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How does a small village primary school facilitate parental involvement in their child's education and wider school life?

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
BA (Hons) Primary Education (5-11) with QTS

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May 2023

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to all my teachers past and present for inspiring me on my teaching journey and also a big thank you to all of my placement schools for helping me become the best teacher I can be.

Huge thank to both my Newby girls and uni friends for keeping me going and giving me the motivation to get this done. I couldn't have got through the last 3 years without you all!

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Abstract

A parent is a child's first teacher in their life and is arguably the most invested one too (LaRocque et al., 2011). It is therefore in the schools interest to ensure that parents are able to be actively involved in their child's education and in the wider school community to continue this valuable role in their child's life which should not stop when they start school. This research paper looks into ways in which schools can ensure parents have the opportunity to be a part of their child's learning and the methods used by schools to facilitate this. As part of a small-scale case study, it draws on the opinions of both parents and teachers to investigate what is being done and also what could be done to bring home life and school life closer together. A variety of events are held in school to promote both academic and social involvement however there are still barriers to overcome to ensure even the hardest to reach parents can be part of their child's life in school.

Word count: 6374

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Introduction

This research report aims to explore the ways in which schools encourage parents to get involved in their child's education and wider school life. It will look more specifically at how this works in a small village primary school due to the researcher spending time in such a school during a university placement. A small village school is defined by Galton and Patrick (1990) as a school that does not have more than one hundred pupils taught in no more than four classes; the school under discussion had 97 children on roll across 4 classes so is within this definition.

As Clinton (2006) stated in her book regarding early childhood development, 'It Takes a Village to Raise a Child' so to raise one who is holistically developed, school and home life should be intertwined. However, it is key to note that parents are not a homogenous group so to ensure they can be included in a child's school life, schools need to use a range of techniques to ensure they can participate (Tait and Prodger, 2007, Kendall and Puttrick, 2020). When discussing parental participation in this paper, it is broken down into two key areas: participation in their child's education and participation in wider school life. In this context, education is parents getting involved with activities which link to their child's study based on the national curriculum (such as homework or study sessions in school) and wider school life is considered to be activities outside of this such as school celebrations and their ensuring child's wellbeing.

This small-scale case study takes the viewpoints of both parents and teachers into account and discusses the role a school plays in creating opportunities for parents to be involved. A survey was first distributed via social media to ask parents about their experiences of involvement in their child's schooling. Then whilst in the school, the teachers in the school were interviewed to gain an insight into what they do to involve parents and observations took place to see this in practice. The researcher also analysed any school documentation related to parents to see whether or not they used a whole-school approach to this.

Parents are often a child's first and most interested teachers and this shouldn't stop when they start school. It is easy to overlook the barriers some parents may face so it is hoped that this paper will showcase what can be done to ensure parents can retain this important role in their child's life as they grow (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Literature Review

A parent is defined by the Department for Education as any person who has care of a child and has parental responsibilities for them; one of which is the responsibility of ensuring that the child receives a full-time education (Department for Education, 2015). It could be said that a parent's role in a child's school day is to feed them breakfast, drop them off in the morning, pick them up in the afternoon, ensure they've done their homework, make sure they're fed then put them to sleep to ensure they have enough sleep ready for another day. However increasing research (such as that by Hornby and Blackwell, 2018) shows that a child's chance of succeeding at school is impacted by what goes on beyond the school gates so for them to have a chance of doing well, parents and teachers should work together and be seen equally as valuable as each other (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013).

This literature review discusses what is meant by parental involvement and the importance of ensuring that it takes place. It will look at the roles of a parent and the school in this process and discuss what can be done to make sure that any barriers can be overcome.

Engagement vs Involvement

Many different researchers have used these two terms interchangeably when discussing parental participation but they often have different meanings.

When it comes to the term 'involvement', different parties in school life comprehend it differently. Anderson & Minke (2007) state how parents see their involvement as ensuring their child is safe and present whereas teachers define it as parents being in the school environment and them participating in activities. It could be argued that both of these definitions are correct and all encompass what it means for a parent to be involved but despite it being a relatively old study, many commentators (such as Ellison-Lee & Coates, 2019, Georgiou, 2007) concur with the work of Epstein et al., (1997). Their idea is that parental involvement has five dimensions. These include parenting, volunteering at the school, participation in school decision-making, communicating with the school, and helping with homework. It could therefore be recognised that involvement starts with the parent and what they do with the opportunities they are given.

Engagement on the other hand can be seen as the school's responsibility. Emerson et al., (2012) define it as schools raising parents' awareness of the benefits of participating in their child's schooling and providing them with important skills so they can do this. It is important to recognise the viewpoint of Goodall (2012) that engagement is a process. This process is never complete as new cohorts of parents start every academic year which schools must attempt to engage. However, this can be impacted by the socio-economic characteristics of the school community such as the local culture and wealth (Watt, 2016). These characteristics impact how easy it is for parents to communicate with schools and also impact their expectations of the school. Nevertheless, by building relationships with the community and understanding their needs Morgan (2016) explains schools can engage parents in what is happening in school leading to their participation. It is therefore the role of the school to ensure they can engage all parents and ensure barriers such as language can be overcome.

Although the researcher has chosen to use the term 'facilitate involvement' in this paper, it is important to recognise that this will also involve looking at the methods used to 'engage' parents. By looking at both of these terms in unison, it allows for a deeper understanding of the role of both schools and parents in ensuring participation in a child's education and wider school life.

Importance of Parents

Before a child starts school, their parents are very influential in providing a positive social and educational environment to help their development. Cummings (2017) explains the positive influence parental involvement in early years can have as it gives them the transferable knowledge, confidence and skills they require to help their child in the future. Studies into parents' viewpoints extend this further and showcase how parents find it useful to watch their children learn so that they can assist more, this includes learning vocabulary used so they can use this at home to further learning (Jackson & Needham, 2014, Izci et al., 2022). In turn, this benefits children as their parents are better prepared to assist them in their learning.

As the child progresses through school, it is widely reported that parental participation can improve their academic performance. The research papers detailed above show how parental involvement can assist in terms of being able to help them with their learning, but it has also been shown in research that parental involvement can increase students' motivation to learn and improve their perseverance which creates positive learning behaviours which can be transferred across all curriculum areas (Menheere & Hooge, 2010). By having these skills solidified as they begin their educational journey, when it comes to the time when learning is more independent, they will have the skills to succeed.

Although this can be proved as beneficial across the curriculum as detailed above, this is especially true as a child learns to read (Aston and Grayson, 2013). Research by the National Literacy Trust (2020) details how reading with your child at home, allows reading to be normalised and practised. Alongside this, parents are able to encourage a love of reading which in turn is proven by many commentators such as Twist et al. (2007) to be linked with increased reading assessment scores later on in a child's educational journey. It could be therefore argued that the importance of reading with your child is therefore more important with younger children as this is when you should foster that love of reading as a lot of research into this field focuses on the early years of a child's life. However, as Axford et al., (2019) state in their research report, as children get older parents should carry on listening to their children read and show interest in reading. They also states how parents provide further opportunities which develop their learning such as new, more challenging books.

As well as academic success, parental involvement in school life can support children's well-being, behaviour and attendance. Schools are important in supporting the mental health of children through PSHE lessons and supportive interventions but this cannot happen without the help of parents at home (Department for Education, 2017, Willis et al., 2021). Techniques learnt in the school setting need to be implemented both in and out of school to have the most impact so by having parents aware of what is going

on in school, they can empower the child at home and build their resilience (Mentally healthy schools, no date). In recent years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of mental health issues reported among children has increased. A UK Parliament report showed the disruption the pandemic caused to young people and showed how it disrupted support structures that were in place (Bunn & Lewis, 2021, Dawes et al., 2021). This meant that parents had to continue the support at home and increased their responsibility.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of parents in education also increased due to the fact that they were now the ones who had to ensure children engaged with their learning. Spear et al. (2021) explains how parents went from supporting home learning based on what they had learnt at school to be involved in school learning at home. This was particularly the case for parents with children with additional needs as they were often the ones who had to relay educational content between teachers and their children in a more accessible way (Schuck et al., 2021). This therefore shows how the importance of a parent's involvement has arguably increased as without their guidance at home, children may not have been able to access learning at home and may have fallen behind even more.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Despite the importance of a parent's role, it does not come without its limitations. There are many reasons why some parents cannot be involved as much as others and some struggle to even be involved at all.

During the COVID-19 pandemic alone, there was a range of factors which affected how involved parents could be in their child's learning. For some parents, the technology used by schools to keep in contact with them and their children was brand new which in turn affected the extent to which they could contact schools and also impacted their motivation to participate in online learning (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2022). This therefore had an impact on the ability of children to carry on learning despite the change in circumstances showing the importance once again of parental involvement. However, this is not the case for all parents as many also had to adapt to the same technology for work purposes. All parents however had to adapt to teaching resources, methods and content they were unfamiliar with and despite most embracing this, this was another barrier that was in place for some parents (Spear et al., 2021). This also shows the importance of school supporting parental involvement as communication between parents and teachers was essential.

Another issue which has long been an issue for families is the language or cultural barrier. A report published by The Bell Foundation in 2020 discussed the barriers that may be in place for parents who have English as an additional language (EAL). They discuss how factors such as their level of proficiency in English as well as their understanding of school culture in the UK can hinder parents' ability to communicate with their child's school. Despite resolutions such as translators or translations on websites, the monolingual features of a school can not only hinder a child's ability to learn but also the parents' ability to communicate with the school regarding learning and the ability to be involved in school life (Piller et al., 2021, LaRocque et al., 2011). To resolve this issue, Kendall and Puttrick (2020) describe how schools should have as much of an understanding of the educational system of their home country as the parents do about our country to understand where misconceptions may arise. Although this could be seen as being

professionally difficult, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that the correct provisions are put in place so that parents can be involved and informed.

The Bell Foundation also sets out how another barrier could be the parents' literacy levels in their home language and how despite a possible good grasp of English, their reading and writing skills may hinder school accessibility. However, this is not solely relevant to parents who have English as an additional language. The latest statistics in the UK show that 16.4% of adults are described as having very poor literacy skills showing how regardless of language, there is a large percentage of potential parents who would not be able to access written communication methods between home and school such as letters home or emails (National Literacy Trust, no date, Menheere & Hooge, 2010). If it is known by the school, they can ensure accessibility however if this group of parents is forgotten about it can cause problems.

For many parents, teaching and learning will have changed since they were at school which often causes misunderstandings and blurred expectations. Parents assume that their child's education will be the same as theirs and dependent on whether or not they had a good experience of education, this could cause variations in how much they participate (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018, Department for Education, 2017). If a parent had a negative experience at school themselves or have had poor communication with the school in the past, the extent to which they involve themselves in school life may be lesser as they have not seen the benefits. On the other hand, you may have parents who want to know more than usual about their child's life in school. In the paper mentioned above by Hornby and Blackwell, they discuss how more affluent parents want to know more about their child's education. However, they fail to go into detail on the impact this has on children; it would have been more relevant to discuss this to see whether or not there is such a thing as parents being 'too involved'.

What is the role of schools?

After reflecting on the importance of parents in school life and the barriers to this, it is important to consider what should be done to ensure that parents can be actively involved. Educational leaders recognise that parents alone cannot maximise student success so everyone must work together to achieve maximum effectiveness (Jeynes, 2018). Carrington et al. (2021) explain how school communities are made of teachers, students and families and they all have obligations to play in the school to ensure effective relationships can be built and everyone is connected, included and feel like they belong in the environment. It is therefore important that schools create this environment and ensure that they engage parents in a variety of ways as collaboration should be implemented as a whole school strategy from a proactive approach, not a reactive one (Goodall et al., 2011).

This consequently sets the context of what this research paper will aim to discover. By looking at methods used by schools in the study, it aims to uncover what schools can do about certain obstacles that parents face to ensure progress towards the shown success of parent participation in a child's life.

Research Methods and Data Analysis

This research has been conducted as a small-scale case study. Case studies are a more naturally occurring form of research which allow the researcher to learn from first-hand experiences and use this to influence practice (Leymun et al., 2017). This seemed a particularly good fit for this study as the researcher would be able to go into the school in question and learn first-hand the methods they used to involve and engage parents without disrupting the children's learning. Case studies also allow the researcher to take these experiences and use them to be reflective and question why things may happen more holistically; this is because they can explain why things may happen using firmer evidence (Denscombe, 2021). This allows for a better analysis of what was found to try to produce results which can continue to be used even after the research has concluded (Yin, 2009).

The researcher used qualitative data in this report using a variety of data collection methods including surveys, interviews, observations as well as analysis of school documentation. This was chosen as this form of data allows for the setting to be viewed without a predetermined hypothesis; it allows the researcher to discover new things about the topic in question and come to more useful conclusions (Check and Schutt, 2012). In order to have a deeper insight into what methods are used by schools, it was important to collect data that did not restrict explanations which is what this type of data allows.

The first stage of data collection used was a survey which was sent out via social media to parents who have had children in primary school. This method of distribution was supported by Parker, Scott and Geddes (2019) who discussed how it increases participation by being shared online, allowing for more voices to be heard. The aim of this was to understand the research questions initially from a parent's viewpoint in terms of what they believe was good or could be improved about parental involvement in schools. When writing the questions, ensured that the wording of the questions was brief to avoid open interpretation and the participants losing interest as advocated by Tymms (2021). The survey was created on Qualtrics survey software and received 68 anonymous participants.

When the researcher started their time in the research school, they began data collection by observing interactions between the school and parents to initially see what methods were used. Observations are useful where the intended outcome is to observe the behaviour of an individual rather than their view of a certain topic which was the aim in the initial days of the research (Kumar, 2019). Whilst in the school setting, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher to see how they interact with parents in their practice. For each interview, the questions asked to the teacher remained the same however if an interesting point was brought up, the teacher was probed to develop their answer further. This ensured that there was a balance between asking the researcher questions and the teacher sharing their own reflections as recommended by Barbour (2014). When the researcher conducted the interviews, they had been in the school for several weeks and had worked alongside each teacher and observed their practice. The interviews were conducted at this time as Wilson (2017) highlights the importance of having a respectful relationship between you and the person you are interviewing as this will influence their attitude towards the interview and how they respond.

After conducting interviews and observations, school documentation was collected from the school website and school office to see if there was any mention of parents in policies such as the school's behaviour or safeguarding policies. Bowen (2009) states how the analysis of documentation allows the researcher to understand the context in which participants operate. This meant the researcher was able to see if the school had a whole-school approach when it came to involving parents and whether or not there were links between previous findings and information stated in the policies.

Once the researcher had completed the data collection, the data collected from each of these techniques was analysed through coding. Coding occurs during thematic analysis and pulls out the key themes within the data to discuss further (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Despite a carefully designed research method, there are limitations of this study due to the small sample size of teachers and the short time spend in school to observe interactions. It is also essential to consider the reliability and validity of the research. All data collected was relevant to the topic under investigation. Walliman (2010) details how validity can be compromised by poor sampling which shows the importance of having a fair sample. The sampling within the research was done by a convenience sample of the teachers within the school. This therefore means if the research was to be completed again in a different school, the results would be slightly different due to a teacher working differently but it would hopefully present a similar conclusion.

Ethical Considerations

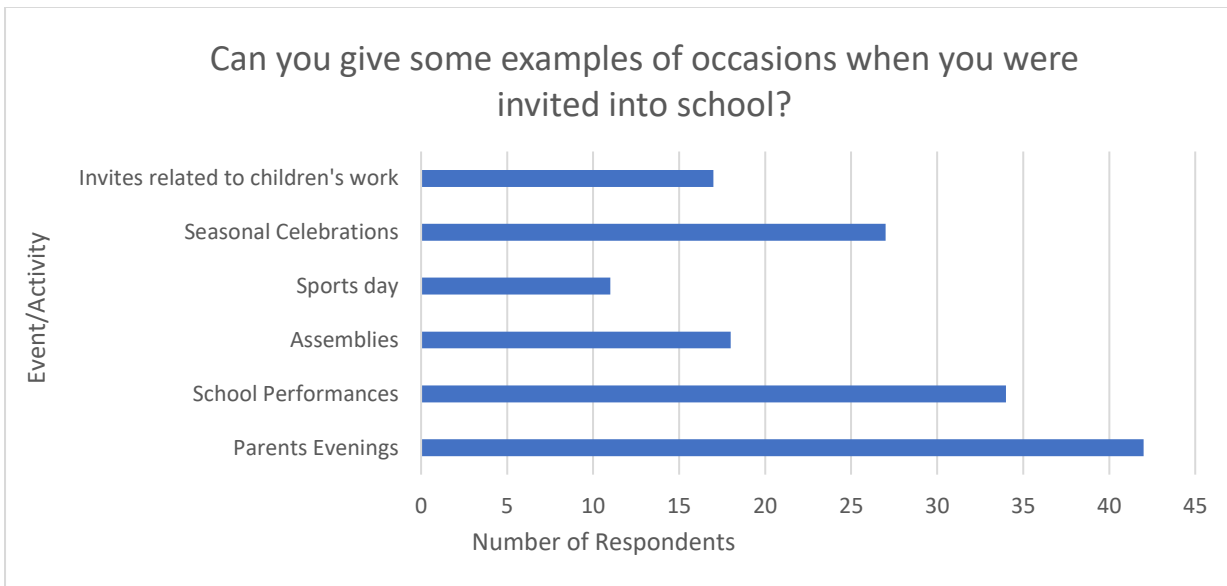
This research has ethical clearance from York St John University. Each participant has remained anonymous throughout the study and data has remained confidential throughout. Passive consent was obtained from the headteacher of the research school as well as the researcher gaining individual consent from each class teacher observed and interviewed. At the beginning of the survey, participants were given details of the study and were asked to give consent based on this. All participants across all data collection methods were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time and were told how to do this.

Findings and Discussion

Why are parents invited into school?

The evidence collected in this research suggests that across an academic year, there are many opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's school life. 38% of respondents said how they were invited into school 1-3 times per year however 39% said they were invited in 4-6 times per year showing how the level of involvement really does vary from school to school.

In the parental survey, each respondent detailed some of the reasons they have been invited into school. The most common responses are shown in the graph below.



Interestingly, only a quarter of respondents gave a reason that was linked to the child’s academic work. Respondents gave examples such as: viewing work in children’s books, watching lessons, end-of-topic events, mathematics mornings and reading/phonics mornings.

When teachers in the school were interviewed regarding academic involvement, it was highlighted that each class in the school engaged parents in very similar ways as advocated by Willis et al. (2021). Parents are invited in to observe lessons and look at their children’s work at least once a term and the head teacher reported how this is often linked to parents’ queries. For example, the school had been receiving questions from parents regarding the school’s spelling policy; they were therefore invited to watch and participate in a spelling lesson which also gave them techniques they could use at home. Menheere and Hooge (2010) also set out the importance of a whole-school approach to ensure equal opportunities among parents, regardless of their child’s age or class teacher.

Parents were also invited in for end-of-topic events such as a dance performance or imagination library sessions in the early years foundation stage. Watt (2016) discusses the positive impact events like this can have as it gives parents a positive reason to be in the school in a non-threatening context which over time will bring about positive attitudes towards education among parents who may have previously had negative ones. Events like this also allow parents to talk with each other which, as discussed by Cummings (2017), increases parental confidence and the likelihood of getting themselves involved.

When it comes to parents being updated on their child’s progress, 81% of respondents explained they were only informed about this 1-3 times a year and it was reported that the main two ways in which this was done were via school reports and parents’ evenings. One respondent reported how ‘I wish I could have constant access to my child’s attainment levels’. It is statutory to report on a child’s progress at the end of the summer term in the UK however anything done outside of that is at the school’s discretion (Standards

and Testing Agency, 2022). To conclude further on the right frequency of parental updates on progress, further research must be done.

When looking at the school's homework policy, it states how parents should make it clear to children that they value homework and wish to support the school in this approach. It also states how parents are encouraged to give teachers feedback on how the child got on with the work to help with the child's learning. One of the teachers that was interviewed reiterated this point and discussed how parents often do this which was found to be beneficial during the pandemic when they often relied on parents to assess their child. This is also backed up by the Positive Relationship policy which sets out how parents should understand and reinforce school language as much as possible.

By assisting their child with homework, teachers detail how it allows more opportunities for progress and as discussed in the literature, it allows children to have a better attitude towards learning as if they can see their parents want to learn, they will replicate this (Margolis, 2005, Medwell and Wray, 2019).

The teacher in the early years foundation stage discussed how although their children did not receive homework in the same way as the rest of the school did, they have phonics home school liaison books which allow parents to see what they are currently learning, read feedback from the teacher and practice this at home. In KS1 and KS2, homework is often interactive and is sometimes set as mini projects. Teachers reported how this encouraged parents to get involved in their child's homework and what they are currently learning. In these key stages, messages about progress were also written in the child's reading record giving parents another way to keep track of their attainment. However, Brău et al. (2016) express caution towards this approach as one has to recognise how a parent can have conflicting motives between helping achieve good results and helping them make progress. It can be argued that sometimes parents may complete homework for the children instead of the child doing it themselves so to combat this, teachers must be aware of this possibility (Dettmers et al., 2019).

In interviews, it was explained how parents were invited into school for decision making too. During the researcher's time in school, they were in the process of changing the hours of the school day. For this decision, parents were invited into the school to take part in a parent consultation regarding school hours. Parents were also consulted on how to celebrate events such as world book day or the King's coronation. This argument is strengthened by Jackson and Needham (2014) who talk about the role of parents in school decision-making specifically and the importance of it in getting parents. They were asked to suggest events which would be affordable for them and ones which they would be able to assist with; the headteacher mentioned how in the past parents with specific skills or interests such as gardening have given up their time and come into school to offer their services. By allowing parents to have these important roles in school life, it ensures sustained participation and them having a meaningful impact on their child's education (Campbell, 2011).

Barriers to parental involvement

The final question of the survey asked parents what schools could do better when it comes to their involvement. The most common replies to this question were that they wish there were more invitations into school, more regular communication and more updates on their child's progress.

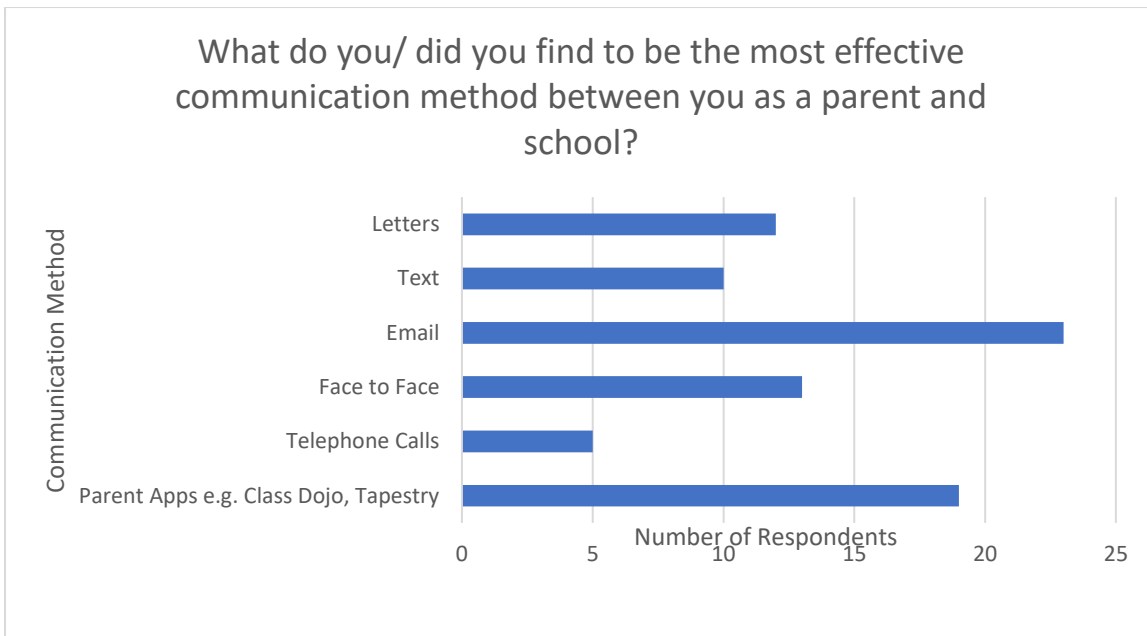
Another common response to the question surrounded the topic of working parents. They expressed the difficulty many of them faced trying to contact parents outside of working hours and since they do not drop their child off/ pick them up from school, all communication had to happen over email, app or the phone. Rattenborg et al. (2018) discuss this issue in their research and state how dual-earner families face limits to participation in school due to the timings of the school day and their workday clashing. Many analysts suggest ways in which this issue can be remedied and a common theme within these is the need for schools to be flexible; for example, Morgan (2017) advocates how schools should be flexible around both venues and timing for participation to work around shift patterns. Schools should also be adaptable to these situations in order to ensure every parent has the opportunity to be involved (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012).

The researcher asked parents in the survey if their level of involvement in their child's schooling has changed as they have grown older and of the 50 parents that this question was relevant to, 70% agreed and said they're involved less. One respondent stated how 'I wish there was more regular communication, especially in KS1 where my child can not always relay what they have been doing'. One of the class teachers interviewed in KS2 also stated how they had less involvement with parents than they do in lower years.

During their interview, the headteacher explained how she is attempting to set up a PTA group however it has been difficult to do this due to parents' commitments. They also discussed how another priority of the school is to encourage more parents to volunteer in a school in roles such as reading partners or volunteering for trips. By allowing parents to have these meaningful roles within the school, it ensures parents are able to feel more comfortable within the school and involvement becomes familiar (LaRocque et al., 2011).

Communication between parents and the school

During data collection, respondents spoke a lot about their involvement in terms of communication. Below are the methods respondents stated as the most effective communication methods.



76% of parents stated that their first point of contact if they had an issue or concern would be the child's class teacher, followed by the headteacher as stated by 50% of parents. The school have an open-door policy meaning that parents can come into the school and speak to a member of staff whenever necessary during opening hours which is advocated by the Department for Education (2017). Nonetheless, parents detailed in the survey how it was often hard to get in touch with teachers as they were busy and conversely, in the interviews, teachers stated how it was often difficult to find time to call parents back due to other demands in the school day.

The headteacher reported how sometimes the chain of communication is broken and they are too accessible as parents come directly to them instead of the class teacher for smaller issues and questions and are often censorious when they do so. Campbell (2011) relates to this in her research and discusses the need for parents to shift from being critical to becoming a critical friend who helps the school to raise expectations and standards by providing constructive feedback instead of purely negative.

In the research school, the main method of communication with parents in the early years foundation stage, KS1 and KS2 is through the app 'Seesaw' where teachers upload messages, homework and information about what their child is learning. Parents have the opportunity to speak with the class teacher at pick-up and drop-off times. Teachers reported how aside from this, communication with parents was as and when either party required it. The school also regularly updates its Twitter account and website with updates on the children's learning and important calendar events.

Results from the survey suggest that technology provides one of the main forms of communication between parents and teachers and applications such as Class Dojo, Twitter and school websites are key parts of this. Locke-Wheaton (2021) promotes the use of technology such as Microsoft Teams and other video call services as a way of connecting with parents and states how video calling/messages give more flexibility in ways they can connect. In addition to this, Axford et al. (2019) discuss the importance of two-way communication so all parties in a child's life remain informed and connected which can be facilitated by

messaging on these apps. This shows how there is evidence to suggest that it is the responsibility of both parents and teachers to ensure involvement as they both can reach out to one another.

The headteacher stated how when they became headteacher just over two years ago, parental involvement and communication were a priority to improve as under the previous head, only 37% of parents said it was effective. Since they have been in the school, they have ensured that parents are invited in to celebrate successes through weekly assemblies as well as inviting them to many social events such as after-school sports classes with school staff and fundraisers throughout the year. Goodall et al. (2011) acknowledge the need for schools to work alongside the community during events like this as another opportunity to engage parents who may otherwise struggle to engage due to work commitments. Mentally Healthy Schools (no date) share these findings and state how it also provides an opportunity for parents to get to know staff which can lead to them feeling more comfortable and supported in school.

When interviewing the SENDCO of the school, they discussed how communication with parents of children with SEND was as and when required which was more than others for some children. They spoke with parents about their child's progress and support at least termly and if appropriate, parents were invited to a yearly EHCP (Education Healthcare Plan) review meeting with all agencies involved in that child's support. This is furthered in the SEND policy which states that parents and teachers must work together to identify and action targets to improve pupil outcomes. However, Lendrum et al. (2013) state that it should not just be the SENDCO keeping in contact, the class teacher must also do so to ensure holistic support for the child. By creating these trusting relationships with all parties in a child's education, teachers can be better prepared to recognise potential discrepancies between a child's life at home and school to ensure this holistic support once again (Schuck et al., 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many ways in which schools can facilitate parental involvement in their child's education and wider school life. Parents are invited into school for many different reasons however the frequency of this varies from school to school.

Results from the research survey showed that parents had more opportunities to get involved in the wider school life than they did their child's education. Nevertheless, it was highlighted through interviews with teachers and policies of the research school that through a whole-school approach which allowed parents to observe learning in which they felt less knowledgeable about, parents could be given positive, meaningful reasons to be in the school setting. However, this does not dismiss the importance of events which encompass the wider school life. By inviting parents in for assemblies, school performances and religious events, parents who may not have had a positive experience with schools in the past to change their perceptions and become more comfortable in the school setting.

Teachers across all year groups in school value the impact parents can have on their child's learning through changing attitudes towards their education and assistance with learning (especially during the

COVID-19 pandemic) and value their opinions when it comes to decision making to ensure all parents voices can be heard and schools can begin to see the needs of individual families and groups in school instead of seeing parents as a homogenous group.

Although, teachers need to be aware of the barriers, that despite their best efforts of encouraging all parents, hinder the ability of some to be involved. Whether that their working responsibilities or the age of their children's schools should recognise these and work towards ensuring even the hardest-to-reach parents are involved. Regular communication was identified as a key factor in parental involvement and it was revealed that arguably the most effective method in the eyes of both parents and teachers was through technology and apps such as Class Dojo or Twitter. All parties still valued face-to-face communication however it was often difficult for parents to get in touch with the class teacher due to their busy workload resulting in many going straight to the headteacher due to them being more accessible at all times of the day.

However, it must be highlighted that this study was completed in a small village primary school where overall, there are fewer parents to involve. Small villages such as that in the study often have a less transient population which results in stronger connections to schools which many generations of a family may have attended; this can result in a more trusting relationship between parent and school (Barley & Beesley, 2007). It must therefore be noted that results may differ in a larger school.

Regardless, the research proved that to have effective parental involvement, one of the most important factors was positive relationships. All partners such as the child's class teacher, SENDCO, headteacher and parents must remain fully connected with opportunities for engagement coming from both sides. To take this research further into future practice, schools need to recognise the importance of building these positive relationships with parents so that they feel comfortable and confident to come into school and participate. This could be done in a variety of different ways such as more informal fundraising events and sports classes or inviting them into the classroom to see their child's learning. Either way, it must ensure that partnerships are founded on trust, support and knowledge on both sides and that the child's best interests are at heart.

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Appendices

Parental Survey Questions

- 1) Do you consent to participating in this survey? You have the right to withdraw at any point and all your data remains confidential.
- 2) Do you have children who are/have been in primary school?
- 3) What did you find to be the most effective communication method between you and school?
- 4) How often were you invited into school per academic year?
- 5) Can you give examples of occasions that you were invited in?
- 6) Did your involvement in school life change as your child got older (Y/N/ Not applicable)
- 7) If you had a question or concern, who in school would you speak to?
- 8) Were class teachers approachable?
- 9) Were class teachers prompt at responding to questions and concerns?
- 10) How often were you informed about your child's academic achievement?
- 11) In what ways was this done?
- 12) Can you think of any occasions/ways in which schools could've involved you more?
- 13) How did school engage with you during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Teacher Interview Questions

- 1) Do you invite parents into school? For what reason? How often?
- 2) What are the main methods of communication between you and parents?
- 3) What kind of things do you communicate with parents about?
- 4) How often do you communicate with parents?
- 5) How do you promote a positive relationship between parents and the school?
- 6) During the COVID-19 pandemic how did you communicate with parents?