

How Good is Your School's Family Learning?



Guidance for school leaders on promoting
and supporting Family Learning

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Learning Beyond School

Children spend 15% of their waking hours in school (*OECD, 2014*). The remaining 85% of children's time is spent at home or in their communities, and this presents a potentially significant opportunity for learning. However, research also shows that around 80% of the difference in how well children do at school depends on their learning at home and in their lives beyond school (*Rabash et al, 2010; Save the Children, 2013*).

Schools play an increasingly vital role in reducing the poverty-based attainment gap by building the capacity of families to maximise children's opportunities for learning. Many schools have well established programmes for promoting and supporting family learning to help tackle disadvantage, to raise attainment and to improve life chances for children and adults.

Family Learning

Family learning is any learning that includes more than one generation of a family (including the wider family, carers and guardians). Family learning can be at an early learning and childcare setting or school, in the home or the wider community. Schools may offer a range of family learning opportunities including, for example,

- family literacy and numeracy programmes.
- courses on early learning and child development.
- vocational learning and skills-based qualifications.
- events to promote engagement, eg, open days, meet the teacher, learning showcases and curriculum evenings.
- active involvement in areas of school learning, eg, outdoor play, cooking, reading, library, extra-curricular clubs.
- increasing parental participation in their children's learning at home by providing activities and support.
- assisting parents in accessing appropriate learning resources, eg, Parentzone, Read-Write-Count, and useful websites.

Promoting Family Learning

Providing formal and informal opportunities for family learning is only part of the challenge. Many adults have poor personal experiences of education and are reluctant to engage with schools. For many families, English is not their first language and some adults experience difficulties engaging with schools through disability or other forms of access. It's important, therefore, that schools have effective systems in place for promoting increased engagement, though, for example:

- ensuring the school is a welcoming place for parents/carers, with clear indications that they are welcome and valued.
- a school website that includes a Parents' section.
- communicating regularly through newsletters, social media and our website.

- ensuring staff are aware of difficulties parents may have in engaging (eg, through disability, access or language) and making arrangements to provide appropriate support.
- using creative approaches to engage families, including the use of digital/social media and social events.

Benefits of Family Learning

The benefits of family learning are significant. For many adults a family learning programme can be the first step to taking up further adult learning and training opportunities, gaining a job or developing new skills - often because they are motivated by wanting to help their children. Family learning helps parents find out how their children learn and understand how to support them better.

Family learning can have a significant impact on children's attainment. Research shows family learning can increase the overall level of children's development by as much as 15 percentage points for those from disadvantaged groups and provide an average reading improvement equivalent to 6 months of reading age. (NIACE, 2013).

Children also benefit more widely from being involved in family learning:

- being more settled in class.
- having improved relationships with peers and teachers.
- improved communication and interpersonal skills .
- increased self-confidence.
- improved school attendance.

Wider outcomes are evidenced through skills development, employability, progression into work, interactions within the family, as well as improvements in parental confidence and parenting skills (Save the Children, 2013).

Addressing Poverty and Disadvantage

Since family learning can help families tackle disadvantage and improve their life chances, schools need to have active strategies for promoting equity and minimising the effects of poverty on children. This can include, for example:

- ensuring staff are aware of the factors causing child poverty within the community.
- identifying vulnerable or disadvantaged families, particularly through SIMD profiling.
- establishing a clear and comprehensive plan to close the poverty-based attainment gap.
- allocating resources through PEF funding and other sources to address poverty.
- collecting and evaluating evidence on barriers to education access, participation and achievement.
- providing financial support for disadvantaged or vulnerable families, eg, funding for clubs, excursions and trips, extra transport.
- providing targeted resources, eg, specialist technology, sporting equipment.

Reflective Questions

In reviewing the quality of a school's family learning provision, the following questions support reflection, discussion and evaluation.

- To what extent are we sure of what meaningful engagement with families looks like?
- How are we ensuring that our provision is responsive to the needs of families?
- How well do we match the right programme to the right families?
- How effectively do we monitor participation?
- How can we demonstrate that families are feeling included and that they are participating, achieving and progressing?
- How is family learning improving their capacity to learn? What is our evidence?
- Are outcomes for children improving as a result of their participation in family learning? How do we know?
- What evidence do we have that family learning is improving the life chances of the families involved?
- How effectively do we use current available data about levels of poverty in our community to help us target interventions?
- To what extent do all staff understand the wellbeing indicators and their impact on children and their families?
- How well are families supported in developing strategies which lead to positive relationships, better learning and better behaviour?

Evaluating the Quality of Family Learning

For a detailed audit of your school's family learning provision, our online **Impact** program provides an evaluation toolkit.

The following audit is an extract from framework for evaluating the quality of a school's family learning provision. The full audit of QI 2.5 *Family Learning* can be accessed online at:

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Use the **Impact** online quality improvement tool to complete the traffic lighting exercise and record strengths:

Theme 1: Engaging families in learning

Promoting family engagement

Our school is a welcoming place for parents/carers, with clear indications that they are welcome and valued.	
Our school website includes a Parents' section.	
We communicate well with parents through newsletters, social media and our website.	
Staff are aware of difficulties parents may have in engaging (eg, through disability, access or language) and make arrangements to provide appropriate support.	
Parents/carers take active roles through, eg, membership of the Parent Council, parent group, volunteering, or helping in the classroom.	
We use creative approaches to engage families, including the use of digital/social media and social events.	
We hold events to promote engagement, eg, open days, meet the teacher, learning showcases and curriculum evenings.	
Open channels of communication ensure that parents feel comfortable discussing their children's progress.	
Parents/carers work alongside practitioners to share their skills, eg, developing awareness of the world of work.	
Parents actively support areas of learning, eg, outdoor play, cooking, reading, library, extra-curricular clubs.	
We encourage parents/carers to take part in their children's learning at home and provide activities and support.	
We assist parents in accessing appropriate resources, eg, Parentzone, Read-Write-Count, and useful websites.	

Supporting family learning

Families are at the centre of planning, as active participants in their learning and development.	
Programmes are responsive to and shaped by the needs identified during consultation with families.	
Our family learning programmes promote equality, fairness and diversity.	
Learning targets are in place for the family as a whole and for individual learners.	
Families have regular opportunities to discuss their learning with staff and set targets for the next stages.	
Participation in family learning programmes is monitored to highlight trends and support early intervention.	
Families receive high-quality universal and targeted support that enables them to access learning which meets their needs.	
Staff have a shared understanding of Getting it Right for Every Child and use these approaches to meet the needs of families.	
Families are well supported to plan opportunities for personal achievement.	
The life chances of those families experiencing particular challenges are improved as a result of family learning.	

Addressing poverty

Staff are aware of the factors causing child poverty within our community.	
We have identified vulnerable or disadvantaged families, particularly through SIMD profiling.	
The school has a clear and comprehensive plan for how it aims to close the poverty based attainment gap.	
Resources are allocated through PEF funding and other sources to address poverty.	
The school collects and evaluates evidence on barriers to education access, participation and achievement.	
Disadvantaged or vulnerable families are encouraged/supported to participate in family learning programmes.	
Disadvantaged or vulnerable families receive financial support, eg, funding for clubs, excursions and trips, extra transport.	
Disadvantaged or vulnerable families receive targeted resources, eg, specialist technology, sporting equipment.	