

## Website Content Good Practice Template

### LOCAL AUTHORITIES

AREA TITLE	Parental Engagement
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About...

There is strong evidence of the beneficial impact of parental engagement in public services on children's outcomes. Parents of disabled children and young people care passionately about the services they receive, whether agencies are working together and most of all whether the needs of their child are truly being met. Effective parental engagement needs to be embedded through local service planning, commissioning and delivery.

#### **What is parental engagement?**

Engaging parents effectively means:

- enabling parents to access information so that they can exercise effective choice
- giving parents the means to influence the shape of services so that they meet their family's needs
- seeking to work in equal partnership with parents to maximize the benefits to the children of the services received
- enabling parents to access additional information and help to deal with specific issues when they need it
- ensuring opportunities for parents to work in partnership with schools, taking account of the constraints on working parents.

#### **Benefits of parental engagement**

It is important to involve parents in service development and delivery in order to:

- draw on parents' expertise and knowledge about their disabled children
- achieve family-centred services
- create flexible, personalised and responsive services
- reach groups which are traditionally excluded and include them in service provision
- develop good relationships through partnership working which can feed into other relationships between families and services
- give parents an opportunity to express views and wishes in a positive and receptive environment

and because

- informed and involved parents are more likely to have realistic expectations of services and some shared ownership of choices and priorities
- parents can be useful resources to support professionals in their work
- involving parents will create more responsive services which will, in turn, be more cost effective.

#### **The government's commitment to parental engagement**

The benefits of parental involvement in a child's education have long been recognised. Parents play a crucial role in influencing the aspirations and achievements of their children. Findings from research and practice about work with parents demonstrate the positive effects of this on children's outcomes.

Parents, carers and families are the most important influence on outcomes for children and young people. The *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* programme aims to ensure that support for parents becomes routine,

particularly at key points in a child or young person's life. The government, in partnership with local areas, is working to make sure parents and families have access to the support that they need, when they need it, so that all children can benefit from confident, positive and resilient parenting, from birth right through to the teenage years. The aim is to ensure:

- Good quality universal support, in the form of information, advice and signposting to other services, is available to all parents. It is important that support can be accessed in places where, and ways in which, parents and carers feel comfortable, such as early years settings, schools, primary healthcare services, and through childcare information services, telephone helplines and the web.
- More specialised targeted support is available at the local level to meet the needs of families and communities facing additional difficulties. Types of support offered could include structured parenting education groups, couple support, home visiting and employment or training advice.
- All schools actively seek to engage parents in children and young people's education, helping parents to understand what they can do at home to work with the school.
- Children's centres and extended schools develop a coherent set of services both to support parents and to involve them properly at all stages of a child's learning and development.

The programme is increasing the range of multi-agency services available to children and families, from integrated working within children's centres and extended schools through to multi-agency teams and panels supporting clusters of schools. These are important vehicles for delivering better information and support for parents and carers.

As part of delivering Every Child Matters with their children's trust partners, local authorities now have a clearer strategic role in the development of support to parents in their area. The Supporting Parents Guidance (2006) summaries what is known about the impact of parenting on outcomes for children, and an overview of the policy context. It asks each local authority to develop a strategic approach to parenting support services, and asks authorities to appoint a single commissioner to champion services for parents. From April 2008, local authorities now have a duty to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents of children and young people. This includes a duty to provide parents of disabled children and children with special educational needs (SEN) with information on the services, facilities and publications that are available to them.

The government sees the role of local authorities as system-leaders, having a responsibility to understand consumers' demand, ensuring fair access and reducing inequalities - it allocated £80 million for parent support services (2006-08). The challenges are to engage with hard to reach families, raise parental aspiration and enable parents to shape the system.

**Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC)**, launched in May 2007, is the government's transformation programme for disabled children's services, jointly delivered by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department of Health (DH). The AHDC programme is backed by significant extra funding. This includes £5m for parent participation. The parent participation programme aims to develop parent participation activities in each local authority area across England.

The Together for Disabled Children partnership facilitates the programme. Over the period 2008 to 2010 £3 million is available through a programme of grants and support from Together for Disabled Children. Grants are being used to develop the active involvement of parents in the service planning and decision making processes within each local authority area. The result of this strategic involvement by parents should be visible changes to the development and delivery of services, making them more focused on the needs of families with disabled children.

In addition there is ongoing work through the Lamb enquiry into improving parental confidence in services for children with SEN. This includes funding for pilot projects in eight areas to look at how confidence can be increased. The projects are in North Tyneside, Durham, Blackburn with Darwen, Wolverhampton, Oxfordshire, Newham, Portsmouth and Kent and will look at a range of approaches including:

- the development of the 'Team around the Child' approach, where a group of professionals are assigned to a child with SEN and a key worker makes a personal link with the family;
- improvements in parental engagement in the school-based stages of assessment and provision, with better information for parents;
- closer involvement of parents in the decision-making process.

The pilots will involve the parents in evaluating the impact of the local project.

### **Involving parents in their children's education**

Many schools already enjoy the benefits of a close working partnership with parents. Research increasingly shows that when parents are involved with their child's education, children do better. Parental involvement is therefore an important lever for raising children's achievements.

Schools are now under a duty to have regard to the views of parents. This means that schools will need to consult with and listen to the views of parents before making decisions on issues such as extended activities, travel-to-school arrangements, school meals, and the curriculum and pupil behaviour. It is up to schools how they fulfil their new duties. Case studies have shown that parents respond positively when they are given relevant opportunities to get involved in school life. Often this means thinking of new ways of reaching out to the more disadvantaged and those who traditionally don't get involved, perhaps because of language or culture.

One way in which schools can encourage all parents to get involved in school life is through parent councils: informal forums where parents are able to raise issues, be consulted on school policy and give their views

The Children's Plan (2007) detailed the government's commitment to

encouraging parental engagement in schools. This includes the development of Online reporting which allows parents have secure online access to information on their child's progress, achievement, attendance, behaviour and special educational needs, when and where they please. From September 2008 all maintained schools will be expected to start the move towards online reporting with all secondary schools providing parents with online reports by September 2010 and all primary schools meeting the requirement by September 2012.

Parental engagement in schools commissioning is one of a number of areas where local authorities are also looking to increase the effectiveness of their approach to engagement (DCSF, 2008 Parental Engagement in schools commissioning).

All local authorities must provide a Parent Partnership Services (PPSs) a statutory service that offers information, advice and support for parents of children and young people with SEN. PPSs also have a role in making sure that parent's views are heard and understood and that these views inform local policy and practice.

### **Putting parents in control: Direct Payments/Personal Budgets/Individual Budgets**

The Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 established the right for people aged 18-65 assessed as requiring community care to receive direct payments in the form of cash payments so that disabled people could arrange their own services, choose the type of support they wanted, and how it was to be delivered.

Following implementation of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, direct payments must be offered to parents of disabled children, giving them greater choice and flexibility in how they receive services. Evidence from local authorities indicates that the take-up by children and families of direct payments has been increasing, partly because local authorities are now offering additional support. Not all families and individuals want the monetary responsibility associated with managing and holding their own budget or the additional responsibility of becoming an employer. The government has been [running a number of pilots](#) which have looked at different ways of giving people control over the resources available to them.

[A small number of authorities](#) are also piloting a programme to identify if individual budgets are a viable and better alternative to traditional forms of services for families with disabled children.

## Links

### [Parenting Support: Guidance for local authorities in England](#)

[Parent Participation Professionals Guide](#) (Contact a Family & Council for Disabled Children 2004) The guide offers an array of practical examples and suggestions to help professionals and parents become effective participators

[Commissioners Toolkit of Parenting Programmes](#) Commissioners of parenting support in local authorities and other similar roles across England can now use an online toolkit to efficiently identify a range of existing parenting programmes that will help them make better decisions about how to support parents and families in their community.

[Duty to provide information and advice and assistance: guidance for local authorities](#) (2008)

[Every Parent Matters](#) explains ways in which practitioners can assist parents in helping their children learn, enjoy and achieve. The document also assesses where we are to date, the gaps in service and how we propose to fill them. It aims to stimulate debate among service planners, commissioners and providers as to how parents can best be supported and engaged.

[Children and Young People's Plan Guidance 2009](#) The guidance sets out the necessary steps that must be taken in preparing, consulting, reviewing and publishing the CYPP

[Disabled Children's Service National Indicator](#) The disabled children's services national indicator (NI 54) will look at parental experiences of services for disabled children and young people aged 0 to 19 and the extent to which these services are delivered according to core offer standards.

[Parenting Implementation Project \(PIP\)](#) The aim of the Parenting Implementation Project (PIP) is to support local authorities to improve the design, commissioning and delivery of parenting support and services.

[Parental Involvement in Children's Education 2007](#) (published 7 May 2008) This report summarises the findings from a survey of parents and carers of children, in order to examine parental involvement in children's education.

[Aiming High for Disabled Children](#): All information on the governments programme of transformation for disabled children's services

[The Lamb Inquiry](#): inquiry into special educational needs and parental confidence

## Case Studies

As part of The Lamb Inquiry Kent local authority through their parent partnership service are looking at how to improve the more detailed sharing of information between schools, parents and services on strategies used with children of different needs at different stages and the decision making process. Portsmouth is addressing parental involvement in the panel that advises the local authority on SEN decisions. For more information go to [www.dcsf.gov.uk/lambinquiry](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/lambinquiry)

Parent groups in 97% of English local authority areas have now been allocated funding to help them have a say in planning and shaping disabled children's services under the Aiming High for Disabled Children £5m programme for

parent participation. For more information as case studies are developed go to [www.togetherfdc.org](http://www.togetherfdc.org)

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