

RUNNYMEDE



**GOOD PRACTICE**

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# TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW

HELPING BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC, REFUGEE,  
ASYLUM-SEEKING AND TRAVELLER PARENTS  
TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN IN EDUCATION



## INTRODUCTION

The Runnymede Trust designed *Tell Me What I Need to Know* to help parents, particularly those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Refugee, Asylum-seeking and Traveller communities to support their children's education more confidently and effectively. Although the information and guidance that we provide will be relevant for parents from all backgrounds, we concentrated on these groups because statistics repeatedly show that, while some children from these groups do extremely well, many others fail to achieve their potential. There are a number of reasons for this, but it is clear that if parents do get involved in their children's learning, both in school and at home, that can make a difference. As our research shows, there is, too, no question that parents in our target group care and want to achieve the best for their children.

In the summer of 2006 we carried out an online survey. Over 200 parents and teachers responded. 88% of the parents felt that it is very important to support and be involved in their children's education. But both parents and teachers told us about their concerns and the barriers to involvement that they experienced. We have also looked at existing research on parental involvement and, although BME parents reflect many of the same concerns as other parents, there are particular factors that affect them more.

One concern consistently repeated by parents is that they don't have enough information: they don't understand how the education system works and don't know their rights. It is clear, too, that there are areas of misunderstanding, mistrust, sensitivity and lack of communication on the part of both parents and schools. Also evident, though, are signs that government, local authorities, schools, teachers, independent agencies as well as parents are searching for – and finding – creative solutions to the perceived problems.

*Tell Me What I Need to Know* attempts to address the concerns of parents and teachers and to bring together strategies to overcome the hurdles. Examples of 'good practice' are drawn from across the country. Since parents are often in the best position to identify and understand their children's needs, we hope that this information will give them increased confidence to engage more effectively with their children's schools.

We have restricted *Tell Me What I Need to Know* to the education system in England and to the period

when a child's formal education begins at the age of 3 until compulsory education comes to an end. The education system is constantly changing and complex. There is a lot that parents need to understand, particularly those parents who have not been through the system themselves. We have therefore divided the information part of *Tell Me What I Need to Know* into 4 booklets, covering the Key Stages of a child's education. Each booklet gives you the information you need to understand what happens in your child's school as well as guidance and suggestions to help you prepare for the next Key Stage. They are:

<b>Foundation Stage</b>	Age 3-5
<b>Key Stages 1&amp;2</b>	Age 5-11
<b>Key Stage 3</b>	Age 11-14
<b>Key Stage 4</b>	Age 14-17

There is a great deal of information in each booklet, but you do not need to read them in one session. You can choose a booklet that is relevant for your child now. You can scan through the headings and decide which parts you need to know about. You could then come back to other subjects at another time.

Throughout these booklets, we've used the term 'parent' to include anyone who has responsibility for the care of a child. When referring to children, we use 'he' or 'she' interchangeably so the words should therefore be understood as referring to both boys and girls.

In this booklet, we have looked at how parents' concerns are being addressed by local authorities and schools across the country so that we can all share examples of good practice. We have also tried to give suggestions about ways in which parents can, themselves, try to overcome barriers. The response of teachers to our survey also indicates that they are searching for creative ways to engage with parents. We hope that this booklet, in particular, will assist parents and teachers to work in partnership as co-educators of our children.



We would like to thank the following organisations and individuals who have helped with research for this project:

- Diane Abbott, MP
- Bolton EMAS
- Bournemouth EMTAS
- Bracknell Forest Education Centre
- Education Bradford
- Buckinghamshire Community Services
- Collective of Bangladeshi School Governors
- Croydon EMA
- Daycare Trust
- Department for Children, Schools and Families, Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit
- Dudley EMAS
- Ealing Children and Young People's Services
- Essex Schools InfoLink
- Hackney Learning Trust
- London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham EMTAS
- Hampshire EMA Service
- Haringey EMA Team
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Hounslow Language Service
- Alison Jones, The Stepladder Foundation
- Director for Schools, Quality and Standards, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Education Leeds
- Leicester Complementary Schools Trust
- Liverpool City Council, EMTAS
- Gill Loughran and Jan Fry, Parentline Plus
- Luton Borough Council, Family Support Service
- Manchester Education Department
- Doug Masterson, EMA Online
- London Borough of Merton Department of Children, Schools and Families
- Milton Keynes Department of Children and Young People Services
- Muslim Education Forum
- Newcastle EMTAS
- Norfolk TES
- Peter Okoye, Camden Black Parents and Teachers Association
- Parents of Black Children Association
- Portsmouth EMAS
- Redbridge EMAS
- Maria Semak, Nottingham AMBER (Adult Minorities Breaking Educational Restrictions) project
- Somerset Family Learning
- Southampton City Council, Inclusion Support Service
- Southampton EMAS
- Southwark TES
- Staffordshire EMAS

- Swindon Borough Council Children Services
- Swindon TES
- Tower Hamlets EMAS
- Wakefield Department for Children & Education
- Wiltshire Department for Children & Education
- All the parents and teachers who took part in our online survey.
- All the schools that have given us permission to cite their examples of 'good practice'.
- The teachers and pupils at St Saviours CE Primary School, Walthamstow and Holy Family Technology College, Walthamstow whose photographs are included in this report.

This project was made possible with the generous support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and ITV. The Runnymede Trust would like to express its thanks to these funders for their commitment to its education programme.

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.



We know that parents of Black and Minority Ethnic, Refugee, Asylum-seeking and Traveller children, just like parents of any other child, want their sons and daughters to achieve their very best. Statistics also consistently show that some children in those groups consistently fail to do so (see [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)). They start off in the education system level with other children and yet, progressively fall behind. There are many complex reasons and the remedies will be different for each individual child. However, there has been a great deal of research to show that the involvement of parents in their children's education is one factor that can make a great deal of difference in improving the attainment of children. How mothers, fathers and carers engage with schools and their involvement with their children's learning at home is a very important factor. Given that BME and Traveller parents do care about their children's education, a major question is: what prevents some BME and Traveller parents becoming more effectively involved?

In the summer of 2006, the Runnymede Trust conducted an online survey asking about the barriers to parental involvement. Over 200 parents and teachers responded giving a clear indication of the difficulties that they perceived. The results of our survey to a large extent confirmed the findings of previous research.

Barriers to engagement seem to fall into a number of broad categories: practical considerations within schools; issues at home and within the family; a lack of information; racism within school and society; the isolation and insecurity felt by parents; some schools and parents not considering parental involvement to be a priority. It is clear, though, that teachers and parents are attempting to overcome the problems and a number of positive suggestions came from our survey. We also looked at the creative ways in which local authorities, schools, teachers and community organisations across the country are attempting to deal with the problems. In this section, we share practical examples of good practice that are in place and that can be duplicated.

There is, clearly, no one solution and what works in one school or community might not work in another. However, we hope that the examples of good practice presented here will lead to further discussion, perhaps modification, and might contribute to parents, teachers, schools, local authority and Government working together more effectively to improve the attainment of BME, Refugee, Asylum-Seeking and Traveller children in schools.





## 1. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN SCHOOL

### a. Schools don't have the necessary resources.

A look at websites across the UK shows schools in affluent areas with incomes of thousands of pounds a year from PTAs. Our PTA raises a valiant £200-£300 annually. This in a low-income area where the numbers of National Front posters on lamp-posts roughly matches the number of times the school is broken into, usually to steal new computers.

Teacher

Funding is continually being cut. The EMAG budget will soon be devolved to schools. Experienced language support teachers tend to be undervalued and are leaving the profession as the central EMA services are closed and their roles begin to lack clarity.

Teacher, Bolton

Senior managers take parental involvement seriously but do not provide sufficient resources, i.e. staffing, space or time.

Teacher, London

We feel out on a limb as we have so few BME and EAL pupils yet feel also that we have a need to equip our children with a representative view of the world and an appreciation of diversity that they don't get in their daily life. We need more contact, more resources and more money!

Teacher, Leeds

Dedicated Parent Support Advisors are being used in schools in order to strengthen home-school links. The government has provided £53 million for around 600 schools in England for this new role which may be expanded to include all local authorities nationally. Advisers offer one-to-one help to parents whose children are misbehaving or truanting. Parent Support Advisers also encourage parents to volunteer at school, attend parents' evenings and keep up a dialogue with their child's teachers.

In **Stepney Green Maths & Computing College, Tower Hamlets**, around 98% of students are from BME backgrounds. Funded by the New Deal for Communities, this boys' college sponsors a number of activities to get both parents and the general community involved in the school. It sponsors adult learning such as courses in Maths, English as an Additional Language, and ICT skills. There have been one-off learning sessions such as how to use digital photography. It also offered a 13-week course on parenting in Bengali called 'Strengthening Parents, Strengthening Communities'. When there is an additional language-need, the school uses the appropriate staff.

In the **London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham** a Romani Induction Programme for Parents has been established. The aim was to bridge the communication between home and school by delivering a very basic literacy and ICT course to parents who had requested support in this area. It was hoped that issues such as truancy, discipline and the low attainment of Gypsy Roma pupils in the school might be resolved if parents understood more about how school works and had raised expectations of their own children's learning. Punctuality, discipline and attainment have now improved for some pupils along with better home-school communication. The programme was initiated to 'break the ice' in order to show that school was non-threatening and to try to improve attendance at parents' evenings. Phone calls and home visits were needed but there was no actual expenditure of funding.





**b. Schools don't have enough BME/Traveller staff and when they do, they're only used in 'crisis' situations.**

Too few BME staff in decision-making positions. Often BME staff are marginalised. They are only valued in 'crisis' management situations and, oh, when OFSTED is involved! As a BME teacher and parent I find school structures often don't want you involved as they don't see any success to be shared - they want complete ownership of success but will hold you entirely culpable for any failings.

Teacher and parent, West Midlands

There is a stigma or attitude from the white teachers that Asian parents are the two extremes – either pressurising their children in education or they don't understand what's going on. But every household is a different one. There is a lot that education departments can do to help the community by employing more staff from ethnic minorities to bridge the gap.

Parent, Cardiff

I see children constantly being reprimanded for things that white kids are not, my contributions to projects marginalised, whilst less-thought-through ideas by my colleagues are met with positive enthusiasm. Pointing this out, however, just makes you guilty of not playing the game and you become the enemy within.

Teacher

When recruiting staff, **Stepney Green Maths & Computing College** in **Tower Hamlets** has tried to employ people who are bilingual.

**The Collective of Bangladeshi School Governors**, working with **Tower Hamlets College**, delivered an accredited 10-week course for people who want to become school governors. They also organise conferences on parental involvement.

**What parents can do**

- a. Offer any skills that you have. You can act as a role model for students by going into school and sharing your knowledge with them.
- b. Consider becoming a governor. You may feel isolated but the rewards for you and your child might be worth it. You can find more information about what governors do at [www.governornet.co.uk](http://www.governornet.co.uk)

There is a lot of pressure on teachers and staff these days so it is important to understand and be sympathetic towards their situation. Think about what you want for your child and how you can support the school to provide that.

Parent, London

I am a school governor. Yes it does work.

Parent

I myself am a Romany Gypsy and totally understand the culture.

Teacher, Oldham





## 2. ISSUES AT HOME

### a. The responsibility for parental involvement is mainly placed on mothers.

The school environment is mainly female dominated with very little or no input from the fathers. What we have to remember is that fathers are also part of the family and should be encouraged to participate in school.

Teacher

**Halley Primary School** in **Tower Hamlets** organised a Father's Day event. Fathers and male carers attended an activity day where they could take part in rounders games, a maths challenge, keep-fit and construction activities. It was so successful that mothers wanted their own day. They now have a Father's Day in June and a Mother's Day in March.

**Bonner Primary School** in **Tower Hamlets** invited grandparents into school for a special day. They visited the classrooms and shared stories about their childhood, had lunch and were then entertained by children in an assembly.

### b. The culture amongst older children is such that they don't want to be seen as doing well and don't want their parents to be involved with school.

Barriers are ingrained into the culture of the wider school population. Students do not see the value of education and only see the glamour of a criminal life.

Teacher

I try and try and try and if that doesn't work I try something else. I believe the reason I try to encourage students to overcome the stigma of failure is mainly down to the barriers I experience.

Teacher, Newcastle Under Lyme

The children feeling embarrassed by having their parents in school. (Secondary only.)

Teacher, Nottingham

**Valentine's High School** in **Redbridge** employs community mentors who work intensively with pupils to promote self-confidence. They also communicate with the parents. They have about 20 mentors who are paid a small amount from a special fund. The mentors have made a marked difference in facilitating links between the school and parents. They hold, for instance, coffee mornings and other events.

### What parents can do

- Consider alternating attendance at meetings with your partner or other family member.
- Parents who don't live with their children could make arrangements with school to be kept informed of school events, parents' meetings etc.
- Consider volunteering to act as a mentor for young people in schools.
- Make sure that your children understand the value that you put on education and how important good attainment could be for their future.





### 3. INFORMATION

- a. Parents feel that they don't know enough about how the education system works and don't know their rights.

In **Norfolk**, Traveller Education Early Years practitioners visit parents to discuss their hopes and fears regarding their children attending pre-school and school. Sometimes, the discussions take place as part of play session visits for children in their early years who are either of pre-Foundation age or of Foundation age and not yet accessing early education provision in the local community.

In **Hampshire**, parents of new arrivals are invited to school for an interview with a project officer who outlines the education system and gives information about adult education opportunities, if appropriate.

**Haringey** have created a Refugee Education section on their website with translated information and curriculum resources ([www.haringeylearning.net](http://www.haringeylearning.net)).

In **Southampton** there is a Cultural and Linguistic Mediator scheme that acts as outreach to asylum- and refugee-seeking families. The Cultural and Linguistic Mediators are from a refugee background and help parents and students in schools. They support them in meetings and help them to understand school policies.

**Ealing Black Pupils Achievement Programme** and parents/carers from three pilot schools visited Brunel University. There was an introductory talk about admissions and finance then Black students from the university spoke about their own experiences at Brunel and how they got there. The students then gave a guided tour of the facilities at Brunel. Parents/carers were able to talk about the role they could play in the Black Pupils Achievement Programme.

In **Swindon**, an Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Teacher often accompanies parents for the initial visit to a secondary school or to the Induction Day for Year 6 pupils who will be moving into the secondary phase. This helps them to form a relationship with their child's teachers and Head of Year.

- b. Parents don't know enough about National Curriculum subjects and how they are taught.

Schools only want the children to be taught Maths using the method they have chosen. Having been educated in Africa, we learned and used many methods to arrive at the same answer.  
**Parent**

The London Borough of **Haringey** has been part of the SHARE programme since 1999. This programme encourages parents and carers, children and teachers to work together to improve home-school links and pupil achievement. Parents find the programme helps them to understand the learning process in the classroom. The SHARE programme offers the opportunity for accreditation for those parents who take part, but most parents participate so that they can 'spend focused time with their children doing the activities that they have been shown at the SHARE meeting'. Schools that participate in the programme can choose which parents they wish to target. SHARE isn't specifically aimed at BME parents but they form the majority of parents attending SHARE groups in Haringey.

**Bolton Gaskell Community School**, working with **Bolton Ethnic Minority Achievement Service**, invites parents to attend weekly assemblies and then follow the children through to class to take part in lessons. They have links with colleagues in secondary education providing support for parents who are not confident in either speaking English or understanding the education system.

**Thames View Junior School, Barking & Dagenham** runs 'Keeping Up With Your Children' courses at Barking Adult colleges.





The Effective Partnership with Parents (EPPa) Action team at **Lansbury Lawrence School, Tower Hamlets** developed a range of activity packs to support the language, numeracy and science curriculum. Parent volunteers design and make the packs with staff and discuss how they can be developed to support learning. Packs include games, simple experiments and books accompanied by props. Families borrow the packs for use at home.

EPPa have also worked in partnership with parents to set up a shop supplying educational materials and stationery items at cost price. Parents regularly evaluate the stock and let the team know what else they want them to buy.

At **Argyle Primary School** in **Camden** every subject co-ordinator runs sessions explaining how their subject is taught.

**Stepney Green Maths & Computing College** in **Tower Hamlets** sponsors days when parents can come in and learn about the curriculum, courses available, and how to help their children to revise for exams. Instead of simply sending the information home in a letter, they try to get parents into the school to learn about what their children are doing.

**Northumberland Park Community School** in **Haringey** has a Mathematics class in Turkish using puzzles, games and other fun activities to stimulate and challenge families. Parents help the children to solve problems in their first language. There are plans to extend such classes to the Somali and other minority ethnic communities. The school also offers language classes, provided by the College of North East London. As they are community classes, parents can bring their children as accompanying learners. Parents develop their literacy skills through the help of their children.

At **Swanlea School, Tower Hamlets**, the Maths department provided student/parents sessions. Parents worked with their children to find out about what they are learning and how to support them with homework. The sessions were interactive and parents were given resource packs to take home.

**Wendell Park Primary School** in **Hammersmith & Fulham**, working with the EMTAS (Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service) EAL (English as an Additional Language) Home School Project, held themed coffee sessions. Staff and parents met in an informal

setting to discuss key issues and to exchange relevant information and questions. Some of the themes covered included: 'how best to help your child in reading and writing', 'homework', 'secondary school transfer' and 'what do parents want?'. During the sessions, parents were able to gain an understanding of the schemes and strategies used within the school and specific training and advice was shared.

#### What parents can do

- a. Ask if you can sit in on a lesson. (Primary schools are more likely to agree than secondary schools.)
- b. Visit websites that give information about the National Curriculum such as the DCSF Parents Centre site ([www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk)) or QCA ([www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)).
- c. Find out if your school runs workshops or has open days to explain the curriculum. If it doesn't, then you can find out if other parents would welcome them and ask the school if they can be arranged.
- d. Ask your child to explain what s/he is learning. This will also help to reinforce their learning.
- e. Spend as much time as you can in school, perhaps volunteering, and look at the pupils' work that is displayed on the walls. This can give a good idea of what they're learning.
- f. The 4 other booklets in *Tell Me What I Need to Know* all give information about how the education system in England works at each of the different Key Stages. You will find a lot of the information you need there as well as other sources of help and advice.

Parents need a far greater understanding of how the education system works, what grades mean, how they can tell if the school is not setting high enough expectations of their children. Parents need to ask hard questions and to be supported in this.  
Parent

I am not a black parent, but have black children. My strongest advice would be that parents need to know far more about how their children are assessed etc. and go into school with that information so they can ask the right questions.  
Parent



#### 4. RACE AND RACISM

- a. Parents feel that schools need to acknowledge the existence of racism and then make efforts to deal with it in schools. Teachers say that parents and pupils are sometimes unwilling to identify their ethnicity for fear of discrimination.

Schools should acknowledge the impact of racism in the education of children and young people from BME communities. Many schools are either dismissive about the issue or under[estimate] its effect.

Parent

Racism changes constantly. For example, there is a new and pervasive racism against Muslims now and staff need to be updated and aware of the issues.

Teacher

Travellers are often unwilling to declare their ethnicity as, historically and presently, this can attract prejudice, discrimination, bullying etc. Being white, it is quite easy for them to 'hide' within the school population. This means that problems they face are overlooked and not addressed.

Teacher

Uneducated ethnic minority parents may not want to put themselves in a situation where they are vulnerable in terms of their own education and because of bigotry and racism outside of school they may not wish to embarrass themselves or their children within it.

Teacher

**Cambridgeshire's Race Equality and Diversity Service Team for Traveller Education** worked with **Witchford Village College, Friday Bridge Primary School** and the **Gypsy Media Company** to produce an audio CD with young people, their families and schools to help improve Travellers' and professionals' understanding of how to combat racism. The CD is intended to be used at local and national level to illustrate issues of racism and strategies for challenging and tackling it. It can be used for training school staff and other professionals as well as being part of a curriculum package for all pupils, linked to the PSHE/Citizenship curriculum. (It costs £3.00. For more information contact [Margaret.Wood@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:Margaret.Wood@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)).

- b. Some parents say that teachers don't mix with people from BME or Travellers communities and therefore have a stereotypical view of them. Schools and teachers also underestimate their – and their children's – abilities.

Resistance to change is very strong where there are very few BME students within the organisation or people in the wider community.

Teacher

Racism and classism on both sides. Parents don't feel welcome and so resist attempts to involve them. They don't challenge the school or the teachers in a constructive way. Teachers only feel comfortable with white middle-class parents and actively encourage them into the schools whilst excluding others. Teachers have many preconceived ideas about BME parents, which hinders any proper constructive dialogue to address the problem. BME parents also don't support BME teachers. Many find it hard to even acknowledge the presence of a BME. It's like they feel acknowledgement will get them accused of some kind of plotting.

Teacher

In all instances where I have had to contact the schools that my children attend when there has been some difficulty, I have tried to do so constructively and without 'flying off the handle'. I have sensed in both schools, which are very different in relation to the ethnic make-up of the student body, that some staff members perceive that Black parents react to them in very stereotypical ways. I take lots of deep breaths.

Parent

We've got underachievement in our black Caribbean and mixed groups. I'm convinced that it's expectation and attitude from school staff and a history of failure and poor relationship between parents and staff. Higher expectations from parents would be good too.

Teacher

My son is a gifted pupil who, despite his ability, has been totally turned off school. The school culture does nothing to alleviate the oppressive vibe that Black parents receive when having to approach the school and it is very difficult to challenge a selection system which, by its nature, seeks to exclude Black children in order to not have to deal with any (stereotypical) black issues/problems or the concerns of Black parents.

Parent

It's hard to overcome negative stereotypes, especially entrenched ones. I find, both as a teacher and parent, black people, children, adults etc. are invisible until we show we exist, then we just become targets.

Teacher and parent

Staff feel unsure about what to expect from parents.

Teacher, Nottingham

During the holidays, **Argyle Primary School** in **Camden** organises activities such as trips to Hampstead Heath or the British Museum.



c. Parents say that teachers don't have enough knowledge of BME/Traveller communities and that their culture is not respected.

John Shield at **Witchford Village College, Cambridgeshire**, believes that differences in culture need to be accommodated. He understands that the Traveller families in his school may want to deal only with the person in authority. He ensures that he is available to meet with them. Staff are also aware that they may want to see staff in large family groups.

d. Parents say that the curriculum is unrepresentative and that schools lack, or don't make use of, anti-racist material.

Resources for a multicultural anti-racist or representative curriculum take a long time to find and are add-ons rather than central to practice in schools.

Teacher

Some BME parents feel the call to help in their children's education is tokenistic, especially when the education system/curriculum is perceived as not recognising or acknowledging BME cultures.

Parent

My children go to a church school and I feel as though they deliberately use the religious angle to avoid integrating the history and culture of the Asian sub-continent.

Parent

**George Green's School, Isle of Dogs**, is setting up a forum for the parents of African and Caribbean boys as well as a general parents' forum.

In **Portsmouth**, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service and school staff jointly plan workshops where BME parents and their children work together on various activities, sharing languages and cultural experiences. Children and parents are at ease speaking in their first language in the school environment and seeing that it is valued by the school. The results of the workshops are shared with the whole school using displays and assemblies with photographs and examples of the work that the children and parents have produced together, celebrating the linguistic and cultural diversity in each school.

At **Filton Avenue Nursery School in Bristol**, support for BME families begins in the home. Children are visited by nursery staff, including an EAL worker, so that parents can address concerns and needs in their

first language. Translation is available for all, making assistance with forms and documents readily accessible. Further support is given by the availability of dual language books for loan. The school also holds 'open sessions' to help families learn how to best support their children's education. Parents and staff work together to promote the school's diverse cultures by celebrating local community festivals as a whole school event.

For the **Globetown Action Zone Project in Tower Hamlets**, Somali pupils interviewed their parents about their experiences in Somalia and migrating to the UK. The aims included strengthening links between Somali pupils and their parents and schools, and for Somali families to feel that their culture is valued and given status through publication. *When you lived in Somalia...: Somali pupils interview their parents* has been distributed to all schools in the borough and some other schools are now undertaking similar oral history projects.

**The Randolph Beresford Early Years Centre in Hammersmith & Fulham** working with the EMTAS (Ethnic Minority Traveller Achievement Service) EAL (English as an Additional Language) Home School Project, started a parent library with information books on the countries the parents came from, dual-language books and teaching posters so that parents could help to teach their children at home. There were also books to share with the children. Parents now run the library. It opens once a week and has become a social event. Parents have started to organise mini jumble sales where parents bring in toys, clothes, videos and books to raise funds for the school. Staff at the Centre also borrow books and buy posters to extend their own understanding and teaching.

**Northumberland Park Community School in Haringey** worked with the Museum of London to organise activities that focused on an exhibition of photography following the lives of three black men in '60s and '70s Britain. Parents had the opportunity to look at the photo exhibition and then discuss them with the artists. The intention was to promote an atmosphere where black parents could discuss their own personal journeys with their children.

A **Family Language Project** was set up in **Hammersmith & Fulham** in which pupils and parents could study their home language together after school for a GCSE qualification.



In **Liverpool**, the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) has been running the Black Achievement Project in a number of schools, using a grant from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. This provides support for Black British pupils, including Black history programmes of work and activities, to promote the development of positive identities. Children from Black and dual-heritage families research their family history and interview relatives in order to create a dossier of their own heritage to share with their peers. In **St. Hugh's Catholic Primary School's** Year 5 Project, pupils conducted research on a local Black role model (the principal of Liverpool Community College) in order to present a mock lesson for the rest of the school, parents and community representatives as part of Black History Month celebrations. These programmes have had the dual effect of bringing learning activities into the home and enabling children to share their heritage with their peers. After the introduction of the Black Achievement Project, data has shown marked improvements in the participating pupils' academic performance and schools have reported an increase in self-esteem and motivation.

At **Bordesley Green Girls' School** in **Birmingham**, parents are sometimes asked to lead acts of worship.

**Wormholt Park Primary School** in **Hammersmith & Fulham** set up a 'Language of the Term' project to increase the understanding between different ethnic groups, to encourage all children to have a sense of pride in belonging to a multicultural school and to increase EAL (English as an Additional Language) parental involvement at the school. Each term the whole school learned a few phrases, such as 'hello', 'goodbye', 'what is your name?', 'My name is...', 'How are you?', 'I am fine', in one of the main additional languages spoken at the school. Posters were made for each class and teachers were asked to practise the phrases for a few minutes a day, three to five times a week. In order not to interfere with teaching time, it was suggested that teachers and children could greet each other during register time and the children could be asked, 'How are you?' after break-time. Children who spoke that particular language were asked to help their teachers to teach the language to the class. Parents also came into school to cook, read stories in their home language and to offer pictures, music and artefacts from their countries.

**Greenside Primary School** in **Hammersmith & Fulham** working with the EMTAS (Ethnic Minority Traveller Achievement Service) EAL (English as an Additional Language) Home School Project, held an International Week in which parents, some with quite limited English, went into classrooms and talked to children about their countries, taught them some of their own languages, told traditional stories and showed them how to cook traditional dishes.

#### What parents can do

- Ask the school to incorporate multicultural materials into lessons and other activities.
- A key worker from a BME community organisation might offer the school an insight into sensitive religious and cultural needs that should be respected.
- Consider letting the school know about community events happening in your area and perhaps invite staff.
- Parents could think about forming a group or association to represent their - and their children's - interests in school. Some schools actively help parents to do so and will provide facilities such as a space to meet.
- If your child attends a supplementary school, does it have links with your child's school? Could links be encouraged?





Know your rights. Ask to see the school's race policy and ask what they are doing to positively promote race relations in school, particularly through the curriculum.

Parent, Blackpool

I have enlisted the help of some BME friends and relatives who are, or have been, teachers. This has proven to be useful.

Parent, Solihull

Visit the school from time to time and monitor your child's progress. Do not feel ashamed to tell the school what your expectations are. Some schools are known to encourage black children to pursue certain subjects; however, this should not discourage you from encouraging your child to take things that they are good at.

Parent, Manchester

By talking to the head teacher and then eventually getting BME-specific organisations to liaise with the school on how to work positively with BME young people, it has worked positively and the school has gone from justifying racist behaviour to dealing with it appropriately.

Parent, Chelmsford

Where social barriers are hard to cross, unless staff are prepared to go more than 50%, then division remains.

Teacher

I have always done the black perspectives at home with my son as we discovered centuries ago that we can't rely on this white supremacist, capitalist dictatorship to educate, love and nurture our black and dual heritage children.

Parent, Northants

We arm our children with positive feelings about themselves and support their learning needs and the needs of parents in community settings.

Parent

I am a white parent of a black child. It is important that people like myself are included as we have to challenge institutional and cultural racism from our position as parents.

Parent





## 5. ISOLATION AND INSECURITY

### a. Parents feel intimidated by schools.

Parents can see teachers as the authority and are reluctant to question them or approach them.

Teacher, Surrey

In **Norfolk**, Traveller Education Early Years practitioners support local pre-schools and Reception teachers in local schools to make photo books showing familiar staff and activities and the school environment for parents to look at before visiting or registering their child.

**Education Leeds**, as part of their Parent Partnership Service, offers an Independent Parent Support service that recruits people in an advocacy role to offer information and guidance in an unbiased capacity to parents whose children have special or additional education needs.

In the London Borough of **Haringey**, one infant and one primary school organised 'Welcome' photo books for newly-enrolled families, available in 30 different languages, which represent the ethos, expectations and daily routines of the school through pictures. The aim was to promote greater inclusion. The project was organised with the Photographers' Gallery and was initially funded by London Boroughs Grants' Outer London Arts Development Fund, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the City Parochial Foundation. After two rounds of production of these booklets, the borough now provides schools with a standard template that schools can modify by inserting their own photographs. 21 schools have now produced their own booklets.

**Brookside School** in Street, **Somerset**, runs 'Inspire Mornings' aimed at general parental involvement within schools. Children bring a family member or carer into class so that the adult can experience how the children are taught and work with them to achieve specific learning goals. The adult can be a parent, carer, grandparent or other adult member of the family. They offer parents who don't have English as their first language one-to-one support to ensure that they understand the aims of Inspire Mornings. They also have workshops for parents such as 'Communication Skills', 'Becoming Assertive', 'Positive Parenting' and 'Managing Stress'.

At **Argyle Primary School** in **Camden**, all new parents attend a meeting with a senior member of staff and a translator (if one is required). Here, the child's

individual learning needs are assessed, together with what the parents can offer and be offered. Actions following the meeting might include anything from putting the new family in touch with others from the same ethnic background to familiarising them with the school's much-used toy library. Laura Wynne says: *'Refugee families are used to being questioned and often in a context that they feel is threatening. So they're always relieved that we're prepared to give them time and listen to what they need. It's all part of winning their hearts and minds and creating an atmosphere of co-operation from the start.'*

In **Hampshire**, there is a Kosovan After School Club. The aim was to give children from different schools an opportunity to get together to do homework (transport was arranged) but there was good attendance from parents who learned informally about the education system and how to help their children.

### b. Parents feel self-conscious about their own academic abilities.

**Wentworth Nursery School** in **Hackney** sponsors a 'Parent in Action' gardening course. It aims to encourage parents to share in their children's schooling and support their learning; to give parents and children an opportunity to learn new skills and develop an active interest in gardening; to help parents to feel confident and enthusiastic in sharing knowledge and activity ideas with children. They also aim to help families to further develop their interest after the course has finished by growing and maintaining plants, in this case herbs. Parents commented: *'I enjoyed learning as part of a group. I liked the way everything was informal and the fact that it was long enough to give us a taster but not too long for us to get bored'; 'I would be interested in future courses and volunteering at nursery/school'; 'She liked having me around at school helping.'*

**Wensley Fold C of E Primary School** in **Blackburn** offers numeracy, EAL and ICT courses for parents.

To help other parents become more involved in their children's education, the **Muslim Education Forum** (MEF) in **Luton** have published an educational handbook for parents. Funded by advertising and written by members of the MEF, this handbook was created to promote the involvement of ethnic minority parents in their children's education, and to raise awareness more generally of resources available. Divided into key topics, the *Muslim Parents' Handbook* contains



guidance and materials on educational matters, such as how parents can help their children learn at school and in the home, as well as extra-curricular activities and sports programmes available in the local area.

Piloted initially in 6 Luton schools, the *Muslim Parents Handbook* will be distributed to the schools with a higher proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children, and may be extended to cover more schools in the area.

#### c. Parents feel isolated in all-white schools and PTAs.

The school feels exclusively white. White values, White parents in key decision-making positions in the school; White parents in cosy relationships with school management teams about who is worthy enough or loyal enough to be involved in the key business of the school. I hate this. Parent Teachers [Association] is a wholly exclusive membership.

Parent

**Hamstead Hall Community Learning Centre in Birmingham** has a special parents' group for Black Caribbean boys.

In **Swindon**, the **Traveller Education Service** worked with Swindon College and then the Library Service to provide a mobile unit with laptops and tutors on the Traveller site to present a series of ICT courses to the Traveller community. The mothers asked for more so the tutors booked internet time at the local library for the parents. Eventually, they paid for courses with other non-Traveller parents. Now all the mothers from the course regularly go to the library with their children and engage with non-Traveller families.

In **Dudley** there is family learning open to newly arrived children (primary, secondary and 16+) and parents to help with English and maths. They are able to meet other families from similar backgrounds to ease feelings of isolation. There is not only a Saturday school but also social opportunities with others such as playing sports. Parents are provided with an informal atmosphere to ask for advice with problems at home, etc. Parents have set up a New Arrivals Association to plan their own activities and support in English, maths and home languages. This has prompted other meeting groups like Pakistani, Yemeni, and African-Caribbean supplementary schools and homework groups.

The **Camden Black Parents and Teachers Association** ([www.cbpta.org](http://www.cbpta.org)) was set up over 25 years ago by a group of Black parents and teachers in Camden who were concerned about the education system. It provides advice, information, support, training and referrals on a range of issues affecting the educational needs within families and the achievement levels of the Black child. It provides unbiased advice, support and strategies for parents facing situations in schools that they find difficult to deal with. It now has its own supplementary school, homework club and holiday play scheme.





The **Parents of Black Children Association** ([www.parentsofblackchildren.org](http://www.parentsofblackchildren.org)) was set up by a group of professionals in West Yorkshire. It aims to work in partnership with parents, families, educational establishments and other organisations to raise the aspirations, expectations and educational achievement of children and young people of African Caribbean descent. They offer a wide range of specialist advice, support and training designed to meet the needs of parents, families, teachers and other practitioners involved in the educational, social and cultural development of children and young people of African Caribbean heritage.

The **Nottingham AMBER (Adult Minorities Breaking Educational Restrictions)** project works with schools and parents. Parents are encouraged to become involved in the life of the school and are given the support and knowledge to work at home with their children. Schools are encouraged to think about the ways in which parents can be welcomed, encouraged and valued as partners and co-educators. The project, which began in 1995 to work mainly with Asian and African-Caribbean parents, has since been expanded to include other groups in the City and County of Nottingham.

#### What parents can do

- Ask a friend to go with you to school events such as parents' evenings.
- Seek out other sympathetic parents who might have common interests or share your concerns.
- Get advice from professionals in your community such as teachers or lawyers and form a support group.

I often go and talk to the teacher as I know children have difficulties being the only Asians in a very white-dominated school.  
**Parent**

Become involved with the school from curriculum decisions to social activities. Don't be intimidated by the system, we are all here to make it better.  
**Parent**

I am involved in my daughter's school as a parent governor and will not be intimidated by members of staff. Although I know of parents who find teachers intimidating and unapproachable, I am determined that my child will not be a statistic. I'm supporting her to the best of my ability and not leaving it down to the school to educate my child.  
**Parent**

Have the courage and confidence to keep on supporting your child and representing his/her interests in the school.  
**Parent**

My child is dyslexic. In the end I found a sympathetic solicitor who negotiated with the Education Department.  
**Parent**

Be strong, trust your instinct, ask for changes and improvements, be involved in school life and be on the child's side.  
**Parent**

Approach the school first. If the response makes you feel uncomfortable then contact your local BME organisation, who will then act as an advocate for you. If this does not work, then contact a national service who will advise further on support mechanisms.  
**Parent, Essex**

Don't be afraid to question things that do not seem right – teachers pay attention when they know parents are looking.  
**Parent, London**





## 6. COMMUNICATION

a. Parents say that schools don't listen to them and that teachers are unreceptive.

I constantly ring, try to contact teachers. I have told them that I fully support them as teachers and will do anything to support my son too. However, a phone call a month or so can be seen as pestering and teachers do not like that. If they would a) do what they promise to do on Parents' nights and b) get back to you, then I would not have to constantly phone for clarification.

Parent, Norwich

There is a tradition in which schools and parents only converse when there is a problem.

Teacher

At **Bordesley Green Girls' School** in **Birmingham**, a parents' group meets with staff monthly.

Many schools have regular questionnaires for parents and - most crucially - demonstrate that they listen to and act on parents' opinions. Other schools have 'feedback' boxes so that parents can make comments privately.

b. Parents want schools to inform them immediately about issues to do with truanting, misbehaviour, homework etc. rather than waiting for a consultation or parents' evening.

**Copland Community School & Technology College** in **Brent** uses text messaging for communication but puts emphasis on using it to send praise messages home. Once set up and administrative staff were trained, it proved easy to use and cost effective.

c. Although most parents in our survey don't see language as a major barrier to communication, many teachers do.

Parents need to be given the opportunity to talk about their concerns in their first language and with somebody from a similar cultural background whom they can trust to speak on their behalf to school staff. Mums want to be involved but it is more difficult for them at secondary level.

Teacher, Newcastle Under Lyme

**Argyle Primary School**, in **Camden**, has translated its website into Somali and Bengali.

In **Hampshire** there are a number of programmes for Nepali speakers; the local authority offers Saturday morning English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for parents and community language classes for children. There is bilingual support for parents and crèche facilities. Parents learn about the education system throughout.

**Sir John Lillie Primary School** in **Hammersmith & Fulham** working with the EMTAS (Ethnic Minority Traveller Achievement Service) EAL (English as an Additional Language) Home School Project, has a bulletin board for non-English speaking parents. They also intend to offer two one-hour conversational English sessions per week throughout the school year. One session will be for beginner speakers and the other for intermediate speakers.





**Sullivan School in Hammersmith & Fulham**, working with the EMTAS EAL Home School Project, has developed dual-language story tapes to be used at home by parents and children. The story is read in the home language by the parent and in English by the EMA (Ethnic Minority Achievement) teacher. The EMA teacher has also developed the strategy of recorded cassettes with letters of the alphabet, first letter sounds and key vocabulary. These are to be used at home and have proved popular with children as they are personalised, with the use of the child's name in the introductory and closing sentences.

**Henry Compton School in Hammersmith & Fulham**, working with the EMTAS EAL Home School Project has translated their Key Stage 4 Information booklet into Arabic, Somali and Farsi, the top three languages at the school.



#### d. Parents see the use of jargon as a barrier to communication.

I have tried talking to teachers and the education authority but it is difficult to understand the jargon.

Parent

#### What parents can do

- Consider taking English language classes, perhaps with your child.
- Some schools and local authorities explain education jargon on their websites. The Advisory Centre for Education also has a brief guide to education jargon at [www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice/jargon.html](http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice/jargon.html).

I was in regular contact with the head teacher, to ensure that she is aware of the importance of my children's education.

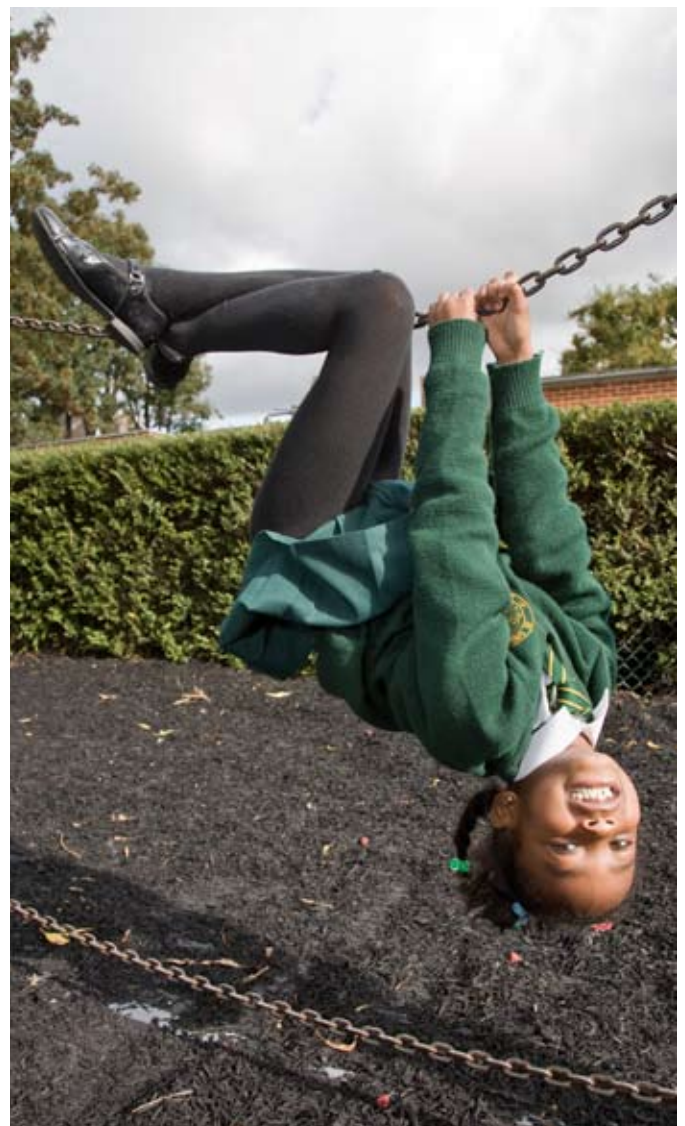
Parent, London

It is difficult for parents who don't speak good English to get involved – especially on their own. Perhaps they could get involved with friends and introduce themselves gently at events such as PTA meetings where all parents should be welcome. Getting involved would help to strengthen links in the community as well as raise the confidence of BME parents and children.

Parent, Kent

We engage in a wide range of responses to and with Gypsy Traveller families from site visits to 'dialogue on demand'. Listening is helpful!

Teacher, Cambridgeshire





## 7. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IS NOT CONSIDERED IMPORTANT

- a. Some parents and teachers feel that parental involvement is not seen as a priority. Some schools don't have a parental involvement scheme and teachers feel that they have too many other issues to deal with.

The head teacher sees parental involvement as a threat and does not accept that equality for all produces quality. A centralised focus on initiatives that parents do not understand have isolated them.

Teacher, Leeds

I tried to set up parents' groups and had stiff opposition from colleagues.

Teacher, London

If parental engagement is not given the same status as other programmes, or it is not monitored as rigorously as, say, 'Teaching and Learning' or 'Attainment' strands, then it will continue to be a low priority for schools. Furthermore, schools sometimes have difficulty appreciating the potential impact that parents can make in raising achievement.

Teacher

Far too many forms to fill out for OFSTED, SEF (PANDA), SEN to leave time for what we really want to do, i.e. build an inclusive school community.

Teacher

The school routines don't have community/parent involvement in a meaningful and productive sense. In many ways schools seem to be social agents where people learn to find and cement their rung in society.

Parent

Many schools don't spend enough time thinking about how to involve parents in the education of their children and assume parents have little to offer, or assume that they know what parents have to offer, which is not the case.

Parent

**Portsmouth Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)** has worked with local schools and minority ethnic community groups to develop a 'How Schools Work' course for parents, meeting the needs of both newly arrived groups, for example, those from refugee or European Union backgrounds, and those from more established communities. Over five weeks the course covers a wide range of topics with parents reflecting on their own educational experiences, learning about the National Curriculum (especially Literacy and Numeracy), having the opportunity to observe lessons and exploring how they can be more involved with

their child's school and give more effective support at home. The course is delivered jointly by EMAS' Community Learning Co-ordinators and school staff and is interpreted by bilingual Assistants but has also been delivered directly in Cantonese.

Parents have found the 'How Schools Work' course extremely useful and schools have reported increased parental involvement through parents' evenings, other family learning events and offers of dual language storytelling. As one mother wrote: *'I now feel so much happier about speaking to the school. This course has really made me believe that I can help my child.'*

To develop links with parents to promote better parental attendance, **Bolton Ethnic Minority Achievement Service**, Castle Hill Centre, **Bolton Gaskell Community School** makes home visits to parents. There are initial visits to welcome the child and family and to collect relevant information. There are visits prior to and following extended visits. There are also visits to invite parents to school events and follow-up visits if parents have not attended parents' evenings.

- b. Parents say that schools and teachers don't recognise the role that parents play in their children's education and development.

Head teachers think they know it all. They resist external input - always defensive.

Teacher

Schools don't respect the fact that a parent might actually know about their child's ability and, unfortunately, they still have embedded within their consciousness what/how your child will achieve and, sadly, this is not in the higher bracket. A long way to go, I'm afraid, considering this is not a new issue/problem.

Parent

Often, teachers and head teachers dismiss parental opinions and it is even worse for BME parents and those who have poor literacy skills in English.

Parent

**Chelsea Open Air Nursery** in the **Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea**, working with the Language Development Service, developed a guide for bilingual families. The publication promoted first language within the nursery, reinforced the value of parental support at home and provided strategies on how best parents/carers could help their child's language development.



In **Hounslow** the Language Service offers a multilingual 'starting school' video, multilingual advice for parents on the 'Advantages of Being Bilingual' and guidance for parents on the importance of reading stories with young children in their mother tongue.

**c. Parents say that they don't have time to get involved with their children's education because of other commitments such as work and childcare.**

In a recent letter sent to parents in a year group of 270 we had 3 responses. Parents do not care what goes on in school, they seem to see it as our job and nothing to do with them.  
**Teacher**

There is sometimes an assumption by schools that parents from BME communities are not interested in the education of their children. This often leads to stereotyping of children and as a result, it is the children who suffer the negative consequences.  
**Parent**

You need to show parents how they can become involved and facilitate the involvement. Some Black Mums who are single parents work long hours and find it difficult to find the time to liaise with the school even though they are very interested in their child's progress.  
**Teacher, Berkshire**

**Wensley Fold Church of England Primary School in Blackburn** allows parents to participate at whatever level they can, even if they are only able to come in for one event each term. They create materials and course guides that will allow families to continue to learn at home.

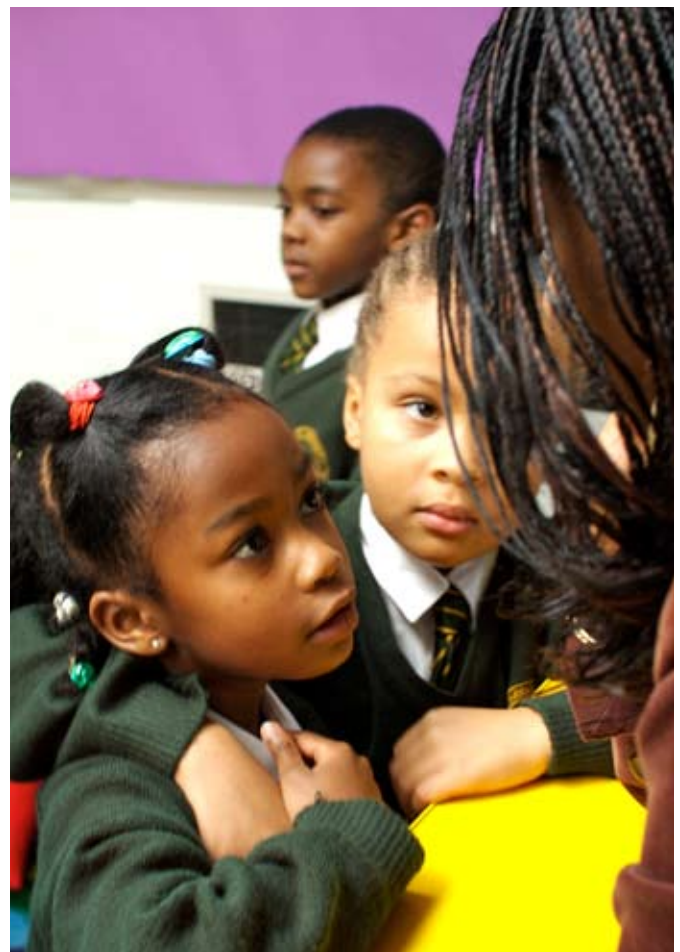
At **Argyle Primary School in Camden**, drop-in sessions are available for parents with pre-school children and there are pre-nursery home visits for all.

Schools could consider whether they make assumptions that parents' daily lives are run according to white, middle-class norms. The **Leys Primary School, Barking & Dagenham** provides crèche facilities and times meetings to meet the needs of parents.

**What parents can do**

- Involvement doesn't have to take a great deal of time. You could, for instance try to spend just a few minutes a day with your child talking about his education, perhaps over a meal or reading together before bed.
- If you can't attend meetings at given times, see if you can arrange to talk to teachers at another time.

- Remember that there is a great deal of information showing that your involvement can make a great deal of difference to how well your child does at school. Your support at home could be one of the most important factors. Find out more about how you can support your child at home by talking to teachers or finding out about courses in your area.





Be as visible in the school as possible. Attend as many school activities as possible as it might be the only black face any other black child sees.

Parent, Wellingborough

Make time for your kids, even if it's 20 minutes per day. Find that time. It is so important.

Parent

Try to find that bit of time – it may just be 20 minutes in your day, to catch up with the teenager who says they've done their homework or the little one who needs to practise some spellings.

Parent

Don't depend on the school to educate your child entirely. You have to take some responsibility for yourself.

Parent, Sheffield

Join support groups and seek help at the first sign of trouble in the school. Do not at any cost assume that the teacher is right when they are making accusations. Remember that a negative report on your child will remain with them for their entire academic career, and possibly beyond.

Parent, Bristol

I've joined the PTFA and arranged my working life so that I can collect my children from school one day each week and take them to school one day each week. Without a physical presence at the school I would feel that I was missing too much. This is only possible because my employer has been so flexible. I still have to miss many activities at school because parents are given too little notice of them and so cannot make alternative arrangements.

Parent, Manchester

I was able to get flexi time with my job to enable me to spend more time with my kid. She reads to me while I drive her to school. We talk about her school day when I get home and she tells me something new she has learned from school daily, and challenges she faces at school.

Parent, London

Parental involvement is a continuum... spending time with your children every evening talking about school, reading, writing, singing etc. is a clear demonstration to your children that you are interested and that education is important.

Parent

Be in school yourself. Attend all school meetings and take an interest in everything your child is doing. Return all letters and sign all journals and return slips. You will be surprised how schools use this information to judge the quality of parenting.

Parent

Try to volunteer for at least one event in the school year.

Parent

Find a way to break down barriers and create a relationship with the teaching staff. Don't assume that teaching staff know what is best for your child. Challenge their expectations about your child's potential.

Parent, Middlesex

There are lots of educational books in the shops and access to information via the internet. Read with your children - if this means turning the TV off early so be it!

Parent

Identify yourself to your child's teacher. Regularly ask for updates on your child's progress/problems. Don't wait until parents' evenings.

Parent

If parents are involved, then they are informed. If they are informed, then they work with you and not against you. If they work with you, then you have a climate for change.

Teacher

