Involving parents

Communication between schools and parents of school-aged children

June 2018

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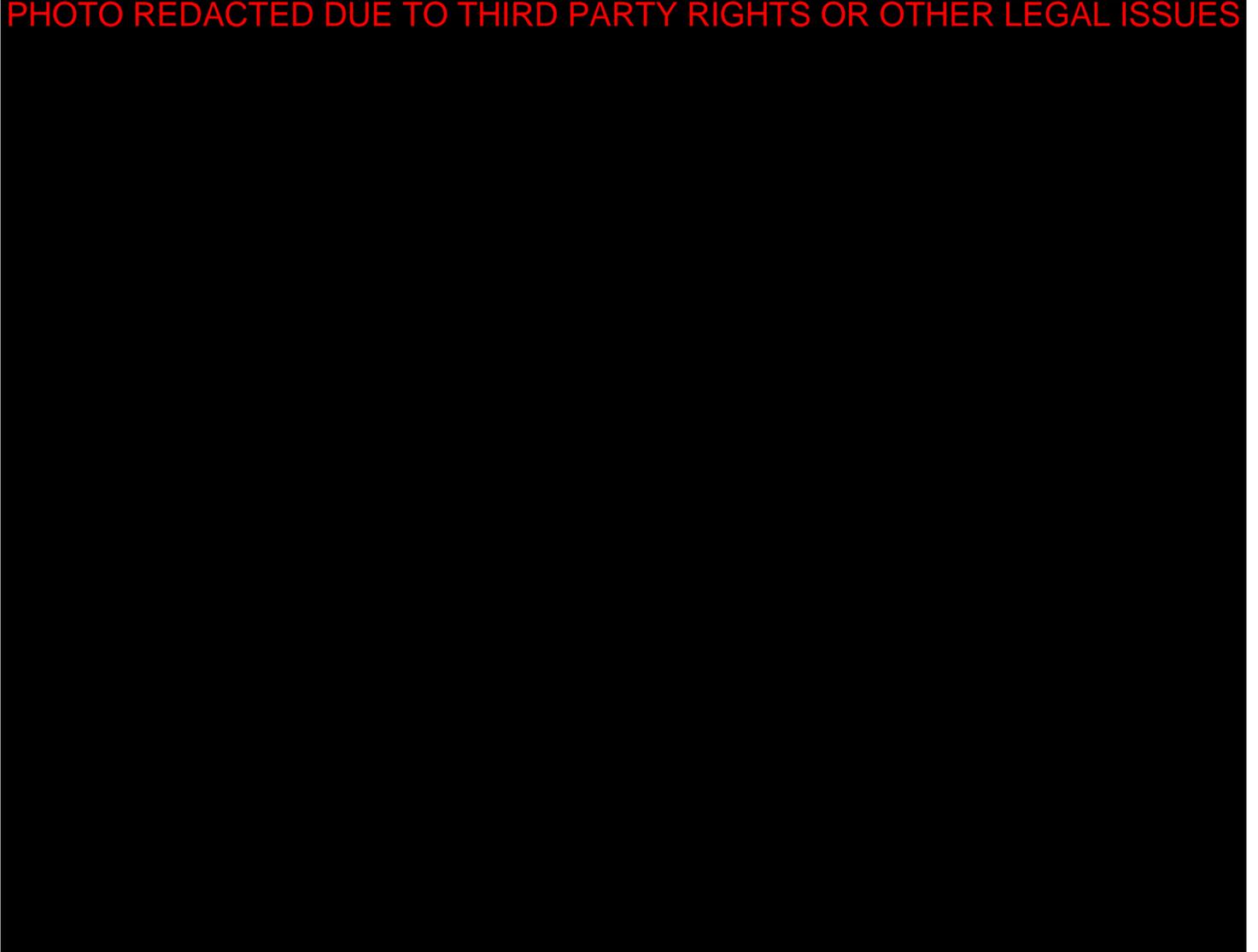
The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ⅄ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ⅄ primary schools
- ⅄ secondary schools
- ⅄ special schools
- ⅄ pupil referral units
- ⅄ all-age schools
- ⅄ independent schools
- ⅄ further education
- ⅄ independent specialist colleges
- ⅄ adult community learning
- ⅄ local government education services for children and young people
- ⅄ teacher education and training
- ⅄ Welsh for adults
- ⅄ work-based learning
- ⅄ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ⅄ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ⅄ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Cabinet Secretary's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2017-2018.

The report is a short study in which we review how effectively schools communicate and engage with parents of school-aged children and explore parents' views of the approaches taken by schools. The findings are based on a combination of interviews with school leaders by telephone and during inspection, an online questionnaire and focus group interviews with parents, and information from inspections during the last cycle (2010 to 2017). In this report, the term 'parent' is used to include parents, carers and guardians.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia. It may be of interest to schools looking to review the way that they communicate and engage with parents to remove barriers to education.

Background

It is generally recognised that parents who have the confidence to support their children's learning have a significant impact on pupils' achievement. Research, suggests that their involvement can have more influence over a child's education than the quality of the school that they attend. (Department for Education and Skills, 2003)

In the last 15 years, a wide range of organisations have reported extensively on this topic. Among other findings, they report that:

- traditional approaches to parental engagement are unsuccessful because modern parenting is changing
- the main barrier to providing support at home is time
- parents need clear, specific, targeted information from schools in order to engage effectively
- parents who feel the least connected to the school are the most critical of its work
- activities to engage parents in their child's learning that are "bolted on" to mainstream activities, and not part of an integrated strategic approach, are less likely to succeed
- programmes designed for parents to work with their children at home without support or skills appear to be ineffective
- information and communication technology (ICT) supports parental engagement because it is better suited to parents' flexible working arrangements

- parents of children in secondary schools are less likely to have an understanding about what their children are learning than parents of children in primary and special schools
- while parents want to be consulted by government and schools, they have little awareness of national education policy
- parents from higher social economic groups are more likely to be active on parent representative bodies than those from lower social economic groups because the latter group lacks confidence in their own abilities
- a minority of parents across the UK are not asked by schools to become involved in the first place
- a large proportion of parents are interested in being more actively involved, for example in formal representation
- there is very little evidence on which approaches are the most successful, and schools' evaluation of the impact of this work is generally poor

The recommendations made from the findings of these studies include that schools should:

- ensure that parents feel valued as partners in their children's education
- give parents meaningful opportunities to inform and shape school policy
- ensure that parents' views are acted on and communicated back to them
- ensure that parental engagement involves two-way communication
- strengthen their efforts to enable parents to engage directly with their children's learning, particularly secondary schools
- do more to engage fathers and younger parents who are more open to receiving support
- persist in identifying and involving hard-to-reach parents in order to help make the shift from being critical to becoming a critical friend
- support parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds to become involved through helping them to develop their skills and increase their confidence
- debunk myths about the time involved in engaging with schools
- help parents understand government policy

(Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Education Endowment Foundation, 2016; National College of School Leadership, 2011; Nuffield Foundation 2013; Ofsted, 2011; Ofsted, 2015; PTA UK, 2017; Welsh Government, 2016)

Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation is often used to assess the impact of approaches used by public bodies to involve the community that they serve in their work and suggests that legitimate participation first starts when schools communicate to inform. However, strategies used to keep parents informed that are one way, with no channel of feedback, or that retain all decision-making power with the school, such as parental surveys, are limited in terms of their impact. Under this model, true partnerships exist when parents are equal partners in decision-making processes. Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, all public bodies are under a duty to act sustainably and this includes involving the public in decision-making (National Assembly for Wales, 2015).

In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government set out its vision for addressing the link

between poverty and underachievement in education in the *School Effectiveness Framework,* which challenged schools to work with all partners, including parents. In *Rewriting the Future*, 2014, the Welsh Government re-emphasised the importance of this work by making Family and Community Engagement one of four central themes to the programme. This was followed in 2015 by the publication of its Family and Communication Engagement (FaCE) toolkit containing practical resources for schools to help them strengthen their approaches to parental engagement.

In 2017, the Welsh Government commissioned an evaluation of its programme, *Evaluation and research for the parental engagement programme of work,* (Welsh Government, 2017), which found that parents view schools as the most trusted source of information on education. Parents in affluent areas see education as a responsibility that they share with the school. Parents want the information that they receive to be short, to the point, and with messages that are easy to understand. The evaluation confirmed the findings of early studies that parental engagement changes with the age of the child. Parents living in deprived areas are more likely to give their children time off from school, for example to relieve what they perceive as stress created by school.

Estyn last reported on this topic in 2009 in a guide to *Good practice in parental involvement in primary schools* (Estyn, 2009). The guide reported that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have parents who are not involved in their education and who have a negative perception and experience of schooling. We also reported that parental engagement approaches can positively impact on behaviour and attendance, but that, at that time, only a very few schools had consistent approaches that resulted in high levels of parental involvement across a wide range of activities. We found that the enthusiasm of the headteacher was the single most important driver for effective parental involvement.

Main findings

1 Almost all schools establish constructive relationships with a wide range of partners, including parents. There is a close relationship between the outcomes of an Estyn inspection and the extent of parents' satisfaction gathered in pre-inspection questionnaires to parents.

2 Many schools are adopting an increasingly comprehensive range of strategies to communicate with parents. However, only a few schools actively consult with parents to identify their preferred methods of communication.

3 The frequency and quality of communication received by parents vary considerably within and across the school sectors. Parents of secondary school children receive considerably less communication from their child's school than parents of children at primary school.

4 A majority of schools use text messaging and social media platforms to give parents information about school events. A minority of schools use a range of digital communication channels to develop a valuable two-way dialogue between teachers and parents, for example through the use of digital applications (apps).

5 Too often schools communicate with one parent only. Because of this, mothers receive the vast majority of communication from schools and this can inadvertently exclude fathers. Only a majority of primary school parents and around a quarter of secondary school parents surveyed feel that their school involves fathers and mothers equally in their child's learning. A few schools have adopted successful strategies to encourage fathers to engage more closely in their child's learning and to contribute to the life of the school.

6 Schools in general have been able to access little external support for their parental engagement approaches, including how to set up and manage their social media accounts. As a result, not all schools know how to use these and other digital platforms well enough or have clear protocols in place to protect the wellbeing of staff and pupils confidently when using them.

7 Generally, parents of primary school children find reports and parents' evenings more useful than parents of secondary school children. Parents prefer it when teachers discuss their child's specific strengths and areas for development. This is more valuable than reports or parents' evenings that only present generic curricular information. In too many schools, reports mainly describe what is taught in lessons rather than how well each child has developed their skills, knowledge and understanding.

8 A majority of schools have adopted a range of different approaches to make it straightforward for parents to raise concerns or ask questions in person. Many parents know the process for raising concerns at their child's school but around half of secondary school parents do not find contacting their school easy. Where schools have ensured that parents understand whom to contact with different concerns, this

has had a positive impact on parents' confidence in approaching the school. Schools that manage their communication from parents well have put in place clear processes for responding to a variety of communication from parents.

9   Most schools across all sectors measure the value of providing additional activities, such as workshops to help parents support their child's literacy or numeracy development, or information evenings on upcoming examinations. However they do this based simply on parent attendance. Too few schools evaluate the impact of strategies to engage parents on pupils' standards and wellbeing.

10   Around half of primary school parents and a minority of secondary school parents report that the school is effective in helping them to support their child's learning. Nearly all schools work appropriately with outside agencies to support individual pupils and their families.

11   An increasing number of schools have appointed home-school co-ordinators to support their work with vulnerable pupils and their families. Occasionally they also support or lead on strategic approaches to family and community engagement activities.

12   Nurture groups and pre-school programmes generally have a positive impact on children and their families. A few schools also provide a valuable range of opportunities for parents to develop their own parenting skills.

13   A majority of secondary school parents and a minority of primary school parents do not feel that they have suitable opportunities to become involved in the life of the school. Schools report mixed responses to their efforts to involve parents directly in the life of the school.

14   Only a minority of parents feel that their school consults well with them on their child's education. Schools across all sectors report that responses to consultation are sometimes low. An increasing number of schools have set up parent forums to enable them to collaborate more effectively with parents on school improvement.

15   Only a few schools are confident that their governing body reflects the socio-economic mix of parents and pupils well. Around half of parents surveyed are not confident that their views are represented well by their child's governing body. This is in part due to their composition, or because parents are not sure who their governors are or what they do.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1 Consult with parents about their communication and engagement needs and review their approaches accordingly to enhance two-way communication

R2 Improve their channels of communication in order to engage with all parents and guardians, in particular fathers

R3 Ensure that reports and parents' evenings focus on a child's specific strengths and areas for development

R4 Make clear how staff and parent governors can be contacted, and implement helpful and clear processes for dealing with parental communication

R5 Consult on and put in place protocols for parents, pupils and staff on the use of digital communication channels, including social media

R6 Seek ways to ensure that they take good account of the views of the full range of parents that make up the socio-economic mix of the school in self-evaluation and other consultation exercises

R7 Evaluate parental communication and engagement approaches for the purpose of improvement planning, to ensure that they have an impact on pupils' standards

Local authorities should:

R8 Provide support for schools to develop their parental engagement strategies, including the safe and effective use of electronic communication channels, particularly social media

The Welsh Government should:

R9 Give further guidance to schools on how to ensure that governors represent and engage with all parents effectively

## Communicating and engaging with parents for different purposes

16   Nearly all schools interviewed recognise that engaging well with parents can have a positive impact on learning. They employ a diverse range of strategies to communicate and engage with parents for a variety of different purposes. Approaches and strategies used by schools usually serve more than one purpose and there can be considerable overlap between them. For the purposes of this report, schools' approaches to communication and engagement with parents are considered according to the following main purposes:

- keeping parents **informed** of the work of the school or their child's progress
- **building a dialogue** with parents and **supporting** them to engage in learning and wellbeing
- **involving** parents in the life of the school
- **consulting** with parents on provision
- **collaborating** with parents on joint projects for the good of the school or the wider community

17   However, the effectiveness of schools in involving parents varies considerably. Schools that are successful in their approaches display some, if not all, of the following common features:

- They are successful because their approaches are well planned, structured and designed carefully to support the needs of all parents. Sometimes they establish this by consulting directly with parents on their communication and engagement needs.
- These schools recognise that one approach does not suit all parents. They put in place a combination of approaches, for example a mix of strategies devised by third sector organisations or developed in-house, that are designed to serve a number of different purposes and complement each other. Occasionally this is part of a holistic approach to family and community engagement.
- The schools use a mix of tried and tested strategies alongside innovative approaches to develop a dialogue with parents and to make it easier for them to communicate with the school.
- Importantly, they evaluate their programmes and initiatives carefully to improve provision and adapt their approaches. In so doing, the knowledge that they build of what works well helps them to ensure that other strategies are also a success.
- Schools with higher levels of participation and parental engagement in general not only inform and involve parents, but also consult and collaborate with them in meaningful ways. As a result, they are successful in building parents' trust

18   Only a very few of the schools surveyed confirmed that they were able to rely on support or advice from their regional consortia's school improvement service to help develop their family communication and engagement approaches, or knew specifically whom to turn to for such advice.

Informing parents of progress and wellbeing

Progress reports and parents' evenings

19   In all schools inspected during the last inspection cycle (2010-2017), there is a strong relationship between the judgement awarded to schools for **Key Question 2 Provision** and parents reporting that they are kept well informed about their child's progress. In addition, findings show that parents of pupils in schools in free-school-meal (FSM) benchmark groups 1 and 2 (low deprivation) feel slightly less well informed about their child's progress than parents of pupils in schools in the FSM groups 4 and 5 (high deprivation) across all judgements.

Figure 1: Percentage of positive responses to "I am kept well informed about my child's progress" compared with judgements for provision during inspections of maintained schools (2010-2017)
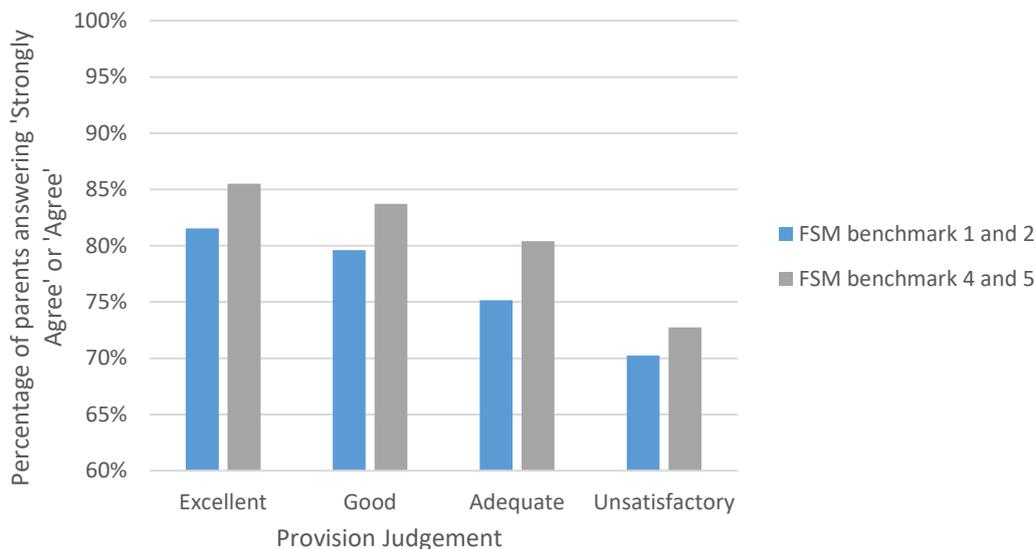
20   Almost all schools comply with their statutory duty to report pupils' progress to parents. Many primary school parents surveyed find reports on their child's progress informative. However, only around half of parents with secondary school-aged children find their child's report to be as useful. Where parents find reports helpful, this is commonly because they are individual to the child, thereby identifying strengths and areas for development clearly as well as the steps needed to develop further. Parents find it less helpful when reports contain too much generic information, such as descriptions of curricular provision. They also do not like receiving reports during parents' evenings as this does not give them enough time to consider the information contained in them before speaking with their child's teachers.

21   All schools offer parents a formal meeting with teachers at least once a year to discuss their child's progress and wellbeing. In general, parents value parents'

evenings because they provide an opportunity to speak to teachers face-to-face about their child's learning, to address any concerns, and to celebrate success. However, a minority of secondary school parents and a few primary school parents feel that these meetings do not help them to engage in their child's learning well enough.

22   Parents' evenings to discuss a child's progress are most effective and allow parents to have the greatest influence if

- teachers know their pupils well, focus closely on the child's specific strengths and areas for development and do not fill time slots with generic information
- schools hold them early enough in the year for parents to make a difference in supporting their children in-year
- they are organised well, so that parents are given sufficient time in slots to speak with teachers and the waiting times between individual consultations in secondary schools are short
- parents have at least one opportunity each year to speak directly to their class teachers rather than only to their form tutors, as is sometimes the case in a very few secondary schools

23   Most parents and schools prefer parents' evenings to take place after the end of a school day. This allows parents to attend outside of working hours or to make arrangements for childcare, for example. However, evening meetings are a challenge for schools. If they are held too early, not all parents are able to attend. Yet delaying the start of parents' evenings can impact negatively on the wellbeing of teachers who typically speak to many parents during the evening and need a rest before the next day.

24   A number of schools, mainly primary schools, are adopting a range of approaches to parents' evenings to overcome some of these issues. For example they provide termly parent evenings, reports, or other opportunities during and after the school day for parents to drop in to speak to staff or look over children's work. Ysgol Glan Morfa, a primary school in Conwy, holds an annual coffee morning for all classes to showcase pupils' work in addition to parents' evenings. Providing a range of opportunities for parents to speak with staff allows closer cooperation on progress and wellbeing and better partnerships with parents than one-off parents' evenings alone.

25   Around half of parents of children with additional learning needs across all settings feel that their child's school communicates information about their child's learning and wellbeing well, for example on their progress on interventions. Many special schools and a few mainstream additional learning needs departments meet the communication needs of parents by using a home-school book to communicate regularly about the progress and wellbeing of children with additional learning needs, sometimes daily or weekly, depending on pupils' needs. At Ysgol Pendalar, in Gwynedd, teachers use the personal electronic devices of non-verbal and profoundly deaf pupils to take pictures of activities during the day in order to provide opportunities for communication about the school day with their families at the end of the day.

Asking questions and raising concerns

26   The majority of parents prefer to communicate with schools face to face, for example to raise concerns or ask questions. Nearly all schools maintain that they have an open door policy, yet the effectiveness varies widely. Many primary school parents and the majority of secondary school parents who responded to our survey find the reception area a welcoming place, and that staff are friendly, approachable and helpful. Many parents know the process for raising concerns or making complaints. The majority of primary school parents and around half of secondary school parents surveyed are of the opinion that their child's school deals promptly with any concerns raised.

27   A majority of schools have helpful systems in place to make it easy for parents to share information, ask questions or raise concerns in person. These systems ensure that matters are dealt with promptly or directed to the member of staff most suited to dealing with the matter. However, a minority of parents across all sectors feel that their child's school could do more to facilitate communication in this way. Parents, in particular those of children with additional learning needs, want reassurance that their concerns are taken seriously.

28   An analysis of judgements for **Key Question 3 Leadership**, compared with a review of the proportion of positive responses to questions on whether parents understand the school's procedures for dealing with complaints and whether they feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem, as noted in pre-inspection questionnaires, shows that there is a marked decline in the proportion of positive responses from parents of pupils in schools in FSM groups 4 and 5 (high deprivation) when schools are judged as **unsatisfactory** for leadership. In particular, they feel less comfortable approaching schools with unsatisfactory leadership when there is a problem than parents of pupils in schools in the top two groups (low deprivation). This suggests that the schools with the weakest leadership could do more to support parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds to engage with them, for example by improving communication and developing parents' skills and confidence to approach the school.

Figure 2: Percentage of positive responses to "I understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints" compared with judgements for leadership during inspections of maintained schools (2010-2017)
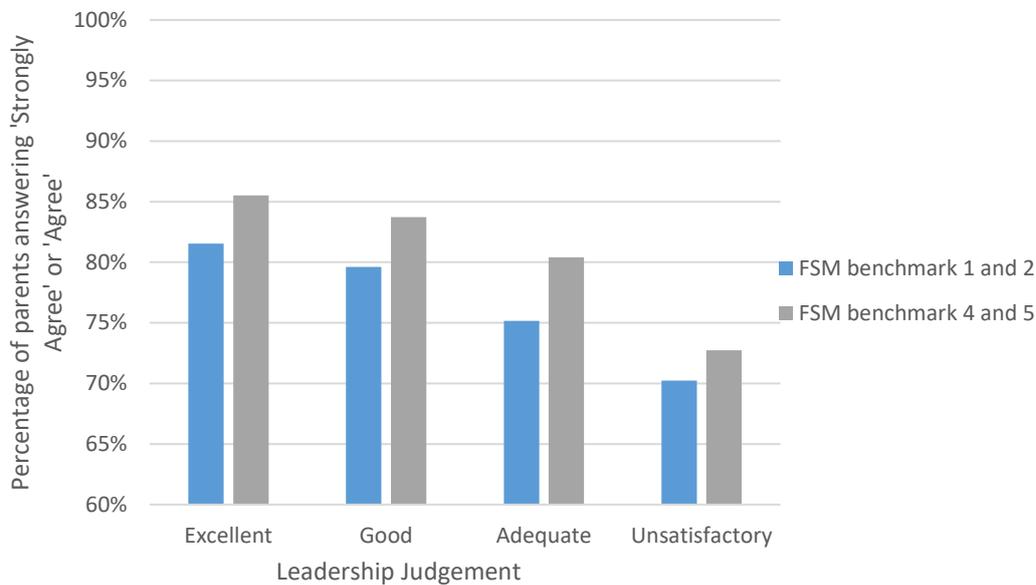
Figure 3: Percentage of positive responses to "I feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem" compared with judgements for leadership during inspections of maintained schools (2010-2017)
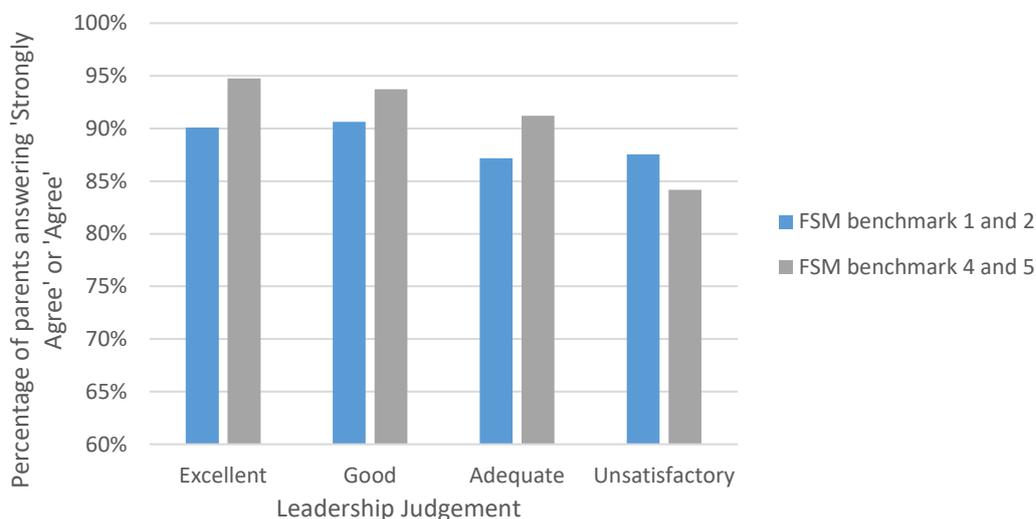
29   Schools with good practice ensure that class teachers or senior leaders are visible at the start and at the end of the day to receive brief information or messages from parents or respond to questions. Other successful schools help to overcome barriers for parents, such as discussing sensitive issues with the office secretary, by ensuring that a leader or other key member of staff, such as the additional learning needs co-ordinator, a head of key stage, or family liaison officer, is on hand daily to "triage" concerns and act upon them quickly where possible.

30   A minority of schools also provide regular 'drop-in' sessions for parents with the headteacher or other leaders. These sessions allow parents to raise broader concerns or ask questions on matters such as curricular provision. While the uptake of these sessions is sometimes low, they enable simple issues to be dealt with swiftly and also create a sense of transparency and openness. A few headteachers use the information that they gather during these sessions effectively for the purposes of self-evaluation, for example to gauge parental views informally on aspects of provision.

31   For example, at Ysgol Gynradd Aberteifi, a primary school in Ceredigion, the headteacher is visible at the school gate every day and pastoral support workers are at the door to greet parents and children daily to deal with any pastoral issues. The school also holds drop-in sessions every Friday with the additional needs, nurture group, and pastoral support co-ordinators. The school uses each of these strategies to ensure that its open door policy is given full effect and they are able to reach as wide a range of parents as possible.

32   Where schools manage communication from parents well, parents know whom they should approach for different matters, when and how to approach staff, and the nature of concerns to raise at different forums. This clarity gives parents confidence that they are welcome to approach the school and that they are approaching the right person to deal with their concerns. This reduces anxiety over speaking to staff and increases parents' confidence that matters will be dealt with effectively. Where these systems work well, schools report that they have reduced the number of matters that are escalated into formal complaints.

33   Parents raise concerns by phone or email in a minority of cases. Around half of secondary school parents surveyed find it difficult to find the right contact details and that, too often, staff do not return emails or phone calls. In schools with effective strategies, there are helpful processes for dealing with communication from parents in this way. These include issuing holding responses to parents if they contact the school by phone or email with clear timescales for a response. In these schools, staff understand and meet expectations around response times to parents.

34   In a small number of cases, relationships between the school and parents can break down. The result is that dealing with parental complaints can take up a large proportion of leaders' time. To improve how they manage complaints, Pen Y Fai Church in Wales Primary School in Bridgend has put in place helpful, sensitive protocols for communicating the process and outcomes of any investigations into complaints that have been escalated:

Case study: dealing with difficult situations

Pen Y Fai Church in Wales Primary School is situated in Bridgend. There are 230 pupils on roll. Around 4% are eligible for free school meals.

A consultation with parents, feedback from staff and a review of historical complaints confirmed that communication between the school and parents was weak. In a very few cases this contributed to issues being escalated beyond the school, taking up large amounts of time and resource. The headteacher established that the school lacked a coherent system and clear policies for communicating with parents.

The school changed a number of its engagement and communication processes as a result of the consultation. To improve how complaints are dealt with, the headteacher and chair of governors put in place a protocol for responding to complaints that have been escalated to the headteacher and governing body. This protocol ensures that complaints are dealt with holistically, that discussions are recorded and agreed between all parties, and that there is a consistent approach to record keeping. The main purpose of the protocol is to avoid a break down in relationships. It therefore covers as standard:

- a description of the incident
- how it was dealt with initially
- advice and agreement on how to ensure that relationships are maintained while the complaint is being investigated
- an expression of sympathy for the concerns of the parent issuing the complaint
- a description of the school's quality assurance procedures relevant to the nature of the complaint
- a clear indication of the time frame for a response

It also sets out expectations and guiding principles of how complaints will be dealt with.

The number of complaints that have escalated beyond the headteacher has reduced markedly. Surveys confirm that parents are much happier with the way that the school communicates with them.

Informing parents of the work of the school

35   Schools have adopted a variety of approaches to share information with parents. However, there is a wide variation within and across sectors, with regards to the regularity and quality of information that schools send to parents. Notably, primary school parents receive more frequent communication than secondary school parents, with the latter noting a marked reduction in the amount of information they receive once their children start secondary school. Around half of secondary school parents who responded to our survey do not find that secondary schools communicate with them frequently enough and do not always find the information that they receive useful.

Using digital technology to keep parents informed of the work of the school

36   The methods that schools use to communicate with parents are changing. Many schools are increasing their range of communication channels, partly in an effort to become paperless in order to reduce administrative and printing costs. However, with only a third of parents reporting that they read their child's diary regularly or use it as a form of communication, schools are also diversifying their approaches in order better to inform, involve and engage parents. To achieve this, many schools are turning to a variety of digital communication methods, for example websites, text and email, social media and similar digital applications. They are used not only because they suit parents' busy lifestyles and are more reliable than pupil post, but parents are also accustomed to using them. A majority of primary school parents and around half of secondary school parents surveyed feel that their child's school communicates with them effectively. Most commonly this is because parents appreciate receiving information electronically.

37   The main purpose of all communication received by parents electronically is to inform them of events at the school. Eighty-five per cent of parents surveyed who receive information electronically do so for this purpose. Around 30% of parents have received electronic messages about attendance, while around a quarter receive information on homework, tests or behaviour. This may be partly due to the platforms used by schools to communicate different types of messages. Social media platforms are suited well to sharing generic information such as events at the school and are used widely by schools. Whereas information on an individual child's attendance, for example, is most likely to be sent by text message directly to the parent concerned. Overall, the use of digital applications (apps) is not as widespread as the use of direct text messages or social media.

Websites

38   A majority of schools see their websites as static communication channels, for example as a prospectus for the school and a place to post statutory information. Only a minority of schools use their website as a means of actively communicating with or engaging parents. Often, in these cases, headteachers recognise the damage an out-of-date website can do to parents' confidence as well as the school's

reputation, so they keep their websites up-to-date, and post headteachers' blogs, social media feeds, newsletters, and upcoming events on them, for example. A very few schools post information on their website that is specific to individual classes.

39   Only around half of parents find the information on school websites useful or easy to find and a minority of parents do not use their child's school's website at all. This is partly because some of the information on a majority of school websites is out of date. Often, schools report having difficulty maintaining their website. A few websites remain underdeveloped because schools lack the expertise or resource to develop them in-house or the funds to employ people with the skills to set them up. To overcome this, a very few schools have websites that have been set up by and are managed by parents.

Text messages and email

40   In our 2009 thematic report, we recommended that schools should improve communication by sending text or email messages (Estyn, 2009). Currently, text messages are by far the most common digital method used by schools to share information with parents. A majority of schools use texts to share short messages such as reminders about upcoming events, for example concerts, parents' evenings or urgent information such as school closures or an outbreak of head lice. Texts are used successfully by a number of schools to contact parents when their child does not turn up for school as part of a first-day response to dealing with school absence. Schools report that most parents sign up to receiving messages in this way and they are the most reliable method of communicating with parents.

41   Around half of schools surveyed send regular emails to parents. The advantages are that they can be used to share larger amounts of information than texts because staff can add links and longer attachments. In general, emails have a lower sign-up rate than text messages. They are also not useful for urgent messages, as not all parents check their email accounts regularly.

42   Text messages and emails are useful for communicating with parents of children who do not live in the same household as their child. However, messages are too frequently sent to one parent only, usually to the child's mother, and this can inadvertently exclude the father. This is partly because many parents identify the mother as the main carer, but also because schools choose to send to the first named contact only. Too few schools take advantage of the option of sending messages, with consent, to both parents, or to the wider family such as grandparents. In the case of text messages, this is sometimes because there is a cost involved. Around half of schools report that a very few parents do not keep the school informed of changes to their contact details, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged catchment areas. This limits how effectively schools can engage with all parents using digital means alone.

Social media

43   To extend their reach, the majority of schools are experimenting with social media. It is used in most cases to communicate information and engage in one direction from the school to the parent, and in some cases also the extended family and wider

community. Most social media feeds are whole-school accounts that are driven often by the headteacher or a senior member of their team. A very few schools have class or subject accounts. As with text messages, busy parents appreciate short bursts of character-limited information and those who are regular users of social media appreciate being involved in the life of the school in this way. This may in part be due to the fact that the percentage of adults accessing the internet using their mobile phones has more than doubled since 2011 (IPSOS, 2017).

44   While Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the UK (IPSOS, 2017), only a few schools use it. The majority of schools use Twitter. The main reason for this is that Facebook is regarded as an open two-way method of communicating and headteachers fear that a forum designed to celebrate success and involve people in school life can become a place to vent frustration inappropriately. Therefore, only a few schools use their social media platform as a form of two-way communication between the parent and the school. In a very few instances where this has been attempted, schools have been exposed to negative publicity. This has resulted in closing down this avenue of communication with parents. Schools that manage this confidently approve every external post before it is published. Digital applications used for the same purposes are not open to the public and therefore do not have the same risks. However, they are not useful for sharing information with the wider community.

45   A few headteachers report that fathers are more likely to engage with information about the school if shared digitally, such as through social media. In general, however, nearly all schools using social media do not track closely how many or which parents, mothers, fathers or other people read or have joined their groups, and the majority are not aware of how this can be done beyond counting the number of followers. A very few schools have targeted fathers specifically to ensure that they are on board for receiving information electronically.

46   While the social media feeds of some schools require parents to be accepted into the group to view posts, some are open to anyone who wants to join, irrespective of their links to a school. In addition, not all schools have clear safeguarding rules in place, such as blanking out names on certificates or agreements around reposting messages. This makes it difficult to safeguard children against image misuse.

47   Safeguarding the wellbeing of pupils and staff while striving to engage actively with as many parents as possible through the use of social media requires careful management. A few schools manage this by implementing very clear policies for their use for parents and staff alike. A few schools using two-way social media accounts ensure that only those messages approved by an administrator are posted publicly. However, this requires making someone available to carry out this role and has resource implications.

48   In comparison to paper-based approaches to communication, that require greater preparation and forward planning, common complaints from parents about information received electronically are that they sometimes receive too many and irrelevant messages or that schools occasionally send information out very late. This, in particular, puts pressure on already busy households if the message requires the parent to make arrangements at short notice. Around half of schools avoid this

by publishing a regular newsletter containing dates of future events. These are distributed digitally and on paper, with text, email or other social media platforms used only for reminders and urgent messages. Other concerns are that the frequency of messages wane as a school term progresses. A very few parents are concerned that social media and applications can be a distraction for teachers.

49   Schools that use these approaches have relied on good practice shared by other schools or personal in-house experience. Although many local authorities have general policies in place regarding the use of social media, a number of schools in the survey have not been able to access support and advice from either regional consortia or local authorities on how to set up and manage their own social media accounts. Too many schools do not understand the full reach and potential of using social media or know how to manage all the risks associated with them well enough.

Using digital platforms to build a dialogue with parents

50   In addition to using modern technology to keep parents informed of and involved in the life of the school, a minority of schools are using digital channels to enhance the ways in which they engage parents in learning and wellbeing.

51   A few schools use digital technology to respond effectively to the needs of parents who are unable to attend events at school. For example, Pontyclun Primacy School in Rhondda Cynon Taf posts video tutorials of mathematical demonstrations created by pupils on its website for parents to view at their convenience and practise with their children at home.

52   A few schools, mostly primary schools, are using digital applications (apps), some of which are free, to share a wide range of information. The schools surveyed are using these apps in a number of innovative ways to help eliminate the traditional barriers between home and school:

- to send short or longer messages, for example on changes to personnel, upcoming events or newsletters
- to share attendance statistics, rewards, or information on behaviour and test results for specific children with their parents
- to share images of pupils' work instantly with parents on their phones, tablets or personal computers
- to inform parents of specific difficulties their child is having with their learning so that parents can support their child at home
- to share links to resources, such as videos, worksheets and photos
- as a homework or reading diary
- as a home school book for pupils with additional learning needs
- to enable parents to make their own appointments at parents' evenings with full visibility of available teachers and time slots
- to consult with parents

53   Most parents who receive information in this way believe that their school keeps them well informed. They value that the information they receive is often specific to their child, as well as the opportunity for them to communicate with the school and develop a dialogue around their child's learning. Schools that use them report a

number of advantages. As they are based on a digital application (app), they do not need to have up-to-date contact information for parents to be able to send them messages. Messages can be sent to individuals or groups. They remain private between the school and parents and are not open to the public. A further advantage is that parents are not able to repost messages on social media easily. Headteachers using apps report that they allow the school to follow how well individual parents are engaging with messages and this allows schools to provide additional support where necessary. Schools report that parents are happier with communication at the school and a greater proportion are more directly involved in their child's learning. These schools report improvements in attendance and behaviour. Of the parents who responded to our survey, the use of apps was by far the most positively received form of digital communication used.

Case study: how two schools use technology to build a dialogue with parents

After an evaluation of its relationship and methods of communicating with parents, **Pen Y Fai Church in Wales Primary School**, Bridgend, recognised that it needed to improve lines of communication between parents and the school. It established that its parents were keen to adopt new communication methods and opted to use a digital application (app) that allows two way communication privately between the school and individual parents. The school uses the app to:

- inform parents of events and work in class and at the school as a whole
- celebrate and reward success
- as a means of sharing pupils' work with parents
- give parents guidance on how they can support with individual areas for development
- inform parents of changes at the school
- as a method for parents to raise concerns with the school
- invite feedback from parents on changes to policies such as behaviour, anti-bullying and uniform

As a result of the introduction of the app, and as experience of the system grows, the school has reduced its use of other communication strategies. All parents now access the app, which is significantly higher than those previously using Twitter alone. The school uses the analytics functions built in to review who is receiving messages. The school has in place a policy of no use after 6pm and is currently developing an acceptable use policy.

Self-evaluation at **St John the Baptist High School** in Aberdare identified that parents frequently complained that they were not sure that their children were receiving enough homework, particularly as how accurately and regularly pupils record homework in their homework diary varies considerably. The school opted to use an app that allows staff to:

- record and upload any homework, including resources, that they set
- share information on whole-school events and promote new activities
- remind parents of policies such as social media, homework and attendance

- share links to YouTube videos, for example for demonstrations on methods in mathematics

As a result of the introduction of this app, the school has been able to save the cost of homework diaries. The system provides learning managers with reports to monitor and follow up pupils who do not engage with the app over a period of 10 days. For a few pupils with additional learning needs, the app has improved the accessibility of homework as they are able to view it using different coloured backgrounds. The school reports that, with training and support, 85% of parents engage actively with the application and there is a notable improvement in parents' views on homework in self-evaluation.

54   The use of digital applications (apps) poses similar risks to the use of other electronic forms of communication in terms of frequency of messages and expectations around when it is reasonable to contact and expect a response from staff. Schools are beginning to develop policies such as "quiet times" for messaging staff or guidelines, in consultation with staff, for how frequently to post messages using the app. Others have ensured a wide reach to their messages by holding information evenings to support parents in downloading and using these platforms. Ysgol Gymraeg y Fenni, in Monmouthshire, has put in place an acceptable use agreement for staff.

Providing support to parents with learning and wellbeing

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55   Around half of primary school parents and a minority of secondary school parents surveyed report that their child's school helps them well to support their child's learning. For example, they report that they have had opportunities to take part in additional parents' evenings, workshops or programmes to help support their child's learning or wellbeing.

56   Most schools, however, do not evaluate the impact of their approaches well enough and measure success based on parent attendance alone. Too often, attendance at these events is low and headteachers question their value. They report a variety of reasons for parents not engaging with their programmes, for example:

- a lack of time
- transport challenges to and from the school (this is particularly true of rural locations or where there is no public transport beyond a certain time)
- a lack of confidence or apathy, for example because of negative prior experience of education
- a lack of basic skills
- other societal problems, such as substance misuse

57   Consequently, these parents require particularly creative and inventive approaches to become successfully engaged. For example, staff at Ysgol Gymraeg y Fenni, Monmouthshire, put on a crèche to improve attendance and limit distractions. Other schools, such as Ty Gwyn School in Cardiff, provide transport to and from the school in the evening where there is little or no public transport or where a lack of transport for other reasons poses a barrier to attendance for specific parents.

58   Many primary schools and the majority of secondary schools organise useful general information events for parents to build their awareness of provision, teaching methods, and activities to support the wellbeing of their children. These include evenings to meet staff at key transition points, information on skills such as the digital competence framework, the new Welsh Baccalaureate qualifications and internet safety. For example, a few secondary schools surveyed have devised well-attended examination skills' sessions as a result of feedback from parents on how they feel the school could help them best to support their children through their exams.

Case study: helping parents help pupils with exams

St John the Baptist High School is a Church in Wales school in Aberdare. It has 1,031 pupils on roll. Around 13% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

The school recognised that parents sometimes find the role of supporting children through examinations difficult. Therefore, the school devised a study skills evening for parents and pupils. While the focus of the evening was to provide strategies for pupils, parents were also given practical tips on how to:

- ensure wellbeing and relieve stress
- provide inspiration and incentives
- maintain a positive attitude
- manage time appropriately and effectively
- provide a beneficial routine within the home

Attendance was relatively poor in the first year, but there had been a positive impact on those families that attended. The school reviewed its strategy and improved uptake by holding the evening earlier in the year, advertising it within school and on social media, texting parents and holding one-to-one meetings with targeted pupils.

Attendance at the event improved. Pupils and parents reported greater confidence as they approached examinations. The school's performance in the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSE including English and Mathematics at grades A*-C improved by five percentage points (Welsh Government, 2017).

59   Schools recognise that it is sometimes challenging to attract all parents to information sharing events. A few schools put on curricular and information events after social events, such as carol concerts or celebration evenings, to secure strong attendance and ensure that they have a captive audience.

60   Around 60% of primary school parents and 28% of secondary school parents surveyed feel that their school involves fathers and mothers equally in their child's learning. This represents a slight improvement since Estyn last published a report in this area (Estyn, 2009). However, as was the case previously, mothers are more likely to become involved in their children's learning than fathers. A number of schools report that fathers, particularly those who work, find it difficult to find the time to engage with their child's learning in school in this way. They report that activities that they have held in the past have not been well attended and would welcome more support in this area.

61   In the best cases, a very few schools organise regular events targeted specifically at fathers or the wider family. For example, Tynewydd Primary School in Caerphilly organises a well-attended annual "Fathers' Extravaganza Day" to encourage fathers to come in and work with their children for the day.

Case study: engaging effectively with fathers

Lansdowne Primary School is an inner-city primary school in Cardiff. It has 486 pupils on roll and around 30% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Just over half the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and around the same proportion have English as an additional language. Around a quarter of the pupils are identified as having a special educational need.

To create opportunities to communicate with families and to ensure that she is visible at the school, the headteacher stands on the school gate every day to welcome families each morning. Parents use this as an opportunity to convey any important information or messages. The headteacher identified that most mothers took their children onto the school playground, while most fathers left their children at the school gate. She also noted that the mothers were more likely to engage with her than fathers, or to take messages to the school office.

A small group of the fathers that dropped their children at the school gate congregated on the other side of the road, talking to each other. The headteacher spoke to them and invited them to come and meet with her to have a chat. Initially three accepted her invitation. She asked them questions about why they did not come onto the school playground and they were able to provide lots of helpful feedback including:

- They felt intimidated by the teachers because they had not had a good experience of school themselves.
- They felt that the school favoured mothers because text messages were always sent to their partners/ex-partners and not to them.
- They felt concerned about giving messages to administration staff in the school office because the waiting space by the school office was very small and they were concerned about bumping into other people that they were having difficulties with outside of school.

These fathers were invited to come and meet with the headteacher again in two weeks' time in order to think further about the barriers to approaching the school and to work together to come up with solutions. They were asked to talk to other fathers to see if they would come to the meeting as well. Seven fathers attended the second meeting. The headteacher arranged to meet with them every two weeks to work on a number of barriers and solutions. She also sent out letters to families inviting fathers and male carers to join the group, and spoke to more fathers on the school gate. The group continued to grow at each meeting, until the school had finally successfully engaged 19 fathers, who attended all or some of the meetings.

The group supported the school to come up with some solutions to the barriers they had identified that prevent fathers from engaging with the school, for example:

- The teachers took it in turns to stand on the school gate with the headteacher so that they could meet families at the gate in a more personable way to encourage fathers to not see them as a threat.

- The text message service that the school was using was changed because it only allowed the school to send messages to one phone number per family and this defaulted to the mother's number when there was more than one parent with custody. The school selected a system that allowed two phone numbers per family.
- The school made changes to the fabric of the entrance hall, extending it and creating a large waiting area so that people no longer worried about sharing a confined space with others that they were having difficulties with outside of school.
- The father group also started to support with decisions about curriculum changes, for example looking at reading schemes in terms of which books they thought might engage boys. They also looked at the learning environment and a group of fathers volunteered to help build a numeracy pirate ship to engage boys with mathematics.

This work has had a considerable impact in a number of areas of the school's work:

- More fathers have started bringing their children onto the school playground and sharing messages with staff on the school gate, or with the school office.
- The number of boys reading at home using the new reading scheme increased by over 50%.
- Attendance rates of boys that live with just their fathers improved.
- The number of fathers attending parents' evening increased by 23% in the first parent meeting after starting the fathers' meetings.
- The school now no longer has a separate fathers' group, but rather a parent group with good representation of mothers and fathers. This suggests that fathers feel as engaged as mothers.

Workshops or learning programmes

62   Many schools across all sectors have put in place at some time or another workshops to help a small group of parents support their children with specific aspects of their learning or wellbeing, such as the development of literacy, numeracy, or other communication skills, such as Makaton, or with their behaviour.

63   However, only a few schools evaluate the impact of their workshops for parents on pupil progress effectively. Schools that put in place structured support for parents, rather than stand-alone events, are more likely to evaluate the impact of their approach on standards and wellbeing.

Case study: working with parents to accelerate emotional development

Maesyrhandir Community Primary School is a community primary school in Newtown, Powys. It has 210 pupils on roll. Around 40% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

A large proportion of pupils displayed delayed emotional development, many of whom found it difficult to sustain positive relationships. The approach was chosen because it is evidenced based, and provides tailored action plans for school and home to address pupils' individual needs and accelerate emotional development.

Working closely with parents is integral to the success of the programme. Trained staff met regularly with parents to discuss children's individual needs and explain the intervention to them. Home plans were given to parents to carry out with their children outside of school. A dedicated "Thrive Hive" was set up for key adults, including parents, to work on action plans. In addition, the school teamed up with a local charity "Honeypot" to enable targeted children to spend one day a week at the centre to work on their plans for a period of six weeks. Parents were invited to spend the last day with their children to have fun with their children while they worked together on the programme. The cost of the programme was met through the pupil development grant.

The programme provided staff with a positive and structured approach to support pupils with emotional development. Nearly all pupils have made notable progress, with around half reaching the right stage of development for their chronological age. The school plans to staff the Thrive Hive fully and train the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator to become a Family Thrive Practitioner.

Pre-school programmes

64   A minority of primary schools are particularly effective in engaging with parents before their child joins the school. These can be activities such as baby massage, or other activities to support with child development or nurture provision. These opportunities are used effectively to build positive relationships, to support families with specific advice, and to identify and put in place support for additional learning needs at an early stage.

Working with partners to engage effectively with parents

65   Nearly all schools work appropriately with outside agencies and other partners to provide support or develop their own provision for vulnerable learners and their families. Where this is particularly effective, schools, often in partnership with community groups, provide family learning programmes and advice for parents on medical, educational and wellbeing issues. In schools with good practice, staff co-ordinate highly effectively the work of specialist services to support parents and families dealing with challenging circumstances or in crises. Some schools recognise that parents feel more confident meeting with external agencies on the school campus and facilitate this. These approaches effectively support the wellbeing of families and pupils to reduce the likelihood of exclusion, to improve attendance, or to provide effective alternative provision for vulnerable pupils.

Home school co-ordinators

66   A minority of schools, often primary schools, have appointed home school co-ordinators to provide pastoral support for parents and to help build relationships between schools and parents who find it challenging to engage. Where this role is carried out particularly effectively, the home school co-ordinator has considerable experience in dealing with vulnerable learners or supporting the local community and often plays a key role in brokering multi-agency and partnership working. They build the trust of parents successfully, organise, and sometimes develop and deliver family and community learning activities. Some are also deployed to assist with parent councils. In a few schools they play a pivotal role within a whole-school approach to family engagement.

Family learning activities

67   A few schools, particularly primary and special schools, run family learning activities that enable parents and their children to learn something together, for example coding and cookery clubs. Ysgol Aberteifi in Ceredigion has held sessions where pupils as "digital wizards" train parents to use specific ICT platforms such as HwB. The school has also created a "homework grid" system that provides opportunities for pupils and parents to work together on specific tasks. A few schools also help parents to re-engage with education by providing opportunities to gain accreditation through Agored Cymru, adult learning or university courses, for example on child development.

Case study: Family learning

Ty Gwyn School is a local authority day special school located in the Ely area of Cardiff. It caters for 172 children and young people aged 3-19 years who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils also have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder and present with severely challenging behaviour.

Forty-two per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 42% are from non-white backgrounds. Almost all pupils are functioning within P-scales.

As nearly all pupils are transported to school, there are limited opportunities for face-to-face contact with parents. Therefore, the school sought to find alternative ways to engage with parents. It opened a Family Centre in 2007 to provide advice, support and training for parents and families. The Centre has grown over the last 10 years and now provides an extensive range of provision to support parents. This includes:

- counselling
- English for speakers of other languages
- behaviour management
- home support visits
- parent and baby groups
- ICT for beginners
- toy and resource lending library
- touch therapy

- Rubicon dance
- craft classes
- healthy eating
- keep fit
- sleep clinic
- epilepsy training
- paediatric first aid

The school worked closely with the local authority's black and minority ethnic support services to tailor their services, taking into account cultural sensitivities and individual needs, for example by providing childcare, transport and a few female-only programmes.

In addition to the Family Centre, the school also has a dedicated room for parents to use when they visit the school. The room has a TV, a music system, toys for younger siblings, internet access and refreshments, as well as a range of information leaflets for parents. The relaxed atmosphere helps parents to prepare for consultation that can be quite stressful at times.

Parents appreciate the "one-stop shop" at the Family Centre. Parents on behaviour programmes report increased confidence in dealing with challenging behaviour. Families welcome the opportunity to meet with other families experiencing similar issues and a few have developed strong friendships with other parents through their dealings with the Family Centre. Staff at the centre respond proactively to parents' needs by arranging expert input for specific concerns or by signposting to organisations that can provide further support. Many parents continue to use the centre as a place to socialise when their children progress to the main school.

Involving parents in the life and work of the school

Celebrations, social events and volunteering

68   There are a number of ways that schools encourage parents to become actively involved in the life of the school. Nearly all schools across all sectors invite parents to concerts, drama performances and other events to celebrate the work of pupils. Many primary schools or their parent teacher associations organise social events, such as coffee mornings, and drop-ins for parents to build relationships with the school and other parents. The majority of schools invite parents to volunteer. This is an area of family engagement where a few schools engage fathers successfully. However, the success of these initiatives varies depending on the level of engagement required. Many of the barriers to involvement identified by schools mirror those that they experience when arranging activities to support parents to engage in their children's learning.

69   Parents of secondary school children have fewer opportunities to become involved in the work of the school than parents of primary school children. Around half of secondary school parents and a minority of primary school parents do not feel that they have suitable opportunities to become involved in the life of the school.

70   Where schools have active parent teacher associations, many raise funds for the school and support at school events, and a few engage with the wider school community to support learning and consultation activities. In a few cases, schools and parents report that the core group does not always successfully engage the wider parent community.

Consulting with parents on provision

71   Many schools consult appropriately with parents, for example by requesting feedback at the end of a child's report, issuing general annual questionnaires or, less commonly, holding wider bespoke consultation exercises on matters that affect them such as uniform, bullying, or health and safety matters. Schools across all sectors report that returns to questionnaires or responses to wider consultations are generally low. In addition, only a minority of parents feel that their child's school consults effectively with them on their child's education, makes the changes they suggest and informs them well of the changes they have made as a result.

72   While they welcome the fact that schools are beginning to embrace social media, parents commented that schools could do more to allow parents to share their views or information using modern technology and should use these channels as an opportunity to control the narrative or to use negative feedback as part of self-evaluation, rather than allowing rumours to spread on social media forums. However, this is difficult using social media, as it lacks the privacy necessary to safeguard individuals' rights and is time consuming to manage.

73   A few schools successfully consult with a wider cross section of parents by using electronic surveys. They report that parents are more likely to respond candidly

because responses are anonymous and therefore more useful for self-evaluation purposes. A few schools are using closed digital applications to gauge parental views and launch consultation exercises such as changes to policies.

74   Around half of parents surveyed raised concerns about how well their school's governing body represents parental voice. The reasons for this are complex. Of the schools surveyed, only a few headteachers were confident that their governing bodies were representative of the socio-economic composition of the school, and only a few schools reported that they actively monitored and ensured that their governing body reflected the whole-school population. This has not improved since Estyn last published a report on this topic in 2009.

75   Where governing bodies have little or no direct contact with parents, parents report that they do not know who their parent governors are or how they support school improvement. This is particularly true of secondary schools. This makes them appear remote and these parents lack the confidence that the governing body represents their interests effectively. This view is exacerbated when parent governors are also teachers or other employees of the school. While many parent governors who are also employed by the school are valued by parents and teachers alike, in a minority of cases this can make parents perceive that parental representation has been removed from the body and this poses a risk to its credibility.

76   Schools with good practice take a variety of approaches to improving the reach of their governing body. For example, they have dedicated pages on their website or social media pages for information from governors. Some governing bodies hold information evenings or question and answer sessions for the wider parent community, or they consult with parents instead of the school's leaders for the purposes of self-evaluation. For example, the governing body at Ysgol Gymraeg y Fenni, Monmouthshire, holds consultation meetings with parents without members of school staff present, to encourage parents to be open. Consultations like this have led to the introduction of a Facebook page, which 70% of parents follow, and a change to the length and regularity of newsletters. Other examples of approaches by governors to engage parents in their work include schools that have given a governor specific responsibility for co-ordinating the governing body's family and community engagement.

77   A minority of primary schools and a few secondary schools attempt to engage a wider cross section of parents in consultation through their parent forums or councils. While some parent councils have evolved from the school's parent teacher association, or while it fulfils this role alongside its fundraising and social activities, many have been set up specifically to support the school with self-evaluation. Schools with parent forums have adopted a range of practices to encourage strong participation and raise the credibility of the forum, for example by electing one parent from each form, or by not calling them "meetings". Effective parent forums are often supported by a member of the school staff, for example the family or community liaison officer, a leader or the headteacher. A few parents' associations also have clear terms of reference or charters. These approaches ensure that meetings remain constructive environments for school improvement. Overall, schools with parent councils consult effectively with parents on a wide range of provision, such as pedagogy, the curriculum or their information and learning needs.

Case study: Parent councils

Pontyclun Primary School is in Rhondda Cynon Taf. There are 519 pupils on roll. Around 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

During its inspection in 2016, the school was given the recommendation to improve communication with parents. In response to this, the school appointed a leader for communication and used the FaCE toolkit alongside actions in its post-inspection action plan not only to improve how it communicates with parents but also to increase parental engagement and raise the profile of the school in the local community.

The school carried out a baseline audit of its approaches using the toolkit, which formed the basis of its action plan with key priorities.

The communication leader consulted with parents at an open evening on their communication preferences. The evening provided actions to improve communication, but also impetus to form a parent council in order to improve parental involvement in decision-making. The council meets half termly, has an agreed charter and protocol for running meetings. The communication leader sits on the council as a representative of the school, but meetings are chaired by an elected parent representative. Agendas are set based on a combination of needs identified by the school and by parents, communicated through the representatives. Minutes of meetings are published and the council's charter has clear guidelines on the use of social media to ensure consistency of feedback to parents.

The school also appointed a governor responsible for family and community engagement, and developed its use of Hwb as a tool for engaging families and to trial ideas suggested by the parent council. Progress against its action plan is reported to the governing body each half term.

The results of a community questionnaire were used to introduce ways for members of the community to contribute to the life and work of the school and vice versa. From this, the school's choir attended community events, and local businesses have provided visits and workshops for pupils and families. This work has been celebrated though the school's website and pupil newsletters.

So far this work has led to increases in:

- members of the school's parent teacher association and parent council
- invitations to local events
- enquiries from companies to work with groups within the school

As a result, partnerships between the school and the local community are more effective and there has been a notable rise in the profile of the school in the local area.

Moreover, the partnership between the school and parents is more effective and all stakeholders are involved meaningfully in the school's operational and strategic development.

The school continues to work towards "successful schools should" statements in the FaCE toolkit.

Parental satisfaction, partnership working and inspection findings

78   Partnership working is good or better in just over 92% of maintained schools inspected between September 2010 and July 2017. This is the highest performance in all of the quality indicators inspected during that cycle[1]. Schools' engagement with parents is one of the key aspects judged by inspectors within this quality indicator.

Figure 4: Percentage of judgments awarded for partnership working in maintained schools (2010-2017)

10%	82%	7%

Excellent   Good   Adequate   Unsatisfactory
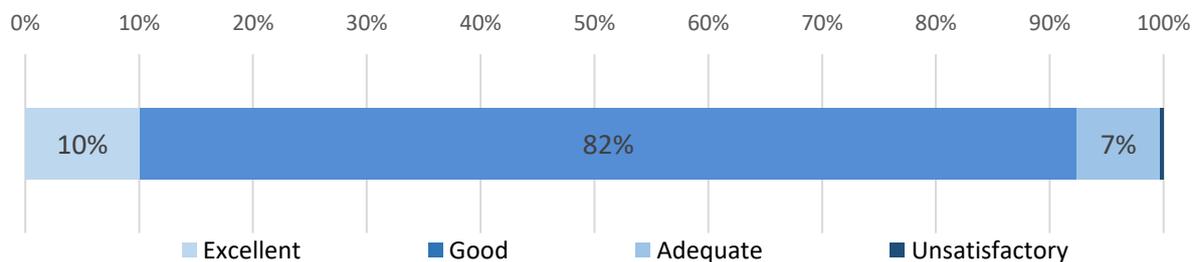
79   A comparison of parental responses to the pre-inspection questions

- "I understand the school's procedures for dealing with complaints"
- "I feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem", and
- "I am kept well informed about my child's progress"

with judgements for **Key Question 1 Outcomes** (including standards and wellbeing) in all schools inspected during the last inspection cycle shows that, overall, parent satisfaction with schools is high and there is a close relationship between inspectors' judgements for outcomes and the extent of parents' satisfaction gathered in pre-inspection questionnaires to parents.

80   Parents with children at schools in FSM benchmark groups 4 and 5 (high deprivation) and with judgements of excellent, good or adequate for outcomes are generally happier with how the school engages with them than parents with children at schools in benchmark groups 1 and 2 (low deprivation).

81   However, the reverse is true where schools have been judged as unsatisfactory for outcomes. In these cases parents with children in schools in benchmark groups 4 and 5 are markedly less satisfied with the level of parental engagement, as judged by responses to these questions, than schools judged as unsatisfactory and in benchmark groups 1 and 2.

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[1] Common inspection framework 2010

Figure 5: Percentage of positive responses to "I understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints" compared with judgements for outcomes during inspections of maintained schools (2010-2017)
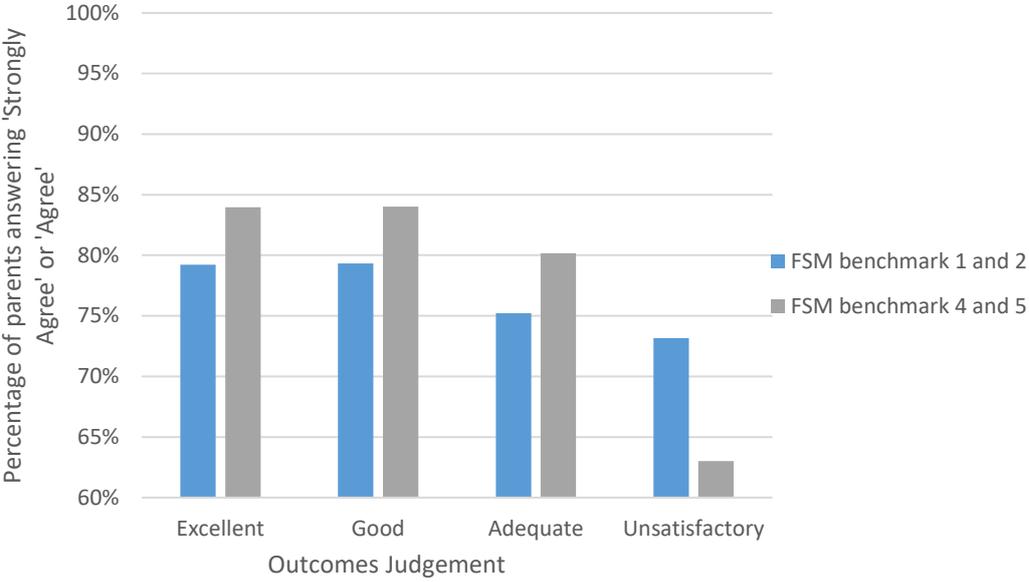

Figure 6: Percentage of positive responses to "I feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem" compared with judgements for outcomes during inspections of maintained schools (2010-2017)
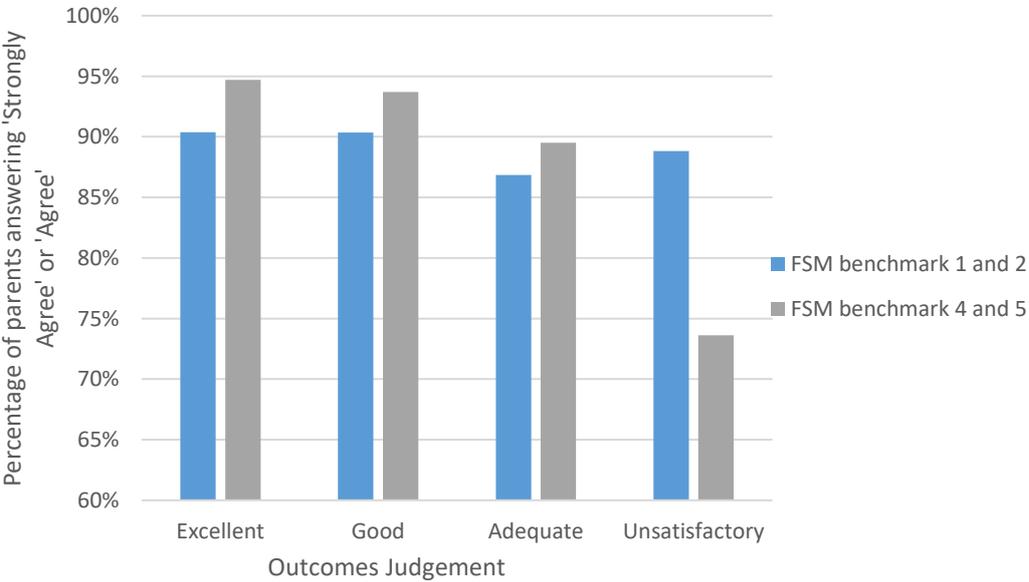
Figure 7: Percentage of positive responses to "I am kept well informed about my child's progress" compared with judgements for outcomes during inspections of maintained schools (2010-2017)
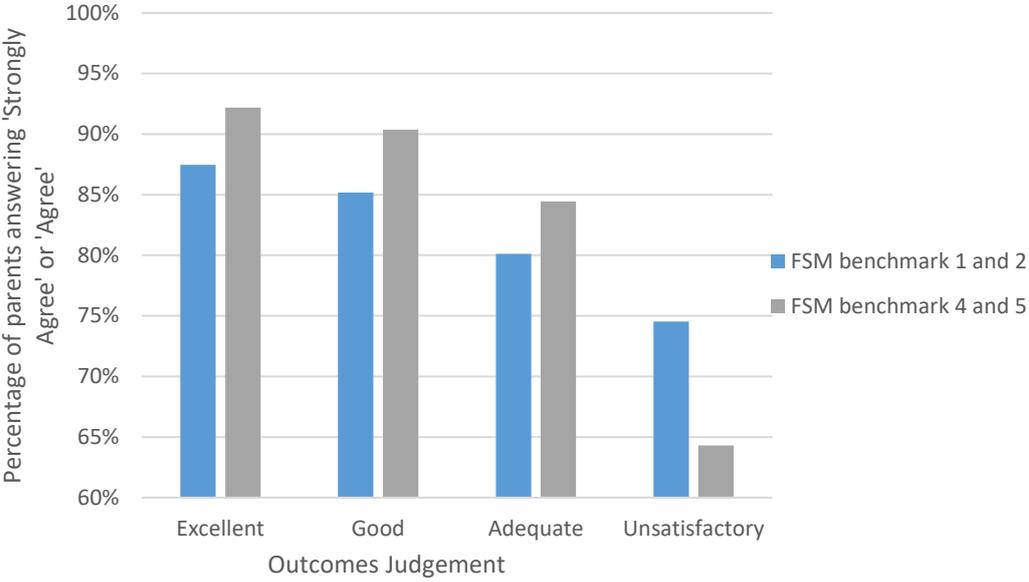
Evidence base

The findings of the report are based on an analysis of findings from:

- 37 interviews with headteachers and their staff in primary, secondary and special schools selected to ensure a balanced distribution of percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, geographical location and medium of instruction
- An anonymous online questionnaire for parents completed by 222 parents
- A focus group meeting of parents with children in special school and primary schools
- Evidence from parents and pupils gathered on inspection as part of the additional thematic focus

List of schools involved in telephone interviews:

Cymer Afan Primary School, Neath Port Talbot
Hook Community Primary School, Pembrokeshire
Llangatwg Community School, Neath Port Talbot
Llanishen High School, Cardiff
Maesyrhandir CP School, Powys
Pen Y Fai Church in Wales School, Bridgend
Pontyclun Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Rhymney comprehensive school, Caerphilly
St Michael's Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
St. John the Baptist High School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Ty Gwyn Special School, Cardiff
Tynewydd Primary School, Caerphilly
Ysgol Crug Glas, Swansea
Ysgol David Hughes, Isle of Anglesey
Ysgol Glan Morfa, Conwy
Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni, Monmouthshire
Ysgol Gynradd Aberteifi, Ceredigion
Ysgol Gynradd Y Tywyn, Isle of Anglesey
Ysgol Panteg, Torfaen
Ysgol Pendalar, Gwynedd

List of schools involved by way of additional thematic focus in inspections:

Castell Alun High School, Flintshire
Ferndale Community School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Gowerton Primary School, Swansea
Glyncoed Primary School
Hendre Junior School, Caerphilly
Lansdowne Primary School, Cardiff
Llanfaes C.P. School, Powys
Llanfabon Infants school, Caerphilly
Porth Infants School, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Roath Park Primary School, Cardiff
Tongwynlais Primary School, Cardiff
Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch, Denbighshire
Ysgol Gymuned Fali, Isle of Anglesey
Ysgol Gynradd Brynsiencyn, Isle of Anglesey
Ysgol Gynradd Nebo, Gwynedd
Ysgol Llanddoged, Conwy
Ysgol Rhydypennau, Cardiff

Glossary

Agored Cymru	A qualifications awarding body that also validates learning programmes by applying its quality mark
Benchmark groups	Benchmarking compares the performance of one school against others who have similar levels of pupils with free school meals (FSM). FSM is regarded as the main indicator of social deprivation in schools. This allows a comparison of the performance of a school against others who are in the same FSM category, and who might therefore have a similar intake of pupils from deprived backgrounds. Schools are divided into five benchmarking groups with group 1 having the smallest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and schools in group 5 having the highest.
FaCE toolkit	Family and Community Engagement Toolkit, published by Welsh Government in 2015
Hwb	The Welsh Government Hwb platform hosts a national collection of digital tools and resources to support education in Wales.
Intervention	Actions taken to improve pupils' wellbeing or standards, often where an area for development has been identified.
Key Question	Under the previous common inspection framework for Wales 2010-2017, the work of schools was inspected under three main areas called Key Questions. Key Question 1 Standards, Key Question 2 Provision and Key Question 3 Leadership.
P-scale	Assessment criteria for identifying progress below level 1 of the National Curriculum
Pupil post	Written communication from schools to parents delivered via their children
Quality indicator	Under the previous common inspection framework for Wales 2010-2017, aspects of the school's work under each Key Question were subdivided into quality indicators.

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Numbers

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