adults and pupils together in response to demand (see also the information about training, above). One approach is to empower parents to make their own decisions about courses and training. This can be achieved by creating a **budget-holding role** for parental engagement workers, who in turn support parents to allocate the funds.

- The provision of courses might be supported with further **written information and guidance** from the school for parents, with practical ideas for supporting their children's learning. For example, a "Parents' guide to success" handbook has been produced as part of the Northampton Working with Families scheme. Sessions are provided to support parents in using the handbooks, and to 'negotiate' the most effective use of their time at home to support their children. This has been rolled-out to schools countywide, in partnership with University of the First Age (UFA) / Study Support.

### Recruitment and delivering activities with parents

- It is important for the scheme to include both **universal and targeted work** with parents. The family support worker role is well suited to engaging parents on a more ad hoc basis, through the various activities and support groups. A tool such as the Pupil Assessment of Self and School (PASS) might be used to identify pupils with low educational aspirations, and to engage with the parents in a more targeted way.
- Possible activities include family learning courses, guest speakers, and days out for parents and pupils. The link to 'at home' learning might be supported by drawing parallels between **activities for parents** and the work that **pupils are doing at school**. This might include running grandparents' days linked to history lessons, or summer school schemes linked to local study centres.
- Holding an **annual parent conference** can be an effective way to give cohesion to the range of activities that have been offered to parents, and to set the priorities for the following year. In Northampton, the Working with Families scheme includes an annual 'Working with Families Day' and 'Continuing Journey' event. This has proven successful for raising awareness of parents' roles in local schools amongst the local community, and to highlight any issues of concerns. The events were kick-started by the Excellence Cluster team, but parents have since been supported to plan and run them directly, alongside school staff. Each event runs to a capacity of around 200 parents.

### 6.4 Costs

A 'whole school' approach for engaging parents in their children's learning can be undertaken at a varying pace and level of investment, depending on the school's base position for working with parents. The following gives an indication of the likely inputs:

- Head-teacher time, to plan the scheme with senior managers and target areas of the School Improvement Plan that the scheme is best placed to contribute towards;
- time from school-based parental engagement staff to attend 'extended' training, or for the school to adjust its' existing training programme so that parental engagement workers and Learning Mentors receive some common training and supervision; and,
- an allocation of the schools' core budget, supported by the local authority wherever possible (such as Extended Schools), to cover the costs of
  - staff training and accreditation -supported by an NVQ3 / A1 Assessors Award.
  - refurbishing a room or area of the school for use by parents
  - planning and hosting an annual conference for parents; and,
  - the printing and distribution of guidance materials.

In Northampton, the Excellence Cluster budget has supported the infrastructure for the scheme, including staff and management costs. To run a 'mature' model on this scale would require an equivalent source of core funding, to cover the following costs:

- the joint training budget for Family Support Workers and Learning Mentors is £10,000. This amount includes a skills audit, mandatory training, and links with PSA training;
- the annual budget for the handbook is c. £5,000. This includes the costs to update the booklet; reproduce copies, and raise awareness with schools, and,
- the annual budget for the two conferences is also c. £5,000. This includes staff cover for the Family Strand Management Group, Parents and Staff working group, and Head teachers. Additional costs are incurred 'in kind', including volunteer time from school staff and parents.

## 6.5 Addressing the main challenges

A number of challenges need to be taken into account when seeking to develop approaches similar to the 'Working with Families' scheme. These include the following:

- **Setting realistic timescales** – achieving a whole school approach requires 'systems change' at a higher level than introducing specific workshops or courses for parents. This means that the scheme can take many years to fully establish and must be part of a long-term strategy and as culture change for staff. This can only be achieved with full head-teacher backing. The following success factors can assist with this change:
  - ethos -a prior commitment amongst the school / schools to work partnership with parents, and an openness to the concept of the 'welcoming school';
  - leadership -an overall coordinator to draw the activities together;
  - structure -some level of prior cluster development, to facilitate an approach whereby schools can build capacity for other schools, cluster-wide; and,
  - clarity of roles for Family Support Workers and Learning Mentors; to provide distinct expertise for supporting parents in a holistic way.
- **Managing an 'open doors' policy towards parents** - whilst having many benefits, an open doors policy towards parents also presents challenges for the school in managing pupil safety. It is important to carry out a risk assessment when providing easier access by parents to the school buildings, and to consider the impact this might have on pupils' movements during the school day.
- **Tackling inequalities in parental engagement** - supporting parents to access resources for themselves needs to be carefully managed. There is sometimes a risk for such groups being dominated by parents who are already vocal within the school and have the confidence to make decisions. This can be addressed to some extent by widening the opportunities that are available for parents to be heard. The use of parent-led conferences is a good way to democratise the process and reach more parents.

- **Overcoming a lack of space within schools** - an issue encountered within the project was that not all schools have regular access to space for parents. This can make it problematic to set aside a parents' room and to offer adult or family learning on a regular basis. It is therefore to be realistic about the scale of activities that can be offered on a school-by-school basis. The process of parental engagement staff negotiating with teachers and curriculum staff to access space during school hours can also have benefits, however, by raising awareness of the role that parents have to play.

## 7.0 Summary: lessons learned

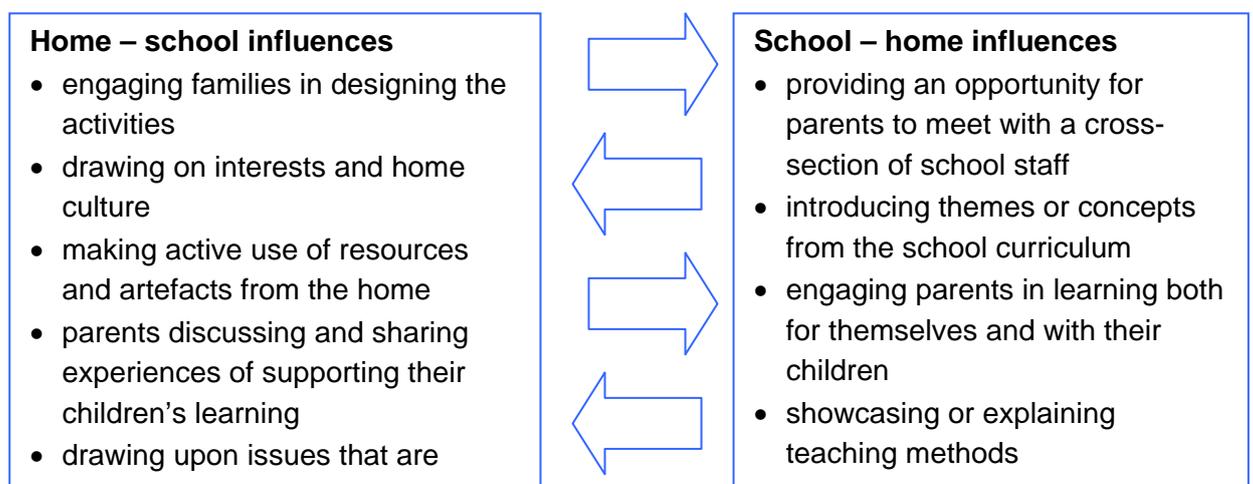
This report has provided an insight into six different schemes that aim to support parents with their children's 'at home' learning and development. The report illustrates how the role for schools within such schemes can vary; from taking the lead in designing and delivering activities with parents largely using the expertise that is available 'in house', to bringing-in expertise from community organisations and local authority teams. The report also highlights the different emphasis that might be taken to support parents in engaging with their children: from more attainment-focussed, to engaging parents as partners in supporting children with the social and emotional aspects of their learning

Despite these differences, a number of common learning points emerge that are useful to take into account when planning this type of work in general. This final chapter draws together the evidence from the schemes and offers some overall lessons learned.

### 7.1 Making the link with 'at home' learning

The action research project demonstrated that the link with 'at home' learning is often assisted by bringing together the formal learning that takes place in the classroom, with the more informal and spontaneous learning that often takes place between parents and their children within the home. Described by Hughes (2007) as the '*two different worlds*' of home and school<sup>1</sup>, these contrasting aspects of children's educational experiences can be more closely aligned through a number of practical measures, as illustrated below.

**Figure 7.1 Making the link with 'at home' learning**



The research underlined the importance of securing knowledge and expertise for supporting both adults and children as learners, by combining school teaching methods with family or adult learning expertise. The more specific strategies for achieving a link with 'at home' learning included the following:

- modelling positive parent-child interactions, such as through the use of play or reading routines that can be adapted to the home learning environment;

<sup>1</sup> Teaching and Learning Research Briefing March 2007- Number 22- '*Enhancing primary literacy and mathematics through home-school knowledge exchange*'. Downloadable from [www.tlrp.org/pub/research.html](http://www.tlrp.org/pub/research.html)

- formative feedback by practitioners, to reinforce the learning outcomes achieved by parents and their children;
- building on family interests and home culture;
- empowering parents in the design of 'take home' games or activities; to extend the influence of the schemes and to engage wider family members; and,
- providing written records and / or organising events to celebrate the families' achievements, and to disseminate the schemes to other parents and pupils.

The project showed that the link with 'at home' learning is often the most successful where parents are engaged in a way that validates their prior knowledge and skills for supporting their child, and is consistent with their philosophies towards parenting. It is usually beneficial to avoid activities that place high demands on parents free time, or that make unrealistic assumptions about the resources that parents have available to them at home.

The research further demonstrated that any activities that are designed to support the child's learning at home will often be in competition with other commitments from the child's school; parents' work responsibilities, and wider demands on family time. Parents' responses are also subject to a range of personal factors; which include:

- their existing role and beliefs in relation to their child's education,
- established home literacy practices;
- the role of extended family members;
- formal religious or cultural education outside of school; and,
- the use of other learning resources such as internet and television at home.

Active consultation with parents is an important part of the process of designing effective schemes, so that this background context is fully understood. This is the case for group activities, in addition to schemes that engage families on a one-to-one basis. The parallel Research Report provides a more detailed consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of these different modes of engagement, and provides some examples of what parents considered to be effective, with reference to quotes and case studies.

## 7.2 Establishing new schemes

The project highlighted a number of lessons learned for schools or local authorities that wish to develop schemes to support parents with their children's 'at home' learning. The following checklist sets out some of the key issues that might be taken into account.

- **Geographical scale** - schemes can be introduced on a small scale at an individual school level, or co-ordinated across a number of different schools within a local area. Each approach has advantages and drawbacks. Small scale 'home grown' schemes present a less cost intensive way for schools to develop activities that are closely aligned to their existing parental engagement work and meet specific objectives within the School Development Plan or Ofsted Self Evaluation Form. The approach of coordinating schemes across a number of different schools with local authority inputs can offer greater economies of scale in the longer term. In addition to providing a more strategic approach, this model helps to justify the development costs for local authority staff, and is suited to rolling out a programme of activities at a cluster level.

- **Leadership** - having strategic endorsement for the scheme can help to ensure that it is afforded priority, and that adequate staffing and resources are made available. At a school level, the active involvement of Head-teachers helps to validate the schemes to the school staff and parents alike, and ensures that the scheme is the best placed to complement school-wide initiatives and targets. At a local authority level, the involvement of service managers can help to ensure that practitioner time is set aside, and that the scheme is joined-up with other funding and initiatives within the local area.
- **Partnerships and networks** - involving partner organisations in the schemes can have tangible benefits for accessing a wider range of families, and adding additional capacity or expertise; whether this is for family learning, parenting support, creative arts, youth justice, or working with children and families with additional needs. If the scheme is school-based, then tapping into the schools' extended services partner organisations is a good starting point. Where the scheme aims to engage parents who have not traditionally engaged with the school, it can be beneficial to involve outreach workers to help boost referrals. This might include a role for home-school liaison staff, Sure Start Children's Centre outreach workers, or health visitors.
- **Resources** - it is often necessary to allow for more substantial time inputs from school and local authority staff when first establishing schemes. This is to ensure that the scheme is underpinned with the right combination of skills and expertise; the appropriate partner organisations are engaged, and the content is of high quality. Once embedded, the ongoing costs of running the schemes are typically lower, as a bank of resources and training materials are built up over time for wider dissemination. Key considerations for resourcing schemes include the following:
  - learning materials and accreditation for parents
  - training materials or short courses for staff
  - crèche and childcare facilities
  - hospitality and catering
  - staff replacement costs
  - printing of resources or worksheets and other 'take home' materials
  - publicity costs for flyers or leaflets; and,
  - costs for secure transport and venue hire, if applicable

Where possible, in-kind contributions in the form of staff time can be invaluable, to help get activities off the ground. An approach of local authorities or schools pairing-up to exchange good practice is one such model that was tested through the project<sup>1</sup>.

- **Scheme promotion and awareness-raising** - the project reinforced that schools often face quite specific challenges for engaging parents from their local community, depending on their size, location, and demographic profile, and that it is important to design the recruitment strategy around this. Appropriate measures to raise awareness of the scheme and recruit parents might include the following:

<sup>1</sup> Refer to Chapter Two in the parallel Research Report, which provides a detailed account of the lessons learned from this local linking model.

- providing advance notice, so that working parents can take annual leave
  - ensuring prominent publicity in the school newsletter, and on the website
  - producing bi-lingual versions of the publicity and materials
  - involving pupils in the recruitment, by designing and taking home invitations
  - face-to-face awareness raising with parents at pick-up and collection points
  - additional support and encouragement for parents who might lack the confidence to engage - telephone contact by a learning mentor, for example
  - outreach recruitment, where this is feasible or appropriate - where home visiting is already established, for example; and,
  - sending reminders by email or letter, the week before the activities take place.
- **Staff training and development** - the research showed that the skills and professional background of the staff are of high importance when introducing schemes that aim to engage parents with their children's 'at home' learning. Schemes with this aim typically require knowledge and expertise in relation to the school curriculum, in addition to parental engagement expertise. It is important to engage curriculum managers and teaching staff at an early stage in the scheme, therefore, to scope how it might be linked to the learning that children are doing within the classroom. It is also necessary to consider the skill-sets that are required for working with adults. These are likely to vary, depending on whether the scheme is based on a family learning, parenting support or more generic parental engagement model. Appropriate actions might include:
    - an initial audit of the skills that are available within the school and its partner organisations, to establish the extent to which they address the requirements of the particular scheme that is to be introduced;
    - identifying any aspects of further training that might be necessary to make the scheme sustainable, including any Continuous Professional Development (CPD) implications for the staff who are involved, and the potential for expanding the scheme to introduce targeted activities for more vulnerable families; and,
    - considering the potential impact of staffing changes, to consider whether there is shared knowledge and ownership of the scheme amongst school staff, or whether there is a risk of discontinuation if key individuals become unavailable.
- **Record-keeping, monitoring and evaluation** - a key learning point from the project is the importance of capturing the available evidence for the outcomes from the schemes. Measuring the benefits for 'at home' learning is inevitably difficult, due to the fact that so many of the intended benefits from the schemes are realised by families within their own homes; and therefore 'behind closed doors'. This means that it is particularly important to set in place mechanisms to capture whatever evidence is available to the staff delivering the schemes. A variety of different approaches exist to support this process; some of which include the following:
    - practitioners keeping *diaries or logs of activities*, as a source of evidence for feedback from the parents or children, and for reflection on what has worked well;

- the use of *comments sheets of graffiti boards* for parents to post their views of the sessions immediately afterwards;
- *self-evaluation* by staff running the sessions, with inputs from both family learning and school staff to capture both sets of perspectives;
- inviting parents and children back for a *celebration assembly or follow-up event*, so that they can report their experiences directly of how or whether the scheme helped them to learn with their children at home afterwards;
- drawing on *indirect sources of evidence*, such as visitor records and whole school parent questionnaires, to identify whether the scheme has had any effect on the regularity with which parents attend the school, or their levels of satisfaction; and,
- the use of more *formal evaluation*, which might include questionnaires or face-to-face interviews with parents and children who participated in the scheme. These might examine a range of potential outcomes, including: raised aspirations; more positive outlooks towards learning; pro-social behaviour, and evidence of children's literacy, language or numeracy skills development.

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