

# Engaging families in learning

A thematic inspection  
of family learning



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The photographs used in this report were taken before Covid-19 restrictions were in place.



Shift in emphasis away from the relationship between parents and schools  
Focus on relationship between parents and their child's learning

PARENTS INVOLVED in the LIFE and WORK of the SCHOOL

# PARENTAL involvement

Parents and teachers working as partners



# FAMILY Learning

FAMILIES LEARNING TOGETHER



Intergenerational LEARNING



Progression



Inclusive

SHARED ACTIVITIES are designed to enable parents to learn how to support their child's learning



ACHIEVEMENT



MEANINGFUL and planned



NEEDS LED



OUTCOME-FOCUSED



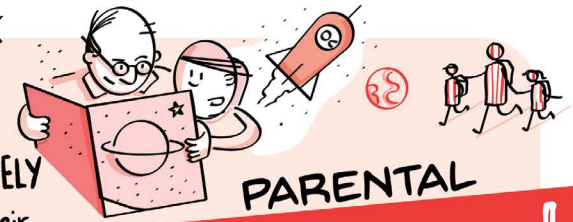
LEARNING at home  
Everyday activities

THE LEARNING which HAPPENS in the HOME, OUTDOORS and/or in the COMMUNITY



Builds on what families already do to help children's learning

PARENTS ACTIVELY INVOLVED in their CHILD'S LEARNING



# PARENTAL engagement

Supportive home learning environment



SCHOOL



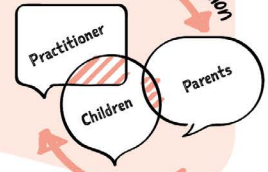
OUTDOORS



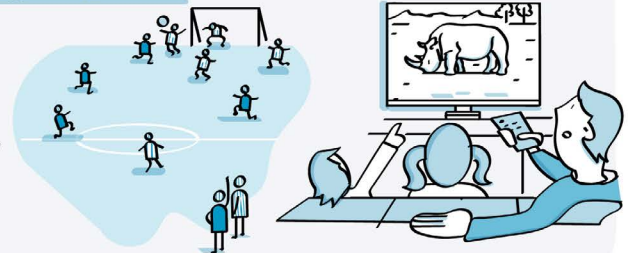
at HOME



Supported by discussion



Including organised or active learning opportunities





# Foreword



“It is a lovely concentrated time with my daughter, a special time. It has made me bond more with her.”  
*(parent)*

Family learning is an important way of engaging parents, children and young people in learning. Family learning facilitates increased parental participation and engagement, improves school attendance, reduces persistent absenteeism and can increase pupils’ attainment. Parents also benefit through skills development, progression into further education opportunities, increased employability and improved interactions within the family.

For now at least, we are living, learning and working in unusual circumstances. With the ever-changing situation with Covid-19, it is a challenging time for everyone and we recognise the pressure that children, families, schools and communities are facing. Schools, teachers and families are adapting to a completely new way of working to ensure learning continues for children and young people. During the first lockdown period the Scottish Government and Education Scotland, provided a range of practical advice through the Parents’ Club online resource and Parentzone Scotland to support parents and families with learning at home. Education Scotland also launched Scotland Learns to support parents and practitioners. Education Scotland continues to work alongside local authorities, schools and partners to help parents engage in their children’s learning.

This national thematic inspection of family learning was carried out before the closure of schools in March 2020. Whilst the findings relate to a different and more familiar time, many of the activities and programmes evidenced here will still be useful as part of education recovery. Family learning, parental engagement, parental involvement and learning at home are perhaps more important now in ensuring that schools and partners, alongside parents, can improve outcomes for children and young people. We are all learning and adapting to new ways of working. I hope that the findings contained in this report will help family learning flourish in the future as we move forward together.



Gayle Gorman  
HM Chief Inspector  
of Education  
February 2021

# Introduction



## Background to the thematic inspection

Family learning is an important way of engaging parents, children and young people in learning. In 2016, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government published a Review of family learning supporting excellence and equity. In its conclusions, the report says:

“Family learning also facilitates increased parental participation and engagement, improved school attendance, reduces persistent absenteeism and can increase pupils’ attainment. The wider outcomes of family learning are shown through skills development, employability, progression into further education opportunities, and interactions within the family, as well as improvements in parental confidence and parenting skills.”

The report also highlighted that:

“improving and increasing ways in which parents and families can be equal partners in their children’s learning at home, school and in communities is crucial to raising attainment for all and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.”

Evidence gathered from school and community learning and development (CLD) inspections, and the inspection of Scottish Attainment Challenge authorities, shows an increase in the range of family learning being offered to support children’s learning. We also know from the research that engagement in family learning can help support life chances of those families experiencing particular challenges. Family learning can also lead to stronger home-school links which helps to improve outcomes for learners.

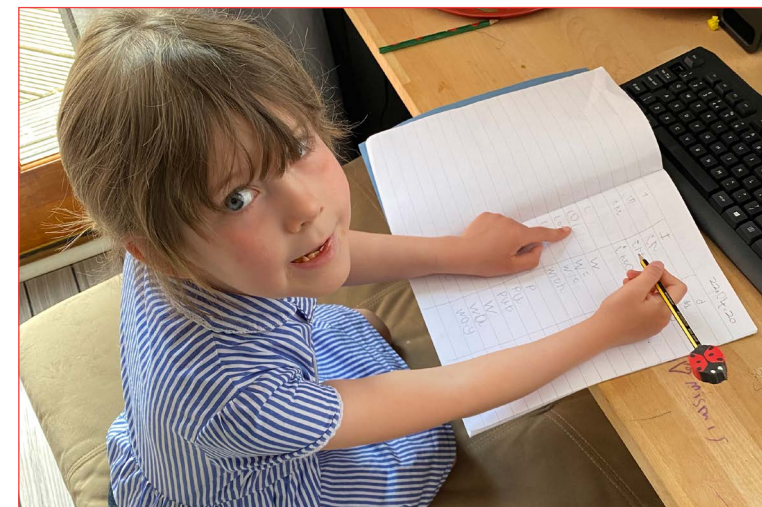
Education Scotland published a report on its Thematic Inspection of Empowerment for Parent and Pupil Participation in June 2019. As part of this report, we considered ‘How well do schools engage parents and the community in the life of the school and their child’s learning to improve outcomes for children and young people?’. The key findings in the report provide some additional background to this inspection of family learning. Those that relate to engaging families in learning, and in particular parental involvement and parental engagement, are extracted below.

### Strengths

- Positive relationships and high levels of trust between schools, parents and partners.
- Increasing range of methods used by schools to improve parental engagement in children’s and young people’s learning.
- Involvement of pupils and parents in creating and reviewing school vision, values and aims relevant to the context of the school within its community.
- Commitment of Parent Councils and other parent groups to support and be actively involved in school improvement.

### Aspects for improvement

- Build on current approaches and further develop ways for pupils and parents to participate meaningfully in the life and work of the school.
- Involve pupils, parents and partners more in curriculum design and evaluating the impact of curriculum change.
- Strengthen further the involvement of parents in their child’s learning.



When taken together, the findings from the ‘Thematic Inspection of Empowerment for Parent and Pupil Participation’, along with the findings in this report, help to tell the overall story of how schools are working to develop further their partnerships with parents.



## Scope of the thematic inspection of family learning

The purpose of this national thematic inspection was to gather more in depth information and evidence around approaches to family learning. We wanted to explore the impact of schools and other settings working with families to improve learning and achievement. We also wanted to identify the key features of highly-effective practice in engaging families in learning and to provide examples of quality family learning which are helping to secure better outcomes for children and young people.

We asked local authorities to nominate up to three schools or settings who offer family learning activities or programmes. HM Inspectors then selected and carried out a total of 41 visits to a range of primary, secondary and special schools, and early learning and childcare (ELC) and Community Learning and Development (CLD) settings during January and February 2020.

Evidence was gathered for each of the following areas:

### 1. Engaging families in family learning activities

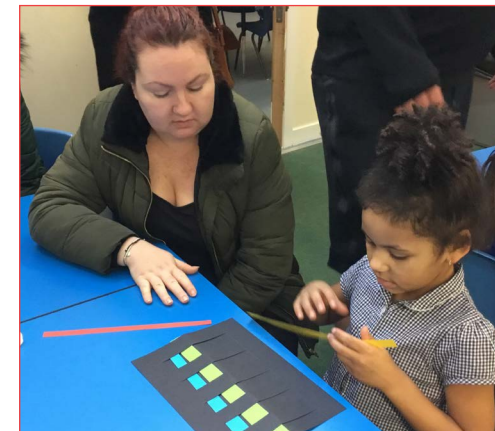
This included a focus on:

- how establishments and settings identify families who will benefit from their family learning activities
- the aims of family learning activities and programmes
- the types of family learning activities and how families are involved in their design and delivery
- approaches to supporting families to sustain their engagement in family learning activities.

### 2. How are families benefiting from family learning activities?

This included a focus on:

- approaches to measuring the impact of family learning on the outcomes for children, young people and their families
- the ways that success in family learning is celebrated
- how establishments and settings will continue to develop their approaches to family learning.



Establishments and settings visited were asked to provide their own self-evaluation on these two areas. This was used as a starting point for gathering evidence. During the visits HM Inspectors observed a range of parental engagement and family learning activities and programmes, and looked at a sample of relevant documentation. We spoke to:

**474**  
parents or  
carers

**292**  
children and  
young people

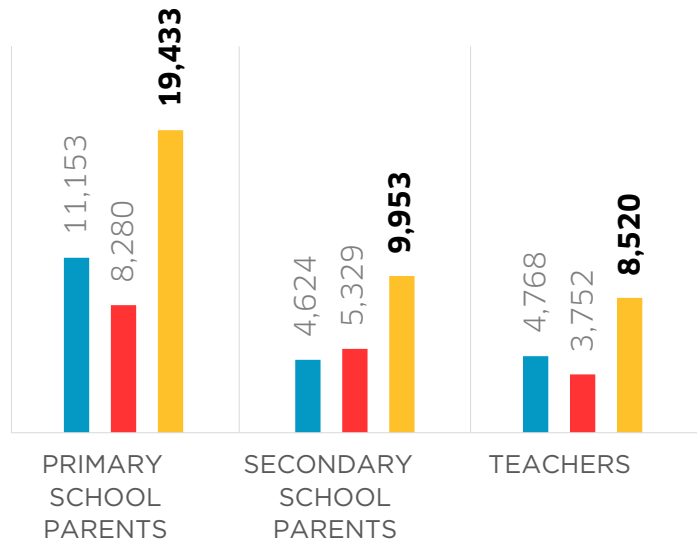
**429**  
staff

**191**  
partners

### Supporting evidence from pre-inspection questionnaires

We have also drawn on relevant information taken from the pre-inspection questionnaire data from the 2018-2019 and 2019-20 academic years. The results are based on the sample of schools inspected between August 2018 and March 2020 and the questions that stakeholders chose to answer. Therefore, the results are not a nationally representative sample. Where terms of quantity are used, these are based on the proportion of respondents who 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' with the statement.

The pre-inspection questionnaire statements are based on the following number of responses.



**Academic Year**

- 2018-2019
- 2019-2020
- Total

\* Includes usable questionnaire responses from schools inspected in 2019-20, as well as schools where questionnaire data had been gathered prior to the suspension of our inspection programme in March 2020, but where the inspection did not subsequently take place.



## Engaging families in learning – definitions

It is important to note that HM Inspectors encountered various levels of understanding in relation to the terminology associated with engaging families in learning. There is unlikely to be a single reason for this. However, it should be acknowledged that schools and other settings often include a wide range of activities within their definition of family learning. Ultimately, knowing what to label an activity is not always necessary, although having a clear understanding of the purpose of an activity and what is to be achieved is essential.

Throughout this report there are examples of family learning, parental engagement, parental involvement and activities designed to support learning at home. Where possible, we differentiate between family learning, parental engagement, parental involvement and learning at home within our findings.

The following definitions describe the variety of work going on to engage families in learning. These definitions are taken from the [Engaging parents and families - A toolkit for practitioners](#) on Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub. A further explanation of these terms is included in [Learning together: national action plan on parental involvement, engagement, family learning and learning at home 2018-2021](#).



**Family Learning:** 'Family Learning encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning. 'Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage'. (Family Learning Network, 2016)



**Parental Engagement:** 'Parental engagement can be considered as active involvement in learning. Such learning can take place in a variety of settings including early learning and childcare settings (ELC) or schools, community, through family learning and at home.' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014)



**Parental Involvement:** 'Parental involvement is about supporting pupils and their learning. It is about parents and teachers working together in partnership to help children become more confident learners'. (Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006)



**Learning at home:** 'Learning at home is the learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. It can take place through everyday activities that families already do and can overlap with aspects of organised or active learning activities'. (Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network, 2018)

# Engaging families in family learning activities

## This includes a focus on:

- how establishments and settings identify families who will benefit from their family learning activities
- the aims of family learning activities and programmes
- the types of family learning activities and how families are involved in their design and delivery
- approaches to supporting families to sustain their engagement in family learning activities.

## Key Messages:

Schools and settings that have fostered strong relationships with parents are more able to progress on to family learning. Helping parents to tackle a wide range of issues, for example, their children's sleep, behaviour and mental health can also be an important step towards participation in family learning.

Almost all staff and partners have a very good understanding of their socio-economic context and how this impacts on families.

Family learning is strongest when it is planned well and identified as a priority as part of strategic improvement planning.

In the majority of schools, the main aim of family learning and parental engagement is to build the capacity of parents to support their child's learning.

Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is supporting schools to extend their family learning approaches.

Parents should be more involved in designing and delivering family learning activities to ensure that the activities are truly reflective of their needs and interests.

Greater consideration is needed to identify learning outcomes for parents as well as for children.



“I have developed a better understanding of the importance of sharing stories and rhyme with my child.”  
(parent)

Most establishments have clear aims for family learning relevant to their context. For example, in primary schools situated in areas of high deprivation, there is a clear focus on improving outcomes for families who are challenged by poverty and disadvantage. Across schools, aims include raising attainment, improving attendance, and increasing parental engagement and involvement. A few schools have used the Family Learning quality indicator from *How good is our school?* (4th edition) to better inform their self-evaluation. In the strongest examples we visited, family learning is a priority in the school improvement plan and, in a few cases, the local authority's Scottish Attainment Challenge plan. We can see from the examples in Scottish Attainment Challenge authorities that a strategic approach to developing family learning at local authority level is highly-effective. Schools and settings in other local authorities are likely to benefit from a more strategic approach to their provision of family learning as part of their parental engagement strategy. A few schools and ELC settings visited would benefit from being clearer about what they want to achieve through family learning. Being clear about their aims would assist them in evaluating the impact of their work more effectively.

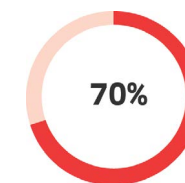
In the majority of schools visited, family learning and parental engagement aims are focused on building the knowledge and skills of parents to support their child's learning. In most ELC settings and primary schools, regular contact with parents helps to strengthen the relationship between home and school. These settings and schools provide a welcoming place where families are supported to engage with their child's early development and learning. Almost all secondary schools are at an early stage of developing family learning. Current approaches range from providing opportunities for parents to better understand what young people are learning to support with homework, for example, through parents in partnership programmes. Secondary schools should consider how to progress from parental engagement and involvement to creating opportunities for young people and adults to learn together. Within the community settings we visited, the aims of family learning are clearly stated. Partners work together well to deliver a range of family learning programmes aimed at reducing social isolation, building confidence and raising aspiration.



In Dundee City Council, the Multicultural Parent and Child Group aims to engage families where parents are learning English. During lockdown, this learning moved online using the 'Learn English Dundee' social media pages. There was a high level of engagement with learners sharing their own stories and knowledge as well as learning from the information shared online by staff.

#### Primary pupils

My homework helps me to understand and improve my work in school. **Most Strongly agree or agree..**







In West Dunbartonshire Council, a community chef is working with families in schools to improve cooking skills. In the Sauchie and Fishcross 'mini-cluster', parents and children cook together then repeat the recipes at home to encourage healthier eating.

In Clackmannanshire Council, families make good use of the outdoor environment to learn together and try new and challenging activities. An allotment project in Dundee supports families to learn together and make meals with their own produce.

Almost all staff and partners know their children, young people and families well. There is a very good understanding of their socio-economic context in relation to poverty and disadvantage and the challenges that families face. Staff and partners use demographic data and local knowledge to design strategies to support families effectively. As a result, family learning programmes and activities are almost always targeted. In a few instances, family learning is a universal offer with some aspects of targeting. This helps to widen the offer to families whilst reducing the stigma that can be associated with a targeted approach.

A majority of schools are using some of their PEF or external funding, in addition to their core budget, to support family learning. Schools often use this funding to employ additional staff to work with and support families in a variety of ways. A few ELC settings now have larger staff numbers and open for longer hours as a result of the ELC expansion. This has increased their capacity and enabled them to develop a more flexible approach to parental engagement and family learning. Schools will need to consider how to sustain their current approaches should there be a reduction in the availability of additional funding. Otherwise, there is a risk that the positive impacts on families will be reduced. Strengthened partnership working between schools, CLD and third sector partners could help to sustain approaches to family learning in the longer term.

A wide range of family learning programmes are offered in schools and ELC settings. Schools and settings that have worked have worked well to establish positive relationships with families through parental engagement are more able to progress on to family learning. 'Stay and play' sessions at start or end of the day, mostly in ELC settings of, are encouraging parents to reinforce what their child is learning. Parents and children also benefit from borrowing resources such as 'story sacks' to reinforce learning at home.

Food and cooking is a key element in many family learning activities and can provide an accessible method of developing skills in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. In a few cases this also helps to address food poverty. Family learning and other intergenerational work is engaging different generations in learning. For example, grandparents volunteer in a few schools to support learning. There are also examples of grandparents participating in activities when the parent is unavailable to attend due to work or other commitments. As a result of engaging with members of the extended family, the links between home and school are strengthened further. On a few of the visits, we observed some other intergenerational work, for example, children socialising and participating in activities with residents in a local care home. While not considered as ‘family learning’ activities, these intergenerational experiences help children to develop valuable skills and attributes in a community setting.

Generally, more mothers participate in family learning activities. However, more fathers attend outdoor learning or when the activities have a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Practical activities, such as doing science experiments, playing football, making dens and building camp fires are particularly popular with dads and grandads.

Structured programmes of family learning and parental engagement with a set menu of activities also feature across schools, ELC and community settings. These are often delivered in partnership with external organisations. These programmes are often received well and lead to adults gaining recognition and qualifications.

“The less structured approach to homework has helped my son to engage in more meaningful learning at home. It is like chalk and cheese with him wanting to engage with his work.”

*(parent)*



Young people from Williamwood High School teach mathematics to members of the local community. As a result, they are learning new skills and supporting adult learners to gain qualifications.

#### Primary Parents

The school gives me advice on how to support my child's learning at home.  
Strongly agree or agree.

82%

#### Secondary Parents

The school gives me advice on how to support my child's learning at home.  
Strongly agree or agree..

59%



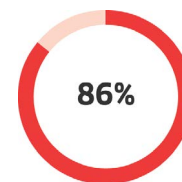
At the Columba 1400 group in Alloa, programmes are delivered at a pace well-suited to the needs and interests of the participants. Parents describe what they have learned and their intended next steps. Regular attendance, active participation and opportunities for progression are important features in successful family learning programmes.

Effective family support underpins much of the provision we saw in schools. Helping parents to tackle a range of issues, such as children's sleep patterns, behaviour and mental health, can be an important step to increasing their participation in family learning. In a few schools and other settings, staff are supporting individuals and groups of parents to help remove barriers that impact on their ability to engage in their child's learning. For example, supporting parents' mental health or with overcoming financial hardship. This is important work, but care is needed to ensure that teachers are not themselves substituting for youth, community, family or social workers who can be valuable partners in supporting families. Partnership working is key to achieving shared outcomes that benefit families.

Supporting families to sustain their involvement in family learning is key to its success. Where the planned outcomes are clear and relationships are positive, families are more likely to continue their involvement. Whilst a majority of schools and ELC settings identify learning outcomes for the children, the intended outcomes for parents and families are not clearly set out. This makes it challenging for schools and settings to evaluate the full impact of family learning. Where this is most effective ELC settings, schools work with their partners to establish clear outcomes which they can measure and reflect on to improve their programmes further. As yet, there were only a few examples of parents taking a role in leading the learning. To ensure that activities are truly reflective of families' needs and interests, and to sustain their involvement, parents could be more involved in the design and delivery of family learning activities. Ideally, a culture of equal partnership and co-production should be fostered.

#### Teachers

The school's arrangements for engaging parents in their child's learning are effective. **Strongly agree or agree.**





# How are families benefiting from family learning activities?

## This includes a focus on:

- approaches to measuring the impact of family learning on the outcomes for children, young people and their families
- the ways that success in family learning is celebrated
- how establishments and settings will continue to develop their approaches to family learning.

## Key Messages:

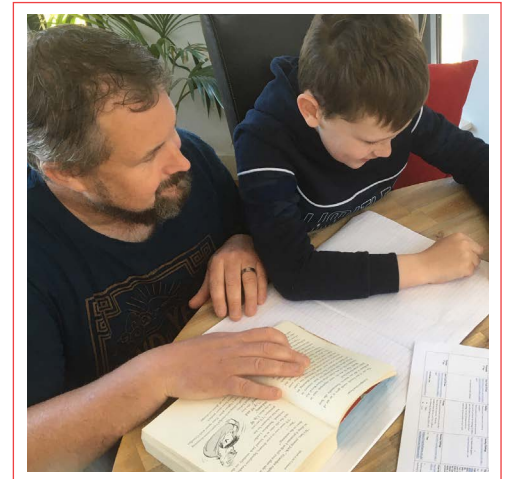
In ELC settings and primary schools, effective family learning is leading to improvement in literacy, language and communication skills.

Where parental engagement has increased, linked to family learning, parents are better able to support their child with homework and learning at home.

Adult learners are gaining in confidence and self-esteem as a result of their participation in family learning.

Families should be more involved in evaluating family learning.

ELC settings, schools and partners would benefit from a clearer shared understanding of family learning and how it differs from parental engagement. This will strengthen their capacity to design activities that meet the learning needs of families.



“Relationships are key to everything we do. Relationship building starts at Primary 1 with parents and children. We get a lot of positive feedback from parents that this is working.”  
*(headteacher)*

As a result of participation in family learning, children are more settled in school, and relationships and children's readiness to learn is improving. 'Soft starts' and 'shared finishes' in schools are encouraging parents to engage with their child's learning. Also, in a few of the schools, attendance is improving and lateness is reducing. Across ELC and primary schools, parental engagement and family learning is contributing to improvements in literacy, language and communication skills.

Parental engagement, focused on families interacting with their child's learning, is resulting in better support at home in most of the schools visited. In a few schools, this is leading to increased parental participation in events and improved support with homework. In ELC settings, staff now have stronger relationships with parents, making it easier for them to deal with potentially challenging situations. Practical advice about sleeping, eating and behaviour is helping parents to cope better. Parents in the secondary schools we visited are keen to support young peoples' learning. By participating in lessons, parents are able to develop a better understanding of career pathways.

Family learning activities and structured family learning programmes offer important opportunities for adults to learn. Most adults who participate, report feeling more empowered, more confident and have increased levels of self-esteem. As a result of family learning activities, a few parents are progressing to further learning, volunteering or employment. A few are achieving qualifications in childcare, sign language and youth work. For many of these parents, this is their first experience of gaining formal recognition for their learning.

A variety of approaches are being used by schools and other settings to show the impact of family learning. Overall the gathering of evidence is currently limited. A few schools visited are using questionnaires, tracking systems and observations. For example, an ELC centre uses a wellbeing web to measure progression and to demonstrate improved parent and child bonding. A few schools and other settings are using case studies, surveys and wellbeing indicators to assess progress.

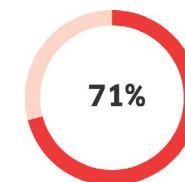


“We get loads of useful information to help children learn, for example with reading. We get tips that we parents hadn't thought about”

*(parent)*

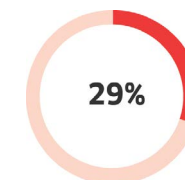
#### Primary Parents

The school organises activities where my child and I can learn together.  
Strongly agree or agree.



#### Secondary Parents

The school organises activities where my child and I can learn together.  
Strongly agree or agree.



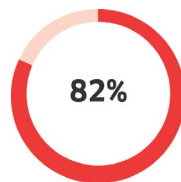


“We are working together with the parent, that’s important, helps relationships blossom, parents feel listened to, this also changes their relationships with other services.”

*(CLD worker)*

#### Teachers

I have regular opportunities to help shape the curriculum through discussions with colleagues, parents and partners. **Strongly agree or agree.**



However, there is scope to increase the involvement of families in the evaluation of family learning programmes and activities beyond gathering feedback. Most of the CLD staff we visited use management information data to chart the impact of family learning programmes. A few local authorities report outcomes through their CLD Plans or through their Scottish Attainment Challenge governance arrangements. A few schools and other settings are also using external evaluation to demonstrate their impact. Longer term approaches to tracking of the impact of family learning would be helpful.

Most schools and ELC settings visited have good arrangements to recognise and celebrate the successes of family learning. These include award ceremonies, assemblies, social media postings and praise postcards. In CLD, adult learners’ achievements are celebrated at annual award ceremonies. Across schools and other settings, there is a need to recognise and celebrate parents’ successes more as well as those of children. Increasing the use of recognised awards to celebrate success in family learning would also help to enhance current approaches. For example, the Family John Muir Award offers an opportunity for families to work towards a shared goal in the outdoors.

Across all visits, HM Inspectors found a wide range of activities identified as family learning. However, in schools and ELC settings, the majority of these were examples of parental engagement or involvement, or activities to support learning at home. Schools, ELC settings and their partners would benefit from establishing a shared understanding of family learning as distinct from parental engagement. This would help ensure that programmes and activities are designed to encourage family members to learn together. This would also help to increase the focus more clearly on meeting the learning needs of families in addition to how parents can support their child’s learning. Involving families more regularly in planning and self-evaluation could also improve their role as active participants in their own learning and development.



# Summary of findings



In many areas across Scotland, family learning is not yet well developed. Many schools and several CLD services do not yet offer family learning within their context or they are at an early stage of developing family learning. From our visits we have identified the following strengths and aspects for improvement. A visual representation of the key features of highly-effective family learning can be found on the next page.

## Strengths

- Most schools and ELC settings where family learning is taking place are building and sustaining positive relationships with parents. This is key to the success of family learning activities and programmes.
- Family learning in schools is starting to improve outcomes in terms of attainment and achievement. Families facing challenges are learning new skills to help them address issues in their lives.
- Children and young people have increased confidence, self-esteem and engagement in their learning as a result of parental engagement and family learning.
- A few adults engaged in family learning are gaining qualifications, progressing to volunteering and in a few cases employment.

## Aspects for improvement

- Developing a stronger understanding of the key features of family learning would help schools, ELC settings and their partners to set out clearer aims and outcomes.
- There is scope for schools, ELC settings and their partners to work together in a more coordinated way to help them achieve their shared objectives.
- Partners need now to establish robust arrangements that enable them to report on the impacts of family learning, and to celebrate and disseminate highly-effective practice.
- The sustainability of family learning needs to be considered as part of planning activities and programmes.
- Progression routes for adult learners needs to be more integral to family learning activities and programmes. Effective partnership working can help to strengthen this.

# Key features of high-quality family learning

## 1 TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS

All family learning begins with relationships based on trust.



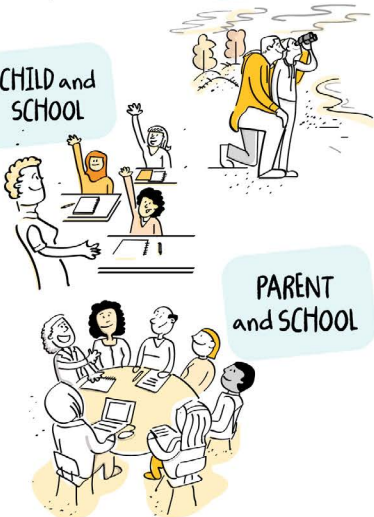
Families are more likely to engage, and stay engaged, when they have a trusting relationship with those who facilitate the learning.

STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN

CHILD and PARENT

CHILD and SCHOOL

PARENT and SCHOOL

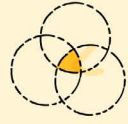


## 2 RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES

Activity design based on



SELF-EVALUATION



and EVIDENCE APPROACH

Needs are identified in various ways including DIALOGUE with FAMILIES, STAFF and PARTNERS.



WIDE RANGE OF DATA



used by staff and partners, including school level data, and local demographic and socio-economic.

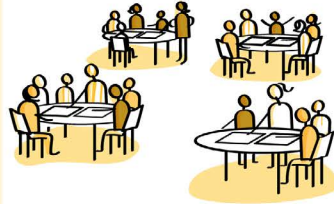


WORKING TOGETHER

to consider the needs of both children and adults when planning, delivering and evaluating family learning.

## 3 INCLUSIVE

family learning is offered as a universal provision with OPEN ACCESS TO REMOVE BARRIERS, and to enable and sustain participation.



CONSIDERATION OF:

Levels of literacy and numeracy



Potentially negative educational experiences of parents

Transport



Childcare

## 4 PURPOSE, PLANNING AND PROGRESSION

Family learning is well planned with a clear long-term aim, short-term outcomes and appropriate

TIMESCALES.



Staff and partners work together with children and families to DESIGN and PLAN ACTIVITIES and LEARNING.

FROM THE OUTSET, careful consideration is given to how success is monitored, measured and evaluated.

CONSIDERATION to how children and young people, and also adults, will progress in their learning.

For parents, this may include further learning, volunteering or employment.



## ACHIEVEMENT

### 5 RECOGNITION

The ACHIEVEMENTS Children and their parents are recognised and celebrated.



Families recognise their own learning and achievements including the skills and attributes they are developing.



RECOGNISED AWARDS AND QUALIFICATIONS ARE USED TO ENHANCE FAMILY LEARNING.



## Case studies

As part of this thematic inspection, evidence from HM Inspectors' visits to establishments and settings has been developed into case studies. These case studies provide examples of quality family learning which are helping to secure better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

In responding to the outcomes of this thematic inspection it is necessary to take account of the impact of the current situation. Covid-19 measures continue to prevent parents, in most cases, from physically accessing school buildings and educational settings to allow face-to-face engagement. As a result, teachers, schools, CLD workers and families have had to adapt their approaches and will need to continue to do so during educational recovery.

To help with this, we have re-visited some of the case studies highlighted in the report. HM Inspectors were impressed by how schools in particular have responded to difficult circumstances and adapted and developed their approaches to family learning. We did note, that in a few cases, external factors outside of their control have restricted what schools and other settings have been able to do.



**“I now feel joyful  
about learning”**  
*(parent)*



**Forthview Primary School , The City of Edinburgh Council,** has a very well-established approach to supporting parents through parental engagement, family learning and adult learning. They recognise that for some of their families, parents need support as well as children. A full-time family support teacher provides regular and effective communication with families at the school gate and during a range of programmes. These include a partnership with publishers to enable children and parents to write books which focus on key topics, such as a residential experience. A recent development is trauma informed learning programmes for parents. Parents describe these interventions as life-changing and in a few cases life-saving. As a result their children are more settled, secure and ready to engage in learning.

Engaging families in learning during educational recovery

From the start of lockdown, staff at Forthview Primary School have retained their engagement with families to support the wellbeing of children and their parents and carers. Staff delivered food parcels and resource packs to around 70 families, with 35-50 going out every week from the start of lockdown until the end of the first week of schools returning in August. Since schools have reopened they have been providing around 130 hot weekend meals each Friday as part of the Edinburgh Covid-19 response. Between the start of lockdown and the end of June staff hand-delivered weekly learning packs and provided daily links to learning sites through social media. Staff use a mix of regular phone calls, one to one meetings, daily school gate discussions and social media to maintain high levels of engagement despite the restrictions of Covid-19. The family support teacher has regular discussions with the parents in the trauma informed learning programme and has moved some elements online. Staff now plan to expand their use of learning journals to all year groups. This should support parents to be more informed about and included in their child's learning.





**Carronshore Primary School in Falkirk Council** provides a range of opportunities for parents to learn with their children including science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes, and a parent and pupil book group. They work closely with the CLD worker to identify families who would benefit from bespoke packages of support. These are tailored to individual need and are developed alongside families. The school prides itself on the relationships that it is building with families. This is leading to better behaviour in school, improved attendance and improvements in children's reading. Parents are now more confident in supporting their child's learning outside of school.

Engaging families in learning during educational recovery

From the start of lockdown and into the recovery phase Carronshore Primary School has built successfully on its very positive relationships with parents. School staff and the CLD worker engaged regularly with parents and families through phone calls, text and email with a clear focus on supporting learning and health and wellbeing. Teachers posted regularly work for children using video messages through an app. Paper copies were distributed to families to complement the approach. Parents were encouraged to support their children through play, reading and outdoor activities. Most children, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic have settled back into school. As a result, the impact on learning has not been as great as predicted with the majority of children progressing well. Re-arranging the school day by removing bells and extending the time for arriving at school is now creating a more relaxed atmosphere.



**Stirling Inclusion Support Service and Fairview School,** work very effectively to support families who are at risk of isolation due to the additional challenges their children face. Staff treat parents as equal partners. They work with families from across their local authority area and beyond to understand their needs and to work with parents to meet these needs. This includes individual family and small group family learning programmes. This increases parents' confidence to help their child with learning, supports parents to cope with life challenges and enables families, including siblings, to learn together.

Engaging families in learning during educational recovery

Stirling Inclusion Support Service (SISS) have remained connected with families, meeting their evolving needs during the pandemic. Prior to lockdown SISS ensured all families had digital connectivity and were able to facilitate ongoing multi-agency support through virtual 'teams around the child' meetings. Staff delivered free school meals twice weekly, including during school holidays, along with learning resources, activities, food parcels and wellbeing packs. As part of the recovery phase, the family worker provides individualised, targeted support to families with garden visits, walks or meetings in cafes rather than home visits. SISS also continues to be flexible, responding to the needs of families to offer the best possible support. A trauma informed approach is now even more critical, enabling SISS to assist in recovery for families both now and in the future. Looking forward SISS intend to capitalise on experience gained by adopting a mix of online and face to face contact.



**Mary Russell School in Renfrewshire Council** is an all-through school where family learning is an ongoing and well-prioritised activity. The ethos and vision for the school is focused on getting to know parents and involving family members in the education of their children. Targeted family learning has been in place for four years. Pupil Equity Funding supports aspects of a 'parents in partnership' model through additional resources such as staffing and materials. This model targets S1 to S3, with a focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The programme involves the school working with a range of partners to deliver bespoke sessions to parents over a six week period. Parents and carers have the opportunity to work alongside their children and young people to share learning experiences across curricular areas. Sessions include, digital learning, physical education, cookery, home economics, mindfulness and mental health first aid. These activities are building parents understanding of the school curriculum, expectations and is developing their wider knowledge and skills, which are being applied in a family setting.

Engaging families in learning during educational recovery

During lockdown, Mary Russell School's communications with parents increased significantly. Weekly calls to families to support learning, pupil engagement, family support, advice and signposting parents to other services were frequent. Since returning in August they have been unable to deliver the Parents in Partnership (PiP) model in school. However, to support transition and recovery they created a Parent Zone area on the school website to support children's transition back into school. The Parent Zone area includes transition videos and information packs for families. Interim reporting has replaced formal parent interviews, which has provided staff with the opportunity to have more focused discussions with parents remotely. Learning from this experience, the school plan to re-establish the PiP programme in 2021. The programme will have more of an emphasis on bespoke individual parent-learner-teacher programmes. They also plan to continue using information technology as a method to engage with families remotely.



**Family learning programmes in Midlothian Council CLD** have clear outcomes. Participation is positive overall and most programmes are run in conjunction with partners. Across all family learning programmes there is a clear focus on a partnership with families. As a result, CLD managers can demonstrate impact on families, particularly around improving communication and listening skills. The resilience and capacity of learners is evident and there are strong examples of learners establishing peer and self-help groups. As a result of the supportive and nurturing approach, most adults and children are progressing to positive destinations.

Engaging families in learning during educational recovery

Midlothian CLD family learning provision has been severely curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions due to the lack of access to schools where almost all family learning is based. This is restricted further by the lack of availability of other council buildings. Some limited family learning took place digitally during the lockdown such as arts and crafts groups and parental learning courses. Forest schools programmes have continued, albeit in a more limited way. The local authority have been successful in gaining a number of devices through the Connected Scotland fund. CLD staff are supporting parents and families to access these on a one to one basis.

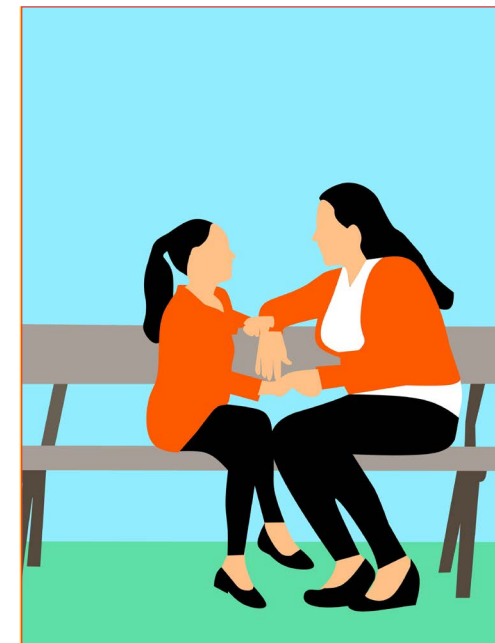




**Loudoun Academy in East Ayrshire Council** engages parents in their child's learning through the well planned Parents in Partnership (PiP) programme. Parents are increasing their understanding about the way young people are educated in today's classrooms. This is leading to improved engagement with the school and better relationships between teachers and parents. Young people are better able to talk to their parents about school life. The school works very effectively with parents and successfully draws on their views, expertise and inputs throughout the year. Parents make suggestions to help make the PiP programme relevant, stimulating and enjoyable. These are acted on by the school in order to improve the programme further.

Engaging families in learning during educational recovery

The PiP scheduled for May 2020 at Loudoun Academy was cancelled due to Covid-19 and the school had to focus on other strategic priorities. However, there was good interaction with parents and families daily based on needs as opposed to a formal part of the PiP programme. As a result of restrictions on visiting school buildings, the school are planning to deliver the 2021 PiP programme online. Recording of these will increase access to a wider group of parents.

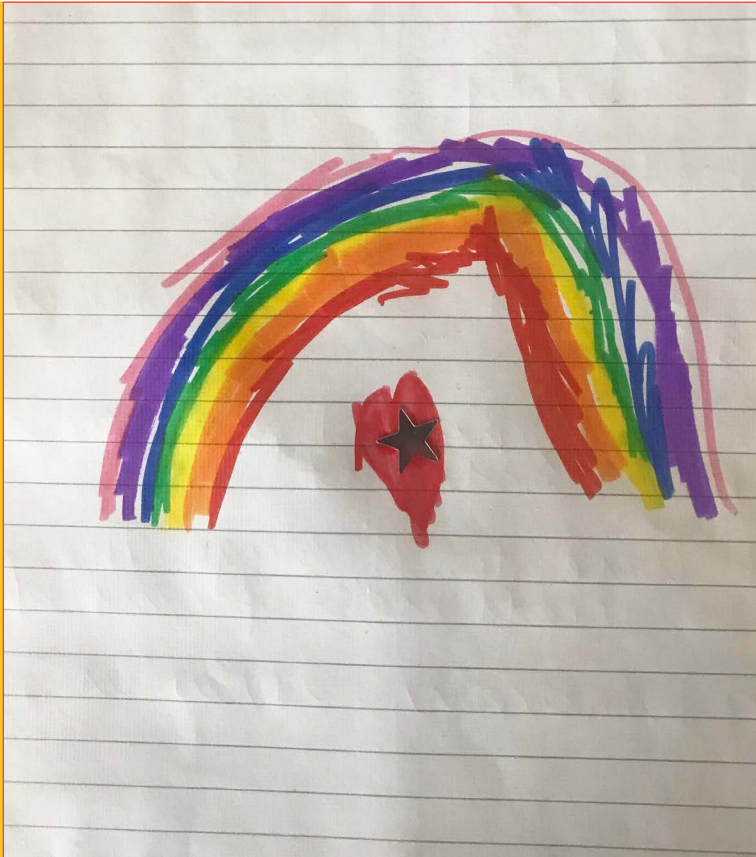


**The Rainbow Family Learning Centre in Inverclyde Council** benefits from a dedicated community wing for family learning activities. Positive relationships between staff and parents is key to identifying the needs of families. Family learning activities have multiple aims including developing the skills of parents and children to raise attainment and address barriers to learning. Programmes such as Bookbug, Eat Better Feel Better, 'drop a dress size' and Paths for All programmes are engaging high numbers of families. As a result, parents are increasing in confidence and developing their skills and knowledge of healthy eating, exercising outdoors and reading and singing with their children. A few parents are progressing to supporting or leading programmes and are gaining qualifications. Parents recognise the positive impact on their children as a result of participation. This includes improved speech, communication and coordination. Adult peer to peer support out with the centre is developing into friendships and a resource for families to learn and apply different strategies. The children are also extending their friendships out with the centre and have built a transition to primary school network.

Engaging  
families in  
learning during  
educational  
recovery

The Rainbow Family Learning Centre have adapted their practice in response to the pandemic. Some classes have moved to online delivery. The health walking group continues, with parents adhering to social distancing guidelines. Bookbug now takes place virtually using pre-recordings of sessions then sharing on social media. The centre now offer online cooking classes with 100% participation by the families involved. This provides the opportunity for face to face contact and the opportunity to build positive relationships. Feedback from families has been positive. Learning from these alternative methods of delivery and support to families, staff have participated in People training. The training focuses on the online delivery of a programme they plan to implement that supports parents and children to learn together.





**Some questions to consider when planning family learning as part of education recovery:**

How can you adapt your engagement with families whilst ensuring that everyone is safe?

How can family learning promote wellbeing and help families to deal with the impact of Covid-19 on their lives?

How will your future work with families help you to meet the needs of those most disadvantaged by Covid-19?

What contingencies have you put in place to communicate with parents, answer questions and help to address any anxieties they have?

How can you work together with parents and children to plan family learning that takes account of the impact of the pandemic on families and communities?



Name of setting or school	Local authority
Bucksburn Academy	Aberdeen City Council
Ellon Academy	Aberdeenshire Council
Johnshaven School	Aberdeenshire Council
Brechin High School Cluster	Angus Council
Cardross Primary School	Argyll and Bute Council
Alloa Academy Cluster	Clackmannanshire Council
Sauchie and Fishcross 'Mini-Cluster'	Clackmannanshire Council
Beattock School and Moffat Academy	Dumfries and Galloway Council
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) Team	Dundee City Council
St Francis RC Primary School	Dundee City Council
Loudoun Academy	East Ayrshire Council
Auchinairn Early Years Centre	East Dunbartonshire Council
Olivebank Children and Family Centre	East Lothian Council
Williamwood High School	East Renfrewshire Council
Carronshore Primary School	Falkirk Council
Pitreavie Primary School	Fife Council
Eastmuir Primary School	Glasgow City Council
Silverdale Nursery	Glasgow City Council
Rainbow Family Centre	Inverclyde Council
Communities and Lifelong Learning Service	Midlothian Council
Mayfield Family Learning Centre	Midlothian Council
Logie Primary School	Moray Council
Ardeer Primary School	North Ayrshire Council
Family Learning Team	North Ayrshire Council

# Schools/settings visited

## Appendix 1

Name of setting or school	Local authority
Greenfaulds High School	North Lanarkshire Council
Time for Us Programme	North Lanarkshire Council
Burray Primary School	Orkney Islands Council
Fairview School	Perth and Kinross Council
Mary Russell School	Renfrewshire Council
Burnfoot Community School	Scottish Borders Council
Mid Yell Junior High School	Shetland Islands Council
Carrick Locality Team (CLD)	South Ayrshire Council
Hollandbush Nursery School	South Lanarkshire Council
Youth, Family and Community Learning Team	South Lanarkshire Council
Stirling Inclusion Support Service	Stirling Council
Forthview Primary School	The City of Edinburgh Council
Farr High School	The Highland Council
St Eunan's Primary School	West Dunbartonshire Council
Ogilvie School Campus	West Lothian Council
St Margaret's Academy	West Lothian Council
Balivanich Primary School	Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)



# Useful links

## Appendix 2



### **National guidance and key reports**

[Review of family learning - supporting excellence and equity, December 2016](#)

[Family Learning Framework](#)

[Engaging parents and families - A toolkit for practitioners](#)

[Learning together: national action plan on parental involvement, engagement, family learning and learning at home 2018 - 2021](#)

[Reporting to Parents and Involving / Engaging Parent Councils during COVID-19](#)

### **Additional resources and examples of highly-effective practice**

[What is Family Learning?](#)

[Family Learning in North Ayrshire](#)

[Sketchnote - Todholm Primary School - Family Learning - January 2020](#)

[STEM Family Learning at Larbert High School, Falkirk](#)

[Collaborative family learning approach to working with ESOL parents through storytelling](#)

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