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Critically explore how increased parental engagement can help to overcome barriers to inclusion.

Parents or guardians are a child's main educator until they start at an educational establishment when then they then have two main educators in their lives. The both have equal responsibility on a child's education. Being involved as a parent at home in the child's learning is essential to give the child the best start in their learning and has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.

(Desforges 2003). The government introduced The Childrens Act 1989 which was the first act that introduced that parents were to have the right to be fully active in their child's education. As well as this the act gives all parents or the child's legal guardians the rights and responsibilities of their child. The Act also promotes the working together between families and authorities. (BBC.org.uk 2014) This study will look at The Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Government Initiative FaCE and the Additional Learning Needs code for Wales in relation to inclusion and parental involvement in education.

Inclusion is when children can access all the opportunities available to them regardless of disability, race, religion, social status and family. It requires the involvement of all concerned to have a school community that is inclusive to all. It requires an inclusive curriculum that offers choice which seeks the views of all, including parents. Inclusion has changed dramatically since the mid 20th century when boys and girls were educated separately and there was not an education system for children with Additional learning needs. When this method changed, and girls and boys were educated together it caused people to doubt it as boys were considered more intelligent than girls. Girls and children with Additional learning

needs were discriminated against and found it difficult to get an education or employment. (BBC.org.uk 2014). Having an inclusive education involves having an inclusive environment and community that puts inclusive values into place which schools have in their school vision and aims. To support everyone in the environment to ensure there is a sense of belonging for all and viewing everyone as equal. It is vital to increase the participation for all children and adults in all the curriculum-based activities, ensuring to reduce exclusion and discrimination. (Csie.org.uk 2019)

The Equality Act 2010 states that it is unlawful for any providers of education to discriminate pupils based on their sex, religion, beliefs, or disability. The act has discrimination defined in four separate sections. Direct discrimination happens when a child is treated differently because of a protected discrimination. Indirect discrimination happens when all children are treated the same but when this occurs it puts the pupil with a protected characteristic at a disadvantage. Discrimination arising from disability happens when a child with a disability is treated unfairly due to a characteristic of their disability. The final one is failure to adjust the environment and provision for disabled pupils. (Gov.uk 2015)

There can be a variety of reasons that parents do not engage with their child's school and education. The National college for school leaders questioned school leaders and it was felt that 90% felt that it was the barriers to parental engagement due to factors within the parents that was the issue rather factors from the school.

Self-esteem is work that is done in schools to raise the wellbeing of children, but this is a recent addition to the curriculum which results in parents not having the experience of education with the importance of self-esteem and wellbeing. Bandura (1986) in his writing uses the term 'self-efficacy' to talk about self-esteem in the sense of self belief. Parents show this through their belief that they can contribute to their child's education in a positive manner. If the parents have low self – esteem in their capability to help their child due to their beliefs, then they are less likely to interact with the school and their child with school related issues. This could be due to being illiterate or have a learning disability themselves preventing them to help with their child's school work or enhancing their education at home, being a parent

who is illiterate can be a large barrier in relation to your child's education. When the child brings home letters from the school regarding events or dates to remember then a parent can find it difficult to read, resulting in the or the child missing important events. School work or reading that is sent home for parents to help with can difficult as the child may need to turn to the parent for help but being illiterate, this can prove difficult for the child to be able to complete work if there is no other adult at home to help them. Understanding of school policies and curriculum matters can be difficult for parents to understand which makes it hard for them to be clear on the curriculum that their child is following and unable to support this at home. (National College for School leadership 2011)

A negative experience of school themselves can be the reason that parents do not engage with the school. Experiences such as unfriendly or negative encounters with school staff or perhaps other parents can be the issue. The feeling of school staff being well educated and even superior to them can be threatening to a parent and worrying that staff will judge them as inferior to them.

Parents often use their lifestyles as a reason for not engaging with the school for attending meetings, volunteering or events at the school. Many parents who work do not have the opportunity to take time off to attend the school. With the increase in single parent families, and the issue some parents have with childcare then they are unable to attend meetings. Time can be a barrier for supporting the child with their school work as working parents can often be picking their children up from after school clubs or family members quite late into the evening resulting in limited times to help with school work. The National Literacy Trust (2004) stated that 24% of full-time working fathers felt very involved in child's school life compared to 26% of full-time working mothers. In addition, 24% of resident fathers compared to 37% of mothers reported helping with the child's homework "every time", and only 14% of full-time working fathers and 16% of full-time working mothers helped in classrooms (Literacy Trust 2004)

The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2018 highlights the importance of parental engagement in respect of their child as they have a crucial part in their child's education Parents may already have the knowledge and experience of their

child's disability or learning needs through different agencies in the past. All parents can make decisions regarding their child's education. Support may be required for the parents in the school if until that moment the parent was unaware of any additional need that the child may have. They may need support for understanding the diagnosis or may feel anxious as they do not understand. All the steps regarding their child should be discussed so that the parents understand the process. If the understanding is still not there, then extra support from multi agency workers may be beneficial. For the parents to express their views and feeling regarding their child they should be listened to with understanding. (Aep.org.uk 2019)

Strong links between a child's school and home are essential to promoting relationships and enhancing parental engagement in their child's education. In Manchester an approach has been trialled over 12 schools to assess the increase of parental engagement. The aim was to train and develop the skills of early years staff to engage with parents. The approach started with all parents in the early years being offered a visit at home or a meeting with the staff for parents to establish a relationship with the staff who would be working with their child. Other services offered were paper copies of information and daily communication of their child's day, parenting classes which involved play session, literacy and numeracy workshops and focused group sessions. Following the approach parents and teachers reported improvements in a variety of aspects of a child's attainment in school and an increased parental engagement. Children's self-esteem was raised, their language skills developed, the relationship between parents and schools. It reached out to a range of parents throughout the schools who had a range of reasons why they had previously been disengaged from the school. (Department for Education 2010)

On occasions parents need some extra help and in Carmarthenshire there is a scheme called Team around the Family where trained professionals can offer support to families who are finding aspects difficult. Schools can refer families for this service and meetings and sessions can be held at schools. It can help parents who are finding their child's behaviour difficult, their own personal issues a struggle or even just as an extra support for parents to have the opportunity to ask for help to engage with their child's education. Schools who find parental engagement low can also ask for the Families First team to run parental engagement sessions at schools

which include art, cookery, games and gardening. This allows the parent to work on a one to one basis with their child on an activity to engage with them but with the support of the team if required. It helps the parent to enter the school and to feel comfortable with the surroundings.

Schools need to be flexible towards parents as they can face numerous barriers, including costs. The realisation that not every home has access to a computer to do their homework needs to be taken into consideration when setting homework and allowing the child time in school to complete it. The cost of school trips can be a struggle for parents so this needs to be considered. Many schools have a supply of school P.E kits as some parents cannot afford to buy any or do not understand or remember what day their lesson is. (Department for Education 2010)

Estyn 2009 reported that schools which effectively involve parents in supporting improved standards of achievement: offer flexible arrangements for parents' evenings; provide translators for parents who do not speak English; provide parents with clear information about their expectations regarding the homework policy and set appropriate homework with enough information so that parents know how to help; provide parents with a topic or subject sheet outlining the term's work and choose topics where parents could help easily; record stories for parents who do not speak English to follow the book with their child at home; and encourage parents to borrow 'story sacks' to use at home with their children (Estyn 2009).

FaCE, Family and Engagement toolkit is a Welsh Government initiative for schools in Wales. The focus of this initiative is promoting engaging that will help a child's learning and it is aimed at families who are from deprived backgrounds and areas and for children who are not performing at school as they should be. The toolkit recognises the barriers and results of poor and good parental engagement. The toolkit contains five themes for school to work at. The first theme is Leadership for a self-improving system. Schools should ensure that this is included in the school development plan and is put into the school ethos of the school. Engagement is key to raise standards in children from deprived backgrounds. The next theme would be to embed a whole school approach to the initiative and enhancing staff roles with engagement activities, allowing activity approaches with parents. The third theme is Welcoming parents to engage with the school where the school plans its activities for

engagement based on the needs of the parents. The school offers more opportunities for parents to be involved with the school through events or volunteering. Helping families to actively support their child`s learning is the fourth theme where parents take part in a range of workshops to develop their skills and engagement activities are arranged. The fifth theme is to develop community partnerships and multi – agency working by involving multi agencies such as Team around the family to develop parental engagement resulting in school standards raising. (Learning.Gov.Wales 2016)

There is a vast amount of evidence that identifies the barriers that some parents face when engaging with their child and the school. Some of the barriers are the same for all parents but some are more relevant to the parents. Research shows that support is available, although some parents are more reluctant to accept help or are unsure where to access the help. Parents want support that is accessible, reliable and relevant to them personally. The support needed must be sensitive to the needs of the parents ensuring that it is trusting, empathetic and relevant.

Early support for parents is vital for the child and themselves. Interventions at any early age can help support parents in engaging with their child and having the confidence to help and support their child to the best of their ability.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background and that the best interests of the child must be a top priority. (Unicef.org.uk no date)

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