For PGCE trainees
Working in partnership

Working with parents/carers and other professionals

Self-study task 17

tda

developing people, improving young lives

Introduction to the self-study tasks

These self-study tasks are designed to help trainee teachers on PGCE courses learn more about teaching pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They can be used as stand-alone activities or to supplement and extend taught sessions on SEN and disability provided by the school or local authority.

There are 17 self-study tasks in all. Each task will take about two hours to complete, excluding practical activities.

Every Child Matters	
SST1	Inclusion and Every Child Matters
SST2	SEN and disability legislation
SST3	English as an additional language and SEN
SST4	Children's needs and development
SST5	ICT and SEN
Cognition and learning	
SST6	Moderate learning difficulties
SST7	Dyslexia and specific learning difficulties
SST8	Working memory
Behavioural, emotional and social needs	
SST9	Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
Communication and interaction	
SST10	Speech, language and communication needs
SST11	Autistic spectrum disorders
Physical and sensory impairment	
SST12	Visual impairment
SST13	Hearing impairment
SST14	Handwriting
SST15	Developmental coordination disorder/dyspraxia
Working in partnership	
SST16	Working with colleagues in school
SST17	Working with parents/carers and other professionals

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How to use the materials

This is an online resource. Some of the tasks are for you to do on your own; others are particularly suitable to do working with a partner.

Where some of the tasks ask you to record information you need to print out the relevant material first. Other tasks may involve using the internet, which gives you access to rich sources of information about SEN and disability and online forums for additional advice.

Each task includes the following elements:

• the professional standards addressed

• learning outcomes

• an opportunity to explore the concepts, definitions and research findings most relevant to the topic

• ideas for implementing the national curriculum inclusion statement in relation to the topic, including target setting, practical strategies, the role of additional adults and pupil grouping

• practical activities – including action research, child study and class observation

• resources – including books and websites

• an opportunity to evaluate your progress against the outcomes and plan your next steps.

A useful resource to support your studies is **Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act in Schools and Early Years Settings (DfES, 2006)**. It is available free to all schools and there should be a copy in your training institution or school. (If you haven't got a copy, you can order one using the link.)

It should be read in conjunction with **Promoting Disability Equality in Schools (DfES, 2006)** – which you can view, download or order by following the link.

Evidence and sources of information

As you work through these self-study tasks, try to keep a critical and evaluative attitude. Much of the understanding we have of what works, or doesn't work, in relation to meeting the needs of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities has not been fully researched.

Remember:

• many interventions suggested for one group of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities will often benefit other groups of pupils, including those without SEN and/or disabilities

• the quickest way to find out what to do is often to ask the pupil or their parent/carer what they think works.

Literature reviews of 'what works' in relation to literacy and mathematics for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities, which has been investigated in some depth, are available at: **www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR554.pdf**

Other sources of information are listed at the end, under 'Resources and references'. You can use these to follow up and learn in greater depth about the material covered in this self-study task.

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Professional standards addressed

Q4 Communicate effectively with children, young people, colleagues, parents and carers.

Q5 Recognise and respect the contribution that colleagues, parents and carers can make to the development and well-being of children and young people, and to raising their levels of attainment.

Q6 Have a commitment to collaboration and cooperative working.

Q27 Provide timely, accurate and constructive feedback on learners' attainment, progress and areas for development.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this self-study task you should:

- have an understanding of the statutory responsibilities and rights of parents and carers
- know how to involve parents and carers appropriately and effectively, and
- understand a range of strategies that can support partnership working with parents and carers.

Activities		Timings
Activity 1	Introduction	**40 minutes**
Activity 2	Research into parents'/carers' involvement in children's learning	**40 minutes**
Activity 3	Formal and informal communication	**30 minutes**
Activity 4	Seeking the views of parents/carers	**10 minutes**
Activity 5	Points for action	**15 minutes**
Resources and references		

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Activity 1

Introduction

Approximate timing: 40 minutes

The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) has a chapter on working in partnership with parents and carers. The code can be found on the Teachernet document bank at **www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=3724**

Parents/carers identify the ability of teachers to listen to their perspectives on their children's education and respond appropriately, as key to successful partnerships.

Parents' and carers' knowledge and expertise are invaluable when planning for social and academic success in school for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities.

Recent research (eg Hallam, 2004) suggests that while parents/carers are happy to be involved in some way with their child's education, the ways in which they wish to or feel able to help will vary greatly. For example, while many parents/carers of pupils with SEN may be happy to work on educational tasks on a regular basis, others may feel it is not their role or something they feel equipped to take on.

It is important not to make assumptions about the quality of support that parents/carers will give their children based on, for instance, ethnicity, social class, education or marital status. The SEN Code of Practice emphasises this point: "There should be no presumption about what parents can or cannot do to support their children's learning. Stereotypic views of parents are unhelpful and should be challenged." (Para 2:6)

Reading

Read chapter 2 of the SEN Code of Practice, Working in Partnership with Parents. This short chapter provides an effective summary of issues concerning partnership with parents and carers.

Under the Education Act 1996, schools must:

- inform parents where they are making special educational provision for a pupil because the pupil has SEN

- use their best endeavours to make sure that the appropriate special educational provision is made for pupils with SEN.

Record any issues you consider particularly important for partnership with parents/carers in relation to a pupil with SEN and/or disabilities that you know or have encountered during your school placement.

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Parental responsibility

Paragraphs 2:4 and 2:5 of the code define parental responsibility.

"'Parental responsibility' means the duties, rights and authority that a parent has in respect of a child."

Throughout the code, the term 'parents' is taken to include all those with parental responsibility, including 'corporate' parents and carers.

There have been some developments in relation to the law on parental responsibility since the SEN Code of Practice was published. The current position is that if the parents of a child are married to each other, or they have jointly adopted a child, they both have parental responsibility. This is not automatically the case for unmarried parents. According to current law, a mother always has parental responsibility for her child. A father, however, has this responsibility only if he is married to the mother or has acquired legal responsibility for his child through one of three routes:

- by jointly registering the birth of the child with the mother
- by a parental responsibility agreement with the mother, or
- by a parental responsibility order made by the court.

Looked-after children and personal education plans

If a child or young person is looked after by the local authority, a care order gives the local authority parental responsibility. Where a child is accommodated by a local authority, the day-to-day responsibility may be with foster parents, residential care workers or carers/guardians. If a pupil in your class with SEN and/or a disability is a looked-after child, they will need a personal education plan (PEP), even if they have an individual education plan (IEP) or a similar record of target-setting.

The scope of a PEP is broad and covers life outside and inside the school. It should contain short-term targets, the pupil's long-term plans and aspirations. Government documentation[1] suggests that every child in public care needs a PEP as it:

- provides access to services and support by detailing the provision to be made to support the achievement of targets in the plan
- contributes to stability, minimising disruption and broken schooling by supporting all professionals in providing an integrated service
- signals particular and special needs
- establishes clear goals and acts as a record of progress and achievement.

Social workers lead on the preparation of the plan, though coordination of the implementation is likely to fall to the designated senior person in school (usually a headteacher or deputy headteacher) who has oversight of all pupils in public care in the school. You may be able to access support and advice from your local authority's Children in Public Care Team.

Meeting both parents

You will need to think carefully when arranging meetings with parents as it may prove problematic to meet with both at the same time. This might be because both are in full-time work, or one partner may either work long hours or far from home. You should be alert to the possible pressures on the parents' time and resources.

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1   www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/7346/ACF3725%5B1%5D.pdf – page 35

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Sharing information

Sometimes parents/carers (or pupils themselves) may share information with teachers, eg about a pupil's disability, which the teacher may wish to pass on to others.

Sharing information is vital for intervention to make sure pupils get the services and support they need. However, it is also important that people remain confident that their personal information is kept safe and secure and that teachers and others maintain the privacy rights of individuals. It is important, therefore, that teachers understand when, why and how they should share information, so that they can do so confidently and appropriately as part of their day-to-day practice.

Look at the Government's information sharing guidance (2008).[2] You will find other useful information on this site, including case studies.

There can be significant consequences to not sharing information – as there can be to sharing information. Ultimately, teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether to share or not, and what information is appropriate to share. It is important to build trust from the outset by clarifying issues and procedures surrounding confidentiality and information sharing. Teachers must adopt the right approach to information sharing by following the correct procedures and by ensuring that the parent/carer (and the pupil, where appropriate) understands the process.

There are seven 'golden rules' for sharing information:

- Recent legislation (such as the Data Protection Act) is not a barrier to sharing information – it provides a framework to ensure that personal information is shared appropriately.

- Be open and honest with people from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could, be shared, and seek their agreement – unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.

- Seek advice if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person, where possible.

- Get consent to share information, where appropriate and possible. But respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. Teachers may still share information without consent if, in their judgement, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. They will need to base their judgement on the facts of the case.

- Base your information-sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the pupil and others who may be affected by your actions.

- Make sure the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up to date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.

- Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it – this should apply whether the decision is to share information or not. If you decide to share, record what you have shared, who with and for what purpose.

There is a flow chart available of key questions to help you to make decisions about when it is appropriate to share information or not. You might find it useful to look at with your tutor. It can be found on page 13 of the booklet, Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers **www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/_download/?id=103** The key questions are set out on the next page.

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2   www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00340

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Question 1

Is there a clear and legitimate purpose for sharing information?

Why do you or the other person want the information?

What is the outcome you are trying to achieve?

Could the aims be achieved without sharing the information?

Question 2

Does the information enable a living person to be identified?

If the information is about an identifiable pupil, or could enable a pupil to be identified when considered with other information, it is personal information and is subject to data protection law. This is likely to be the case in the course of your work. You should be open about what information you might need to share and why.

However, it may not be appropriate to inform a person that information is being shared, or seek consent to this sharing. This is the case if informing them is likely to hamper the prevention or investigation of a serious crime, or put a child at risk of significant harm.

Question 3

Is the information confidential?

Not all information is confidential. Confidential information is information of a private or sensitive nature that is:

- not already lawfully in the public domain or readily available from another public source, and

- has been provided in circumstances where the person giving the information could reasonably expect that it would not be shared with others.

Question 4

Do you have consent to share?

You should seek consent, where possible, and respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement on the facts of the case, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest.

You do not always need consent to share personal information. There will be some circumstances where you should not seek consent – for example, where doing so would:

- place a child at increased risk of significant harm

- prejudice the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime, or

- lead to unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm or serious harm.

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Question 5

Is there sufficient public interest to share the information?

Even where you do not have consent to share confidential information, you may lawfully share if this can be justified in the public interest. Where consent cannot be obtained or is refused, or where seeking it is unsafe or inappropriate (as explained in question 4), the question of whether there is a sufficient public interest must be judged by the practitioner on the facts of each case.

Where you have a concern about a person, you should not regard refusal of consent as necessarily to mean that you cannot share confidential information. In making the decision you must weigh up what might happen if the information is shared, against what might happen if it is not, and make a decision based on professional judgement.

Question 6

Are you sharing information appropriately and securely?

Only share what is necessary to achieve the purpose, distinguishing clearly between fact and opinion.

Share only with the person or people who really need to know the information.

Make sure the information is accurate and up to date.

Understand the limits of any consent given, especially if the information has been provided by a third party.

Check who will see the information and share the information in a secure way. For example:

- confirm the identity of the person you are talking to

- make sure a conversation or phone call cannot be overheard

- use secure e-mail, or

- make sure the intended person will be on hand to receive a fax.

Establish with the recipient whether they intend to pass it on to other people and make sure they understand the limits of any consent that has been given.

Inform the person who the information relates to that you are sharing the information, if it is safe to do so, and if you have not already told them that their information may be shared.

Question 7

Have you recorded your information-sharing decision properly?

Record your information-sharing decision and your reasons, including what information you have shared and with whom, following your school's arrangements for recording information and in line with any local information-sharing procedures in place.

If, at any stage, you decide not to share information, you should record this decision and the reasons for it.

For more details, see the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) document, Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers.

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Activity 2

Research into parents'/carers' involvement in children's learning

Approximate timing: 40 minutes

Concepts of parental inclusion

Historically, parents/carers left their children at the school gates to be 'educated' by professionals. In the sixties, it was fairly common for parents to be banned from crossing a certain line in the playground, let alone going into a classroom!

In recent years, parents and carers have been welcomed into schools and invited to be involved with their child's education. Research studies have given strong backing to greater parental involvement.

Briefing: Parental involvement in children's education

Read the following research briefing. When you have finished, try to answer the quiz questions that follow. You will find the answers to the questions marked with a superscript in the text like this.[Q3]

> This briefing brings together some findings from the research on parental involvement in children's education, with particular reference to pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. In this briefing, parental 'involvement' includes both parents' involvement in the child's life at school and in their child's education at home.
>
> ### The overall picture
>
> A review of the research by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003)[3] found that parental involvement included a range of activities at home and at school. Activities that parents involve themselves in at home include:
>
> - talking with their children
> - enhancing their child's self-esteem
> - modelling social and educational aspirations and values
> - monitoring out-of-school activities, eg supervising homework.
>
> Activities parents participate in at school include:
>
> - attending events, such as open days and school fairs
> - working in the school to support teachers, eg helping with activities in the classroom, on trips and with sports activities
> - assisting in the governance of the school
> - meeting teachers to discuss their child's progress.
>
> However, Desforges and Abouchaar's research found that the most important activities of all for enhancing pupils' achievement are the conversations and discussions parents have with their children at home.[Q1]

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3 The full report of the research is available via the following link:
   www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/11194/rr-impact%20of%20parental%20involvement.pdf

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What the research says about parental involvement for all children

The main research findings on the effects of parental involvement in their children's education are summarised in a paper published by the Department for Education and Skills (2003). This paper identifies seven key findings:

- parental involvement in a child's schooling for a child between the ages of seven and 16 is a more powerful force than family background, size of family and level of parental education[Q2]

- in the early years, parental involvement has a significant impact on children's cognitive development and literacy and number skills[Q3]

- parental involvement has a significant effect on pupil achievement throughout the years of schooling

- educational failure is increased by lack of parental interest in schooling

- in particular, a father's interest in a child's schooling is strongly linked to educational outcomes for the child[Q4]

- most parents believe that the responsibility for their child's education is shared between parents and the school

- many parents want to be involved in their child's education – in a recent study in England, 72 per cent of parents said that they wanted more involvement.

The research confirms what our instincts might tell us – ie, that the involvement of parents in their child's education is important for all pupils. The effect of parental involvement on pupils' educational progress is an effect that can be assessed independently of their parents' occupations and education, though the research also identifies these as significant.

The Children's Plan, published by DCSF in 2007, highlighted the importance of partnership between parents and schools to support children in their learning. A further report, also titled The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education, was published by DCSF in 2008. This focused on parents' involvement in supporting their children's learning at home, rather than in the life of the school, and followed a survey of parents in 2007. The report confirms that there is consistent evidence of the educational benefits of involving parents in their children's learning at home. It acknowledges that because of the complex interaction between a number of factors (only some of which had been taken into account in the analysis) it is difficult to prove that one causes the other, and that the research instead demonstrates that a relationship exists between parental involvement and achievement. Its key findings are:

- Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.[4]

- The quality and content of fathers' involvement matter more for children's outcomes than the quantity of time fathers spend with their children.[5]

- Family learning can also provide a range of benefits for parents and children, including improvements in reading, writing and numeracy as well as greater parental confidence in helping their children at home.[6]

- The attitudes and aspirations of parents and children themselves predict the children's later educational achievement. International evidence suggests that parents with high aspirations are also more involved in their children's education.[7]

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4   Sylva et al (2004)

5   Goldman (2005)

6   Brookes et al (1997)

7   Gutman and Akerman (2008)

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- In 2007, around half of parents surveyed said that they felt very involved in their child's school life. Two-thirds of parents said that they would like to get more involved in their child's school life (with work commitments being a commonly cited barrier to greater involvement).[8]

- Levels of parental involvement vary among parents – for example mothers, parents of young children, black/black British parents, parents of children with a statement of special educational needs are all more likely than average to be very involved in their child's education.[9]

The Children's Plan, published by DCSF in 2007,[10] highlighted the importance of partnership between parents and schools to support children in their learning. A further report, also titled The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education was published by DCSF in 2008.[11] This focused on parents' involvement in support of their children's learning at home, rather than in the life of the school, and followed a survey of parents in 2007. The report confirms that there is consistent evidence of the educational benefits of involving parents in their children's learning at home. It acknowledges that, because of the complex interaction between a number of factors (only some of which had been taken into account in the analysis), it is difficult to prove that one causes the other, and that the research instead demonstrates that a relationship exists between parental involvement and achievement. Its key findings are:

- Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.[12]

- The quality and content of fathers' involvement matter more for children's outcomes than the quantity of time fathers spend with their children.[13]

- Family learning can also provide a range of benefits for parents and children, including improvements in reading, writing and numeracy as well as greater parental confidence in helping their children at home.[14]

- The attitudes and aspirations of parents and children themselves predict the children's later educational achievement. International evidence suggests that parents with high aspirations are also more involved in their children's education.[15]

- In 2007, around half of parents surveyed said that they felt very involved in their child's school life. Two-thirds of parents said that they would like to get more involved in their child's school life (with work commitments being a commonly cited barrier to greater involvement).[16]

- Levels of parental involvement vary among parents – for example mothers, parents of young children, black/black British parents, parents of children with a statement of special educational needs are all more likely than average to be very involved in their child's education.[17]

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8   Peters et al (2008)

9   Peters et al (2008)

10   DCSF (2007)

11   DCSF (2008)

12   Sylva et al (2004)

13   Goldman (2005)

14   Brookes et al (1997)

15   Gutman and Akerman (2008)

16   Peters et al (2008)

17   Peters et al (2008)

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Parental involvement and disability and SEN

Some of the research holds particular messages for those working in partnership with the parents of pupils who may not thrive in the education system. For example, Attwood and Thompson (1997) argue that such parents can:

- feel they are 'long-term players' because they know their children will be dependent on them for many things for a much longer period than would be the case for typically developing children

- have heightened emotional involvement in education in view of the knowledge that failure and marginalisation is a more constant threat for their children than for others.

Differences in perspective between parents and teachers are often found in the literature, particularly in relation to behaviour, including behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). This is not because parents or teachers are right or wrong. It may simply be a matter of context. Pupils behave differently in school compared with home. Similarly, while parents have fewer children to compare with their own child, they may see their child in more contexts in which to judge behaviour (Lindsay and Dockrell, 2000).[Q6]

A major longitudinal study carried out by the Institute of Education, University of London (2002a and 2002b), showed that parental involvement in their child's learning at home was an important factor in reducing the risk of developing special educational needs at entry to pre-school and at entry to primary school at five. This effect was independent of other effects that were found to have an impact on outcomes for children – socio-economic status, maternal levels of education, birth weight and other factors.

Other studies stress that parental involvement is vital in specific areas of SEN. For example, the introduction of a pupil to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems, such as sign language or the sort of speech-generating technology made familiar by Stephen Hawking, requires family commitment. The literature here is moving from straightforward discussion of the need for involvement to more finely-tuned exploration of how teachers and other professionals can use approaches that suit the diversity of parental experience and perspectives (eg Goldbart and Marshall, 2004).

Buswell Griffiths et al (2004) studied parent partnership in relation to dyslexia. They found that a mother often developed specialised knowledge of the condition (as it related to her family) and an identity for herself as 'the mother of a child with dyslexia', which might mean that she had a very different perspective from the school on aspects of literacy learning. The researchers also found that some teachers failed to recognise things that parents thought straightforward. These ranged from the poor practice of always giving pupils homework to write down at the very end of a lesson, to less obvious points such as "the recognition that labelling which has negative connotations for educationalists serves a very real purpose for parents and pupils." One mother told the researchers that a teacher said about her son, "'He won't try [if we tell him he's dyslexic]: labels are no good.' And I said 'I'm sorry, but since Ben has known what's wrong with him he's so much better because, bless him, he thought he was stupid. Well, he's not stupid.'"[Q7]

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Parent partnership services

Every local authority area now has a statutory parent partnership service. While these vary in approach and resources, they all offer information, advice and support to parents and carers of children and young people with SEN.[Q8] Parent partnership services can also put parents in touch with other local and national organisations. They have a role in making sure that parents' views are heard and understood and that these views inform local policy and practice.

All parent partnership services are at 'arm's length' from the local authority and the services they provide are free, confidential and impartial.

They are able to provide information and advice about:

- how special educational needs are identified and assessed by schools and the local authority
- who parents can talk to in a school or local authority about their concerns
- the SEN Code of Practice, the statutory assessment process and statements
- parents'/carers' rights and responsibilities
- meetings and reviews about a child's needs
- how progress is monitored and reviewed
- what parents can do if they are not happy with a decision made about their child's SEN.

More information is available at **www.parentpartnership.org.uk** This is the website of the National Parent Partnership Network which has information about local and national provision.

Conclusion

Across a range of public services user involvement has become an increasingly significant factor in the development of services. In the field of social care, parental 'involvement' is broadening into their 'participation' in the design of services. Contact a Family and the Council for Disabled Children (2004) identify the benefits of this approach.[Q5] For instance:

- It leads to services better designed to meet the needs of users.
- It helps parents to become active agents as opposed to passive recipients in caring for their children.
- It can empower parents and help them to feel they have some control over their lives and their children's lives. This in turn can lead to lower levels of stress and better use of services.

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Questions

Q1 What parent/carer activity is most likely to enhance pupils' achievement?

☐ Regular discussions with teachers at school

☐ Attending events such as open days and school fairs

☐ Regular conversations with their children at home

☐ Buying children books to read at home

Q2 What is the most powerful force in a pupil's education?

☐ Family background (eg social class/ethnicity)

☐ Level of parents'/carers' own education

☐ Amount of parent/carer involvement in schooling

☐ Size of family

Q3 At what phase is the impact of parental involvement strongest?

☐ Primary

☐ Secondary

Q4 Which parent's/carer's interest in their child's schooling has the strongest link to the child's educational outcomes?

☐ Mother/female

☐ Father/male

Q5 Give three possible reasons for moving from a policy of 'parent/carer involvement' to 'parent/carer participation in the design of services'.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Q6 Give one reason why parents and teachers may differ in their views of behaviour.

_____

_____

_____

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Q7 Why did the parents in Buswell Griffiths et al's study favour 'labelling'?

_____

_____

_____

Q8 Write down three distinctive features of parent partnership schemes.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

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Activity 3

Formal and informal communication

Approximate timing: 30 minutes

Overview

As you have seen from activity 2, research tells us that it is very important to involve parents/carers in their child's education. This activity considers some of the ways of planning for effective partnership – whether communicating with parents/carers of pupils with SEN and/or a disability informally, or in a formal meeting involving key professionals.

Planning for meetings between parents/carers and other professionals

Whether for a formal or informal meeting, it's always best to plan in advance.

Any form of school meeting or communication should recognise parents' feelings and the ideas they bring to any discussion as valuable. Some parents/carers of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities may:

- have had poor experiences with their own schooling
- be worried about what you might say
- be angry about past provision for their child's SEN, or the lack of it
- be reluctant to hear bad news and/or unable to accept good news.

Professionals coming to a formal meeting may have:

- a busy schedule
- a short amount of time for the meeting
- a large caseload
- a clear remit in relation to possible courses of action.

When organising a meeting, you need to be sensitive to their situation too.

The following is a checklist of points that you might find useful when planning formal meetings involving pupils with SEN and/or disabilities.

- Make sure your line manager(s) is/are appropriately involved in the meeting, if necessary.
- Make sure everyone is clear about the purpose of the meeting.
- Check that the pupil is involved appropriately.
- Give prior notice of the meeting, in appropriate forms/formats/languages.
- Make sure any papers/minutes/plans have gone out in advance of the meeting, and make clear how long it is likely to take.
- Take account of any disability/access issue the parents/carers or professionals may have.
- Tell parents/carers and others who else will be at the meeting and why they will be attending.
- Encourage parents/carers to bring a friend along if they want to.
- Tell parents/carers about support they can access from parent partnership services.
- Have explanations in appropriate language (key terms or procedures to be used in the meeting).
- Focus on the pupil's strengths, as well as areas of additional need.

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- Keep jargon to a minimum.
- Keep notes of the meeting.
- Think about offering refreshments.
- Think about childcare issues the parents/carers may have.
- Be clear about what happens next and make the course of action clear to everyone (recap the points covered and action to be taken by you and by everyone else).
- Be clear about any confidentiality issues and any issues which may need action by others and therefore need to be more widely disseminated – eg if new information about a disability means new reasonable adjustments.
- Send out minutes/notes after the meeting of what has been agreed.

Now look at the following checklist, which you may find useful when planning formal meetings but which may also be useful for planning informal meetings with parents and carers in the future. You might find it useful to use the checklist to audit any meetings with parents/carers that you sit in on during school placement.

Did the meeting:

- allow enough time to develop a real dialogue?
- enable the parent/carer to contribute their views?
- have a clear framework?
- draw on evidence of the pupil's progress?
- finish with all the participants knowing what they had agreed and when they would review the situation?
- draw on parents'/carers' knowledge and expertise in relation to their child?
- focus on the child's strengths as well as needs?
- recognise the parents'/carers' feelings and respect their differing needs?
- ensure that the parent/carer understood any relevant procedures?
- respect differences of opinion and seek constructive ways of reconciling these?
- recognise the need for flexibility in the timing and structure of meetings?

Communication with parents and carers

During your next school placement, find out the different ways that the school communicates with parents/carers of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. Add any new ways to the list in table 1. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each method of communication and complete the table. Discuss your notes with your tutor or mentor.

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Table 1: Ways of communicating		
Communicating with parents or carers		
Advantages	**Suggested ways of communicating with parents/carers**	**Disadvantages**
	Home-school diary	
	Phone update	
	School learning platform	
	Summary text message/e-mail	
	Picture diary update	
	Fortnightly school meeting, after school in homework club	
	Photo of pupil in class put on a memory stick/printed out for parents	

Explore Becta's work on technology and parent engagement.[12] Make notes on anything that interests you.

12   www.becta.org.uk/engaging.php

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Activity 4

Seeking the views of parents/carers

Approximate timing: 10 minutes

10 mins

Interview with a parent/carer

During your school placement, arrange through your mentor to interview the parent/carer of a disabled pupil or a pupil with SEN about what has worked for them in their child's education. The overall purpose is for the parent/carer to identify examples of successful practice in the child's experience of school and their experience of working in partnership with school(s).

Explain that the information they give you will be kept confidential.

Use table 2 as a checklist for your discussion and to make notes. When you have finished, make some bullet points outlining the key elements of effective practice.

Table 2: Interview checklist
Communication (home-school)
Independent study (including homework, if relevant)
Goals and targets and their review – both social and academic
Relationships – with other pupils or adults in school
Activities outside lessons – breaktimes, clubs, sporting activities
Development of personal independence – going to and from school, keeping books, etc tidy, being prepared for lessons, relationship with teaching assistants (if appropriate)
Development of resilience – knowing how to ask for help, coping with failure or disappointment

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Activity 5

Points for action

Spend a few minutes reflecting on this self-study task and record key points for action below.

What do I want to do next to develop my practice?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How will I do this?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is my timescale for this to happen?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How will I know if I have been successful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do I need to involve anyone else in enabling this to happen?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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