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## Guide

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# Teacher Guide: Parental Engagement and Narrowing the Gap in Attainment for Disadvantaged Children

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# Teacher guide to parental engagement

This guide sets out key messages from research and practice on how to engage parents from disadvantaged groups. Written for primary school Senior Leadership Teams, it is based on a rapid review of the evidence carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and a Department for Education [review](#) of parental engagement (Goodall *et al.*, 2011). The Oxford University Press and NFER co-funded this work.

## What works and what's the impact?

- Reported outcomes of increased parental engagement include improved academic performance; improved relationships between parents, teachers and schools; and increased parental involvement in schools.
- Interventions focusing on both academic outcomes and parenting skills are more effective than interventions addressing either aspect in isolation.
- A number of parenting characteristics are statistically associated with children's levels of achievement, including parental promotion of reading and learning, parents' relationships and interactions with the child, and disciplinary practices. This is the case across all levels of family resources, suggesting that positive parenting benefits children regardless of their socioeconomic circumstance.
- Support and training for parents can achieve greater parental confidence in managing children's behaviour and supporting children's learning.
- Parental engagement can improve the home learning environment, leading to increased parental confidence in supporting children's literacy at home and a major impact on achievement.
- There is robust evidence of the impact of family learning, literacy and numeracy (FLLN) programmes.
- There is a large volume of evidence on the impact of parental engagement programmes on children's literacy, but much less for other curriculum areas.

## Key messages from the research and practice

**Use evidence to choose the best parental engagement strategies.** Consider:

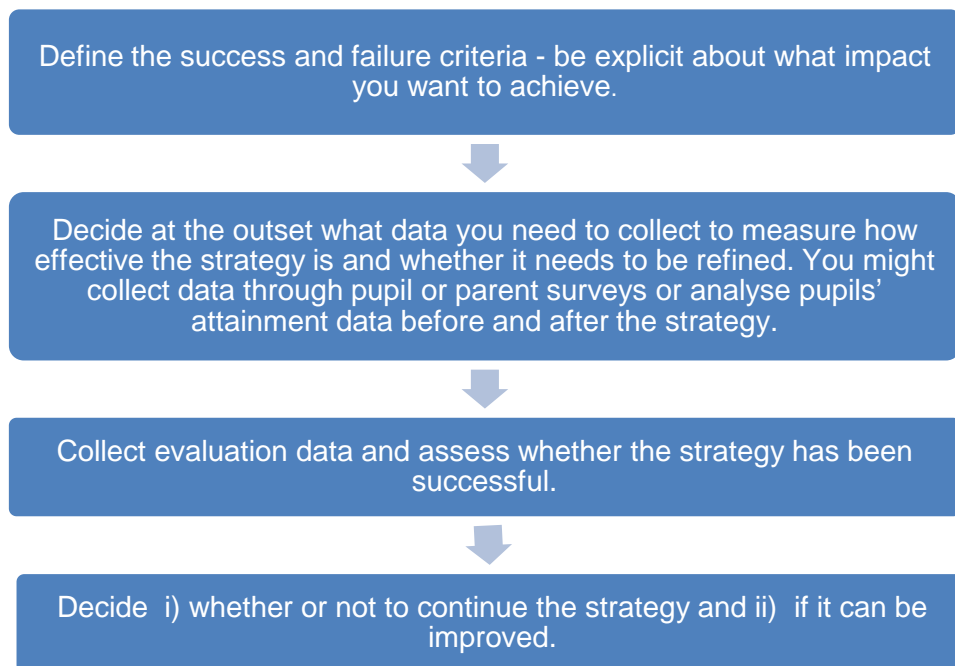
- the best available research evidence on which strategies work best and how to implement them
- research into local needs and circumstances
- data from consultations with staff, parents and pupils.

**Give your parental engagement strategies the best chance of working**, by putting these features of successful interventions in place:

- Proper resourcing, with sufficient capacity to develop the strategy. Recent [Ofsted research](#) and [case studies](#) describe how some schools have resourced their parental engagement, including using the pupil premium.
- Senior staff who are engaged with and committed to the strategy.
- Measures to overcome any barriers to parents taking part.
- A robust evaluation design.
- Sustainability, so developments remain when a specific piece of work concludes or staff member leaves.



## Evaluate the success of your parental engagement strategies



## Use a whole school approach for engaging parents

- Create an ethos that says that all families are reachable.
- Get all staff on board.
- Make sure staff are confident to engage parents and provide any necessary training.
- Don't underestimate how important personal contact is - talk to parents one to one and show them that you value their input.
- Use small, informal parent engagement strategies. For example:
  - welcome and engage parents when they bring their children to school
  - prioritise opportunities for parents to come into the classroom to meet the teachers
  - use teaching assistants to model strategies that the parent could use to read with children at home.

## Prioritise communication

- Provide clear, specific and targeted information for parents.
- Use ICT to give parents access to information and engagement opportunities.
- Make your expectations of parents and children clear. For example, the use of the ['structured conversation'](#) as developed by Achievement for All could facilitate this.
- Use a variety of approaches to engage parents. These might include home visits and meetings at unthreatening, neutral locations.
- Consult with parents regularly and share the findings.

## Maximise choice, minimise barriers

- When designing parental engagement activities, take into account the logistical barriers faced by parents (such as costs, time and transport).
- Provide universal services to reduce stigmatisation.
- Use a range of different engagement strategies and let parents choose what they want to participate in. You could use workshops and courses to encourage parents to connect with children's learning; family literacy classes; or involve parents in the classroom (e.g. listening to pupils reading) or in extra-curricular activities (e.g. as volunteers on school visits, or to support before- and after-school activities).



## Provide advice, emotional support and training to enable positive parenting

- Working with parents to form positive ways of managing children's behaviour can in itself be important for improving children's achievement. For example, one of our key sources ([Beckett et al. 2012](#)) discovered robust evidence of the impact of the Incredible Years (IY) behaviour and relationships intervention on improved child literacy. IY aims to help parents build better relationships with their children and develop skills to manage difficult child behaviour effectively, using social learning and cognitive and behavioural principles.

## Work with others

- Develop partnership and multi-agency arrangements with local services. This offers more opportunities to reach the most vulnerable families, because any service with which they are in contact can refer those families to supportive interventions. [Local practice evidence](#) describes the establishment and successful operation of such arrangements.
- Help to coordinate and deliver services to improve outcomes for families.
- Identify early issues with families (e.g. non-attendance at school, child behaviour, and parenting skills) and share information (appropriately and legally) with other schools and local services.

## Don't forget fathers!

- Use strategies such as hands-on activities designed to appeal to males; initial face-to-face contact with intensive follow-up contact via mobile phone; and employing male practitioners to work with them.

## Using this guide

You could use this guide to help you to evaluate your school's parental engagement work. Here is a quick checklist, which you could use as a discussion aid with the Senior Leadership Team and/or governors.

- Use evidence to choose the best parental engagement strategies for your school
- Give your parental engagement strategies the best chance of working
- Evaluate the success of your parental engagement strategies
- Use a whole school approach for engaging parents
- Prioritise communication
- Maximise choice, minimise barriers
- Provide advice, emotional support and training to enable positive parenting
- Work with others
- Don't forget fathers!

## Find out more

The Department for Education review conducted by [Goodall et al.](#) (2011) discusses many further examples of initiatives used in schools. Among the sources NFER reviewed, the studies by [Beckett et al.](#) (2012), [Carter-Wall and Whitfield](#) (2012), [Lindsay et al.](#) (2011), [McCoy](#) (2011) and [O'Mara et al.](#) (2011) provided our strongest evidence.

