



Family Support in Extended Schools

Summary

RESEARCH & POLICY FOR THE REAL WORLD

Family Support in

A close-up photograph of two young boys, one white and one Black, smiling warmly at the camera. They are wearing grey sweaters over blue collared shirts. The background is slightly blurred, showing a blue wall with some colorful shapes.

Extended Schools

By 2010, all schools are expected to become community hubs for a range of health, education, employment and leisure services aimed at children, families and communities. Extended schools will need to provide a variety of services: wraparound childcare from 8am to 6pm, access, or 'fast track' referral pathways to specialised health and social services, after-school clubs and study support, adult education and family learning sessions, parenting programmes and other family support, and access for the community to information and communication technology (ICT), sports and art facilities.

This paper highlights key findings from a new Family and Parenting Institute study into how extended schools provide family support. The family support services examined included parenting courses; support groups and drop-ins; home visits; adult education and employment training; family learning and any other services that 'provide a resource to families and seek to promote their wellbeing through improved intra-familial relationships and improved standards of living'.

A sample of primary, secondary and special schools across England was questioned about how their staff were planning, commissioning and delivering this kind of family support through extended schools. The report is intended as a guide to promising practice and is for head teachers; deputy heads; teachers; community managers; family support workers; extended schools coordinators and others involved in extended schools services.

The full research report is available with in-depth analysis and 16 case studies; find out more at www.familyandparenting.org/publications

1 Overview of family support services offered by schools

Parenting Support

Parenting support was offered on a universal and targeted basis. Drop-ins and one-to-one advice sessions were examples of services offered to all parents whose children attended a particular school. Targeted services included both structured parenting courses (some specifically focused on behaviour management) and more informal family learning approaches such as sport and cookery classes as an alternative, non-threatening way of providing parenting support.

Information Sessions

A number of schools offered information sessions and courses to all their parents, focused on supporting their children's education. Topics included:

- how to give academic help with specific subjects
- practical advice on how to study at home and different learning styles
- giving children emotional and psychological support especially at key transition stages of education.

These services generally ran as one-off events or short courses, but one school in the study was part of a cluster of 30 schools that jointly produced a booklet for 8,000 parents on parenting and education.

Family Learning

Family learning activities were more common in primary than secondary schools.

Activities included:

- a theatre company that ran workshops and activities for the youngest children, their parents and anyone in the wider community with a small child. This taught parents how to engage with their children and provided scripts and songs to use at home
- involving parents in preparations for a community celebration – which had been instrumental in reformulating parents' attitudes to the school and support for their children's education
- family academic sessions e.g. literacy and numeracy, IT classes, English as a foreign language and family French
- leisure activities from knitting and sewing to salsa dancing.

2 Services addressing behaviour management issues

“Initially parents come in and say ‘I’ve got the child from hell’ and they usually finish the course saying, ‘I understand that I can have an impact on my child’s behaviour.’”

Courses for parents that helped them manage their children's behaviour were most common, but some initiatives were aimed directly at children. Services included:

- a Parenting Behaviour Management course run with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). This was a response to the large numbers of families where there were mental health concerns relating to parenting that did not meet the threshold for social service intervention
- a group using role-plays with older pupils and discussions targeted at parents with adolescents who were at risk of anti-social behaviour
- a special support group for Somali parents that gave them regular contact with the local Behaviour Support Service

- a cookery course for parents and children (with around five families involved) which was also used as an alternative to parenting classes. A family liaison officer identified families who might be suitable for this course
- a 'Families and Fun' group for parents, many of whom enrolled themselves, but were also encouraged to attend by social services, family support workers or teachers
- DIY courses for pupils and parents – introduced in one school that recognised the problem of poor housing in the area and the needs of families to improve their home.

We opened up an old building that we had and made it into a construction centre. And we have children in Years 10 and 11 doing an NVQ course in construction in it...painting and decorating...and then we had a day a week free, so we offer parents DIY skills...some of the children who were on the NVQ course got involved with working with parents on it. Not their own parents, other parents. It's amazing how much their behaviour improved.

3 Planning services: consultation, evaluation and user input

Listen to the parents and find out what they actually want, and don't try and give them things that they don't want, because they won't come anyway.

All schools emphasised the importance of consulting with families and the local community, if only because it was important both to offer families what they wanted and not to duplicate and compete with services which already existed locally.

Lesson learnt around consultation were:

- It was important to contact parents and the community away from the school site. One community manager personally delivered mailshots to families on their estates
- Questionnaires and evaluation forms were only useful for people literate in English and often elicited a poor response rate
- It was important that courses were named to make them attractive to parents ('Find out Fridays' proved a more effective title than 'Help your child develop reading skills'). Parenting courses had to have names that did not stigmatise
- Ongoing consultation was needed so that courses were responsive to changing needs. Parents wanted courses which progressed in difficulty as they gained confidence and skills
- Collecting information around parents' lifestyles and standards of living was important, for example asking what the families' homes were like. Did they have

access to gardens? Were they sharing kitchens? This enabled schools to plan family activities to fill 'experience gaps'

- Planning should take account of teachers' interests and skills even if it means they offer courses not specifically asked for by parents
- Community networks should be maintained as much as possible so that services are complementary and schools and community organisations can work together. One school organised a consultation day with community groups, others had contact with the local Anglican church and the young people's service.

“ Often by meeting people from the estate when you're on the estate, you actually get a lot of goodwill...I didn't know this but, by all accounts, I got a lot of brownie points because I actually got off my backside and I went and walked around the estate.”

It was also important to get parents themselves involved in planning extended school provision. In one school parents helped equip and design the parents' room. In another they were involved from the planning stages in the Early Years Play area. Schools made sure parents were involved in Parent Teachers Associations and governing bodies. Some schools set up parental advisory committees, extended school committees and sporting committees.

4 Delivering services: staffing

“ You need people on your side; the governors have got to get behind you because there are huge implications for governors. You need your cleaning staff on your side because the school's open with all sorts of things going on all the time.”

Schools said it was important to have a mix of staffing in extended schools. These included:

- mainstream teaching staff who were trusted and respected and could build up relationships through regular and repeated contact with parents
- dedicated workers who had different skills from teachers and were seen by some parents as more independent of teaching staff and the school, making it easier for parents who have ambivalent feelings about education to talk to them
- family support workers who gave targeted advice in school and in families' homes. Some schools had a team of family support workers, others just one individual
- paid parent-workers and volunteers who had been trained to run extended school activities. One school trained its own crèche workers from the parent body; another ran football leadership courses so parents could lead sporting activities.

Head teachers were key to driving the extended schools programme forward, but could easily face too much work that was outside their core remit.

Ways of managing head teacher overload included:

- delegating to deputies and other members of the senior management team
- having dedicated extended school staff
- having a dedicated worker with responsibility for direct family support.

5 Delivering services: multi-agency and joint working

It's working with as many agencies as we can engage with to make sure the support is there.

Schools worked with a large number of agencies:

- children's centres which were very supportive to schools
- social services: the most helpful aspects of work with social services were special-needs multi-agency meetings and forums because they helped develop contacts and links with other services
- health services: schools wanted to work with health services more than they were able to, but seven schools had a school nurse to discuss specific issues with children and parents. In three schools there was a drop-in health advice service
- youth workers and police officers based on-site
- voluntary and faith groups
- local authority adult and family learning teams
- other schools as part of a cluster or individual link
- private sector: mentioned by a third of schools, private companies mostly provided childcare or specific activities (e.g. family theatre courses).

6 Reaching and engaging parents

Some schools had a history of close parental involvement, while others did not and had difficulties engaging parents. Schools attributed this to the low value placed on education locally, negative individual experiences of school and a lack of self-esteem. Some schools had a catchment area with a high mobility rate and some children were bussed to school so parents did not have reason to come into the school regularly.

The most effective ways of publicising activities were by direct contact with parents rather than through leaflets and newsletters. Some innovative suggestions included:

- getting parents to act as ambassadors to promote activities in the community
- getting non-teaching staff such as cleaners and caretakers to make the courses known in the community
- engaging children's interests and enthusiasm for getting parents to come into the school.

Overcoming the challenges of getting parents into the school included:

- making up for lack of space by basing after-school family courses in the local secondary school or renting community facilities
- running a community café in an end-of-terrace house where parents could drop in
- co-locating with nurseries, pre-schools and children's centres
- on-site cafes, libraries, breakfast clubs and other drop-in spaces for parents
- providing transport and childcare for parents
- using family link workers to target families with alcohol and drugs problems, and those involved in crime, while their children were at pre-school
- specific events for fathers or aimed at men's interests (i.e. ICT with sport) or science and technology projects for fathers and grandfathers and their children, a Saturday *Robot Wars* event, den-building courses and a PE and maths group.

More about the study

The study was carried out in 2006 by Joanna Apps, Val Ashby and Matt Baumann for the Family and Parenting Institute. It was based on in-depth telephone interviews and supporting documentary analysis.

Local authorities that had received the most investment from government in Behaviour Improvement Programmes were selected because the impact on children's behaviour of family support and other extended services was a key element of the research. Regional extended school support staff were then asked to suggest schools within these areas which they considered examples of promising practice in family support work.

The full report is **Family Support in Extended Schools: Planning, Commissioning and Delivery**. It is available at £12.50 plus p&p from the Family and Parenting Institute: for full ordering information visit www.familyandparenting.org/publications or telephone 01787 249 287.

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