

Cost

£££££

Evidence strength



Impact (months)

+4

Effect size

0.33

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## What is it?

Parental engagement refers to teachers and schools involving parents in supporting their children's academic learning. It includes:

- approaches and programmes which aim to develop parental skills such as literacy or IT skills;
- general approaches which encourage parents to support their children with, for example reading or homework;
- the involvement of parents in their children's learning activities; and
- more intensive programmes for families in crisis.

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## Key Findings

1. Parental engagement has a positive impact on average of 4 months' additional progress. It is crucial to consider how to engage with all parents to avoid widening attainment gaps.
2. Consider how to tailor school communications to encourage positive dialogue about learning. There is some evidence that personalised messages linked to learning can promote positive interactions.
3. Parental engagement strategies are typically more effective with parents of very young children. It is important to consider how you will maintain parental engagement as children get older. For example, providing flexible communications (e.g. short sessions at flexible times) might create opportunities for parents of older pupils to engage with the school.
4. Consider what support you can give to parents to ensure home learning is of high quality. For example, providing practical strategies with tips, support, and resources to assist learning at home may be more beneficial to pupil outcomes than simply gifting a book to pupils or asking parents to provide generic help to their children.

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## *How effective is the approach?*

The average impact of the Parental engagement approaches is about an additional four months' progress over the course of a year. There are also higher impacts for pupils with low prior attainment.

The evidence about how to improve attainment by increasing parental engagement is mixed and much less conclusive. There are examples where combining parental engagement strategies with other interventions, such as extended early years provision, has not been associated with any additional educational benefit. This suggests that developing effective parental engagement to improve their children's attainment is challenging and needs careful monitoring and evaluation.

There is some evidence that supporting parents with their first child will have benefits for siblings.

Parents' aspirations also appear to be important for pupil outcomes, although there is limited evidence to show that intervening to change parents' aspirations will raise their children's aspirations and achievement over the longer term.

The EEF has tested a number of interventions designed to improve pupils' outcomes by engaging parents in different types of skills development. The consistent message from these has been that it is difficult to engage parents in programmes. By contrast, a trial which aimed to prompt greater parental engagement through text message alerts delivered a small positive impact, and at very low cost.

Despite the global evidence that parental involvement is greatly valued for teachers, parents, and students, there is scant evidence in the Arab world to establish association between parents' involvement role and students' academic performance. Studies of parents in Qatar, UAE, and Algeria have found that parental involvement in promoting the educational well-being of their children is limited. Parents interactions with school were often reported as being limited to visits to discuss behavioral issues rather than their children's learning. Studies have also found that some parents are not aware of the importance of their involvement in the education of their children.

However, a study of parents in Jordan, found that those who were actively involved in their children's learning, positively influenced their behavior, emotions, and cognitive skills which indirectly influenced their academic achievement.

Overall, there remains a limited amount of published studies on parental participation and schooling in the Arab world. Researchers in the Arab world are recommended to examine the relationship and association between parental involvement and children academic achievement and behavior. Researchers are also suggested to investigate which parental involvement interventions will increase attainment.

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## *Behind the average*

Effects are substantially higher in early years settings (+5 months) and primary schools (+4 months) than secondary schools (+2 months).

Effects tend to be higher for literacy (+5 months) than for mathematics (+3 months).

The majority of studies examined home reading interventions. A smaller number of studies examined interventions that aimed to improve parenting skills.

Approaches where a parent works directly with their child one-to-one typically show greater impact (+5 months). Lower attaining pupils appear to benefit in particular.

Parental engagement approaches have been evaluated in 10 countries around the world with broadly similar findings.

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## *Closing the disadvantage gap*

Disadvantaged pupils are less likely to benefit from having a space to conduct home learning. Evidence also suggests that disadvantaged pupils make less academic progress, and sometimes attainment levels even regress during the summer holidays, due to the level of formal and informal learning activities they do or do not participate in. By designing and delivering effective approaches to support parental engagement, schools and teachers may be able to mitigate some of these causes of educational disadvantage, supporting parents to assist their children's learning or their self-regulation, as well as specific skills, such as reading.

However, parental engagement strategies have the risk of increasing attainment gaps, if the parents that access parental engagement opportunities are primarily from affluent backgrounds. It is crucial to consider how parental engagement strategies will engage with all parents.

While encouraging parents to become directly involved in homework might appear attractive, schools should consider whether parents have the knowledge and skills to provide the right support, particularly at secondary level. Interventions designed to engage parents in homework have generally not been linked to increased attainment. Students who are struggling academically may be more likely to request parental assistance with homework, but parents may be unfamiliar with the most effective teaching methods. As a consequence, it may be more effective to encourage parents to redirect a struggling pupil to their teachers rather than to take on an instructional role.

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## *How could you implement in your setting?*

The key mechanism for parental engagement strategies is improving the quality and quantity of learning that takes place in the home learning environment. This is very challenging to implement in practice. Some key elements schools might choose to implement include:

- tailoring communications to encourage positive dialogue about learning
- regularly reviewing how well the school is working with parents, identifying areas for improvement
- offering more sustained and intensive support where needed

Implementing parental engagement strategies needs to consider potential barriers to parents engaging. For example, is there provision for working parents to engage in short sessions with flexible times - or even through remote engagement where available.

Parental engagement approaches are typically delivered over the course an academic year, as building effective relationships between school and parents requires a sustained effort over an extended period of time.

When introducing new approaches, schools should consider implementation. For more information see [Putting Evidence to Work - A School's Guide to Implementation](#).

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## *What does it cost?*

Overall, the median costs of implementing parental engagement are estimated as very low. Most costs arise from staff training and development, all of which are more likely to be start-up costs.

Whilst the median cost estimate for parental engagement is very low, the option to include additional ongoing staff training, materials and resources, and additional staff time means that costs can range from very low to moderate.

These cost estimates assume that schools are already paying for technology for communication with parents, and facilities to host any in person meetings. These are all pre-requisite costs of implementing parental engagement strategies, without which the cost is likely to be higher.

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## *How secure is the evidence?*

The security of the evidence around parental engagement is rated as high. 97 studies were

identified. Overall, the topic lost one padlock because a large percentage of the studies were not independently evaluated. Evaluations conducted by organisations connected with the approach – for example, commercial providers, typically have larger impacts, which may influence the overall impact of the strand.

As with any evidence review, the Toolkit summarises the average impact of approaches when researched in academic studies. It is important to consider your context and apply your professional judgement when implementing an approach in your setting.

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