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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Theme 4: Helping families to actively support their child's learning

Resources 1–5



Audience

Primary, secondary and special schools in Wales, nursery settings and pupil referral units.

Overview

This is the fourth of five themes contained within the Welsh Government's *FaCE the challenge together: Family and community engagement toolkit for schools in Wales*. The toolkit is designed to provide practical support for schools in Wales to help them develop and strengthen their approach to family and community engagement.

The resources within this theme set out some helpful ideas for schools to encourage families to support their children's learning. The support suggested is designed around an understanding of families' specific circumstances, wants and needs. There is a specific focus on involving families as partners in children's learning and ideas for schools on developing a range of family activities to develop their skills.

Action required

For use in planning interventions to raise the attainment of learners living in poverty.

Further information

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This document along with other relevant guidance can be accessed from the Learning Wales website at
learning.gov.wales/deprivation

Related documents

Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools (2014)

www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolhome/deprivation/rewriting-the-future-schools/?lang=en

Rewriting the Future 2015: A Year On (2015)

www.gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150630-rewriting-the-future-a-year-on-e.pdf



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Family and community engagement toolkit

Theme 4: Resource 1

Foundation Phase – Engagement for learning



This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.
- What are the best things for families to do to support learning?
- Ideas for interventions.
- Third sector programmes.
- Further sources of help and information.
- Activity – Developing parent/carer prompts.

Introduction

We know that in the early years (0–7) a child's cognitive, social and emotional development is significantly affected by what is happening at home and the degree of parental involvement in their education¹. If schools and nurseries can help families to provide a better home learning environment and to better support their child's learning during the Foundation Phase then they will be exerting a powerful lever to help children achieve their potential. This is believed to be particularly the case for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Schools and nurseries can help families to support their child to learn by:

- communicating the best ways for families to support learning and help get children ready for primary school
- providing family learning opportunities for families to practice these skills
- providing or loaning materials that prompt and support families to use these skills at home.

What are the best things for families to do to support learning?

The most effective ways in which families can support children to learn during the Foundation Phase are:

- conversations that encourage children's natural inquisitiveness and love of learning (parents/carers answering on average 23 questions per hour!) while also developing language and communication skills
- play, including role play, to encourage purposeful talk
- reading stories, talking about the pictures
- teaching songs and nursery rhymes
- playing with letters and numbers, pointing out numbers and shapes around them (e.g. door numbers)
- painting and drawing

¹ Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment* UK Department for Education and Skills.

- developing one-to-one correspondence, e.g. matching socks
- visiting the library, museums and galleries
- outdoor trips to parks, woods, beaches
- supporting social and emotional learning
- helping their child to be 'ready to learn' when they start in the Reception year at school.

What does 'ready to learn' mean?²

Children age four tend to settle more quickly in school if they:

- have enough language to express themselves and ask questions (early language skills)
- can listen to and follow instructions
- can get along with other children, sharing and taking turns
- go to the toilet and get dressed by themselves
- cope with being away from their parents/carers
- are interested in stories, songs and rhymes, drawing and making things
- have some familiarity with letters and numbers
- are curious about the world, with a desire to learn.

Not all children starting school will be able to do all of these things. Teachers are skilled at helping children progress at their own rate.

Ideas for interventions

You will want to consult with your own families to get an idea of the types of activities that would work for them. However, here are some ideas to start you off.

The ideas for interventions provided below will help you build on the work you have already conducted to engage families in school life (see **Theme 3** of this toolkit and in particular the **A welcoming school** resource (Resource 1)) and help take families to the next level where they are actively working as partners with the school or nursery to support their child's learning. You may also find it useful to look at the ideas for interventions in the **Primary school age 7–11 – Engagement for learning** resource (Theme 4: Resource 2) in this toolkit as you may be able to adapt some of these ideas for younger children.

Welcome meetings – meetings in the summer term for new parents/carers followed by taster sessions where the children visit their new classroom for a morning to familiarise themselves with their new learning environment (see the **Transitions** resource (Theme 3: Resource 4) in this toolkit).

Welcome leaflets – at the start of each year, provide a simple, attractive, easy-to-read leaflet for families on what the children will be learning and how parents/carers can support this at home. You could direct parents/carers to the Welsh Government leaflet *How is my child doing in the Foundation Phase?*³ which describes what their child will be learning in the Foundation Phase and how they can support that learning.

² Introduction of the Foundation Phase Profile baseline assessment in September 2015 will help to define what is meant by school readiness in Wales.

³ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/earlyyearshome/foundation-phase/?lang=en

You could create displays in your reception area that also communicate the value that the school/nursery places on working with families as partners in their child's learning.

Family workshops around reading – evidence shows training parents/carers to teach specific reading skills to their children can be more than twice as effective as encouraging parents/carers to listen to their children read⁴, especially if they are trained to use the same techniques as the school (e.g. phonics). Schools could run workshops with family members, in or out of school hours, in order to help the adults develop the skills they need to help their child learn to read.

Family workshops around numeracy – there is also robust evidence that teaching parents/carers how to help their child develop their numeracy skills can be very effective. These could build on the 'What you say counts' campaign (learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/news/140228-what-you-say-counts-en.pdf) that encourages parents/carers to stop saying "I can't do maths" in front of their children.

Family workshops to develop parent/carer skills – research shows that parental support programmes which focus on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills are the most effective⁵. You could run workshops to help families to build parenting skills, such as the development of positive discipline strategies and coaching skills, that will establish good home environments to support learning. These could draw on parenting support expertise from other public sector agencies or the third sector, and on help from the school's parent/carer group.

How workshops are badged and how people are invited is important – to avoid any stigmatisation and perceptions that parents/carers are being labelled as 'rubbish parents/carers'. Hold, and convey, the expectation that parents/carers will want to collaborate with you in order to help their children progress in school – then you can recruit people to join by expectation rather than by invitation.

The Welsh Government 2014 *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support* publication⁶ provides lots of useful information on best practice for parenting support.

Family Learning Programmes (FLPs) – FLPs which engage children and families jointly in learning activities can be particularly useful for families who are currently less engaged with their child's learning, or families with low literacy and numeracy skills. These are discussed in the **Family Learning Programmes (FLPs)** resource (Theme 4: Resource 5) in this toolkit.

Stay and play days – where parents or carers come into the school setting, have guided play time with their child, and gain a better understanding of what their child is being taught, and how children learn through play. They are then provided with practical ideas of games and activities to do with their children at home.

Story sacks/activity bags – provide or loan materials so that parents/carers can share activities with their child at home, e.g. a book plus puppet, a songs CD.

⁴ Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary* UK Department for Education.

⁵ Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary* UK Department for Education.

⁶ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/?lang=en

Storybooks created by families –

empowering children to create or dramatise their own stories has been shown to be a powerful way of promoting early language development. It works best if the stories are about issues that are important to them, with themselves or significant others as protagonists.

The school/nursery could support families to create, over a period of weeks or months, a simple family storybook together (e.g. 'I am' books and stories about their

children's names) including pictures and words, with the intention of promoting parent/carers–child discussions at home. An initial workshop with parents/carers (as well as the children) would probably be needed. The Early Authors Program⁷ delivered an intervention like this (though in a classroom rather than home setting) and showed it enhanced children's expressive and receptive language.

A course piloted in nursery schools by the Midlothian Adult Literacy and Numeracy Initiative in Scotland got parents and carers to learn to use cameras and support their child's learning at the same time. After an initial session in the nursery, the parents/carers took the cameras home and recorded their child learning. Then an IT tutor and a literacy tutor, using the school's computer suite, worked with the parents/carers to create storybooks with text and special effects. Most parents/carers had no previous computer experience and both parents/carers and children were happy with their new-found skills.

Parent/carers prompts – these are short activities for families to do at home to question and share conversations with their children in order to build on topic areas and skills that the child is learning in the Foundation Phase. An example is provided at the end of this resource. Provide a space for families to feedback comments on how they found it.

Engagement in learning through social

media – social media can be used to involve the community in learning, e.g. through sharing videos of storytelling and mathematics or blogging advice on how to support children's learning. A best practice example from Estyn shows how⁸.

"Parents who were given interactive homework and were trained on how to support that homework, doubled the amount of time they spent on helping their children ... and their children performed the best."

Battle-Bailey et al. (2004) *The Effects of Interactive Reading Homework and Parent Involvement on Children's Inference Responses* Springer

"Levels of parental engagement could be improved if schools made more use of the potential of technology to support at-home learning."

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary*, UK Department for Education

⁷ Bernhard et al. (2008) "Read my story!" Using the Early Authors Program to Promote Early Literacy Among Diverse, Urban Preschool Children in Poverty Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

⁸ Estyn best practice case study of Cogan Nursery School, Vale of Glamorgan: www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/289079.7/sharing-learning-through-social-media/?navmap=33,53,158.

Virtual learning environments – providing families with accessible information online on their child's progress can help them engage.

Hwb+ is the Welsh Government's fully bilingual learning platform which has the capability to provide an individual and customisable solution for every school in Wales.

As well as offering schools a number of significant web-based solutions (see below), Hwb+ will see the potential for schools to subscribe to provisioning for parent/carers accounts on the platform. This will allow parents/carers to access specific information on their children and further enhance home-school links.

Hwb+ offers the following functionality for each school in Wales:

- a public-facing website
- virtual classroom tools
- announcements and events
- blogs, wikis and forums
- a personalised user interface
- access to Microsoft Office 365 (which includes Outlook e-mail, video conferencing via Lync, an e-Portfolio and streaming of core Office apps including Word, Excel and PowerPoint).

Home visits to new families – to ascertain the 'parental signature' of the cohort and discuss any issues and concerns face-to-face, establishing a good relationship from the start.

Getting 'school ready' workshop or leaflet – readiness for school is a particular challenge for schools in areas with high levels of deprivation. For families of children nearing Reception age, hold a workshop (perhaps jointly with nearby primary schools) or provide an attractive, easy-to-read leaflet that explores what families can do to get their child ready for school (see the 'What does 'school ready' mean?' box (page 6), and also the **Transitions** resource (Theme 3: Resource 4) in this toolkit.

Third sector programmes

You may also want to consider whether to draw on services offered by the third or private sectors to help you engage with families. Third sector programmes can bring to the table family and community engagement expertise and help schools to reach out to families that they would otherwise struggle to engage with (see also the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit).

The Welsh Government has produced a catalogue of programmes that schools could use (and pay for, using the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) where appropriate): *Interventions that really work: third and private sector resources for schools tackling deprivation*⁹. This catalogue includes, among others, the following programmes that are suitable for the early years.

⁹ www.learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/150417-pdg-third-en.pdf

Families and Schools Together (FAST) – delivered by Save the Children, this is an eight-week rapid intervention with the families of children aged 3–8 years. It is primarily a parenting programme which supports families by encouraging good behaviour and a positive attitude to school and learning. It helps parents/carers to get more involved in their child's education so they can support learning and development at home. Families attend weekly two-and-a-half-hour sessions including discussions, games, singing and group activities, along with a family meal. The group sessions are followed up by monthly meetings run by families who have already graduated from the FAST programme.

Incredible Years – a suite of programmes for parents/carers, children and teachers to promote positive social skills and classroom behaviour that have been shown to be effective interventions for both prevention and treatment of conduct problems. The suite is suitable for babies and toddlers, pre-school and school-age children. The core delivery components involve discussion, observation of video clips to help the participant to identify key skills, role play rehearsal of skills and home or classroom activities to promote generalisation and maintenance.

Investors in Families – an accreditation, similar to EcoSchools, which can assist schools to audit and enhance their family and community engagement. The award can be gained every three years upon submission of a portfolio of evidence, a development plan and a visit from a trained assessor.

Nurture Groups – a specialist form of provision in early years, primary and secondary schools for learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which also helps to build bridges with families and engage them with their child's learning.

Solihull Approach – this aims to improve the emotional health and well-being of parents/carers, learners and staff, and also to improve family engagement. It is especially suited for families with children (aged 0–18) with additional learning needs. Their parenting course 'Understanding your child's behaviour' has been awarded the CANparent Quality Mark and is also available in an online version. Whole-school training for teachers and support staff is also available.

Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities – a 13-week parenting programme, for use in early years, primary or secondary schools, that has been used with families from a wide range of backgrounds, including from marginalised communities, and those with drug, alcohol or violence issues.

In addition, **Barnardo's Cymru** offer a range of school-based interventions, including family support services, early years education and play, and specialist services for fostered and adopted children, children of offenders, young carers and more.

Further sources of help and information



The Welsh Government has developed the 'Education begins at home' campaign to encourage parents/carers to be more involved in their child's learning – 'the little things you do at home will help your child do so much better at school'. Schools can access the campaign website at www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/?lang=en for further information. There is a Facebook page for parents and carers with tips and links to websites which can help them support their children's learning at www.facebook.com/beginsathome. Parents/carers can also visit www.gov.wales/schoolsinfo4parents.

Pori Drwy Stori is a bilingual programme aimed at supporting children's literacy as they start Reception class in all maintained schools in Wales. The programme provides resources to use in the classroom and to support parents/carers at home in their vital role as partners in their children's learning. For more information visit poridrwystori.booktrust.org.uk

The NHS Choices website has an interactive guide on child development from birth to five years old, that charts the milestones along the way, including videos and advice for parents/carers www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/birthtofive.aspx#close and it also has a useful page giving advice to parents/carers on how to prepare their child for school, including videos on how to teach a child to hold a pen. www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/teaching-child-essentials.aspx#close

The Solihull Approach website has information sheets for parents/carers on 'Development and emotional milestones' and 'Brain development through childhood' for children from birth until four years old. solihullapproachparenting.com

NSPCC has a number of leaflets for parents/carers including some around positive parenting. Some are available in Welsh. They also have a helpline for parents/carers (Tel: 0808 800 5000, e-mail: help@nspcc.org.uk or text 88858). www.nspcc.org.uk/help-and-advice/for-parents/for-parents-hub_wda96726.html

Good practice guidance and a range of resources on 'Early Home Learning Matters' can be downloaded from the Parenting UK website. www.parentinguk.org/resources/early-home-learning-matters-a-brief-guide

The Family Lives website has video clips, leaflets to download, and other advice and information online: www.familylives.org.uk Family Lives includes a section on games parents/carers can play with their child to help them learn and develop, and keep them entertained. www.familylives.org.uk/advice/toddler-preschool/learning-play

An information sheet, *Play and early years: birth to seven years* produced by Play Wales, explores what is play and its importance to and for children's development in the early years (birth to seven years old). It also explores the importance of adult roles, advocacy and the child's right to play. www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets

The Literacy Trust 'Talk To Your Baby' website has a series of quick tips for parents/carers and practitioners to help children develop good talking and listening skills. Each sheet is available bilingually in 13 languages. www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk_to_your_baby/resources/418_q

The Literacy Trust 'Words for Life' website has advice and resources for parents and carers to help their children develop vital communication and literacy skills. www.wordsforlife.org.uk

I CAN is a children's communication charity which provides information, advice, resources and assistance to parents/carers and professionals to support children's communication needs.

I CAN also has a Help Enquiry Service, online via the Talking Point website and in person through their multi-disciplinary speech and language assessments for children.

Tel: 020 7843 2544 or e-mail: help@ican.org.uk, www.ican.org.uk

The Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) has developed Learning Together materials to support parents/carers and practitioners. There is information and ideas for things parents/carers can do at home for babies to four-year-olds. Please visit the Peers Early Education Partnership website for more information. www.peep.org.uk/section.asp?id=30andcachefixer=cf17225978334996.

They also run an English language confidential free helpline for parents and carers open between 7am and midnight. Parents and carers in Wales are able to access this. (Tel: 0808 800 2222).

Most local authority areas operate a Child and Family Bibliotherapy Scheme. Parents and carers may be issued with an appropriate 'book recommendation', from a list of the self-help books recommended by specialists and reviewed by both professionals and other parents/carers. This recommended book will be available through their local library. A list of the recommended books is available here: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/lifestylewellbeing/bibliotherapy

Activity – Developing parent/carer prompts

A parent/carer prompt describes an activity for families to do at home that builds on topic areas and skills that the child is learning in the Foundation Phase. The tasks need to be designed so that children and parents/carers can do them together at home using everyday objects. The activities should be fairly short but encourage dialogue and discussion between parents/carers and children. It is important that parent/carer prompts avoid jargon.

In best practice, teachers would involve parents/carers in the design of these prompts (feeding in their views on how they can be made most appropriate/useful/enjoyable). It is also important that parents/carers and children can feedback on the parent/carer prompt activity to the class teacher – and that this feedback is acted on.

Parents/carers may need further information (outside the prompt) that explains how the activity connects to what is being taught in school.

Example of a parent/carer prompt

Class:	Name:
Subject: Science	Topic: How things grow
What we are learning in class: Planting seeds and watching them grow, measuring them weekly, drawing a chart	Home learning: Have some fun learning about what plants need in order to grow by doing this activity together: resources.hwb.wales.gov.uk/VTC/factors_plant_growth/eng/Introduction/MainSessionPart2.htm What happens to a plant when: • it wasn't watered? • it was kept in the cold? • it was kept in the dark?
What we did, what we talked about, what we found out: (Child to fill in – using drawings or notes)	
Feedback: How did you find this activity? (for children to complete)	
☐ Tricky	☐ Okay
☐ Easy	
Feedback: How did you find this activity? (for family member to complete) – any comments welcome	
Would you like to discuss this further with your child's teacher? (please tick if so) ☐	

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Family and community engagement toolkit

Theme 4: Resource 2

Primary school age 7–11 –
Engagement for learning



This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.
- What are the best things for families to do to support learning?
- Ideas for interventions to get families supporting learning in primary schools.
- Third sector and private sector programmes.
- Further sources of help and information for schools and for parents/carers.

Introduction

Between the ages of 7 and 11, a child's educational attainment and their cognitive and social and emotional development depends in large part on what is happening at home – their 'home learning environment' and the degree of parental involvement in their learning¹⁰. If schools can help families to provide a better home learning environment and to better support their child's learning then they will be exerting a powerful lever to help children achieve their potential. This is believed to be particularly the case for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It's not who parents/carers are, but what they do, that matters. As children age, many parents/carers begin to feel that they can't help, because they no longer can cope with mathematics or other languages – but what's important isn't their subject knowledge but that they take an interest in what children are doing and learning.

Primary schools can help families to support their child to learn by:

- communicating the best ways for families to support learning
- providing family learning opportunities for families to practice these skills
- providing or loaning materials that prompt families to use these skills at home.

What are the best things for families to do to support learning?

Between the ages of 7 and 11, the most effective ways in which families can support children to learn are:

- showing interest in their school and school activities
- communicating the value of education and helping them to feel that they belong in the school
- ensuring that they go to bed at a regular time, have breakfast and attend school
- spending 10 minutes a day reading with the child – any text, anywhere
- using opportunities in daily life to use numbers and talk about "how big/much/many"

¹⁰ Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment*, UK Department for Education and Skills.

- outings to the museum, library and art galleries and extracurricular activities
- working with the school to support the child with any particular issues
- supporting social and emotional learning.

“In schools with active communication with parents, children made better academic progress in reading and mathematics and showed better self-regulation.”

Sammons et al. (2007) *The Influence of School and Teaching Quality on Children's Progress in Primary School*, UK department for children, schools and families

Ideas for interventions to get families supporting learning in primary schools

You will want to consult with your own families to get an idea of the types of activities that would work for them. However, here are some ideas to start you off.

The ideas for interventions provided below will help you build on the work you have already conducted to engage families in school life (see **Theme 3** of this toolkit and in particular the **A welcoming school** resource (Theme 3: Resource 1) and help take families to the next level where they are actively working as partners with the school to support their child's learning. You may also find it useful to look at the ideas for interventions in the **Foundation Phase – Engagement for learning** resource (Resource 1) in this toolkit (for learners aged 3–7) as you may be able to adapt some of these ideas for older children.

Welcome leaflets – at the start of each year, provide a simple, attractive, easy-to-read leaflet (also on the school website) for families on what the children will be learning in the school and how parents/carers can support this at home. The Welsh Government has produced a leaflet *How was school today? Parents' and carers guide to primary school*¹¹ that describes what their child will be learning at school and how they can support that learning. You may wish to supplement this, or create displays based around it in the school reception area, that clearly indicate how families can best support their child's learning. This could also communicate the value that the school places on working with families as partners in their child's learning, or information or ground rules about communications between families and school.

Weekly communication with parents/carers using a home–school diary – some primary schools develop a home–school diary. The idea is to improve the communications between home and school as well as providing key information to both families and learners. The diary could for example:

- contain information on what the child is learning at school
- contain information on how families can best support their child to learn

¹¹ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/how-was-school-today-guide-to-primary-school/?lang=en

- describe homework/home learning activities for families to do with their child (and some easy to follow instructions to the parent/carer on how they could best approach the task)
- act as a reading record
- provide a space for families and children to give feedback on the activity. Make sure you acknowledge the feedback and let the families know how you plan to respond as a result, otherwise this could backfire by setting up another way for parents/carers to feel that they are ignored by schools
- provide a vehicle through which the school can send out other information.

The benefits are that parents/carers have a starting point for discussion with their child about what they have been learning at school, and children are encouraged to review their own learning each week. Families also have a clearer idea of the school's expectations of homework and can be provided with some pointers on how to best go about the activities with their child. Staff also have an easy and routine method of communicating with families. If the form of the diary is developed collaboratively with families then staff also gain a clearer idea of the sorts of activities that parents/carers want for home learning. The school could also provide books on learning and learning styles for families to borrow. Provide a space where parents/carers and learners can give feedback on how they found the homework task (e.g. needs more help on this topic/completed with some help/completed on own ...).

Family workshops around reading – evidence shows training parents/carers to teach specific reading skills to their children can be more than twice as effective as encouraging parents/carers to listen to their children read¹², especially if they are trained to use the same techniques as the school (e.g. phonics). Schools could run workshops with family members, in or out of school hours, in order to help the adults develop the skills they need to help their child learn to read.

Family workshops around numeracy – there is also robust evidence that teaching parents/carers how to help their child develop their numeracy skills can be very effective. These could build on the 'What you say counts' campaign (learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/news/140228-what-you-say-counts-en.pdf) that encourages parents/carers to stop saying "I can't do maths" in front of their children. One school got learners to produce a video for parents/carers illustrating the mathematics methods they had been taught in school to aid mental arithmetic.

"Parents who were given interactive homework and were trained on how to support that homework, doubled the amount of time they spent on helping their children ... and their children performed the best."

Battle-Bailey et al. (2004) *The Effects of Interactive Reading Homework and Parent Involvement on Children's Inference Responses*, Springer

¹² Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary* UK Department for Education.

Family workshops to develop parent/carers skills – research shows that parental support programmes which focus on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills are the most effective¹³. You could run workshops to help families to build parenting skills, such as the development of positive discipline strategies and coaching skills, that will help establish good home environments to support learning. These could draw on parenting support expertise from other public sector agencies or the third sector, and on help from the school's parent/carers group.

How workshops are badged and how people are invited is important – to avoid any stigmatisation and perceptions that parents/carers are being labelled as 'rubbish parents/carers'. Hold, and convey, the expectation that parents/carers will want to collaborate with you in order to help their children progress in school – then you can recruit people to join by expectation rather than by invitation.

The Welsh Government 2014 *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support* publication¹⁴ provides lots of useful information on best practice for parenting support.

Family homework – homework in primary schools most often revolves around reading books, times tables and spelling tests. Family homework tasks, designed specifically to be completed together by the family, can encourage a culture of learning, and learners often proudly bring back their results. Careful thought would be needed on how to encourage families who are less engaged to take part (see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit), and do provide a space for families to feedback comments on how they found the homework.

Often family homework projects are creative projects that build on a topic that the child is studying at school, and require only everyday materials that families will have easily to hand (or otherwise the school may provide the required materials). For example, the task could be filling a shoebox with artefacts that the children thought might motivate their writing, with parents/carers asked to discuss the children's choices at home. The contents of the boxes could be used in class for oral presentations or storytelling. Or perhaps families could be asked to jointly write a report on their family history during the First World War or other historical event. Other projects could involve using cameras, IT, or developing specific literacy and numeracy skills.

Family Learning Programmes (FLPs) – FLPs which engage children and families jointly in learning activities can be particularly useful for families who are currently less engaged with their child's learning, or families with low literacy and numeracy skills. These are discussed in the **Family Learning Programmes (FLPs)** resource (Theme 4: Resource 5) in this toolkit.

¹³ Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary* UK Department for Education.

¹⁴ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/?lang=en

Engagement in learning through social media – social media can be used to involve the community in learning, e.g. through sharing videos of storytelling and mathematics or blogging advice on how to support children's learning. A best practice example from Estyn shows how¹⁵.

Virtual learning environments – providing families with accessible information online on their child's progress can help them engage. Projects in the USA suggest that simply providing parents/carers with the opportunity to view their child's progress data online may motivate young people to do better in secondary school.

“Levels of parental engagement could be improved if schools made more use of the potential of technology to support at-home learning.”

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement Practitioners Summary*, UK Department for Education

Hwb+ is the Welsh Government's fully bilingual learning platform which has the capability to provide an individual and customisable solution for every school in Wales.

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Hwb+ offers the following functionality for each school in Wales:

- a public-facing website
- virtual classroom tools
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- blogs, wikis and forums
- a personalised user interface
- access to Microsoft Office 365 (which includes Outlook e-mail, video conferencing via Lync, an e-Portfolio and streaming of core Office apps including Word, Excel and PowerPoint).

Goal setting evenings – some schools have 'goal setting' evenings rather than parents'/carers' evenings – using a 'visible learning'¹⁶ approach based on the research findings of John Hattie. Learners are supported to assess their own performance, and bring their parents/carers to the goal setting evening where, with the support of a teacher, they explain to parents/carers what they can do, and what they aim to achieve by the end of the academic year. Because the learners themselves are leading the evening, this can result in a high degree of engagement from parents/carers, while also encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

¹⁵ Estyn best practice case study of Cogan Nursery School, Vale of Glamorgan: www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/289079.7/sharing-learning-through-social-media/?navmap=33,53,158.

¹⁶ www.visible-learning.org

Including all parents/carers in a ‘playing with mathematics’ project – there is robust evidence that family numeracy programmes can have a positive impact on academic outcomes. To help parents/carers learn how to teach their child numeracy skills you could personally invite parents/carers in for an hour each week (for say, four weeks) to play mathematics games in school with their child, using the mathematics techniques that the child is learning at school, e.g. maths bingo, go fish, etc. Invite families to choose a game to take to play at home. The benefits for children are that they enjoy quality time with their parents/carers and also then have an adult at home who understands what they are learning in mathematics at school.

Drop-in café/workshop sessions – these can give parents/carers practical ideas to do with their children at home.

‘Come and see my best work’ days – open the classroom up to parents/carers at certain times or even include them regularly in some lessons so that parents/carers come into the school setting and observe and take part in lessons to gain a better understanding of what their child is being taught. Some schools run weekly sessions, for example on Friday mornings, where parents/carers can read with their child, supported by the school staff. This has been found to be especially useful in supporting early language development, particularly for children with English as an additional language.

Book club/multilingual reading club – set up a regular afternoon reading club for parents/carers and children, reading and then discussing a particular book. Any child can attend, providing that they have read the book and bring an adult with them who has also read it. Children are told there will be no homework, no book reports and no wrong answers. Discussions run as long as 45 minutes for older children. Younger children take part in a shorter discussion followed by activities related to the book. In multilingual reading clubs there would be interpreters present to translate (recruited from the parent/carer body), plus dual language story packs to use at home. It is good practice to involve parents/carers in the design of parents’/carers’ evenings – see **Rethinking parents’/carers’ evenings** resource (Theme 3: Resource 6) in this toolkit.

An auction of promises – auction off jobs promised by children (e.g. cleaning the car, tidying up) or free activities offered by the school (e.g. IT time) to the bidding audience (e.g. family members) who pay for the items for example with a bid of five hours of bedtime reading.

Third sector and private sector programmes

You may also want to consider whether to draw on services offered by the third or private sectors to help you engage. External projects can be especially helpful when working with ‘hard to reach’ families as they can bring to the table family and community engagement expertise.

The Welsh Government has produced a catalogue of programmes that schools could use (and pay for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) where appropriate): *Interventions that really work: third and private sector resources for schools tackling deprivation*¹⁷. This catalogue includes, among others, the following programmes that are suitable for primary schools.

¹⁷ www.learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/150417-pdg-third-en.pdf

Family Learning Signature – the Family Learning Signature is a tool to engage families in thinking about learning, and how, as a family, they can better support learning in the home. Specially trained staff invite families to a workshop to complete the signature, and this identifies how and where a family's capacity to support learning can be strengthened.

Family Values – the Family Values scheme is based around a set of 22 values. Each month/half-term the school chooses a different value such as respect or cooperation and a pack is sent home which encourages parents/carers or families to participate in a series of fun tasks and challenges which they plan and carry out together.

Families and Schools Together (FAST) – delivered by Save the Children, this is an eight-week rapid intervention with the families of children aged 3–8 years. It is primarily a parenting programme which supports families by encouraging good behaviour and a positive attitude to school and learning. It helps parents/carers to get more involved in their child's education so they can support learning and development at home. Families attend weekly two-and-a-half-hour sessions including discussions, games, singing and group activities, along with a family meal. The group sessions are followed up by monthly meetings run by families who have already graduated from the FAST programme.

Investors in Families – an accreditation, similar to EcoSchools, which can assist schools to audit and enhance their family and community engagement. The award can be gained every three years upon submission of a portfolio of evidence, a development plan and a visit from a trained assessor.

Nurture Groups – a specialist form of provision in early years, primary and secondary schools for learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which also helps to build bridges with families and engage them with their child's learning.

Solihull Approach – this aims to improve the emotional health and well-being of parents/carers, learners and staff, and also to improve family engagement. It is especially suited for families with children (aged 0–18) with additional learning needs. Their parenting course 'Understanding your child's behaviour' has been awarded the CANparent Quality Mark and is also available in an online version. Whole-school training for teachers and support staff is also available.

Incredible Years – a suite of programmes for parents/carers, children and teachers to promote positive social skills and classroom behaviour that have been shown to be effective interventions for both prevention and treatment of conduct problems. The suite is suitable for babies and toddlers, pre-school and school-age children. The core delivery components involve discussion, observation of video clips to help the participant to identify key skills, role play rehearsal of skills and home or classroom activities to promote generalisation and maintenance.

Further sources of help and information for schools and for parents/carers

The Welsh Government has developed the 'Education begins at home' campaign to encourage parents/carers to be more involved in their child's learning – 'the little things you do at home will help your child do so much better at school'. Schools can access the campaign website at

www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/?lang=en for

further information. There is a Facebook page for parents and carers with tips and links to websites which can help them support their children's learning.

www.facebook.com/beginsathome. Parents/carers can also visit www.gov.wales/schoolsinfo4parents



The Welsh Government's *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support* provides a great deal of advice to public sector agencies involved in supporting parents/carers.

gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/help/flyingstart/?lang=en

NSPCC has a number of leaflets for parents/carers including some around positive parenting. Some are available in Welsh. They also have a helpline for parents/carers (Tel: 0808 800 5000, e-mail: help@nspcc.org.uk or text 88858). www.nspcc.org.uk/search/?query=advice+for+parents

The Literacy Trust 'Words for Life' website has advice and resources for parents and carers to help their children develop vital communication and literacy skills. www.wordsforlife.org.uk

The Family Lives website has video clips, leaflets to download, and other advice and information online. www.familylives.org.uk

They also run an English language confidential free helpline for parents and carers open between 7am and midnight. Parents and carers in Wales are able to access this. (Tel: 0808 800 2222).

Most local authority areas operate a Child and Family Bibliotherapy Scheme. Parents and carers may be issued with an appropriate 'book recommendation', from a list of the self-help books recommended by specialists and reviewed by both professionals and other parents/carers. This recommended book will be available through their local library. A list of the recommended books is available here: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/lifestylewellbeing/bibliotherapy.

4

Family and community engagement toolkit

Theme 4: Resource 3

Secondary schools – Engagement
for learning



This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.
- What are the best things for families to do to support learning?
- Ideas for interventions to get families supporting learning in secondary schools.
- Third sector and private sector programmes.
- Further sources of help and information for schools and for parents/carers.

Introduction

It is sometimes assumed that neither parents/carers nor learners are interested in families being particularly involved in the child's learning during secondary school. However, research indicates that this is not actually the case. Furthermore, there is evidence that increasing family engagement with learning can lead to higher student achievement and uptake of post-16 education.

However, families may face more challenges in supporting learning through secondary school than primary school, as their children gain greater autonomy, the curriculum is more complex, learners have more than one teacher, schools are larger and usually further from home, and parents/carers come into the school building less frequently.

“ Young people told us of the importance they place on independence. However, they also reiterated – strongly – the need they felt for parental guidance and interest.”

Harris and Goodall (2007) *Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement. Do Parents Know They Matter?* UK Department for Children, Schools and Families

What we do know is that when children are in secondary school, effective family engagement isn't necessarily about knowing or understanding the answers needed for a homework task. Instead it is much more concerned with showing an interest and providing background support.

What are the best things for families to do to support learning?

During secondary school the most effective ways in which families can support children to learn are:

- taking an interest in the topics they are following at school
- communicating the value of education, modelling respectful relationships with teachers and helping their child feel that they belong in the school
- keeping them focused on learning and homework, while also supporting their autonomy
- ensuring that they go to bed at a regular time, have breakfast and attend school
- communicating aspirations and celebrating achievements – powerful motivators for children at this age
- providing an environment at home in which they can study (with no distractions)
- encouraging children to read, including reading to keep up to date with news
- involving children in household tasks, such as how to understand bills and plan trips or plan spending/saving
- outings to museums, arts and cultural venues
- extracurricular activities, such as sports, creative and cultural activities, that help them to apply their knowledge and develop social and emotional skills.

Ideas for interventions to get families supporting learning in secondary schools

Secondary schools can help families to support their child to learn by:

- communicating the best ways for families to support learning
- providing clear, targeted information about what young people are studying, clear schedules for exams and revision, and what parents/carers can do to support that study
- engaging with families to help them support their child through course selection and post-16 planning.

You will want to consult with your own families to get an idea of the types of activities that would work for them. However, here are some ideas to start you off.

The ideas for interventions provided below will help you build on the work you have already conducted to engage families in school life (see **Theme 3** of this toolkit and in particular the **A welcoming school** resource (Theme 3: Resource 1)) and help take families to the next level where they are actively working as partners with the school to support their child's learning. You may also find it useful to look at the ideas for interventions in the **Primary school age 7–11 – Engagement for learning** resource (Theme 4: Resource 2) in this toolkit as you may be able to adapt some of these ideas for older children.

Welcome leaflets – at the start of each year, provide a simple, attractive, easy-to-read leaflet for families (also on the school website) on what the children will be learning in the school and how parents/carers can support this at home. The Welsh Government has produced a

leaflet *How was school today? Parents' and carers' guide to secondary school for children ages 11 to 14*¹⁸ but you may wish to supplement this, or create displays based around it in the school reception area, that clearly indicate how families can best support their child's learning. This could also communicate the value that the school places on working with families as partners in their child's learning, or information or ground rules about communications between families and school.

Drop in café/workshop sessions on topics suggested by parents/carers – for example building students' vocabulary; development of positive discipline strategies; supporting students through crisis; tests and assessment; course choices; post-16 choices; financing post-16 education, etc. Careful thought would be needed on how to encourage families who are less engaged to take part in both determining the topics and in attending the workshops (see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit).

Family workshops to develop parent/carer skills – research shows that parental support programmes which focus on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills are the most effective. You could run workshops to help families to build parenting skills, such as the development of positive discipline strategies and coaching skills, which will establish good home environments to support learning. These could draw on parenting support expertise from other public sector agencies or the third sector, and on help from the school's parent/carer group.

How workshops are badged and how people are invited is important – to avoid any stigmatisation and perceptions that parents/carers are being labelled as 'rubbish parents/carers'. Hold, and convey, the expectation that parents/carers will want to collaborate with you in order to help their children progress in school – then you can recruit people to join by expectation rather than by invitation.

The Welsh Government 2014 *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support* publication¹⁹ provides lots of useful information on best practice for parenting support.

Student planner – a version of the home-school diary (see the **Primary school age 7–11 – Engagement for learning** resource (Theme 4: Resource 2) in this toolkit) but adapted for older learners. It can provide an open home-school communication channel, act as a starting point for family discussions with their child about what they have been learning at school, give families a clearer idea of the school's expectations of homework and provide some pointers on how to best go about supporting their child's learning.

Provide a space for families and children to give feedback on the activity. Then make sure you acknowledge the feedback and let the families know how you plan to respond as a result, otherwise this could backfire by setting up another way for parents/carers to feel that they are ignored by schools.

A 'virtual' school planner might be less resource-heavy in terms of school staff time.

¹⁸ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/how-was-school-today-guide-to-secondary-school/?lang=en

¹⁹ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/?lang=en

Virtual learning environments – providing families with accessible information online on their child’s progress can help them engage. Projects in the USA suggest that simply providing parents/carers with the opportunity to view their child’s progress data online may motivate young people to do better in secondary school.

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As well as offering schools a number of significant web-based solutions (see below), Hwb+ will see the potential for schools to subscribe to provisioning for parent/carer accounts on the platform. This will allow parents/carers to access specific information on their children and further enhance home–school links.

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“ Levels of parental engagement could be improved if schools made more use of the potential of technology to support at-home learning.”

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Engagement in learning through social media – social media can be used to involve the community in learning, e.g. through sharing videos of mathematics techniques or blogging advice on how to support children’s learning. A best practice example from Estyn shows how²⁰.

Offer regular meetings with families to discuss their academic programme, options and progress, so that families and the school can work together to prepare the students for the next phase. Always ask about the families’ expectations for their child’s education. See also the **Rethinking parents’/carers’ evenings** resource (Theme 3: Resource 6) in this toolkit.

Feedback phonecalls – some schools set aside staff time each week so that teachers can provide families with feedback phone calls. One school ensures a 3:1 ratio of good news calls (“your daughter did something really well today”) to more difficult calls (e.g. slippage in progress). Good news postcards are an alternative. It is important for the school to keep track of which families have received what!

Goal setting evenings – some schools have ‘goal setting’ evenings rather than parents’/carers’ evenings – using a ‘visible learning’²¹ approach based on the research findings of John Hattie. Learners are supported to assess their own performance, and bring their parents/carers to the goal setting evening where, with the support of a teacher, they explain to parents/carers

²⁰ Estyn best practice case study of Cogan Nursery School, Vale of Glamorgan: www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/289079.7/sharing-learning-through-social-media/?navmap=33,53,158

²¹ www.visible-learning.org

what they can do, and what they aim to achieve by the end of the academic year. Because the learners themselves are leading the evening, this can result in a high degree of engagement from parents/carers, while also encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

It would be a good idea to ask parents/carers about the type of parents'/carers' evening they would prefer, trialling new versions and then asking for feedback.

Family homework – create homework that requires learners to work with their family on a project that relates to something they are studying at school, such as creating a presentation on family history, or a science experiment using everyday materials that everyone will have at home, or watching an interesting documentary and writing down their thoughts about it afterwards. This can act as a starting point for discussion with their child about what they have been learning at school. Careful thought would be needed on how to encourage families who are less engaged to take part (see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit). Provide a space for families to feedback comments on how they found it.

Third sector and private sector programmes

You may also want to consider whether to draw on services offered by the third or private sectors to help you engage. External projects can be especially helpful when working with 'hard to reach' families as they can bring to the table family and community engagement expertise.

The Welsh Government has produced a catalogue of programmes that school could use (and pay for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) where appropriate): *Interventions that really work: third and private sector resources for schools tackling deprivation*²². This catalogue includes, among others, the following programmes that are suitable for secondary schools.

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Nurture Groups – a specialist form of provision in early years, primary and secondary schools for learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which also helps to build bridges with families and engage them with their child's learning.

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Solihull Approach – this aims to improve the emotional health and well-being of parents/carers, learners and staff, and also to improve family engagement. It is especially suited for families with children (aged 0–18) with additional learning needs. Their parenting course ‘Understanding your child’s behaviour’ has been awarded the CANparent Quality Mark and is also available in an online version. Whole-school training for teachers and support staff is also available.

Further sources of help and information for schools and for parents/carers

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There is a Facebook page for parents and carers with tips and links to websites which can help them support their children’s learning at www.facebook.com/beginsathome. Parents/carers can also visit www.gov.wales/schoolsinfo4parents

The Solihull Approach website has an information sheet for parents on ‘Teenage Brain Development’. www.solihullapproachparenting.com/information-for-parents

The Family Lives website has video clips, leaflets to download, and other advice and information online to support parents and carers of teenagers. This includes information about drugs and alcohol; online safety; school and learning; behaviour; health and well-being, self-harm and sex. www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers

Young Minds provides information and advice on the emotional well-being and health of children and young people. They also run a parents’/carers’ helpline which offers free confidential telephone support, including information and advice to any adult worried about the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person up to the age of 25. Call free on 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday 9.30am–4pm) or e-mail: parents@youngminds.org.uk (the query will be responded to within three working days). www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents

4

Family and community engagement toolkit

Theme 4: Resource 4

Interventions for learners less supported at home



This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.
- Models of support and approaches that schools can take.
- Positive school ethos: Pastoral and caring cultures.
- Compensating for a lack of family support.

Introduction

Schools can be a safe haven for children who, for a host of reasons, get less support at home, and provide a structure they may lack elsewhere. Schools can identify vulnerable children early and play a positive role in building their resilience and self-esteem.

Individual teachers may also represent a positive relationship the child is missing.

A trusting, caring relationship with an adult can be a key protective factor for children, and this role can, where appropriate, be taken by a teacher or other member of school staff.

Schools play a key role in the educational, social and emotional development of children. They work to enable all children to become **responsible citizens, confident individuals, successful learners and effective contributors**. Children's well-being is essential in developing these four capacities, and school staff can help support this in a variety of ways.

" Schools often support vulnerable children and families in ways which do not appear in the literature; it is recognised that these supports are part of very effective practice with children and families, even if they are not part of 'official' evidence."

Dr Kelly Stone (2013) *The role of schools in supporting vulnerable children and families*
WithScotland

Models of support and approaches that schools can take

One useful child-centred model²³ proposes that practitioners ask the following key questions from a child's perspective.

- What do I need?
- What do I need you to think about?
- What do I need you to do?

Other models such as the 'My World Triangle'²⁴ and the 'Resilience Matrix'²⁵ enable assessment and identification of risks and strengths in the child's world, which includes but is not limited to their educational experiences. It supports the participation of the child or young person in the process, as well as that of other family members and professionals who have insight into the child's world.

²³ Daniel, B., Taylor, J. and Scott, J. (2011) *Recognizing and Helping the Neglected Child: Evidence-Based Practice for Assessment and Intervention* Jessica Kingsley.

²⁴ www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/national-practice-model/my-world-triangle

²⁵ www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/national-practice-model/resilience-matrix

The Vulnerability Matrix can also be used to record risk factors (adversity) and protective factors (the protective environment) for children who might be at risk. Once the process of assessment and analysis of a child's risk and protective factors has been completed, this information can be used to plan next steps towards desired outcomes for the child's well-being.

There are several different approaches that schools can take to attempt to compensate for an apparent lack of parental support for a child's learning.

- Keep going with attempts to engage with the family – see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) of this toolkit.
- Use multi-agency working (including the Team Around the Family approach) to support families dealing with multiple problems or where you believe the child may be at risk – see the **Multi-agency working** resource (Theme 5: Resource 2) in this toolkit.
- Provide a caring culture in your school – see below.
- Put some particular interventions in place to overcome the practical barriers to learning that learners may be experiencing if they are not receiving much support for learning at home – see below.

Positive school ethos: Pastoral and caring cultures

Caring school communities support the social and emotional development of children as well as their educational attainment. In such school cultures, additional support, learner support and pastoral care are evident throughout the school and are part of an inclusive approach to meeting children's needs.

Promoting positive relationships and behaviour is key to not just helping children develop the four capacities (responsible citizens, confident individuals, successful learners and effective contributors), but to enabling the most vulnerable children to benefit from as full an educational experience as possible. Schools can use a range of approaches to support this, including restorative approaches, solution-oriented approaches and nurture groups.

Schools can play an important part in helping children develop the three building blocks of resilience.

- A secure base whereby the child feels a sense of belonging and security (expressed in statements such as 'I have').
- Good self-esteem ('I am').
- A sense of self-efficacy, with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations ('I can').

Teachers and other school staff who use a resilience-focused approach help children by building a protective framework around them, thereby improving longer term outcomes for children.

Schools with a protective ethos support all children, including the most vulnerable, and crucially they also support teachers who need to feel confident enough to recognise, respond to and help those children.

Independent counselling services – counselling can be beneficial for learners who are struggling with emotional difficulties. Local authority independent counselling services are available for children in Year 6, and for children and young people aged between 11 and 18. Within schools, counselling complements the different approaches already in place to support the health, emotional and social needs of learners.

An independent evaluation found that school-based counselling services in Wales were felt by teachers to have made a positive impact on the attainment, attendance and behaviour of learners (65 per cent, 69 per cent and 80 per cent respectively).

Nurture groups – nurture groups address 'impoverished early nurturing' by supporting children's emotional needs as a foundation on which to develop their learning. The 'classic' nurture group is based on attachment theory and is comprised of a teacher and an assistant who model positive behaviour and social skills in a nurturing environment which is safe, predictable and at the appropriate development stage for each child. The Welsh Government has produced a handbook for schools, available at: learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/121128nurtureen.pdf

An increasing number of secondary schools are setting up nurture groups, to help young people develop trust, communication skills and improve self-esteem. Early evidence shows that nurture groups can also have a positive effect on academic attainment.

Nurture support in secondary schools can be very effective when young people have experienced sudden and/or severe trauma; when they are or on the verge of becoming school refusers; and as a support to parents/carers, as well as a way to develop and improve relationships with them.

Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) – children who have experienced less support at home may be behind in their social and emotional learning (self-awareness, ability to manage their feelings, motivation and degree of empathy). There are SEAL resources available on Learning Wales to help primary and secondary schools develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills: www.learning.wales.gov.uk/resources/browse-all/sealcymru/?lang=en

The implementation of SEAL Cymru in schools was one of the key recommendations of the National Behaviour and Attendance Review commissioned by the Welsh Government to improve behaviour and attendance in schools.

Compensating for a lack of family support

There are some other practical things that schools can provide in order to compensate to some extent for a lack of home support for learning.

Homework clubs with internet access – Save the Children's *Small Voice Big Story* report²⁶, produced in 2013 by young Welsh researchers from deprived backgrounds, identified that one of the things learners who have less support at home would like is a safe, quiet space at school in which they can study and complete their homework.

Books and school materials – ensure that learners have access to the resources they need to complete their work, including for example a library card and familiarity with using the library (where they will often also be able to use the internet).

Look for another adult family member to support learning – sometimes an older sibling, aunt, uncle or grandparent can step in to act as the child's learning mentor, helping them with reading practice or supporting them with homework tasks.

One-to-one support – alternatively the school might be able to provide the support (e.g. in lunch breaks) with reading and homework that the child is not getting at home.

Lead worker – the Welsh Government's *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework*²⁷ (2013) and its implementation plan set out plans to provide a lead worker for all young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Local authorities each have an Engagement and Progression Coordinator (EPC) to coordinate the support for young people, and schools can contact their EPC in order to seek lead worker support. In circumstances where the young person is in receipt of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG), schools can use the PDG to help fund this work.

Other role models – the school could take extra steps to ensure that the child experiences a number of positive role models who can model the value of learning and developing their future career path. Schools that become Rights Respecting Schools (see www.unicef.org.uk) not only teach children's rights but also models' rights and respect in all its relationships. The Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) has had a significant and positive influence on the school ethos, relationships, inclusivity, engagement in learning and well-being of the school community²⁸.

Team Around the Family – use multi-agency working (including the Team Around the Family approach) to support families dealing with multiple problems or where you believe the child may be at risk – see the **Multi-agency working** resource (Theme 5: Resource 2) in this toolkit.

" We recommend that every school seek to establish a CIC – Cartref i Cartref (Home to Home) study centre, a place in a school where children can go to study and gain extra educational help and support, which feels like a home from home."

Young Welsh Researchers/Participation Unit (2013)
Small Voice Big Story, Save the Children

²⁶ www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/small_voice_report_english.pdf

²⁷ www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/youthengagement/?lang=en

²⁸ Taken from the three-year qualitative study of UNICEF's RRSA undertaken by University of Sussex and Brighton evaluation (2010) available at: www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/about-the-award/impact-on-schools/evidence

Some strategies that can help learners who get less support for learning at home include:

- a commitment from all staff to meeting the learners' needs
- effective monitoring systems to identify learners at risk
- close collaboration between primary and secondary schools to support learners during transition
- the involvement of a wide variety of adults within the school and the community to support learners
- modifying the curriculum and drawing on educational providers and other local agencies beyond the school
- provision of practical help, such as a homework club
- continuing to pursue ways of involving parents/carers (remember, circumstances may change at home) – see the **Reaching all families** resource (Theme 3: Resource 3) in this toolkit.

4

Family and community engagement toolkit

Theme 4: Resource 5

Family Learning Programmes (FLPs)



This resource contains the following.

- Introduction.
- Evidence of the impact of FLPs.
- Available funding.
- What do schools need to know to establish a good FLP?
- A checklist for good practice in reaching families for FLPs.
- Case study: Millbrook Primary School.
- Further sources of help and information.

Introduction

Family Learning Programmes (FLPs) engage parents/carers and children jointly in learning. They are most often used in early years settings or in primary school, and are a means to support parents/carers who have had a poor experience of school and who may not otherwise participate in something badged as 'literacy' or 'numeracy'.

"If you can't get parents and carers in it's because we are getting it wrong, so we need to keep trying different ways."

Torfaen Family Programmes Organiser

They specifically aim to develop family members' basic skills at the same time as the child's. For example, FLPs could include joint parent/carer and child sessions to support early reading skills.

Depending on need, some programmes may include adult-only time, where parents and carers work on their skills needs, which could include literacy and numeracy, and which are often set within a context as varied as family history, wildlife or football. There is also children-only time – a chance for teachers to work with children on particular aspects of their development. Clearly, however, it is very important that adequate time is provided for adults and children to work and learn together, modelling behaviour and helping families to develop their parenting skills as well as developing a culture of learning in the family.

Evidence of the impact of FLPs

The benefit of learning across the family is now well documented. Research shows that family learning could increase the overall level of children's development by as much as 15 percentage points for those from disadvantaged groups and improve average reading age by up to six months. Importantly, family learning has long-term benefits, as it affects behaviours and attitudes to learning across the whole family.

"Family learning has multiple positive outcomes for adults and children, for families and communities. It could, in one generation, change the lives of a whole generation. We would be foolish to miss such an opportunity."

Baroness Valerie Howarth, family issues champion

Children who have participated in FLPs have been found to have better classroom behaviour and better support from their families compared to their peers. Communications between parents/carers and children were also found to improve markedly, and parents/carers also reported being more confident in helping their child at home and communicating with the teacher at school.

Evaluations have also highlighted benefits for parents and carers in terms of progression to further education, training or a better job for over 50 per cent of participants, and improved parenting and better relationships with their children. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) ran an inquiry into family learning in England and Wales and in 2013 published *Family Learning Works*²⁹, concluding that FLPs had particularly positive impacts for 'harder to reach' families and those living in poverty. More recently in 2014, Ofsted published seven case studies highlighting excellent examples of good practice in family learning that community and skills providers, schools and other organisations have developed across England. The case studies are part of a joint initiative between Ofsted and NIACE and are available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-case-studies-for-family-learning-joint-project-niace>.

Available funding

FLPs in Wales have been previously run by the Basic Skills Agency, and more latterly by providers employed by local authorities using grant funding from the Welsh Government. This funding stream has ended but FLPs for eligible children can now be part-funded or fully-funded by schools or nursery settings using the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG). School/nursery settings should contact their local authority to find out about the programme operating in their area.

What do schools need to know to establish a good FLP?

Firstly it can be difficult to persuade some parents/carers to come on courses but the benefits can be positive for all involved. We all want schools to be a happy place in which every child achieves and reaches their potential but schools are also places where many parents/carers failed, where they were often told they were wrong and where they are apprehensive about returning. It often needs a lot of courage for parents/carers to cross the threshold and come back into learning.

Some parents/carers may also feel stigmatised by being invited to participate in an FLP. This issue is dealt with in the **Foundation Phase – Engagement for learning** resource (Theme 4: Resource 1) in this toolkit.

²⁹ <http://shop.niace.org.uk/family-learninginquiry-report.html>

There are many barriers to be broken down first and a whole-school approach is essential.

Do your preparation

- Reception staff are often the first contact as most courses sign up at the reception desk. Ensure your staff know the course is running and that they have read the publicity leaflets or have some available.
- Ensure everyone knows about the course especially the learning mentor, the class teacher and support staff in the classroom.
- Use the personal touch. It is more effective for teachers and learning mentors to give out a leaflet to the parent/carer as a personal invitation to support their child rather than put them in a book bag.
- Be aware of the reading levels of some parents/carers. Summarise the course for them as you give out a leaflet.
- There is safety in numbers – let them know who else is on the course.
- Greet parents/carers at the front office and accompany them to the room for that first session.
- Ongoing encouragement and interest from staff is much appreciated – “How is it going?”; “Your child really looks forward to joining you on the course.”
- Celebrate the learning of both parent/carer and child.

Goals and outcomes

- Consider your programme’s overall goals, including the timeline for achieving them.
- Include descriptions of the groups of learners and their parents/carers you wish to engage and your desired learner outcomes.
- Formulate descriptions of your desired family outcomes and how they are linked to learner outcomes.

The planning process

- Ensure FLPs are jointly planned by the children’s teacher and adult learning tutor.
- Make opportunities for immediate and extended family learning available, together with a clear and appropriately defined proportion that are adult focused, particularly in family literacy, language and numeracy courses.
- Think about making initial short taster courses and workshops available, progressing to short, wider family learning courses and on to family literacy, language and numeracy provision.
- Plan provision throughout the year, and think about having some longer courses in the summer term.

- Give careful consideration to the range of challenges that learners face and ensure you provide a range of strategies to make provision accessible to targeted groups, for example by offering free crèche facilities to learners and offering courses at venues and times to suit learners.
- Ensure your plans demonstrate clearly identified outcomes for both parents/carers and children linked to the core curriculum, personal targets or the national curriculum and there are regular opportunities for assessment.
- Outline the specific steps that school and community partners will take to carry out your strategies.
- Set out the methods of outreach that school and community partners will use to connect with the families of learners who are most at risk for academic failure.

Learner information

- Be clear on the total number of learners you are targeting. If you are targeting learners in different year groups, indicate how many learners are in each (a chart might be a useful way of presenting this information).
- Include data showing that these learners are at high risk of low attainment/disaffection and would benefit from more support from family interaction at school and at home.
- Include a description of the obstacles and underlying issues that prevent families from taking the actions described in your family outcomes.

Evaluation

- Consider providing a model of your planned initiative, which will provide a visual representation of how your outcomes, strategies and school/community partner actions are connected.
- Give a description of the indicators of progress you have chosen to show whether you are achieving your outcomes.
- Provide a description of how you will manage data collection and analysis, and your plan for reviewing evaluation findings to identify and implement necessary improvements.

Resources

- List the resources you will need to implement the programme, e.g. knowledge, influence, technology, money.
- Include a breakdown of how the resources will be used, e.g. implementation of school/community/other partner activities, programme evaluation, general management of the initiative.

More recent research undertaken by NIACE has identified other factors necessary to ensure effective delivery and success of FLPs. These include the following.

- Schools needing to build strong relationships with local authorities who themselves will need to develop effective partnerships with colleges where access to qualified adult literacy tutors might be required.
- Schools holding celebration events (perhaps in morning assemblies) where children see their parents/carers gaining qualifications, which will send a clear message of the importance of learning together.
- The importance of making your school more welcoming and the use of parent/carer support or liaison officers and learning champions to recruit parents/carers (**Theme 3** of this toolkit deals with this), which may include providing parents/carers-only sessions linked directly to the school curriculum and including information for parents/carers on how, as well as what, children are taught in school.

Remember, none of this will be possible without commitment and regular attendance from parents/carers and therefore ensuring good school/family relationships, as well as engendering an atmosphere where parents/carers can support each other, will maximise potential for success.

“The way that parents and other caregivers treat children, interact with them and respond to their physical and emotional needs can exert an influence on their well-being and behaviour that endures through childhood, adolescence and on into adult life.”

Headteacher, Monmouthshire

“Parents have high aspirations for their children. A survey conducted in Wales on parental engagement found that 79% of the parents of 16 year olds wanted them to continue in full time education but do not always know how to help. In the same survey fewer than half of parents in poor families with young children looked at books with their children daily, whereas it was a third higher at 64% for those in the wealthiest groups.”

Family Learning Works – NIACE Cymru

A checklist for good practice in reaching families for FLPs

- Ensure there is strategic support for and commitment to quality family learning provision.
- Ensure a whole-school approach with family learning embedded in the school evaluation form and the school development plan, so that everyone in the organisation understands the importance of family learning and how it can contribute to a whole-organisational approach to parental engagement.
- Ensure there are committed and suitably qualified staff with recent DBS (previously CRB) checks.
- Ensure quality childcare is available.
- Build strong partnerships with key organisations to support recruitment and progression opportunities.
- Ensure there is a shared understanding of the aims of family learning, the target audiences and the roles of partner organisations.
- Investigate different sources of funding to meet the needs of target families.
- Ensure clear, accessible and customised marketing to include fathers, mothers, grandparents and carers.
- Involve the learners in planning from the outset wherever possible, including setting up consultation events.
- Ensure clear safeguarding, inclusion and equality policies and practice with families in school are in place.
- Ensure the venue and room are welcoming and adult friendly.
- Keep learning in small chunks, encouraging reflective feedback and early success and achievement.
- Build in opportunities for learners to share experiences from their own lives and home culture to build from their strengths and interests and to help embed their learning.
- Build in advice and guidance to support progression from informal family learning to accredited programmes, including Skills for Life.
- Have systems in place that show how families engaged in learning together progress, including children's learning and achievement.
- Don't forget you can use your Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and your Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) to support family and community engagement as long as you can demonstrate an increase in learners' attainment.

Case study: Millbrook Primary School

Background

Millbrook Primary School is a one form entry 3–11 primary school located on the Bettws Estate in Newport. There are currently 240 learners on roll. Approximately 28 per cent of learners are entitled to free school meals (eFSM) and 30 per cent of learners are identified as having additional educational needs.

Family learning: a team approach

The school adopts a team approach to its Family Learning Programme and uses its Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) to employ a Pupil and Family Engagement Officer (PFEO). The PFEO works with the whole-school community to determine an annual programme of family learning activities. Activities are designed as a result of data analysis, consultation with families and team discussion. The programme is closely linked to the School Development Plan (SDP) priorities.

Family Thursdays

The school has a designated day for its planned family learning activities. This is in addition to a wide range of additional family learning activities that take place throughout the week. This strategy has the benefit of creating a routine for families and allows the school to target year groups. Consultation with the whole community resulted in a Thursday being the chosen day for the programme. Activities that have taken place include:

- a family reading café
- family literacy workshops linked to the national tests
- family numeracy workshops linked to the national tests
- Talk 4 Writing family learning workshops
- a digital learning café.

Each programme is designed to last a minimum of three weeks. Any family member is welcome to attend. Sessions are designed to be instructional workshops, as well as to give some time to adults only, and are generally led by the school's PFEO. Family members are then given an opportunity to put what they've learned into action in a workshop session with their child.

Learning outcomes

The PFEO works closely with school staff to ensure that the Family Learning Programme is closely linked to learning outcomes. Learner data is analysed and this information is used to inform planning. The PFEO works with small groups of identified learners and strives to engage their families to provide a further layer of support.

Whole-school approach

The school adopts a whole-school approach to its Family Learning Programme. Class teachers run their own family learning workshop sessions throughout the school year, which are designed to support learning in literacy and numeracy and to help strengthen family-school relationships. An active parent council ensures that parents/carers have a voice in the development of the programme. At each half-termly meeting, the council reflects upon current learning programmes and suggests ideas or areas of learning that they would like to see included.

Early Years Family Learning Programme

The school uses its Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) to fund an Early Years Family Learning Programme. The programme is designed to support new to nursery, nursery, new to reception and reception children and their families. The programme includes:

- early mark making fun workshops
- home visits
- language and play workshops
- number and play workshops
- reading workshops.

Extra-curricular Family Learning Programme

The school provides additional opportunities for learners and parents/carers after school hours and during holiday time. Initiatives that the school runs include:

- a family film literacy club
- a family computer coding club
- a Twitter café
- a homework club/learning café.

Working with partner agencies and the wider community

The school recognises the benefits of working with a wide range of partner organisations who can provide the school with additional resources and funding opportunities – for example, the school has worked with Save the Children Cymru and Communities First to successfully run an after school Families and Schools Together (FAST) Programme. The school has utilised its links with the community and with partner agencies to meet family learning needs and to provide training opportunities for parents/carers. This has led to parents/carers gaining accreditation in first aid, food hygiene, parenting skills and childhood education.

In addition, the school currently works with The Education Achievement Service and University Wales, Trinity St David to run a Masters course in Equity in Education. The PFEO and a school governor have taken part in this work enabling the school to further review and develop its family and community engagement work.

Impact of Millbrook Primary School's Family Learning Programme

- The number of parents/carers engaging with their child's learning has increased by 50 per cent since September 2007.
- Attendance at the school has risen by over two per cent since July 2012.
- The learners of families who regularly attend Family Learning Programmes consistently achieve their learning targets.
- The gap in performance between learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and those learners not eligible for free school meals (non-eFSM) has closed.
- The number of parent/carers volunteers in the school has increased.
- Families are making a more active contribution to whole-school development.

Further sources of help and information

A 2012 Estyn report entitled *The impact of family learning programmes on raising the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults* considers how effective FLPs are in raising the standards of literacy and numeracy of young children. It also considers the extent to which FLPs lead to better follow-up support for those children who need it and the extent to which FLPs provide value for money. The report can be accessed at: www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/impact-family-learning-programmes-raising-literacy-and-numeracy-levels-children-and

Published by NIACE in 2013, *Family Learning Works* (<http://shop.niace.org.uk/family-learning-inquiry-report.html>) recognises that the best way to support children is to work with the whole family and emphasises preventative and early intervention, encouraging an overarching 'Team Around the Family' approach.