

## Schools and Communities

*“How can we close the gap in educational achievement without parents being part of the process? Ninety per cent of all caring is done by the parents and carers. It goes the whole way through everything. If schools don't involve parents, there isn't a relationship between the parent and the child where they can talk about issues in school...”*

**(Father)**

### Introduction

This final summary brings together the key messages from three C4EO knowledge reviews with the aim of supporting you to develop school-based services for children, young people and their families. The reviews include up-to-date evidence from research and local practice as well as the views of service managers, children, young people, parents and carers gathered in consultations organised by C4EO.

C4EO's aims to support senior managers in local authorities, their partner agencies and schools to improve the lives of children, young people and their families, by providing the best possible evidence of what works.

C4EO started its work before the Coalition Government was elected in May 2010. New policy priorities are being set by Government; however, the evidence of 'what works' in improving outcomes contained in the reviews will help you, whatever the future policy framework.

C4EO's work focused on three specific areas in relation to this topic: closing the gap in educational achievement and improving emotional resilience for children and young people with additional needs<sup>1</sup>; ensuring that all children and young people make successful transitions<sup>2</sup>; and strengthening family wellbeing and community cohesion<sup>3</sup> through extended schools. Cross-cutting themes emerging strongly from the evidence were:

- Parent and family engagement, to bring home and school closer together, is fundamental to positive outcomes for children and young people.
- Trusting relationships between school and home are at the heart of providing effective family support and building community cohesion, and include regular consultation, a respectful approach and recognising parents' strengths. As one father said 'Rather than dictating to parents, it's trying to include them'.



# Using the evidence to improve practice

## Working in strategic partnerships

Effective partnerships between different agencies, schools, families, children and young people are key, and can be promoted by:

- identifying roles, responsibilities and coordinating strategies across different partners, shared performance indicators and outcome targets
- accurate timely data about the local community to ensure a shared understanding of what is needed and inform decisions about services
- structures that promote cross service and cross professional learning, e.g. by offering multi-agency training, joint planning and pooled resources
- information sharing between agencies to ensure integrated approaches and better management of individual cases, e.g. data sharing protocols
- sharing knowledge and experience, e.g. helping schools achieve stronger community involvement by collaborating with partners who already work closely with local communities
- monitoring outcomes to learn which approaches make the most difference.

## Working with schools

- Provide support and training to encourage schools to carry out innovative activities and to operate in fields outside their traditional area of expertise, e.g. identifying children at risk who need to be referred to other services.
- Work with school leaders and teachers to ensure commitment to new ways of working.

- Encourage good communication and partnership working across the Early Years Foundation Stage sector, schools and post-16 to help develop joined-up transition strategies.
- Ensure secondary schools have strategies to engage parents.
- Motivate schools that have made less progress by disseminating good practice and hold celebration and achievement events. Facilitate shared learning through peer-to-peer support.

## Involving children, young people and families

- Ensure regular consultation with parents and carers, children and young people and the wider community. Involve them in the development of services and shaping practice and policies.
- Work with local voluntary, community and faith groups to reach parents and families who do not easily engage.
- Increase the involvement of under-represented groups on school governing bodies through, for example, a governor recruitment officer and targeted advertising.

## Service structure

School-based services vary, but there are some common principles associated with positive outcomes, including being:

- diverse – take account of different needs, backgrounds and cultural expectations
- relevant to the lives of parents and sensitive to families' needs
- holistic – consider the child and their environment, which requires coordination of services across different dimensions of a child's life

- targeted at the families and children/young people who are most likely to benefit
- part of school structures and systems, so that they receive the support of school heads and are viewed as core school business
- sustainable, funded for the long term and integrated within existing service provision.

## Delivering services

- Ensure parents know about the services on offer.
- Establish trusted intermediaries who can help to engage parents in schools and services, especially those from seldom-heard communities.
- Provide parents and carers with one key contact to link them to the services on offer, and provide continuity. Educational transition offers a good opportunity to engage with parents and carers, as they often seek information and support at this time.
- Train school staff so they are:
  - confident with all groups in the school's local community
  - equipped to deal effectively with young people's social and emotional needs during transition
  - skilled in inter-agency working, particularly identifying early evidence of children at risk of underachieving.
- Ensure family workers and parent support advisers are well trained, and adequately supervised and supported to undertake this often demanding work.



## Local practice that has made a difference

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Practice examples have been submitted to C4EO and validated against a range of criteria to determine the extent to which they have evidence of improving outcomes for children and young people. Here we summarise two validated projects and one promising practice example:

**Hertfordshire's Summer Reading Challenge** aimed to develop a reading habit and increase public library use by children and their families. All Hertfordshire primary schools received information about the project and librarians visited schools in areas of high deprivation or where library use was known to be low. It was also promoted to visually impaired children (who were encouraged to access audio books), looked after children and young carers. As a result, library use increased with 17,027 children participating in the challenge, 9,662 completing it and 706 children joining the library for the first time. The project helped children and families to view reading as a fun activity outside school and libraries as welcoming and inclusive services relevant to the whole family. It also strengthened multi-agency working. (Validated).

**The Warrington Family Support Model (WFSM)** promotes integrated working to provide support to children/young people and their families. It includes an 'Information Hub', where practitioners with concerns about a child/young person can request background information from other services' databases. There are regular meetings where practitioners who have completed a CAF (Common Assessment Framework) assessment can consult a range of professionals to identify local services. The model has reduced duplication of work, improved information sharing, helped to hold services accountable and has been positive for staff and families. During this period (2008–09), 57 per cent of families supported showed a reduction in the level of need (Validated).

The family programme delivered to 529 families at a cost of £158,000. This equates to a cost of £6 per family per week.

**In Nottingham, a Parent Counsellor** has been recruited to fulfil the role of a trusted intermediary working across 10 different primary schools. She offers both individual and group work, through one-to-one support, group therapy sessions and

after-school family play sessions. Parents who are unwilling to meet in schools can be offered support by phone or in community venues. The Parent Counsellor encourages parents to attend Life Events, which are information sessions where different agencies promote their services to families at an after-school 'roadshow'. This has shaped the way that providers link to schools and has facilitated access to the different kinds of support that families might need, for example from the housing department or welfare benefits. (Promising).

**Further details on these examples and more validated and promising local practice, can be found on the C4EO website.**

An additional example on supporting educational transitions is taken from Bryan et al (2007), cited in the C4EO Schools and Communities Knowledge Review 2 *Ensuring that all children and young people make sustained progress and remain fully engaged through all transitions between key stages.*

**The Eastbank Network for Academic, Behavioural and Learning Education (ENABLE)** project was implemented at Eastbank Academy in 2002 by the school and Glasgow City local authority. The project aimed to improve young people's transition from primary to secondary school, particularly for vulnerable and low-achieving young people, by providing them with tailored support.

Students were taught literacy and numeracy in a separate class by a primary school teacher during their first two years at secondary school to help them develop their basic skills. Pupils returned to mainstream classes in the third year. The evaluation found evidence of improvements in these pupils' Standard Grade results at the end of secondary school. Pupils also reported feeling more confident about moving into mainstream classes and fewer dropped out of school than those in a comparison group.

## Footnotes

1. Children with 'additional needs' describes a group of children who pose particular challenges to the children's services system. It includes those who are excluded or at risk of exclusion because of behavioural issues, who may or may not have additional educational support needs.
2. Educational transition includes moving between key stages, between years and between institutions.
3. Strengthening community cohesion is about finding ways to avoid the corrosive effects of intolerance and harassment: to build a mutual civility among different groups, and to ensure respect for diversity alongside a commitment to common and shared bonds.

## Reference

Bryan, R. and Treanor, M. with Hill, M. (2007) *Evaluation of pilots to improve primary and secondary school transitions*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive (available at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/163851/0044590.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/163851/0044590.pdf))

## Stay involved with C4EO

- Access the range of support and national and local data on the C4EO website and compare your data with that of other areas.
- Encourage managers to consider applying to be C4EO sector specialists.
- Use C4EO Tailored Support scheme. Discuss with your colleagues and directors of children's services whether you could use the free support from C4EO's accredited and trained experts to develop your service.
- Suggest that your organisation submits local practice examples which can be validated and placed on the C4EO website.

## Final summary and recommendations

This summary is a concise overview of C4EO's work in this theme for directors of children's services. Please visit [www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk) to download full, in-depth versions of the knowledge reviews as well as copies of this summary and other materials.