A REPORT FOR SAVE THE CHILDREN AND WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY THROUGH HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IN THE EARLY YEARS

Dr. Daniela Sime
Liz Seagraves
Marion Sheridan
Konstanze Spohrer

Faculty of Education,
University of Strathclyde

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was commissioned by Save the Children to inform the planning of a long term programme of activities in West Dunbartonshire Council. Save the Children has identified in 2008 the improvement of the educational experiences and life chances of children and young people living in severe poverty as one of its main objectives. As part of this initiative, this study was commissioned in March 2009, to identify the priority areas in relation to Save the Children's future contribution in West Dunbartonshire to inform future interventions in the field of home-school partnership that will improve educational outcomes for children living in severe and persistent poverty. This research was designed as a qualitative study aimed to report on current initiatives and practice in relation to home-school partnerships and service delivery for the poorest families and to identify programming opportunities that could form part of a long term collaborative programme of activities between West Dunbartonshire Council and Save the Children.

The main objectives, as set in the commissioning document developed by Save the Children, were:

1. Establish what data is available locally concerning the target group of children in severe and persistent poverty (including information about Free School Meals and Clothing Grants) and identify critical gaps.
2. Map what is currently being done in West Dunbartonshire (with a focus in Clydebank area) to improve outcomes for the target group through home-school partnership. Evaluate the impact of these initiatives, including the level of involvement in decision-making experienced by children and parents living in severe and persistent poverty.
3. Identify developments that should be undertaken to improve outcomes, based on evidence.
4. Formulate a set of outcome targets with respect to children, parents and professionals (multi-agency) for the long term programme.
5. Outline the activities that should be undertaken to achieve the set outcomes and how they should be delivered.

The research questions linked to the above objectives, as set in the commissioning document developed by Save the Children, were:

1. What data is available locally concerning the target group of children in severe and persistent poverty?
2. What are the critical gaps in data?
3. What is currently being done to improve outcomes for children in severe and persistent poverty through home-school partnership?
4. What is the impact of these initiatives?
5. What is the level of involvement in decision-making experienced by children and parents living in severe and persistent poverty?
6. What developments should be undertaken to improve outcomes, based on evidence?
7. What outcome targets should be set concerning children, parents and professionals (multi-agency) for the long term programme?
8. What activities should be undertaken to achieve the set outcomes?

To answer these research questions, interviews were initially held with 13 key informants from a range of services. These were individuals in charge of delivering services to children and families in the West Dunbartonshire area. In the second stage (Phase 2), 3 schools and 3 Early Education & Childcare Centres (EECCs) were invited to participate in the study.

Interviews were conducted with the head teacher/head of centre in each of these schools/EECCs, to discuss current approaches to home-school/home-EECC links and issues of supporting children and families, with a specific focus on engagement of parents living in severe poverty. Two schools and two EECCs were located in one area of high deprivation, Clydebank, with a high proportion of children entitled to free school meals. One school and one EECC were outside the Clydebank area and these were highlighted by key informants as examples of good practice; their involvement in the study was for this reason. Practitioners, parents and children from all settings were also involved in the research, through focus groups carried out in the schools/EECCs. In total, 3 head teachers, 4 EECC managers, 10 teachers, 10 early years practitioners, 25 parents and 26 children took part in the research. The methods used in gathering the data from all participants are presented in more detail in Section 4.

Findings are presented in four sections. Section 5 provides a mapping of key services available to poor children and their families in West Dunbartonshire, especially in the Clydebank area. Section 6 summarises the findings from key informants, Section 7 presents the findings from data collected from managers and practitioners in schools, including head teachers, managers, teachers and early years key workers, while Section 8 presents the findings from parents and children.

The last section of the report provides a summary of recommendations on how the development of home-school links in West Dunbartonshire and approaches to supporting parental involvement in children's learning could be best developed in order to improve poor children's educational experiences. These recommendations include:

- Make more effective use of existing data to identify vulnerable children and their families and provide targeted support early on; develop systems of longitudinal monitoring of progress;
- Increased advocacy for parents as able educators and for the importance of meaningful home-school links to improve children's educational experience, enhance aspirations and ensure children's well-being;
- More support and opportunities for parents to develop the necessary skills in order to engage in meaningful home-school links and their children's learning;
- Provide training opportunities for school staff to engage parents in more meaningful ways in their children's education and become creative in developing home-school links;
- Training events for staff from schools and other agencies to support coordinated provision and the development of communities of practice between services;
- Development of materials and events that facilitate parents' engagement with the curriculum-related materials at school and at home, for example through literacy, math or science packs;
- Improvement of communication opportunities and methods used by schools to involve families and increased opportunities for meaningful consultation and genuine involvement of parents in decision making processes;
- Increased family support, especially through outreach workers, especially for families with young children;
- Better facilities for parents to meet and develop informal networks of support, flexible provision of events, including some outwith the parents' working hours.

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CONTACT DETAILS

For any enquiries about the report, please contact the project leader, Dr Daniela Sime, at: daniela.sime@strath.ac.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

"Parents, carers and family members are by far the most important influences on children's lives." (Scottish Executive, 2006)

Over the past decade, there have been significant changes in ideas about home-school links and parents' role in supporting children's education. Research consistently shows that parents' involvement in their children's education and parents' own level of education, especially that of mothers, are a strong predictor of children's academic success. The importance of parents and other family members as children's primary educators has long been acknowledged by policy makers, schools and other service providers. However, until recently, parental involvement in children's learning at home was generally disregarded in schools, unless that learning matched the curricular areas. Similarly, parents' involvement in learning at school tended to be minimal and often tokenistic. Rarely are parents asked to contribute with ideas to the curriculum or how it is taught and they have, still, minimal influence in the decision-making process at the school level.

The introduction of the *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*, which makes parental involvement in schools a key priority and acknowledges the important role that parents need to play in their children's education means that schools and early years centres need to re-think the relationship with the children's parents and find ways of genuine involvement of parents/carers in children's learning. Teachers, parents and other agencies need now to find ways of bridging the gap between children's informal and formal learning opportunities and work together in enhancing children's levels of aspiration and achievement in education.

These changes in legislation are important to ensure a more coherent learning experience for children. Research suggests that parents who find it most difficult to get involved with their child's learning and the education system are white working class parents, ethnic minority groups and disabled families, the groups traditionally marginalised. The reasons often cited by these parents for their apparent lack of involvement is their own bad experiences of schooling and the fact that the culture of the schools is often too formal and distinct from the culture of the home. Also, more parents feel more involved in their children's education at the early years stage.

It is in this context that Save the Children has identified home-school links and parental involvement in children's learning in families living in severe poverty as a priority and has commissioned this study. The main aim of this scoping study has been to report on current practice in relation to home-school links in West Dunbartonshire, with a focus on early years and transition to primary, and to identify further opportunities that could form part of the future collaboration between Save the Children and West Dunbartonshire Council.

The report starts off with a brief overview of the current policy context and approaches to identifying families in poverty. In Section 3, current research on support for poorest families to engage in their children's education is reviewed, with a focus on transitions and multi-agency work. Section 4 outlines the methodology used in collecting the data in West Dunbartonshire. Section 5 maps out current provision for parents in general, with a focus on disadvantaged families. Findings from key informants, staff in schools and EECCs, parents and children are presented in Sections 6 to 8. The report concludes with a summary of findings and key recommendations in Section 9.

2. POLICY CONTEXT AND POVERTY INDICATORS

2.1 POLICY CONTEXT

Services provided in West Dunbartonshire that seek to improve the educational outcomes of children living in severe and persistent poverty, in particular through home-education partnerships, are delivered within a complex policy context. Educational outcomes and partnership with parents are not the sole responsibility of Education services, but are delivered within the context of inter-agency working and policies which seek to put the child and family at the centre.

The passing of the *The Children (Scotland) Act* (1995) required local authorities to publish a Children's Services Plan, which was the product of multi-agency working. Guidance from the Scottish Executive in 2004 led to Integrated Children's Services Plans in which services, (social work, health, education and the voluntary sector) were required to produce one single plan, which focused on effective planning for better integrated services for children and families. Policy developments and priorities since 2005 set the framework for current planning and delivery of children's services in and through local authorities.

The framework for planning was substantially altered with the introduction of the Scottish Government's Concordat in partnership with the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in November 2007, which set out new partnership arrangements with local authorities. The aims of the Concordat included consolidation of funding provision, more flexibility to local authorities (in particular the removal of ring-fenced funding) and streamlining reporting. The first stage involved Single Outcome Agreements between the Scottish Government and local authorities based on the Government's 15 national outcomes. From 2009, the Single Outcome Agreements are between the Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships. A number of public sector organisations are statutory partners in Community Planning. These include: the local authority, health board, fire, police, enterprise agency and transport partnership. In addition to the statutory partners, Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) typically involve other public, voluntary, community and private sector partners (http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/community-planning/). While all national outcomes are at least indirectly related to the issue of improving the life chances of children and young people living in poverty, in the context of this study, three are particularly relevant:

> 4. *Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.*
> 5. *Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.*
> 8. *We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk.*

Within the West Dunbartonshire SOA (2009), the focus for outcome 4 is on school estates, national assessment and exam performance, implementing Curriculum for Excellence and supporting staff development in relevant pedagogies. It is noted that West Dunbartonshire performs well on 5-14 attainment in relation to a consortium of authorities who have agreed to share and benchmark this data. The main issue which is relevant to the age group of the children which are the focus of the current study (4 to 7 years) is the strategy for implementing Curriculum for Excellence. Outcome 5 focuses on supporting parents (especially during pregnancy) and children's health outcomes and providing family support through community resources and specific parenting programmes. Quality pre-school education and early intervention in literacy support are highlighted in addressing Outcome 5. Services and programmes provided in relation to this outcome are of relevance to the current study, e.g. parenting strategy, early years and early intervention strategy, and

Curriculum for Excellence implementation. Outcome 8 addresses issues of those on the Child Protection Register and the needs of looked after and accommodated children.

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (Scottish Executive, 2006) is the Scottish Government programme that promotes wellbeing of children and young people. GIRFEC identifies 8 areas of wellbeing which need to be addressed for children's progress: healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included and safe. It is underpinned by 10 core components and 14 values and principles (see list in Appendix B) which are relevant to all services and should be embedded in all policies. Its emphasis is on prevention, early identification and intervention to ensure that children, young people and families get the kind of support and help they need when they need it. Universal services (health care, early years centres and schools) are essential to the process of early identification of the need for additional support. Key to improved outcomes is partnership working across agencies involved in the lives of children and their families in order to undertake integrated assessment and care planning. Over the past 3 years implementing and delivering services in line with GIRFEC has been a priority for local authorities and their partners.

The *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act* (2006) aims to provide a framework for schools to develop their partnership work with families. It identifies specific aims of developing the home-school links, by ensuring that parents are more involved in their children's education, they are active participants in the life of the school and have a voice in the school's decisions. The Act recognises that parents and families are children's most influential educators and emphasises three levels of parental engagement, to include learning at home, home-school partnerships and parental representation in schools and at the local authority level. Over the past 3 years, education and children's services departments of local authorities have been developing strategies for parental involvement, which should support the meaningful engagement of parents and other carers in children's learning and education.

In November 2008, the Scottish Government published, jointly with COSLA, *The Early Years Framework,* which sets out a framework for supporting children from pre-birth to 8 years old. 'This broad definition of early years is a recognition of the importance of pregnancy in influencing outcomes and that the transition into primary school is a critical period in children's lives' (p3). The Framework is premised on 10 elements of transformational change and identifies some key elements for action (see Appendix B).Two of the elements are highlighted in relation to the current study: 'Breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years' and 'Using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and intervention'.

The *Early Years Framework* emphasises the importance of building the capacity of universal services and that investment should focus on ensuring 'antenatal care, postnatal community nursing, childcare, pre-school and school are equipped to identify needs and risks, and able then to deliver a service that meets the different needs identified within mainstream services as far as possible' (p17). Some of the key elements for action are:
- More help to develop parenting skills with ante-natal and post-natal care and developing the capacity needed to deliver this;
- Break down barriers between education and childcare through a move towards more integrated, flexible services;
- More consistent access to intensive family support services in the early years;
- More help for informal support networks;
- Nurseries, schools and childcare centres developing their role in family and community learning;
- Building on work already in progress through *Getting it Right for Every Child* and *Curriculum for Excellence* to provide child-centred, outcome-focused services. (p5)

2.2 IDENTIFYING POVERTY

Definitions and indicators

Poverty, its definitions in terms of income and material deprivation, its causes and its consequences are highly complex issues which are not explored here. However, one of the key questions for providers of services is how to identify those that are in poverty, and one of the questions for this research relates to what information is held at local level about families in poverty.

When considering available indicators, there are a number of issues that need consideration in using existing indicators to identify and support the poorest families. Some of these issues are summarised as follows in a *Technical Review of Indicators of Deprivation* commissioned by the Treasury/DfES (2006: 1):

- *Whether it is possible to use a **direct** measure of need, or whether it is more appropriate to use a **proxy** measure;*

- *whether the measure is primarily to identify **deprivation** (e.g. the numbers on benefits), or looks at the full spectrum of pupils;*

- *where the measures used are proxies, whether they relate directly to the pupil(s) **(pupil-based),** or to the area in which the pupil lives (or the school is situated) (**area-based**) ;*

- *where the measures used are **proxies,** how **relevant** they are likely to be.*

The report identifies four sets of indicators (see Appendix E), namely:

- *Income-based indicators*, e.g. Free School Meals (FSM), benefits-based measures (income support, job seekers' allowance, housing and council tax benefits), estimates of average income (ACORN);

- *Area-based indicators*, including the Index of Multiple Deprivation, commercial geodemographic classifications, 2001 Census data;

- *Attainment-based indicators*, including early assessment results (KS 1-3 scores, Foundation Stage profile, other tests)

- *Pupil-based indicators,* including mobility/turnover, looked-after children or children at risk, EAL children and ethnic minority children, refugees and migrants.

In West Dunbartonshire, data for most of these indicators are available or easily obtainable from other organisations (e.g. SIMD neighbourhood statistics, Department of Work and Pensions Work and Child Tax Credit data, the Census data etc.). The question is which of the indicators are most reliable in identifying the poorest children or those more likely to be in severe poverty. Partington (2006), the author of the above cited report, also gives a list of criteria for the choice of most valuable indicators. These include:

- *Accuracy/Reliability of indicator*
- *Objectivity*
- *Timeliness, i.e. how often can the indicator be updated*
- *Availability/accessibility*
- *Coverage*
- *Ease of use/transparency*

In finding the best indicators to identify and track children in severe and persistent poverty, consideration needs to be given to the above criteria, to ensure that any systems put in place that would collect data from a range of sources are valid and consistent in predicting poverty. Also, it seems that a combination of indicators rather than reliance on one single type of indicator is more likely to predict severe poverty.

Magadi and Middleton (2007) identify characteristics of severe child poverty. These include: workless parents in receipt of means tested benefits; mothers who have left education before 16 and have low qualifications; living in rented accommodation (social rather than privately rented housing); no savings; lone parents; large number of children in the family; young parents; Asian or Asian British; disabled adult in the family.

At school and authority level, free school meal entitlement is often taken to be an indicator of need, though it is often seen as an unreliable indicator, as it is based on benefits entitlement and not all parents claim benefits to which they are entitled, not all parents claim free school meals they are entitled to; also families that are working and on low incomes are not entitled to claim (the so-called 'working poor'). (It was noted during the course of the research that West Dunbartonshire's commitment to the Scottish Government Policy of introducing free school meals for pupils in P1 to P3 would greatly benefit such families.)

Although some children who attend a school with a high uptake of free school meals or live in an area with high levels of deprivation will not necessarily be poor, there is a high likelihood that they will suffer from aspects of poverty. Therefore, income and area-based indicators can be used to target entire areas of deprivation, particularly in terms of supporting families through 'universal' services such as health care and education. Research indicates that profiling of areas is an important aspect of targeting support for the neediest and in identifying particular target groups, such as lone parents or young mothers. It is however acknowledged that there is a lack of publicly available data to help identify and quantify specific target populations (Belsky *et al.* and Hannon *et al.*, both in Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Hutton *et al.,* 2008).

Poverty in Scotland, West Dunbartonshire and Clydebank

Recently published statistics on poverty in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2009) indicate that, in 2006-2007, there were 860,000 individuals in Scotland who were living in relative poverty[1]; this equals 17% of the Scottish population. In 2006-2007, there were just over 200,000 children living in relative poverty; this equals 20% of children in Scotland.

At local authority level, Work and Child Tax credit data from the Department of Work and Pensions is used to indicate levels of poverty. According to West Dunbartonshire's Single Outcome Agreement, for 2009 onwards,

> *…some 10,910 families are in receipt of child and working tax credits, which is around 19% of the population. There are 1,850 children living in households where the family is in work, but where the household income is 60% of the national median income. These are the families who are described as the working poor. There are also 4,860 children living in households where no one works who would also be classified as poor children. Taken together this means that 38% of all children in West Dunbartonshire could be classed as 'poor' (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2009- Single Outcome Agreement)*

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[1] Individuals are defined as being in poverty if their disposable household income is below 60% of the UK median. Relative poverty measures whether those on the lowest incomes are keeping up with the growth in the economy as a whole.

The SOA indicates that, in 2006/07, 45% of children were living in low income households that are dependent on out of work benefits or child tax credits more than the family element. The latest *Local Authority level proxy poverty data* (July, 2009)[2] published by the Scottish Government gives an even higher figure, of 55% of children and young people living in low income households. This places West Dunbartonshire as the 2nd most deprived local authority in Scotland, after Glasgow (with 59% of children in low income households).

The *Scottish Indicators of Multiple Deprivation (*SIMD) is a tool for identifying area concentrations of multiple deprivation, derived from data related to 7 domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing; across these domains there are 37 indicators. The country is divided in 6505 datazones, each with a population of under 1000, and ranked in terms of deprivation based on data currently available as at 2005/2006. As the focus of our study is Clydebank (excluding Faifley)[3], 13 datazones were identified which lie within the country's 20% most deprived datazones. One indicator has been chosen to illustrate levels of deprivation: the percentage of the total population who are income deprived (at 2005 - the latest figures available at the time of the research).

Table 2.1 Percentage of population income deprived in 2005 in Clydebank datazones and their overall rank in Scotland (out of 6505)

Datazone	% of population income deprived	SIMD rank	Percentile
A	38.4	185	0-5%
B	38.2	320	0-5%
C	42.7	373	5-10%
D	36.7	423	5-10%
E	36.7	425	5-10%
F	36.1	476	5-10%
G	35.5	532	5-10%
H	33.8	647	5-10%
I	26.6	663	10-15%
J	27.1	899	10-15%
K	25.7	1144	15-20%
L	26.7	1240	15-20%
M	24.5	1248	15-20%

West Dunbartonshire	19.5		
Scotland	13.9		

Source: Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (http://www.sns.gov.uk)

West Dunbartonshire is the second most deprived authority in Scotland in terms of income deprivation. The Clydebank Schools and Early Years Centres involved in the research have mixed catchment areas, with some not identified within the 20% most deprived. Geographically, their buildings are located in zones D and L.

While these data provide indicators of area poverty and deprivation, they do not identify individual families or children in severe and persistent poverty. Therefore, at a local school and early years centre level, school and centre staff, while aware of the above indicators, need to be alert to circumstances and characteristics that indicate a family is in severe and persistent poverty.

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[2] See data at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/IncomePoverty/LAdata
[3] At an early stage in the research the advisory group recommended not including Faifley as it was part of a regeneration project.

3. REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH

This section provides a review of current research in relation to the issues that represent the focus of the current study, namely poverty, early years provision and transition to primary school and parental involvement.

3.1 POVERTY AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parental involvement is a general term used by policy makers, teachers and other services to encapsulate a wide range of activities in which parents engage in relation to their children's education. Some suggest that the term is too general:

> *Parental involvement is a catch-all term for many different activities including 'at home' good parenting, help with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, through to taking part in school governance.* (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003:12)

In the United States, Epstein has produced an influential classification of types of parental involvement that makes a clearer distinction between activities in which parents engage at school and at home as different sites of parent-child interaction. This classification (from Kreider, 2000) includes six areas in which parents can get involved, as detailed in Table 3.1, below.

Table 3.1. Types of parental involvement (adapted from Kreider, 2000)

Type of involvement	Definition
Parenting	• Provide housing, health, clothing, nutrition, safety; • Parenting skills for all age levels; • Home conditions to support children; • Information to support the school staff to know the child and the family.
Communicating	• School-to-home communication; • Home-to-school communication.
Volunteering	• Attend school events (trips, parent evenings, concerts, assemblies, curricular events, classroom help etc.)
Learning at Home	• Follow up school work through homework; • Provide intellectual stimulation; • Facilitate out-of-home opportunities for learning; • Facilitate development of other skills and talents.
Decision Making	• Membership of Parents Council, committees and school advisory groups.
Collaborating with the Community	• Fundraising, donating, other contributions to the school from the community.

The above classification suggests that parental involvement is a multi-faceted concept, because it subsumes a variety of parenting interactions and practices. Crozier (2000) raises the issue of how problematic the definition of parental involvement is, especially as parents are not a homogenous group, although schools sometimes treat them as such.

Family economic status is a strong predictor of children's school outcomes from a very early age (Alexander and Entwisle, 1996). Research shows that at entering the primary school, children from better off families have already better verbal and math skills than children from disadvantaged homes. Also, family background appears to have more of an influence on young children's educational attainment than it does for older children (Entwisle *et al.,* 2004).

A growing body of literature on the home-school relations shows that the parents who find it most difficult to be involved in their children's education are white working class and ethnic minority group parents (for a review, see Crozier and Reay, 2005). Factors linked to poverty, such as crowded housing, unemployment, limited access to transport and cultural resources, illness and isolation, make parenting far harder and more stressful and affect considerably the parent-child interaction and children's chances of exclusion (Ghate and Hazel, 2002).

The new discourse of policy and practice on 'hard to reach families' is seen by some authors as implying a sense of inadequacy, with little opportunities for genuine parental participation and dialogue. Crozier and Reay's recent book (2005) indicates that many parents face considerable difficulties in meeting the demands of schools and asserting a voice for their children, while also protecting their families' private space. Part of the problem may rely with the fact that parental involvement in schools tends to imply an undifferential parental voice. However, in practice, two distinct strands with different rationales can be identified (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). One of these strands is clearly directed at working-class parents, comprising interventions such as early start programmes, home-school community links and early school-leaving interventions. This strand appears to be based on a cultural deficit model which explains educational failure as a result of parental styles and family circumstances and appears explicitly 'classed' as it targets mainly parents affected by poverty. Parental involvement schemes are often directed towards

> *schools in multiple-disadvantaged areas and are targeted at 'needy parents'…(there is) little evidence that parental support is based on any thorough investigation of the actual circumstances of families, the parenting practices within them (including what may be very positive features of those practices) or any genuinely collaborative attempt at needs analysis. That some of the needs of some parents are met by such schemes is beyond doubt. However, the question remains as to whether the needs of the schools may not sometimes take precedence over the needs of the families.*
> (Dyson and Robson, 1999)

However, although the link between parenting styles and child outcomes is important (O'Connor and Scott, 2006), parenting may not always be the cause of a child's difficulties (Scott *et al.,* 2006).

By contrast, the other strand aims to involve parents in initiatives such as school boards and parents councils; evidence suggests that in relation to these, the white middle-class mothers are most involved and most visible (Reay, 2005; Crozier, 2000). A small group of 'elite participationists' (Vincent and Martin, 2002) who do not connect with the wider parent body and have limited concerns make parental involvement in children's learning 'less of a protective barrier than a lever to maximise the potential of the already disadvantaged' (Hallgarten, 2000:18). This is also the case when it comes to young people accessing other services, such as leisure or after-school clubs. Children from more affluent backgrounds are better supported by their parents to make use of local services and this puts them at advantage over their more deprived peers (Wager *et al.,* 2007). Some research suggests therefore that parental involvement can reinforce the existing educational inequalities around class, gender and ethnicity (Crozier *et al.,* 2000; Vincent and Martin, 2000; Hanafin and Lynch, 2002).

Parents' own experiences of schooling and cultural capital also condition their involvement in children's learning. A study of working-class mothers has found that they cited pitfalls and negative experiences from their own schooling and felt ill-equipped to engage with the school or support their children through home activities (McNamara *et al.*, 2000) Reay (2005) claim that many of these mothers lack financial resources, confidence in relation to the educational system, educational knowledge and information to fully participate in decisions about their children's education or support them on a daily basis. Furthermore, one quarter of all children living in poverty live in lone parent households, headed in 9 out of 10 cases by mothers (DWP, 2006). The increase in lone parent households and the cultural expectations of the father as the breadwinner in families headed by couples, are some of the factors that often explain the 'father absence' phenomenon in children's education (IPPR, 2005). More needs to be done to address the structural and attitudinal aspects that limit fathers' involvement in children's education. Although there is sufficient evidence to show that fathers' involvement has considerable impact on children's well being, academic achievement and behaviour, fathers' involvement in children's education, especially formal, is still limited (Flouri, 2005).

Given the Government's priority in supporting poorer families, there is now a growing interest and support for inter-agency work and home-school links, as well as interest on 'family learning', a concept that involves planned activities through which children and parents learn together. Such initiatives include literacy and health-promotion initiatives, parenting programmes and even activities such as cooking classes, sports activities for families etc. The purpose is to develop a culture of the schools as spaces for family learning and as catalysts for community learning, with a key aim to support poorer children and families at risk. There is evidence that these initiatives can work well, provided that the interventions are targeted at the right groups and tailored to the parents' and children's needs, with a degree of flexibility for attendance (Scott *et al.*, 2006). However, some express the view that these initiatives show a 'curricularization' of the family interactions, and put even more pressure on poorer families to comply to the school-defined priorities for children's learning (Buckingham and Scalon, 2003).

Ghate and Hazel (2002) also showed that poorer parents may occasionally perceive services as patronising and as trying to control their personal lives. Nevertheless, parents and children living in disadvantage see the school as having a key role in supporting them and trust schools to help them with their children's education, well-being, behaviour and career choices (Seaman *et al.*, 2005). This makes matters even more sensitive for schools, which are now given a key role to mediate access of other agencies to poorer children and their families.

3.2 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND EARLY YEARS PROVISION

The Early Years Framework refers to the findings of the OECD Review on the *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland* (2007) that social circumstances in Scotland have a major impact on educational attainment with children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes less likely than others to achieve.

There is robust research evidence from the United States, like the High/Scope Perry pre-school programme (Schweinhart *et al.,* 2005) and from the UK, through the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study that high quality early years provision can greatly benefit children and their families, especially those from a lower socio-economic group. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study (Sylva *et al.*, 2007, 2008) highlighted the importance of both the home learning environment and the mother's highest level qualification in influencing children's social and academic outcomes.

Throughout the study, following children from the age of 3 to 11 years, these two factors were the strongest predictors of school success.

The home learning environment is viewed as supportive where parents take part in learning activities with their children, such as reading to the children, playing with letters and numbers, taking children to the library, painting and drawing, teaching the children nursery rhymes and songs, and arranging for children to play with friends at home. Children with poor home learning environments were disadvantaged on cognitive scores on entry to pre-school at age 3 and remained disadvantaged at later stages of schooling. Their findings clearly have implications for supporting mothers to pursue learning and educational opportunities – whatever their starting point.

MacQueen *et al.* (2007) in a literature review of support services for parents indicate that the evidence on 'what works' with very young children is limited though the 'caregiver environment' is important in predicting difficulties at school entry and so is major theme for interventions for parents with children under 3. They state that:

> *evidence suggests that 'pick up' mechanisms through health visiting practice, pre-school provision and at entry to primary school provide structural opportunities to address disadvantage and difficulty through universal and targeted means without stigmatising children* (p24).

Both the EPPE work and the above review support the view that pre-school settings and schools have an important role in promoting support for parents and helping them develop positive home learning environments with the potential for raising achievement and improving social and behavioural development. MacQueen *et al.* also cite studies that provide evidence on the effectiveness of home visitation and in-home modelling of parenting for young children, including the 3-5 age group.

The EPPE study was concerned with the quality and impact of pre-school provision. In the report, the researchers conclude:

> *If a child experiences no, or poor quality, pre-school and then moves to a less academically effective primary school, their prospects of good outcomes are significantly reduced. This is of particular concern for those already experiencing other disadvantages and who are already at higher risk of poor outcomes. Thus educational influences, and early learning experiences, have the capacity to mitigate or further exacerbate inequalities. It is particularly important therefore to ensure that the most disadvantaged groups have access to high quality educational experiences from pre-school up.* (Sylva *et al.*, 2008: 6).

One of the key findings was that the quality of the learning environment increased with the early years leaders' qualifications. High quality pre-school has the following characteristics:

- High quality adult-child verbal interaction, defined as 'sustained shared thinking'; Both child and adult or child and peer engage in contributing ideas to tasks such as problem-solving, clarifying concepts, evaluating or extending narrative with the aim of developing and extending the child's understanding;
- Staff knowledge and understanding of the relevant curriculum;
- Staff knowledge of how children learn including an appropriate balance of free play, planned activities and child initiated activities;
- Discipline behaviour and policies that support children to be assertive, to rationalise and to talk through conflict;

- Centres where staff involved parents in their children's learning, shared educational aims with parents and supported learning at home. In disadvantaged areas, staff had to be proactive to engage parents in this way (Sylva *et al.*, 2007).

The EPPE study reported that an early start (age 2-3) was particularly beneficial, with those starting before 3 showing more cognitive and sociability gains than those who started at 3.

McQueen *et al.* (2007) refer to North American studies (Belsky *et al.,* 2007 and Loeb et al, 2007) that question the benefits of early centre-based care for very young children; while it may have some cognitive benefits it can be associated with later problem behaviour. Likewise Margetts (2007) reports on Australian studies that showed that children who spent extensive time in childcare, especially those under 2 years, were at risk of lower levels of social skills, academic competence, and more problem behaviour. By contrast, there were benefits for those who were at pre-school from age 3 for 10-12 hours per week with tertiary qualified staff (Margetts, 2007: 112).

Woolfson and King (2008) in evaluating the Scottish pilot project of extended pre-school provision for vulnerable 2-year olds, found while the children developed socially and cognitively they did not develop more than a comparator group from similar areas of disadvantage who had not participated in extended provision. This may have been due to the short time scale of the intervention. However, the parents involved showed greater development in parenting skills than a comparator group. They learned new skills in managing their children's behaviour, they had new understanding and expectations of their children's behaviour, and they had time to themselves all of which contributed to coping better with their children. The parents and children involved in the pilots were identified as being those who were most at need. The authors conclude that:

> *Changing parents' behaviour towards their children and enhancing parenting capacity is likely to be a highly important outcome for impacting on children's development in the longer term* (Woolfson and King, 2008: 4).

This evidence taken together, suggests that provision for children under 3 years of age which engages and includes parents in their child's development and their own learning, while offering some time to themselves away from the stresses of parenting, is of benefit to both the mother and the child. High quality pre-school provision from the age of 3, in an environment that continues to engage and support the parents is seen as providing a good start that can mitigate inequality.

3.3 TRANSITIONS

While considering wider provisions to support families and children in poverty during the early years, this study focuses in particular on the 4 to 7 age group to investigate parental involvement and family support over the transition period from pre-school to primary school. It was thought appropriate therefore to offer an overview of current research on transitions from early years to primary schools and support that can be offered families at this stage through service provision.

Defining and conceptualising transitions

Young children face many transitions including home to childcare and nursery; between different types of childcare, for example, in Scotland, where full-time childcare is required children may experience this in different contexts such as their part-time 'entitlement' from the age of 3 in a nursery alongside private provision and/or childminder. However, the transition that is addressed most in the literature is the move from pre-school to primary school. There is interest in transition because social and academic success at such times

influences a child's future progress and development (Fabian 2007). Poorly managed transitions can be disruptive and stressful; however, coping with discontinuity and change is an important developmental process (Niesel & Griebel 2007) and transition between stages is an opportunity to encourage adaptability and resilience. Dunlop (2007) states that:

> *transitions have the capacity to transform both positively and negatively, and …. if they are not always positive, if they are even just a little too challenging for any given child, then the transition itself needs to be transformed* (p157).

Traditionally, the focus has been on the readiness of the child in social, emotional and academic terms i.e. on the characteristics and skills of the child, to enable them to 'fit in' with the culture of the school and the school curriculum (Boethel, 2004; Dunlop, 2007). Petriwskyj *et al.* (2005) in a review of international literature noted a trend towards more complex understandings emphasising 'continuity of children's experience, partnership with stakeholders and system coherence across extended time periods' (p 55). There is increasing focus on the 'ready school' in addition to the 'ready child', which assumes diversity and difference in children and families and schools' willingness to adapt and be flexible (Dunlop 2007). Home-school linkages are emphasised (Petriwskyj *et al*, 2005). There is also increasing focus on the concept of family or parental readiness (Sheridan *et al.,* 2008) and the important role of the family in children's learning.

Much of the literature on managing transition processes references Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework which recognises the importance of a range of contexts or spheres of influence and their interactions and their impact on the developing child (Dunlop, 2003; Boethel, 2004; Fabian, 2007; Niesel and Griebel, 2007; Margetts, 2007; Sheridan *et al*., 2008). The framework or model is conceptualised as micro, exo and macro systems. At the microsystem level the focus is on the interaction of the child's personal characteristics with the settings in which they live their daily lives i.e. home, family, pre-school, school and their local community. The exosystem is seen as indirectly influencing the child, for example, parents' employment, socio-economic status, policies and practices that influence the provision of education and childcare and other services and local community facilities. The macrosystem encompasses the subculture or dominant beliefs and ideologies of the society in which they live (Margetts 2007). While all levels are important, the understanding of the interaction of relevant 'microsystems' (sometimes referred to as 'mesosystems' (Dunlop 2003) and the effect of factors in the 'exosystem' are of greatest relevance to our study and the day-to-day practices of nurseries and schools.

The ecological model at the microsystems level places emphasis on the development of relationships and linkages across the different contexts, recognising that each child and family has a unique set of circumstances through which they construct meaning. Transition programmes need to go beyond providing information, vital as it is, to building on existing and developing new relationships. These linkages and relationships promote the continuity of children's experiences between home and pre-school, pre-school and school, and home and school, and help them cope constructively with the discontinuities. Parents, carers and other family members, children, pre-school practitioners, primary teachers and other support services can and should all be active participants in learning in general and the transition process in particular.

At exosystem level, continuity and coherence of structures and systems are an important focus in transition. Thus in Scotland the inclusion of nursery education as part of the education system and having a curriculum designed for continuity from the age of 3, should contribute. However, challenges have existed in relation to pre-school and school coherence in terms of different pedagogical approaches, sharing of information between the sectors and general knowledge about each others' sectors (Dunlop, 2002); Niessel and Griebel, 2007). Different routes to qualification and professional development for staff have also been

recognised as challenging for closer working of the two sectors (Scottish Executive 2006, 2007). Dunlop (2003) typified differences between learning environments in pre-school and school as follows: pre-school learning is 'activity based' with children choosing what to do for a large part of the time and interaction with adults is variable; at school the child is in a large group, the adult is setting the goals and directing the learning, and there is little one-to-one interaction with the adult. Neuman (2002) emphasised the importance of collaboration and co-operation between pre-school and school to ensure compatible programme philosophies and to broaden staff understanding of children's experiences. For example, approaches to teaching and learning in the reception class which allow for independent learning, time for individual talk and storytelling, active learning and play provide a measure of continuity in the children's learning environments (Dunlop, 2002). The promotion of active learning within the Curriculum for Excellence developments is beginning to address some of these issues (Scottish Executive, 2007); the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008) strongly promotes the use of play in learning in the early stages of primary school.

Parental socio-economic and employment status is identified as a key factor in determining influences in the child's home context. It is established that families from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to be able to provide their children with supportive home learning environments either because of lack of income or other circumstances that lead to deprivation (such as addiction and mental health issues) and early intervention programmes focus on assisting parents with parenting and supporting children's learning. Thus, it is not surprising that literature on transition emphasises the importance of identifying children and families at risk and ensuring strategies are in place to support them (Fabian 2007: 9; Margetts 2007).

Parental involvement at transition stage and afterwards

In a review of North American literature, Boethel (2004) notes that although families of all types of backgrounds are involved in their children's pre-school programmes, involvement declines when children enter primary one. The types and frequency of involvement change. Johansson (cited in Dunlop, 2004) refers to the

> *twin-role of the preschool: to prepare children and parents alike for the system, to foster their influence and empower parent-teacher partnership, so involving families more in the process of education and the curriculum from the beginning (p56).*

Schools as systems were less likely to involve parents or to involve them on their own terms (Boethel, 2004; Dunlop, 2004). In studies reported by Dunlop (2002), parents indicated that they did not expect as much contact with teachers as they had with pre-school practitioners; informal contact did not survive when children went to primary school; primary staff were approachable but there were few opportunities to meet and talk.

Several writers refer to the theoretical model of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) as to the reasons parents get involved (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Boethel, 2004; Dunlop, 2004). These include:

- parents' understanding of their role as parents (what they believe they are supposed to do, what is important, necessary and permissible);
- parents' personal sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed (do they believe they can help their children; do they have the skills and knowledge; is what they can teach their children valued by the school);
- invitations, demands and opportunities for family involvement (does the child and the school want their involvement; schools send signals about what they want and expect).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that schools can work actively to involve and welcome parents and can enhance and support parents' efficacy (in Henderson and Mapp 2002). This view is shared widely. Driessen *et al.* (2005) in a study on involving families from lower socio-economic background and ethnic minorities in Holland propose (amongst other recommendations) that schools be more active in finding out parents' desires and interests, that parents of all backgrounds are approached as 'serious educational partners', that schools need to

> move from a **request situation** where parents are asked occasionally to help … to an **interaction situation** in which teachers, parents and schools exchange ideas as equals (p529).

Meaningful parental involvement is critical (Neuman, 2002); the focus should not be on partnerships of 'shared responsibility' which emphasise what parents can do for schools, but on relationships and 'how families and educators can work together to promote the academic and social development of the children' (Niesel and Griebel, 2007).

The work of Sheridan *et al.* (2008) (Nebraska, USA) links to the view expressed by Johansson (above) that pre-schools tend to focus on preparing both parents and children. The approaches they are developing are of relevance both to early years practitioners and to teachers in early primary school. The work of Sheridan et al is about equipping professionals who work with parents of pre-school children in the context of school readiness. They recognise the transactional nature of young children's development and the role parents play in pre-school readiness and school-age success. They encourage collaborative partnerships between parents and professionals to promote parents' confidence and competence in making the most of children's natural learning opportunities and preparing both parents and children for long term school success. Their focus is on the one-to-one interactions with parents which models for parents and guides them into 'warm and responsive interactions, to support their child's autonomy and to participate in their learning' (p158). The approach aims to provide continuity of learning for the child across home and early years settings and so to promote the child's development and to equip parents to be ready to 'act as an advocate and support their child's learning across ecological and temporal contexts (home, pre-school, elementary school and beyond)' (p158).

> Triadic interventions with parents, professionals and children should focus the professional's attention on the parent as learner and the parents' attention on their child as learner while prompting the parent's reflection on the effects of their own actions (p163).

To engage parents as equal contributors, to facilitate shared understandings about individual children and how they learn requires that teachers have time and space to speak to parents privately; parents need to feel that they belong to the school and are genuinely welcome (Fabian 1996). Dunlop (2004) reports on how parents experience their children's pre-school to school transition from a longitudinal study in one local authority in Scotland. Findings included that parents wanted:

- pre-school and schools to share information about child
- nursery staff to know about primary education
- primary teachers to know what they had been doing in pre-school
- parents' views to be taken into account (e.g. to go to school with friends)
- to be able to approach children's educators quickly and without fuss if there is a problem
- feedback on child's well-being and learning sooner than first parents' evening
- flexible arrangements for meetings so they can attend

- time to get to know child's teacher and pass on information in a less hurried way
- to feel involved and know what their children do at school all day
- to know child is stimulated and interested
- to develop sense of efficacy for helping child succeed and be valued in that role.

Although this section has focused on the involvement of parents, the child him or herself is the major participant in the transition process. Dunlop (2003) highlights the agency of the child and promotes the view that the child needs to be and to feel involved in the process, to feel worthwhile and to be able to contribute. It is important that practitioners, teachers and parents hear what children say about how they view what is happening to them in the process of transition and how they perceive the various worlds (home, pre-school, school etc) they are experiencing.

Transition activities and programmes

Margetts (2002 and 2007) reports on transition programmes in Australia identifying principles that underlie effective programmes and implications for practice. She identifies that key elements of transition programmes include collaboration between stakeholders, clear goals and objectives, understanding of the challenges that face children, written plans and strategies, and evaluation of the programme.

Collaboration can be supported by establishing a transition team that includes teachers, parents, specialists from school and pre-school services. As children go from pre-school to different schools and schools receive from different nurseries focusing on wider networks as part of the team is important. Inter-professional respect and openness to multiple perspectives are essential. Each team will derive its own local *goals and objectives* but Margetts provides some examples: promote the speedy adjustment of the child and the family to the new situation; encourage the child's independence and successful functioning in the new environment; support and inform the family in the process; promote collaboration between family, school, pre-school and community; encourage active involvement of children, parents, family, school, pre-school and community in the transition process.

Effective transition programmes require clear *written plans and strategies.* It is suggested that such plans include a description of the transition programme along with time lines or dates and specific responsibilities of key personnel. There should be sections on the preparation of child for school; involvement of parents; communication/collaboration between pre-school and school staff and programme continuity. Examples are provided of the types of activities that can be included in relation to each of these aspects.

Preparation of children:
- many formal and informal opportunities to visit the school before commencement (research shows this leads to fewer problem behaviours); multiple opportunities to familiarise themselves with the school environment and expectations;
- allow children time to talk about their feelings with sensitive adults;
- visits not just to tour school but to see concerts, listen to band, use library or art room, participate in classrooms and playtimes; have lunch at school. (Does not need to be school they are going to, just an excursion to school);
- buddy systems;
- older children visit pre-school to play with the children, pre-schoolers visit school fortnightly to do things in the school;
- strategies at home and in pre-school to develop social skills e.g. cooperation, initiating interactions and self-control. Encouraged to interact with peers and adults in positive ways;
- confidence and experiencing success when trying new things;

- pre-school staff know about school practices so they can answer children's questions accurately;
- continuity of friendships both in and out of the new environment (friends in same class).

Parent involvement
- informed about school procedures and expectations;
- teachers listen to parents' concerns and goals for children;
- orientation visits, verbal and written information, opportunities to meet staff and parent organisations, parents rights and responsibilities, helping parents understand it from the child's perspective, identifying skills and behaviours related to successful school adjustment, suggest activities that can help, social events. Important that they know procedures for first day.

Communication between staff
- sharing information about the children (formal transfer of records and informal);
- visits to each other's centres, schools invite pre-school practitioners into class during first months of commencing school;
- part of transition team/network.

Programme continuity
- some of time in school given over to messy play, art and dramatic play, outdoor play – water, sand;
- flexible schedule of attendance and gradual introduction to school.

Evaluation of the programme through questionnaire and interviews of all stakeholders is important for ongoing developments and revision of the programme.

Dunlop (2007) found in a study in a Scottish local authority when teachers shared what they were doing in their current work, the examples included

> *combined events for prior-to-school and school children; a buddy system …. ; good liaison between nursery and primary teachers; school visits and tours; a video of the new school 'through the eyes of a child'; nursery children joining in class with last year's leavers; photo records of school visits; training for buddies; home visits; staff discussion and closer links between settings.* (p162).

Margetts (2007) concludes:

> *Creating and sustaining effective transition programmes is a multifaceted challenge that should involve governments, schools, families and local communities. There is widespread agreement that programmes should be based on a philosophy that children's adjustment to school is easier when children are familiar with the new situation, parents are informed about the new school, and teachers have information about the children's development and previous experiences and school experiences can be adapted to minimise change and discontinuities"* (p116).

3.4 INTER/MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

With the New Labour ideology, joined-up working became a central tenet for reducing poverty and social exclusion. Through the *Sure Start* programme launched in 1998, for example, families with children under 4 in the 500 most deprived areas in England were to be offered flexible, affordable, accessible 'joined-up services' to support families to get out of poverty. The main benefits anticipated for joined-up work were: positive outcomes for service users, synergy of service delivery leading to greater efficiency and enhanced professional

development of the staff involved (Frost, 2005). The idea of joined-up working has since impacted on practice in all public services across the UK.

Several terms were used in the last decade to describe joined-up thinking and working, from 'partnerships between agencies' to multi-professional teams, inter-agency and multi-agency working. Frost (2005:13) suggests a continuum of partnership working, with four levels:

- *Level 1- Cooperation-* Services working together towards shared goals and complementary services, but maintain their independence;
- *Level 2- Collaboration-* Services plan together to avoid overlaps and gaps in provision, based on common outcomes;
- *Level 3- Coordination-* Services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared goals;
- *Level 4- Integration* – Different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery.

Frost and others clearly state that it is not the configuration of the team that dictates how effectively they are at working together, but rather the way in which the teams are organised and managed. Atkinson *et al.* (2001) identify other factors that are key to successful multi-agency work. Key factors were: commitment, clear leadership, clear focus with common aims, regular meetings and plenty of opportunities to spend time doing the groundwork together, for professionals to understand each others' working activities. However, several reviews of multi-professional practices did not provide clear evidence that practice brings better services for children and families, mainly because of the practicalities involved (Webb and Vulliamy, 2001; Cameron and Lart, 2003). Cameron and Lart (2003) conclude their review with the conclusion that knowledge of what constitutes effective joint working needs still further advancement.

Wenger's (1998) concept of 'communities of practice' has been in recent years widely used when discussing multi-agency work. He argues that knowledge is created in 'communities of practice' through processes of *participation* in daily activities and interactions and shared experiences of working together towards professional goals and *reification*, through which individuals have to represent their version of knowledge through artefacts, such as documentation. The process of developing communities of practice depends on mutual engagement from those involved (co-participation), a joint enterprise and shared accountability, and a shared repertoire (common understandings and concepts). Wenger also emphasises the importance of professionals' constructions of their own identities in the process of sharing practices and learning with others. How professionals see themselves in the team is key to their motivation to contribute to the team success. Hudson (2002) identifies three potential barriers to multi-professional working, including:

- *Professional identity*, how professionals see themselves and their roles;
- *Professional status*, how professional hierarchies and power distribution is generated;
- *Professional discretion and accountability*, how professionals exercise discretion on a daily basis.

Individuals in multi-professional teams have to confront and lay to one side the distinctiveness of their own discipline and their 'tribal' beliefs and behaviours and negotiate a new, shared understanding with others involved. Each individual will bring to the ream their own professional and personal histories, knowledge and skills and negotiating a shared understanding of the task at hand and means of achieving it is conditioned by the profiles and histories of the individuals involved. The complexities of the processes through which

teams learn new ways of working together are quite often neglected by managers, who tend to focus on structural changes (Anning *et al.*, 2006).

In a study of a range of multi-agency teams, Anning *et al.* (2006) found that professionals involved in these teams need to be confident enough about their professional identity they bring to the team to feel safe about transforming it (2006:75). Also, this process of assuming new roles and identities means that professionals may feel anxious, destabilised and vulnerable in the early stages of adjustment. In teams, individuals whose roles were more peripheral or who were lone representatives of their profession were more likely to feel isolated, less supported or not included. Also, individuals' status in the world outside the team did impact on team functions and dynamics.

One other issue affecting the success of multi-agency groups is the opportunities professionals have to share their knowledge and expertise. Most of the knowledge in the workplace is often tacit, i.e. individuals may find it difficult to explain why they do things in the way they do them, although professionals have a theoretical understanding of their work (Wenger, 1998). If knowledge is to be shared between team members, the nature of the teamwork, its location and history are key to the process. Informal opportunities are as valuable as formal ones (meetings, training etc.) for sharing practice and for developing a climate of collaboration and support.

Anning *et al.* (2006) identify the following issues as key in ensuring that the principles of joint-up working operate in practice:

- Joint procedural work and inclusive planning systems;
- Clear lines of accountability;
- Recognition of individuals' roles and careers;
- Leadership vision;
- Role clarity and a sense of purpose;
- Addressing barriers related to status/hierarchies;
- Agreed strategic objectives and shared core aims;
- Transparent structures for communication with partner agencies;
- Co-location of service deliverers;
- Acknowledging peripheral team members;
- Acknowledging professional diversity;
- Awareness of impact of change on service users;
- Joint client-focussed activities;
- Ongoing support for professional development;
- Paying attention to 'specialist' skills retention.

Finally, although there is still work to be done on identifying what exactly makes successful multi-agency work for service delivery, the key policy messages for continuing to reform services for children and families are the importance of:
- A needs-led approach to the design of services at both universal and targeted levels;
- Statutory inspections deploying multi-professional teams;
- Better understanding of the processes of commissioning services;
- Clearly designated responsibilities and accountabilities for services;
- Listening and responding to the voices of children and families at local organization level;
- Better performance monitoring of outcomes and management of processes at service delivery/coordination levels;
- Better leadership/management at local levels.

3.5 KEY POINTS FROM THE LITERATURE

- Low socio-economic background is associated with poorer educational outcomes. Early advantages in children's development may be lost through poor social environments; the home influence has greater impact on younger than older children. Factors linked to poverty make parenting more stressful and affect parents' ability to support their children's learning both at home and to engage with the school system and support school learning. Prior unsatisfactory experience of the education system can influence their self-perceptions of both their willingness and ability to participate.

- Two strands of initiatives have emerged to encourage parental involvement: those targeted at engaging so called 'hard to reach' families and those seeking parental involvement in school management e.g. school boards and parent councils. It is suggested that these different approaches prioritise the needs of schools rather than families and can reinforce inequality.

- There is evidence that high quality early years provision can benefit children and families. Cognitive and behavioural benefits established in early years persist to later stages of school. Rich home learning environments and the mother's level of education are the strongest predictors of schools success. Therefore initiatives that focus on supporting parents to provide learning opportunities at home and encourage mother's to pursue their own learning are beneficial. High quality pre-school provision requires effective pedagogy, relevant curriculum and high quality workforce. In addition, good centres involve parents in their children's learning, share learning aims and support learning at home. Home visitation support is reported as effective in developing parenting and children's learning in the early years.

- Poor transitions can be disruptive and stressful for children and families, but well managed transitions can provide opportunities for the development of adaptability and resilience. Focus on transitions from pre-school to school has shifted from the idea of 'ready children' to fit into a homogenous school experience to 'ready schools', which support variety and diversity and take account not only of child readiness, but family readiness. As parents generally have less involvement in school than in pre-school provision, schools need to be proactive in involving parents through the transition process. Effective transition programmes make familiarity with the different contexts and people a priority for children, staff and parents. Clear sharing of information and active involvement of all participants is important.

- 'Joined-up working' between services has become a central tenet across the UK in tackling poverty and exclusion, with a view to providing efficient services for the benefit for service users. In addition to clear management structures and leadership, multi-agency working is best developed through professionals and practitioners 'doing groundwork together' leading to new and shared understandings of service provision. A needs-led approach to services that listens to service-users is important in developing multi-agency practices.

4. METHODOLOGY

The focus of the present study was to provide an overview of the current provision in relation to home-school partnership and other related services in West Dunbartonshire, with a specific focus on initiatives aimed at families living in severe poverty in Clydebank area, and to identify opportunities for further programmes. The study aimed to consult a wide range of participants, from service providers to parents and children in the Clydebank area, in order to establish the range of views and opinions on what can be done to improve service provision for the children affected by severe poverty and their families. The study also aimed to examine the factors that contribute to successful outcomes in such initiatives, in order to inform Save the Children on future initiatives in this area of work.

4.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were derived from the Terms of Reference set out by Save the Children, which took into account the findings from Save the Children's report *Improving Educational Outcomes for Children Living in Poverty Through Parental Involvement in Primary Schools* (June 2007), which presented a set of key findings and recommendations for action. These research questions were:

1. What data is available locally concerning the target group of children in severe and persistent poverty?
2. What are the critical gaps in data?
3. What is currently being done to improve outcomes for children in severe and persistent poverty through home-school partnership?
4. What is the impact of these initiatives?
5. What is the level of involvement in decision-making experienced by children and parents living in severe and persistent poverty?
6. What developments should be undertaken to improve outcomes, based on evidence?
7. What outcome targets should be set concerning children, parents and professionals (multi-agency) for the long term programme?
8. What activities should be undertaken to achieve the set outcomes?

4.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Data to address these research questions was collected in two stages, as suggested in the Terms of Reference. The methods and data collected in each of these stages were as follows:

Phase 1 Interviews with key informants (March/April 2009)

Data collection in Phase 1: Desk-based study of data sets and Interviews with key informants from a range of services

Key informants were identified by the local authority partner initially, and then through further recommendations. These included a range of service managers from education, social work, health and psychological services. In total, a number of 9 service managers and 4 practitioners were interviewed, including:

- 1 senior manager Early Years and Childcare
- 2 managers from the Early Intervention Unit
- 1 Integration Strategy Officer from Social Work
- 1 manager for Young Families' Project

- 1 manager Children's Services, Community Health Partnership
- 1 manager from Pupil and Family Support Service
- 1 quality improvement officer with responsibility for early years, primary and transitions
- 1 senior educational psychologist, with management responsibility for early years
- 4 outreach workers and family support workers from Young Families' Support Service and health service.

All sessions were conducted face-to-face and took the form of a semi-structured interview. The main themes covered by the interviews included:

- key areas of provision in early years and support available for the poorest families;
- current regional and local initiatives on home-school/EECC partnerships;
- current and planned initiatives to support home-school/EECC links;
- examples of successful schools/EECC that support poor families;
- methods of identifying families, targeting;
- perceived factors of success in working with parents;
- challenges of involving families in children's learning;
- involvement of hard-to-reach groups;
- communication with parents about initiatives;
- inter-agency work – issues;
- priorities for future development and initiatives.

The data from these interviews was supplemented with documentation from informants on policies, regional and local research, evaluations, information materials for staff and parents and so on. Appendix D lists the documents supplied by the key informants or sourced online by the research team.

Phase 2 Data collection in Early Education and Childcare Centres (EECCs) and primary schools (May/June 2009)

In the second stage of the research, 2 primary schools and 2 feeder EECCs centres were identified in the Clydebank area to take part in the study, based on the SIMD data presented in section 2.2 above. Also, a further primary and linked EECC were identified outside the Clydebank area, as these were suggested by several informants as models of good practice in terms of home-school links and parental involvement. It was thought that the latter two settings would provide a useful comparative element to the settings in the Clydebank area, yet still operating within the same local authority. Data was collected through multiple visits to each setting and included:

- Brief informal observations of practice in working with children and their parents;
- 6 interviews with the head/head teacher of each of the EECCs/schools recruited;
- 6 focus groups with practitioners in each EECC/school recruited;
- 6 focus groups with parents in each EECC/school recruited;
- 6 activity groups with selected children in each EECC/school.

Table 4.1 below summarises the participants from each school/EECC. Participants were selected by the head teachers/managers in each school/EECC, after a discussion with the researchers, who asked for children and families who were more likely to be affected by poverty to be involved. The range of participants ensured that the profile of the informants for the whole study was varied and it was not biased towards the service providers. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full for analysis.

Table 4.1 Participants interviewed in each setting

Area A	School A Head Teacher Teachers x 3 Parents X 4 Children X 5	EECC A Centre Manager EE practitioners x 3 Parents x 4 Children x 4
Area B	School B Head Teacher Teachers x 4 Parents X 4 Children X 4	EECC B Centre Managers x 2 EE practitioners x 3 Parents x 4 Children x 4
Area C	School C Head Teacher Teachers x 3 Parents X 4 Children X 4	EECC C Centre Manager EE practitioners x 4 Parents x 5 Children x 5
Total interviewees (78)	3 head teachers 4 EECC managers 10 teachers 10 early years practitioners 25 parents 26 children	

Head Teachers and EECC managers. The interview sessions with the head teachers/EECC mangers were semi-structured, to collect data on home-school link initiatives, organisations and staff involved, participating families, ways of identifying the children and the families, strategies of involving the parents, role of parents and children in decision-making processes, home-school communication, key factors for success, major challenges (policies, staffing, costs, parental support, impact on children etc.), areas for development and improvement and strategies for evaluation of progress (see all interview schedules in Appendix A).

Teachers and EECC practitioners. The interviews with the staff addressed similar themes with the ones identified for the head teachers, but they were more focussed on practice and the best strategies that work for engaging children and families living in poverty (see all Interview schedules in Appendix A). Additional themes included: inter-agency collaboration, children's and parents' needs at transition stage, communication strategies with families etc. In schools, staff working with P1 and P2 children were invited to interviews. In EECCs, staff who wanted to participate were included. These group interviews were all face-to-face and were audio recorded and transcribed.

Parents. Parents were explained the rationale for the research by head teachers or key workers, based on a letter and a Consent Form given to them by the research team. Then interested parents were invited to the school/EECC at a time identified by the head teacher as most suitable to them. Themes for discussion with the parents included: perceptions of home-school link initiative(s) that parent is involved in, perceived expectations, benefits of involvement for them and the child, involvement in child's learning, feelings of engagement and participation in decision-making processes at EECC/school level, issues concerning transition, suggestions for future activities that would benefit parents in the area.

Children. Group activities were arranged with 4 or 5 children in each of the 6 settings. These groups were involved in short child-centred activities (Borland *et al.,* 2001; Hill, 1996) and aimed to explore the range of learning activities and other activities that children engaged in with their families, perceived roles of the carers in their education, children's feelings on being involved in such initiatives and use of other services in the area. Parents' and children's consent was sought before participation. Children's contributions in the group activities were audio recorded and transcribed in note format for analysis.

4.3 ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

All face-to-face interviews were audio recorded with the participants' permission. Interviews with key informants in Phase 1 were fully transcribed, while most of the other interviews were transcribed in note format. Researchers co-coded most of the data in Phase 2 for increased reliability of the findings. All data was coded under qualitative themes, which are presented in a narrative form in sections 5 to 7 of the present report. Section 5 presents the findings from key informants, Section 6 reports findings from school/EECCs staff, while Section 7 include the data from parents and children.

4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All adult participants were given a letter detailing the purposes of the study and their role in it. This letter was tailored to the specific group of informants – key informants, staff, parents and children. All participants willing to be interviewed were given a Consent Form to sign. We were careful not to discuss findings from one setting with participants from the other settings, nor did we discuss the comments of parents and children with staff.

When involving parents, we asked the school staff to pass on a letter outlining the project to parents, together with a Consent Form. We also asked staff to obtain parental consent from parents to involve children in the group activities. Children were also asked for their consent to participate, at the start of the group activities. Gift vouchers were given to participating parents as a 'thank you' gift at the end of the focus groups and all children received books appropriate for their age. During the focus groups with parents and children, we were aware of the sensitive nature of the topic and did not ask questions that could have made parents or children feel uncomfortable. We also emphasised the participants' right to refuse to answer any of the questions or withdraw participation at any time. In the report, parents and children are not named and the schools/EECCs are not identified.

During the field work and in writing this report, care was taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents. When reporting the findings, we identify all informants and schools/EECCs by codes to protect the confidentiality of all informants.

4.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

The main limitations of the study are:
- The relatively limited sample of key informants and services contacted for the purposes of the study;
- The fact that data from practitioners, parents and children from a relatively limited number of settings was sought;
- Parents and children were selected by schools and were not screened for their level of deprivation; although heads of EECCs and head teachers were asked to identify parents most likely to be in severe poverty, we did not check for parents' employment status or financial situation.

5. MAPPING OF CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION

The overview of what is currently being done in West Dunbartonshire, and Clydebank in particular, to improve the outcomes of children living in poverty was informed by analysis of documents provided by the local authority and by interviews with service managers, and supplemented where appropriate by views from other service providers, including early years practitioners and managers and school staff. The primary focus of the research is on partnership between the home and early years centres/schools in relation to children between the ages of 4 and 7, thus covering the crucial transition from pre-school provision to primary school. However, as the importance of early intervention was constantly emphasised by those interviewed, a wider range of services are included in the mapping. These are represented in the following diagram and described in this section.
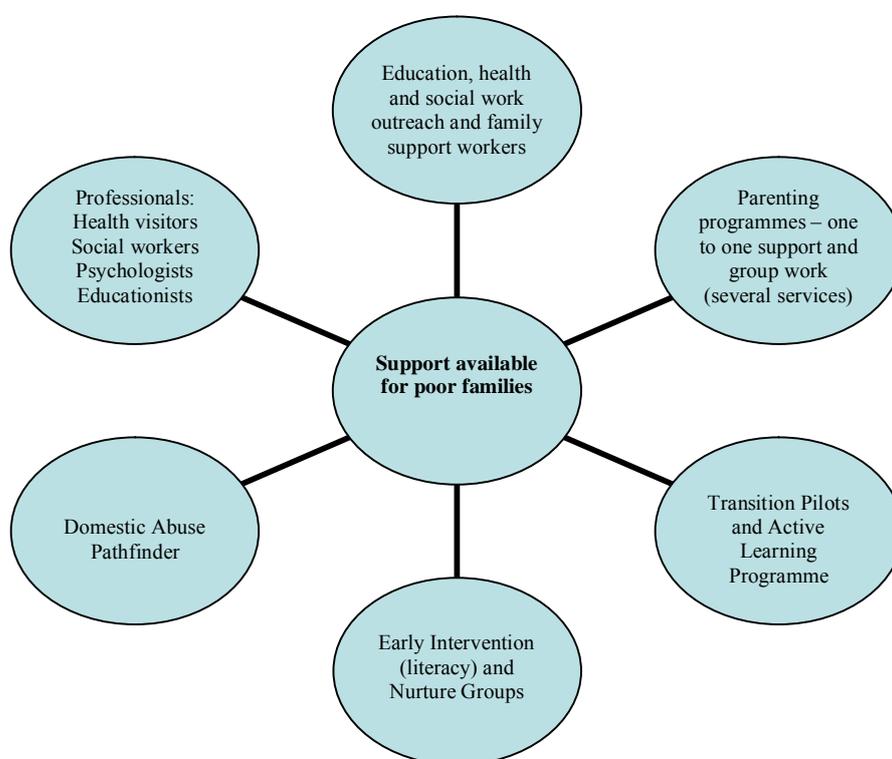
Figure 5.1 Services supporting poor families in West Dunbartonshire

There are aspects of provision which are of relevance to all families, such as transition programmes from early years centres to primary school although our interest was to identify how these might assist families identified as being in poverty and provide additional support that they may need. This is in line with policy that universal services have a key role in supporting those at risk and, where appropriate, engaging further support. Many of those interviewed emphasised that their services were for any family that needed support, or where children were at risk for any reason, not only because of poverty. However, it was recognised that poverty was a significant compounding factor, which made any difficulty or challenge more difficult to deal with.

5.1 JOINT PARENTING STRATEGY

At the time of the research, West Dunbartonshire Council and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board were engaged in developing a joint parenting strategy through an interagency parenting strategy group. The group had representatives from health, education, social work and clinical psychology. Issues around funding both the writing up of the strategy and the longer term maintenance of it were being addressed. It is also recognised that the strategy is a framework which guides service delivery.

The strategy recognises different levels of support from universal services, through some additional support required, 'middle-tier' parenting support through parenting programmes, and more intensive, therapeutic support requiring greater intervention.

- *Universal services*: NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council have given all parents a safe parenting handbook, through health visitors and schools. Staff from health, social work (although a targeted rather than universal service) and early years centres had National Children's Home (NCH) handling children's behaviour training and were expected to provide one-to-one parenting support as the need and opportunity arose.
- *Additional support*: health visitors or other service providers may identify that a family needs more support around issues of attachment, behaviour management, or general coping. Within West Dunbartonshire referrals can be made to the Young Family Support Service which is managed by community health and has a team of family support workers; the service also manages education-centre based outreach workers for providing families more intensive parenting support. The school-based Pupil and Family Support Service provides support for older children.
- *Middle tier support:* the use of the *Incredible Years* parenting programme is being developed; at the time of the research there had been inter-agency training and practitioners were using the knowledge and expertise gained from this on a one-to-one basis but further developments were under discussion. This programme was chosen partly because of its suitability for working with parents of older children.
- *Intensive support:* *Mellow Parenting* and *Mellow Baby* programmes had been introduced and at the time of the research the first group of parents were part way through the programme. A total of 12 staff from social work, early education, clinical psychologists, health visitors and the looked after and accommodated children's team had been trained.

Different elements of the tiered strategy are explored in the following sections. The findings reported in this section are taken from interviews with key informants and analysis of existing policy texts and relevant other documentation provided at the time of the research or identified through online searches (see Appendix D).

5.2 EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK OUTREACH AND FAMILY SUPPORT WORKERS

The Young Family Support Service (YFSS)

The West Dunbartonshire Young Family Support Service was established in 2003 as a collaboration between the Community Health Partnership (CHP), West Dunbartonshire Council and a voluntary sector organisation, who employed a team of family support workers. The service manager is from the CHP. When the voluntary sector organisation went into administration the CHP, with the support of the Council, continued the employment of family support workers. The service was extended in 2005 by the appointment of early education and childcare outreach workers as part of West Dunbartonshire Council's Early

Education Service. The outreach workers are employed by the education service and based in Early Education and Childcare Centres (EECC), but have their case load managed and supervised by the YFSS manager. At the time of the research, in addition to the manager, there were 6 family support workers and 4 outreach workers for the whole of West Dunbartonshire. Two of the outreach workers were based in centres in the Clydebank area.

The aim of the service, working interactively with other services (health, education, social work) as appropriate, is to provide personal and practical support to vulnerable families with children under 5 years both in their homes and in the community. There is a particular focus on developing parenting capacity by helping parents understand their role in their child's development and supporting positive parent-child relationships. Referrals to the YFSS can be made by any professional who has contact with a family but the most usual source of referral is health visitors: in 2008/09, 66% of the 263 referrals received were from health workers, 17% from early education and 11% from social work. Just under 60% of referrals were for support from the family support worker and the remainder from the outreach workers.

Family support workers have varied support roles dependent on the needs of the family, for example, they can assist parents establish household routines, support their attendance at doctor's appointments, provide respite, help with child's behaviour, show them how to play with their children, help them access community facilities such as playgroups for their children or learning opportunities for themselves, and provide financial advice. The outreach workers' role is to focus more specifically on assisting with parenting skills and engaging the parents in their child's development, particularly where issues of attachment have been identified. They support parents through parenting programmes on a one-to-one basis and also organise group-based parenting programmes in the Early Years and Childcare Centres. Their work is primarily with families with children under 3 years of age in order to help prepare for the transition into early years provision, though they work with families with older children.

Documentation about the service and interviews with managers and workers emphasise the importance of putting the family and child first. The first stage of the support process is a joint meeting with the referrer and the agreement of a care plan. The support and outreach workers emphasised that the most important aspect in the early stages is developing a relationship with the family, encouraging trust and respect and working towards an agreed plan with the family rather than 'telling them what to do'. A senior manager commented that the strengths of this service were the inter-agency working and the fact that the workers were supporting people in their homes: 'these people are seriously involved with families'. A further strength highlighted was that the workers were from health and education and their involvement in the life of the family was perceived as less stigmatising than social work.   An issue raised by the family-support workers and the outreach workers was that, although most referrals came from health visitors, some health visitors referred less than others. This was not seen as an area based difference, i.e. some were coming into less contact with families who needed support.   Their concern was that families who could benefit from support were not being identified and referred.

Interviews in the three early years centres, none of which were the 'home' base for the outreach workers, suggest that two of the centres had regular contact with the outreach workers for their area and where appropriate the outreach workers were sharing relevant family information with the keyworkers.   One keyworker commented that the outreach workers offer 'a fantastic service that does a lot for parents and children'. However, in the third centre, while aware of the existence of outreach workers, there appeared to have been little recent involvement. Some of the keyworkers in the EECCs also spoke of knowing that families had support workers and appreciated the feedback they received about families,

especially as the support workers had insight into home circumstances. They felt that this helped them better understand the needs of both the children and the parents.

Pupil Family Support Service (PFSS)

The Pupil and Family Support Service is part of the pastoral care team in schools. Each team is based in a secondary school but also serves the associated primary schools. All 6 school clusters in West Dunbartonshire have a Pupil and Family Support Team. (The cluster interviewed for the study had a team of 4 workers.) The teams are managed by a senior member of the pastoral care staff in the secondary schools. The pupil family support workers are recruited from the local area: one manager described them as follows:

> *… they fall into that special category of people who come from the area … their interpersonal skills are very strong, their compassion is very strong, they're firm and fair.*

They undertake a very wide range of tasks in supporting pupils and families. One of their key roles is to ensure that children are in school and when a case is highlighted they work co-operatively with families to assist in developing routines, making alarm calls and when necessary collecting the children. They also work with pupils individually and in small groups addressing behavioural and emotional issues; they may accompany pupils and parents to make sure they attend health appointments; they provide informal opportunities for young people to talk to them; they may address basic health and hygiene issues when this is not supported at home. They are also involved in summer programmes for the children.

Requests for support for children and families in the associated primary schools are made by head teachers to the Pupil and Family Support Service manager. Support may be asked for families where the children are in P1 and P2 (thus within the age-group that is the focus of our study). Interviews with primary school managers indicate that they used the service particularly when there was a problem with attendance and they spoke very positively about the support offered; one commented that the family support worker developed relationships with the parents when going to get the children to school; another indicated that the service meant that support could be offered without involving social work. One primary head teacher spoke of the family support worker helping with groupwork with a group of boys with challenging behaviour. A number of family support workers are men and this was seen as providing important, approachable, supportive role models for boys both in primary and secondary schools.

One of the service managers indicated that where primary head teachers, in discussion with the heads of early years centres identify that a family may need support for transition to the primary school, a member of the pupil and family support team can contact that family during the holidays, visit them and work with them until the child is settled in primary school. We did not, however, establish how many such cases have been identified.

There is a potential challenge for continuity in the support offered to some families. Some families may be supported by a support worker of the Young Family Support Service and when the children progress to primary school the family may then have contact with the Pupil and Family Support Service. This may only apply to a very small number of families; however, interviewees did indicate that liaison between outreach workers and family support workers for the early years service and pupil and family support workers for schools would be valuable. Limited resources made this 'vision' difficult to achieve.

From the perspective of the managers of early years centres and schools, one of the biggest limitations of the work of both the YFSS and the PFSS was the small teams. The views were

that every EECC would benefit from a family support or outreach worker and every primary school would benefit from a pupil and family support worker.

Social Work Children and Family Services

The detail of the work of Social Work Services was not investigated as part of this study. However, it is important to note that, when families are referred to them, they have a wide range of supports on offer, many of which parallel the services offered by the YFSS and PFSS. In addition to social workers, family support teams include family support workers, homemakers, home carers for children with disabilities and alternative to care workers. In documentation and during interviews it was noted that the role of the homemaker and support worker were very similar and this was being reviewed. The support workers accompany children and families to appointments, support attendance at school, provide practical support such as assisting with household routines and skills and with budgeting. An important aspect of the support workers' role is supervising the contact of looked after and accommodated children with their parents. As suggested in the job titles some offer specialist support for those with disabilities and the alternative to care workers provide support for children at risk of being taking into residential care or who are already in residential care preparing for return to their families. They also provide advice on parenting skills and run parenting courses.

5.3 PARENTING PROGRAMMES

As noted above, the joint services Parenting Support Strategy is seeking to present a tiered approach to parenting support but is still in its early stages and will require elaboration and formalisation. Interviews with service managers, nursery and school managers, practitioners and teachers presented a picture of current practices.

One to one support

One of the authority managers talking about practitioners in early years centres stated that 'there is a real expectation that working with the parents and families is part of the day job.' Keyworkers in the early years centres included in the study clearly shared this view, giving priority to involving parents 'regardless of background', building relationships so the parents trusted them and could talk about problems. Parents often asked for help with behaviour issues and both managers and keyworkers indicated that they discussed how the child behaved and learned in nursery, gave ideas to try at home and followed up on progress. Examples were shared which indicated that workers did become quite closely involved in families that had particular needs. A local authority observer commented about one centre:

> *The nursery staff work really hard at modelling what parents can do with their children and this is one of most successful ways because parents often say they hadn't thought of doing it that way.*

It was emphasised that the heads of centres were ready to help with all types of problems (benefits issues, form filling, accessing services, looking for jobs, etc.). Some of the keyworkers appeared to be better equipped than others to undertake this frontline parenting support; others indicated either that they felt the pressure of the job did not allow them time to do as much as they would like or that they needed further training to help them do this and the expectation was that it would be the head of centre who carried out this role.

School head teachers and deputy head teachers spoke of having 'open door' policies and emphasised that if a parent wanted to talk individually about their child, or anything else, it was a priority and they were not asked to wait. Some P1 and P2 teachers spoke of supporting individual parents, giving advice on behaviour management and learning support,

but generally they did this less than their early years counterparts and tended to refer matters of concern to school management.

At one stage up from universal services, representatives of the YFSS (both support workers and outreach workers) emphasised that one-to-one parenting support was a key aspect of their roles, particularly modelling for parents how to relate to and play with their children and how to manage the children's behaviour in a consistent and positive way. Working with them in their home environments was important. The view was expressed that the most vulnerable families and those that were reluctant to engage with service providers were unlikely to attend courses; developing relationships with individual workers was less threatening and could provide a route to more formal involvement.

Programmes

Short programmes for parents to help them with parenting issues were mentioned by several interviewees. These are organised on the initiative of centre and school managers using different sources of support. The YFSS outreach workers run group work sessions on handling children's behaviour. Usually nurseries identify parents who would benefit from being part of a group and where possible the outreach worker runs them in the centre the children attend. However, this is not always possible as all nurseries do not have suitable accommodation. One outreach worker spoke of running an 8 week course of 2.5 hours per week for 15 parents in one nursery. In another early years centre, the head had arranged for a course to be run by an educational psychologist on 'parent-child relationships'. This had been an open invitation to parents and some of those who would have benefitted most did not attend; it was felt, however, that they possibly would not have coped along with those who did and there were plans to hold a series of more targeted sessions with smaller groups by special invitation.

One of the schools had run a parenting group supported by the school nurse and again it was mentioned that those who most needed support did not attend; as the school nurse would not be available to do this in the coming year it was unclear if such a group could be run again. In another school, parents had approached the head teacher asking if there was any support for them as parents. The school in collaboration with social work ran a parenting course for them and other parents identified as particularly needing support. They were described as:

> *…. a group of parents very lacking in self-esteem, very much blaming themselves for things their children were doing, very critical of themselves, and worrying they had damaged their children for evermore and not sure how they would cope, not sure how to turn themselves around and help their children.*

The group was supported by a learning assistant who was known to the parents. Each session gave them ideas of what they could do differently and it was reported that they met the challenge and supported each other. This group of parents are now keen to be involved in finding ways to involve other parents in such a group and for it to be offered again. It was stated that one of the main reasons for the success was the ownership of the group by the parents and it was possible because of the open and supportive ethos of the school. In contrast, during the interviews with parents in another school, one parent indicated that they would like more support but thought that classes were only run by social workers and so did not think that was appropriate.

A key issue to emerge from all interviewees was finding resources to offer parenting support groups, particularly facilitators with the appropriate knowledge and skills.

As noted above, in the Parenting Strategy the 'Incredible Years' programme had been identified as being suitable for use within West Dunbartonshire and although people had been trained implementation was still to be developed.

'Mellow parenting' has been introduced and at the time of the research the first group was in progress. It is an intensive 14 week programme of a day a week. Feedback about this through interviewees explained some of the processes and the progress that had been made. The group was being run specifically for women from a background of domestic violence and abuse. As the group was particularly vulnerable, building relationships before any involvement in the group was important and each mother was visited 4 times at home before coming into a group situation. The views were that those who had engaged and remained with the course were benefitting greatly. The programme was being formally evaluated, but it was also important to find ways of longer term evaluation in relation to children's outcomes. Sharing the cost of resourcing the programme across services was to be agreed.

5.4 TRANSITION PILOTS AND ACTIVE LEARNING

Over the past two years (07/08 and 08/09), the education service has had a steering group made up of 5 primary schools and associated local authority nurseries to review the transition process between nursery and school. This has involved reviewing the information that is shared between the two sectors and developing transition programmes. Two of the schools and early years centres involved in the study were part of the transition pilot. The new approaches will be introduced more widely through staff development opportunities in the coming academic year (2009/10).

The practice has been for early years workers to prepare lengthy summative assessments for each child but it was found that the teachers did not find these helpful, particularly as they did not highlight concerns about a child's development; discussion of concerns was reserved for meetings between the head of centre and the school head or deputy head teacher with responsibility for the infants stage. The steering group was developing and piloting a simpler, more meaningful approach using the 'traffic lights' system. However, those with responsibility for primary one classes reported that the new transition programmes they were developing meant that they knew the children really well and did not need to depend on written reports. Some of the features of the programmes were:

- they started in the September of the year prior to transition
- the primary one teachers visited the nursery regularly to get to know the children and for the children to get to know them
- the pre-school children had 'buddies' – in one school this was P6 children; in another in the second year they had P1 children as the buddies.
- the pre-school children visited the school with their buddies and keyworkers and the P1 children visited the nursery
- there were joint curricular tasks or projects where they learned together e.g. autumn changes, butterflies, using the library, developing a garden.

Key benefits identified were that the children were familiar with the school so there were 'no tears', children were excited about going to school, the teachers were able to start appropriate learning tasks right away as they already knew each child's levels of achievement. Early years staff and the primary teachers gained a better understanding of each others' work and an appreciation of different approaches to teaching and learning. While this was clearly of benefit to all children, it was of particular benefit to those for whom previous, less supported transitions would not have been a good experience.

Parents had been kept informed of the transition process; the deputy heads from the primary schools had talked at parents' meetings in the nurseries; one school had a 'transition' wall that parents could look at and one of the nurseries kept a photo record of all the children were doing in 'floor books' so that parents could see what had been happening. Parents also knew about the buddies and were very supportive of the idea and the pupil who was their child's buddy. In the coming year, staff spoke of finding ways to involve parents actively in the transition process, to find out how they felt and what might help them to be part of the process, and to be involved in some of the decision making.

Developing such in-depth transition programmes requires schools and nurseries to be committed and willing to work closely together. They sit in a complex network of relationships and during the pilot phase each focused on working with one or two partners (though one nursery spoke of working with 4 primary schools) and were reflecting on how their programmes could develop to encompass wider networks.

West Dunbartonshire has had a programme of staff development to support _active learning_ in both early years centres and in primary schools. Active learning engages children in learning by encouraging them to learn through practical and play-based problem-solving tasks that encourage them to explore and ask questions. This provides greater continuity with early years experiences where, in the words of one teacher, children are 'up and about learning' compared to 'traditional approaches in schools' where they 'sitting down at desks and the teachers were in control of learning'. Managers from both early years centres and schools were strongly supportive of this and believed that it was an important element of transition between the sectors providing continuity of curriculum and learning experiences. One head teacher also saw it as providing a good opportunity to involve parents as the classroom planning was less tightly constrained and there were roles that other adults could take on. However, engaging parents in this way did not necessarily mean that those from poorer families were going to become involved.

Staged Intervention Transition Process

A number of interviewees spoke positively about West Dunbartonshire's approach to Staged Intervention, which is a requirement of the Additional Support for Learning Act (2004). West Dunbartonshire Psychological Services have produced guidelines which present clear steps in the process of identifying additional support needs and the involvement of different agencies at appropriate stages. Those who have a higher level of need are given more focussed support at transition stages and the guidance encompasses all stages from entry to pre-school provision to leaving secondary school. Principles underpinning the transition support include early consultation and planning, child's and parent's involvement in the planning process and decision making and multi-agency working. In the case of transition from pre-school to school the law requires that the process of consultation commences six months before transition; West Dunbartonshire, however, commences the process in the September prior to transition. A clear calendar to support this transition process has been produced.

5.5 EARLY INTERVENTION AND NURTURE GROUPS

Early intervention and nurture groups are both initiatives that are designed to provide additional support when particular needs are identified: early intervention addresses cognitive development, in particular literacy, although other aspects of learning are also supported, and nurture groups address socio-emotional and behavioural development. While not specifically targeting children from poorer families, service providers indicated that many of those supported were from families who have complex issues made more difficult by poverty.

Early Intervention

West Dunbartonshire's Early Intervention literacy scheme has received wide publicity in the educational and national press for achieving notable progress in literacy levels for those entering primary school through to secondary school over a 10 year period[4]. The scheme was noted for having high expectations of learners and strong one-to-one support where there was evidence of a child falling behind.

At the time of the research, the work of the Early Intervention Team, along with that of the Network Support Team that supported the Staged Intervention Process, was under review. The key informants for the service spoke of the work that they had been doing. The team of 23 teachers worked across all nurseries (including partnership nurseries) and schools in the authority to provide support for both literacy and numeracy. A key element was baseline testing in nursery school with follow-up testing at P1 and P2 to enable the tracking of all children and to monitor improvements in literacy and numeracy, although testing in numeracy has been discontinued. The Early Intervention teachers worked with teachers in the nurseries and schools to support all pupils, though sometimes they were asked by heads of centres and head teachers to provide specific support for children who had done less well in the tests and so were targeted for additional support; they were additionally being asked to work with 'more able' children. As the early intervention team worked across nurseries and schools some had become involved in the transition pilots and their role was perceived as providing continuity for children. Another key element of the work of the Early Intervention team was the 'Toe by Toe' project, a structured reading programme, which supported literacy from P5 through to the end of secondary school. The interviewees noted that there was a dip in support between P2 and P5; as it was often children who had been identified as needing additional support to achieve age appropriate reading levels at P2 who again required support in P5 there appeared to be a need to continue support for such children at all stages.

Working with parents is in the remit of the Early Intervention Team. They do this through running interactive workshops which present parents with ideas about reading and books in a way that helps parents see that they already have the knowledge and skills to help their children, well encouraging them to use library and community services. They want a parent to be able to say 'there is nothing here I can't do'. The aim is to make the workshops informal and relaxed and to use it as an opportunity to allow parents to chat openly and to raise questions about other issues concerning them as well as addressing literacy. A specific initiative of the Early Intervention service is providing all children starting school with a school bag with a range of resources including books, games, alphabet mats and leaflets for the parents explaining how to use them. They had also recently run a successful 'family literacy night' at which an author had spoken to the parents and children. A number of local voluntary and community organisations and the local college had participated. It was felt that this had stimulated a lot of interest amongst parents who had approached the Team to do it again.

Nurture groups

West Dunbartonshire initiated a nurture group pilot in 2005 with the first year concentrating on planning, mapping needs and identifying pilot schools. Three schools took part in the 2 year pilot from 2006 to 2008. Children are considered for nurture group support if they are at risk of underachievement because of significant social, emotional and behavioural concerns demonstrated either through restless, aggressive behaviour or are withdrawn and over dependent on adult support (supported by psychological profiling). The aim is to provide

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[4] See http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=367532; http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=2213185

developmental experiences that help them adapt to mainstream class and help them develop secure and trusting relationships with adults and peers. The evaluation of the data at local authority level on nurture groups showed that participation was extremely beneficial to the children, leading not only to improved integration, but improved academic attainment. Further schools had been identified in the authority for the introduction of new nurture groups, but at the time of the research resources were still to be identified. Neither of the schools we visited as part of the research in the Clydebank area had nurture groups available.

During 2008/09, the pilot schools had continued running nurture groups by finding resources from their own budgets. One of the schools included in the study had a nurture group and we were particularly interested in how parents had been involved. In the early stages of the pilot, the focus had been on establishing the nurture group and developing communication between nurture teachers and classroom teachers. It was also important that all teachers understood nurturing principles so that they became embedded in school practices and so this was the focus for whole school development. Parents had been informed about the group and their consent had been sought and all were very keen for their children to benefit from the nurture group experience. Parents have gradually been involved more and they are invited to come into the group where they learn along with their children. Interaction with the children is modelled by the nurture teacher and learning assistants and they are shown how to do things, such as reading stories and playing games, which they can do at home with their children.

5.6 DOMESTIC ABUSE PATHFINDER

The Domestic Abuse Pathfinder programme was highlighted by many interviewees as being an important initiative in relation to supporting families and children at risk. The National Domestic Abuse Pathfinder pilot is working in 4 areas in Scotland and is funded by the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) initiative. West Dunbartonshire has the highest recorded rates of domestic abuse incidents in Scotland (W Dunbartonshire's Single Outcome Agreement, 2009). The purpose of the Pathfinder is to review how services respond to children exposed to domestic abuse and to improve support. Staff from the YFSS, the PFSS, early years centres and schools all reported that communication was now very good - there was good liaison between all services involved; when there had been an incident those working with the children were informed right away and could deal sensitively with their needs. It was not in the remit of the research to identify children or parents linked to the service or evaluate the effectiveness of this service for children in the schools identified, but informants suggested that around 1,000 families benefited from support since the initiative has been put in place.

5.7 PROFESSIONALS WHO DELIVER THE SERVICES

In the final section of figure 5.1 we have listed a range of professionals. Two issues are relevant here – firstly, the knowledge, skills and attitudes of each professional, and their professional development and training and secondly, the way in which they work together. A skilled workforce and multi-agency working are core elements of current policies as outlined in section 2 of the report.

Training related to supporting parents was most prevalent in relation to the work of the family support workers (both young families and in schools) and the outreach workers where all had completed the NCH Behaviour Management training, which gave them knowledge, skills and strategies to share with parents. Health visitors had also accessed this training. It was reported that, while popular, this training did not have a sufficient evidence base and would be replaced by the programmes identified in the parenting strategy. There had been specific training for a small number of people in relation to the Incredible Years programme, though

as noted at the time of the research the delivery of this programme was still to be taken forward and a group of staff had been trained for the delivery of the Mellow Parenting programme. We did not gather clear evidence on the extent to which key workers or teachers had had the opportunity to access training that helped them work with parents.

There had been inter-agency training for the Staged Intervention process and also for the Integrated Assessment Framework (see below). While both of these processes emphasise the importance of including parents as equal partners, it is not clear that training involves developing skills in working with parents or helping them engage with their children.

Multi-agency working

It was anticipated that the implementation of the Integrated Assessment Framework (IAF) in 2008 by West Dunbartonshire Council and the Glasgow and Clyde NHS would enhance multi-agency working. This was in response to national requirements as stated in the GIRFEC programme. A major training initiative was undertaken across the authority in 2008 involving over 200 health, education, social work and some voluntary sector staff. The aim of the framework is to ensure that, where multiple services are involved with a child or family, information is shared effectively between services and families are not asked for the same information by multiple service providers. The process should allow each service to have a more holistic view of the child and family circumstances and will result in better planning and decision-making, involving where appropriate the parent and child in the planning and decision-making. One of the services, usually the one that identifies the need for the plan, will take the lead in the assessment process and preparation of the paperwork though consultation will take place between services first to decide if and IAF assessment and plan is required.

At time of our research, senior managers highlighted the importance of this process and the effectiveness of West Dunbartonshire's approach. Views expressed by other interviewees were that it had potential to be a very good process for children and families who need a clear, co-ordinated approach especially between social work and education, but few had experience of it in reality. It was reported that most were being initiated by secondary schools with one of the main reasons being that no child could be referred for an alternative placement without the completion of an IAF. Only one case was known to interviewees where it had been used in an early years setting and there were no clear views as yet on the effectiveness of the process, either in terms of promoting better collaboration and communication between services or more effective support for children and families.

As few had experience of the IAF, it was clearly not yet influencing the way in which the different services worked together or how they engaged on a day to day basis. In general terms, interviewees were positive about working with other agencies, although there were cases of lack of communication and slowness of dealing with situations. Some practitioners and support workers felt that there had been occasions when social work colleagues had withheld essential information and they approached situations unaware of the full extent of problems.

5.8 OTHER SERVICES

During the course of the research, interviewees referred to a wide range of other services that existed in West Dunbartonshire to support families in poverty. Some were wider community services and some were very specialised forms of support for particular groups. None of these services was studied in detail or fully evaluated, as this was not the scope of the research.

- Of particular note is the Special Needs in Pregnancy (SNIP) project which identifies mothers at risk, particularly from drug addiction, during pregnancy and provides additional support to them and to the child after the birth.
- In relation to support for mental health issues there are Stepping Stones; Goldenhill Mental Health Clinic which also has a programme to help parents with their children; CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Addiction support is provided through DACA (Dumbarton Area Council on Alcohol); CAT (Community Addiction Team); 'Alternatives' is a voluntary sector community drugs project which also provides family parenting and support work.
- In addition to the Domestic Abuse pathfinder project highlighted above, there is support from Women's Aid and CARA (Challenging and Responding to Abuse)
- 'Includem' is a voluntary group that offers intensive support to families mainly to support looked after and accommodated children, to prevent them being taken in to care away from home or to assist with returning home.
- Community Learning and Development Services were mentioned as providing suitable courses for parents and particular reference was made to CLAN, the council run Community Literacy and Numeracy project. In addition to supporting adult literacy they offer parents courses about helping their child with homework and family learning. Libraries also offer 'rhyme time' and Bookstart which parents are encouraged to use.
- Y Sort It, which is part of the Young Scot initiative, and provides support for 12 to 25 year olds was mentioned specifically in relation to the work it does to support young mothers.
- Some interviewees highlighted the benefit of the Council's Leisure Services 'passport to leisure' scheme which provides people with leisure passes to use council facilities at reduced rates. The service liaises with social work and education to help people access it. Other interviewees indicated that in the cases of large families or those in extreme poverty even reduced costs were prohibitive.

5.9 SUMMARY

A range of initiatives are in place to support children in families in West Dunbartonshire. While not specifically targeting those living in greatest poverty, interviewees considered that many who were involved would be among the most deprived.

Those most likely to engage on a one-to-one basis to provide support were the family support and outreach workers of the Young Family Support Service and the support workers from the Pupil and Family Support Service in schools. They all worked with families in their homes and in the community. All informants valued these services highly and highlighted the value of the home-visiting aspect for developing trusting relationships that made support acceptable to the service users. It was considered that an increased service would be beneficial.

It was expected that practitioners in the Early Years and Childcare Centres would engage with families on a one-to-one basis, developing relationships that would enable them to engage parents' in their child's learning development. There was evidence that managers and keyworkers in nurseries were highly committed to this role and also supporting parents in other matters. However, some practitioners were not confident in this role. Working with parents did not appear to be a focus for staff development in early years centres or schools.

Initiatives that focused primarily on enhancing the learning experience for children in both nursery and school (Early Intervention, Transition Pilots, Nurture Groups) also sought to engage parents. The Transition Pilots and Nurture Group Pilots having focused initially on establishing the programmes were considering strategies for involving parents more. The approaches to transition that had been piloted were seen to be particularly beneficial to

children, early years workers and teachers and these would be introduced across the authority. The schools and nurseries who piloted the transition programmes at the time of the research indicated that they wanted to find ways of involving parents in the planning and decision making process. This should be a shared focus and ongoing development for the pilot schools, particularly in relation to identifying and involving low-income families.

An inter-agency 'parenting strategy' was emerging at the time of the research. From the views expressed through the interviews, it appeared that parenting support, in terms of groups or classes, was somewhat *ad hoc*. The parenting strategy should address this. It is important that there is coherent, well publicised support for parenting which helps 'normalise' such support and also enables people to overcome any perceived stigma of needing help.

6. THE KEY INFORMANTS' PERSPECTIVES

This section draws on two sources of information: documents related to data held by the authority and in the public domain, and interviews with key informants. Section 6.1 considers the first research question: 'What data is available locally concerning the target group of children in severe and persistent poverty?'. Further consideration is given to this question from the perspective of individual schools in section 7 of the report – 'The Practitioners' Perspective'. Sections 6.2 to 6.6 report on interviews that were carried out with senior managers from the Community Health Partnership of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Social Work and Education Services including Early Intervention, Early Years and Childcare, Early Primary and Psychological Services. The interviews sought information on current initiatives in West Dunbartonshire related to the provision of services supporting families living in poverty and these have been reported in section 5: Mapping of Services. Interviewees were also asked about issues of identifying and engaging with families in poverty, what is perceived as indicators success, inter-agency working, aspects of supporting families living in poverty which could be improved, and future developments. The service which is the source of the information reported is given in brackets.

6.1 DATA AVAILABLE ABOUT TARGET GROUP AT A LOCAL LEVEL

All services work to the performance indicators provided in the Scottish Government's National Performance Indicators[5] and a range of other relevant frameworks e.g. NHS HEAT targets, Audit Scotland Performance Indicators, local targets based on national policies. These are reported in the Single Outcome Agreements and progress towards targets is posted on the local authority's website[6]. So for education, for example, progress on 5-14 attainment levels is published: these figures, however, represent progress at a whole authority level.

In section 2 we referred to indicators of deprivation that are publicly available for local areas from the Scottish Government Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics database and we used one indicator (income deprivation) to illustrate the degree of deprivation in the area of Clydebank. These data indicate that these are high levels of deprivation based on income, employment, education, health, housing and crime indicators and so can provide descriptions of areas, but they do not have any indicators that relate specifically to young children or families with young children. We also noted the availability of Working and Child Tax Credit data, which details by datazone the number of children in families that are in receipt of child and tax credits; it gives the number of lone parents and children in lone parent families and those in work/not in work. This however, includes children up to their 16th birthday, and up to 19th birthday if they are still in full-time education, and so does not relate specifically to young children.

The education service provided data on school attendance, attainment at 5-14 levels and exclusions at the level of individual schools. Thus it is possible to look at the performance of schools in the areas identified as having high levels of deprivation. They do not, however, address the age group which is the focus of this study, namely 4 to 7 year olds, nor is it possible to identify within schools the attendance or performance of those who might be identified as being in severe and persistent poverty. A further breakdown of the data would show attendance and exclusion and progress towards levels A and B for pupils in P1 and P2

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[5] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes
[6] http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-your-council/single-outcome-agreement/

but it is only within the school that these becomes meaningful in relation to particular children and how performance relates to poverty.

The education service also provided the literacy and numeracy assessment scores for early years centres and schools in Clydebank. These were for whole centres and schools though for the schools they were separated into P1 and P2. While these can be interpreted in relation to literacy and numeracy and the need for further support in these aspects they are not linked to any indicators of poverty. The Early Intervention Team indicated that through their baseline and ongoing assessment of children from nursery through to P2 and then engaging again with some of the same children in P5 (see section 5.5), they could identify families that had 'educational poverty'; the data they held could be analysed on a postcode basis and if shared could help identify target areas for additional support.

The percentage of pupils entitled to and claiming free school meals in each school is in the public domain[7] but as West Dunbartonshire Council has confirmed that all children from P1-P3 will receive free school meals from 2009/10, this (fortunately) no longer remains a relevant indicator for the target group for this study. The authority holds data on clothing grants. These indicators of level of need are not relevant to those in early years centres.

The education service holds a lot of data on children but it does not appear to hold data that identifies those that are in severe and persistent poverty beyond the general indicators of area deprivation.

6.2 IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING WITH FAMILIES LIVING IN POVERTY

Interviewees across the different services were in agreement that early identification of families in need of additional support was absolutely essential and that health service staff were those most likely to have early contact.

> *The most deprived families need to be identified early and so the health visitor's contact with the family after birth is the best place to pick up needs. Midwives, of course, are also important .* (Early Years).

The majority of referrals to the Community Health and Education Young Family Support Service (YFSS) were from health visitors who would be alert to evidence of families where the mother in particular was not coping, for example, through missed appointments, the house in chaos, older children not attending nursery, children are hungry and not cared for. Workers in early years centres who identify concerns about the welfare of children would discuss this with the head of centre who could either contact the health visitor who is the nominated liaison person for the centre or refer directly to the YFSS.

Interviewees were confident that families where children were in need of support would be identified before the child went to school – either through the health visitor at the earliest stages, or through the early years centres. It was reported that 99% of the 3-5 population had taken up their entitlement for free early education and childcare[8] and so, provided service providers are alert to the needs of families, few should 'slip through the net'. (Though see below at 6.5; there was concern that some might not be identified soon enough.) It was expected the staff in early years centres would work closely with families as well as the

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[7] www.scottishschoolsonline.gov.uk

[8] The Scottish Government Preschool and Childcare Statistics (2008) based on January 2008 census indicates that there were 1830 children between the ages of 3 and 5 in nurseries in West Dunbartonshire, over 1500 of whom were in local authority centres. This represents 99% of the eligible population.

children and that they would identify children needing further support; the head of centre would share this information with the head teacher or deputy head responsible for the infants class in the primary school.   Additional support if required could then be requested from the Pupil and Family Support Service (PFSS) (Early Years and Education Managers).

However, assessment of risk is not based on poverty, but some other need; some families are in:

> *severe financial circumstances but they are doing ok – parenting is consistent, they are getting the child to nursery … but where there are other factors such as addiction, mental health, relationship breakdown the parent has other priorities and the child is not looked after* (Health).

This is where extra help can support the child and the mother to get through the difficult circumstances. Likewise with respect to referrals to Social Work …'people (are) not referred because of poverty, but because of something else'. Income was not looked at to identify whether a family was in need of support, though in the process of supporting families they could be referred to the Welfare Support Team and advised to 'have a benefits check' (Health and Social Work).

Members of the Young Family Support Service were aware that families dependent on income benefits or in multiple low income jobs but without other recognisable support needs were 'below the radar' of the YFSS and SW. They could be struggling to support their child's education because of lack of time and resources, but these needs could be overlooked.

The Early Intervention Team indicated that through their baseline and ongoing assessment of children from nursery through to P2 and then engaging again with some of the same children in P5, they could identify families that had 'educational poverty'; the data they held could be analysed on a postcode basis and if shared could help identify target areas for additional support.

Challenges of engaging parents

Interviewees were in agreement that identification of families in need did not equate to engagement with services. Families can be wary of allowing involvement of other services; therefore although the health visitor is in a pivotal position and can reach the family, the family may not want a support worker in. This may be because of the stigma of involvement with services – a particular problem in relation to social work. Services can be seen as patronising and so families reject support.

Many families have very complex circumstances including addiction, relationship problems, inadequate housing, and physical and mental health issues (see also Section 8 on data from parents) – all of which contribute to poverty and make it difficult for families to see a way out. These issues can also mean that parenting and nurturing their children is not a priority, nor supporting their learning. They may also try to hide these difficult circumstances and so it can be more difficult for service providers to identify those in need.

Many parents in poverty, aggravated by other issues, often have had limited educational success themselves, they have had poor educational experiences and so may not value education; or they may find the system threatening and fear that they will not be valued within it. Interviewees highlighted the issue of low literacy levels and the fact that people did not always reveal that they could not read and so were not able to help their children with early years learning or school work. One of the education service informants reported how this had come to light through approaching parents because of their children's inability to read by P7. This had led to disclosures from parents that they hadn't been able to help

because they couldn't read themselves. At that time support was arranged through the Early Intervention Team. It was agreed that it was very challenging in terms of how services communicate with parents.

What has been successful in engaging families who are in poverty?

Services that are targeted to supporting the needs of families through referral (YFSS and Social Work) engage best when they are able to develop a care plan in which parents have 'had their say'. Developing relationships with families rather than 'telling them what they need' is an important element of successful engagement. Where possible, the parent needs to have a role which is clear and for which they take responsibility. Social work interviewees highlighted the importance of this due to the perceived stigma of having social work involvement and people's fear that their children will be taken away. It was reported that area teams had a good track record of avoiding children being taken into care (Health and Social Work).

Early years centres were generally perceived to be open and welcoming as their 'raison d'être' was to support parents as well as children. Parents were welcome in the nursery, they 'didn't just drop the children at the door' as often happens in schools (Education). It was thought that many schools could develop more open approaches and welcome parents in informal ways and where it was done it was successful. For example, one interviewee speaking from experience of working with parents in P1 said:

> *The soft touch works well … social evenings, 'freebies' when they come e.g. book, DVD, school bag for the parent to take away …. but it has to be informal.* (Education)

The Early Intervention Team also highlighted the importance of informality and finding practical, active ways of helping parents experience what their children are experiencing as they learn to read.

Active learning has encouraged schools to involve parents in the classroom … in some places:

> *the parents just took to it … they'll do anything you want them to … but these are parents that are really engaged with their children's learning. It's different with other parents.* (Education)

Parents who were less engaged could be involved in classroom activities developed for active learning but they would need more encouragement and more support which required willingness on the part of the school to do this.

The nurture groups that had been established as part of the nurturing pilot (see Mapping of Services, section 5.5) were beginning to lead to greater involvement of parents from deprived backgrounds, but this was still in early stages of development. This was important as the children who were identified for the nurture group were generally from families where there had been inadequate parenting. Keeping these parents on board once the children were no longer in the nurture group was a challenge but it was thought that developing nurturing principles across the school would create an ethos that would help keep the parents on board (Education and Psychological Services).

6.3 INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Interviewees were asked 'what counts as success' in relation to initiatives seeking to support families in poverty. How would they know that the service they have offered has been successful?

For service providers such as the YFSS, success meant families being satisfied with the service, trusting them and being able to develop relationships with them. In some cases, 'getting in the door' was success. Often very small changes marked successful progress e.g. a parent is able to get her child to nursery on her own, appointments are kept, the parent plays with her child, the parent can manage a child's behaviour or the parent learns to cook a meal. Not needing the 'scaffolding' that the service provides as their situation improves was a major success. This service used 'exit surveys' with service users and they had lots of positive feedback. (Health and Education)

Interviewees were in agreement that often success was in the very small steps that people took towards improving their lives depending on their circumstances – gaining in confidence, gaining skills that led to college or employment, improved health and well-being, more interest in their child, participating in events at their child's nursery or school (all services).

Indicators of successful service provision in relation to children varied according to age and stage: relevant to all was improved health and well-being; they were getting enough to eat and they were getting enough sleep. In relation to early years and school, they were attending, they were settled and happy, they were confident and learning, they were relating to adults and other children (all services).

As these indicators are mainly subjective, the challenge is to find a system of measuring progress and tracking improvements due to services provided over time. All services work to the performance indicators provided in the National Performance Indicators and reported in the Single Outcome Agreements; for example health services report on targets of breast-feeding, immunisation and dentition; education reports on attainment targets. These however are high level targets and there was agreement that it was difficult to find appropriate performance indicators for the types of factors identified as representing success.

In relation to improving parental involvement in their children's learning it was thought that appropriate indicators would be how often parents' attended school events, parents' satisfaction with the school and how it supported them and their children. Improved participation of families should lead to improved attendance of children where this was an issue and improved attainment. Early years centres and schools could record the activities they offer to support parents generally, the focus of the event and the number attended; at an individual level they could record the incidents of support to families, what they do and the number of parents supported (Education and Social Work).

6.4 INTER-AGENCY WORKING

Several interviewees referred to the Integrated Assessment Framework as a way of clarifying and supporting inter-agency working (see Mapping of Services).

It was reported that professionals in West Dunbartonshire have direct contact on a regular basis and there was evidence of informal, close working across all services (Health). The YFSS was reported by all services as being a good example of 'inter-agency working' between health and education. However, it was also thought that communication between services could be improved, there could be better understanding of each others' roles which would avoid misinformation to service users, and 'joined up working … [with other services]

… could be better'. It was acknowledged that there had been cases where both Social Work family support workers and the school Pupil and Family Support Service workers had been involved and this had been confusing for families. Clarification between services was required when this happened (Social Work). Some interviewees indicated that they felt that strong professional barriers between service providers still existed.

6.5 INFORMANTS' VIEWS ON IMPROVEMENT TO SERVICE DELIVERY

Interviewees were asked if there were areas that were not successful in supporting the poorest families, what contributed to limited success and how these might be addressed.

Responses covered a range of themes including improving local facilities and access to them, increasing staffing and supporting staff development, more effective systems and procedures and more opportunities for supporting parents

Facilities

There is a lack of places for young mothers to go with their children, for example:

> *In Clydebank they tend to go to the shopping centre as there is a lack of parks and open spaces where they can play with their children and meet other mums* (Health).

It was noted that the cost of parent and toddler groups were prohibitive for families on low incomes, particularly when there were several young children in the family; some groups required a retainer fee for sessions when the children did not attend (Health).

Managers from both Health and Early Years services agreed that increased support for families with children under 3 years, with more places available in nurseries would benefit poorer families. A barrier to this was the need for increased funding.

Some of the nursery and school buildings were limited in the space they could make available for working with families. 'Nice' spaces in or near schools which parents could use for social contact or to pursue their own learning interests would make them feel more welcome, provide more opportunities for support and help parents feel part of the community (Early Years and Education)

Staff

The effectiveness of the Young Family Support Service and the Pupil Family Support Service would be enhanced by having larger teams as this would increase the support to families in their homes and communities (all services). It was suggested that support and outreach workers could work alongside midwives before the birth of a child to help prepare the mother (Health). A family might need support in the evening or at the weekend but that was not available except through Social Work, which was not appropriate for, nor wanted, by many families. Finding a way to extend the service would be invaluable (Education).

In addition to the support workers of the above services, it was thought by some that the reintroduction of the home-link teacher for nurseries and schools would help establish stronger links between schools and communities and assist in reaching those who were less likely to become involved in their children's education (Education).

As the practitioners and managers in early years centres had close contact with families, it was important that they were confident and mature in their working relationships with families in difficulty. It was important that they were able to recognise needs, for example,

signs of addiction, and that they knew the range of services that support families. Many workers were already very good at this, but it was a priority for staff development (Early years).

While some primary schools had very good practice in welcoming and involving parents in others more dismissive and patronising attitudes required challenging; an ethos of openness and participation needed to be promoted (Education and Social Work). Schools tended to be very good at involving parents in primary one, but more needed to be done to keep them involved at later stages (Education).

Systems and procedures

While managers were confident that families needing support would be identified by the time children entered school (see above 6.2), there was concern that needs were being identified too late. There was a need to improve ways of identifying such families earlier and targeting support (Early Years and Health).

The longer term benefits of services to families were not known. Tracking of families who had received support from the YFSS would be helpful in further evaluation of the service. For education, it was important to know the progress of children who participated in the nurture group 'in 7 years time' or if the apparent benefits of the pilot transition programmes were sustained as the children progressed through school.

As noted above in relation to multi-agency working, improved communication between services was an ongoing requirement. Additionally, it was thought that communication with parents and families could be improved, with particular attention to identifying and addressing literacy needs.

Supporting parents

Worklessness was identified as being a major challenge in West Dunbartonshire. It was considered that all services could contribute to helping parents move towards employment. For example, all services could take a role in helping parents access other services, addressing issues of confidence, assisting with completion of forms, encouraging further training and development as appropriate to the needs of the parent (Health and Early Years).

Increased provision of and easier access to parenting classes would help many families. Some parents thought that going to a parenting groups suggested that they were 'bad parents' and so found suggestions to attend threatening. If attendance was 'normalised' then it would be easier to encourage participation (Health).

Ways of supporting specific groups needed to be improved, in particular, parents with addictions, lone parents and literacy needs (all services).

While the pilot transition project had been very effective in improving the experience for children and staff more thought as to how parents could be involved was required. It was recognised that parents who felt comfortable in the more play-oriented environment of the nursery might feel less confident in their abilities to get involved in the school. The ongoing work in the pilot schools and the roll-out to other schools would improve parental involvement at the transition stage.

Future developments

At the time of our research a number of reviews were taking place, including the roles of the Community Health Service staff, the range and roles of family support workers in Early Years, Education and Social Work and also the roles of the Early Intervention Team. Plans for ongoing developments in these areas were dependent on the outcomes of the reviews.

Developments planned were:
- Writing up and implementing the multi-agency parenting strategy
- Roll-out of transition guidelines and calendar based on the work of the pilots
- Further development of nurture groups, provided resources became available.

6.6 ASPECTS IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT

The following aspects of services would benefit from further improvement:

Facilities

- ***Develop current facilities, to ensure suitable, non-expensive places for parents to take their children and meet other parents.*** Suitable facilities are key for mothers to have opportunities to interact with other mothers and build informal networks of support. Spaces in or near the early years centres and schools could be provided for parents to use for social contact or learning opportunities.

- ***Provide more support for families with children under 3.*** Parents with older children seemed to have access to more places and opportunities for learning and leisure. The under-3s group seemed also more vulnerable and parents were more isolated, as after children started attending nursery, there were more chances for interaction.

Staff development

- ***Continue provision of staff development activities for early years practitioners in working with parents.*** Input from key informants and feedback from parents show that keyworkers in nurseries and teachers are often excellent at building one to one relationships with the parents. However, more training is required to enable staff to take parental involvement a step forward, by involving parents in children's learning and the decision making processes.

- ***Promote an open, welcoming, participative ethos in all settings.*** In settings with leaders committed to working with the parents in meaningful ways, there was an open, welcoming and participative ethos that motivated and engaged parents. This type of ethos needs to extend to other establishments.

- ***Build in more direct family support and outreach workers.*** Many families benefitted from direct, on site, targeted support to enable their participation in children's education and other activities in nurseries and schools. Outreach workers were praised several times, their role seems key in providing effective support to the most vulnerable.

Systems and procedures

- *Ensure earlier identification of families that needed support.* Some families, especially with very young children, or who may be on the brink of poverty (e.g. the working poor), may not see themselves as requiring support or not know what support is available.

- *Build in a longer term tracking of children of families who had received support to evaluate improvements.* Several services talked about the benefits of any investment in early years provision or family support as being a long-term process, with results visible only later on, through children entering further education or securing employment.

- *Improved communication between different services and raised awareness of support available to families.* Although in most cases individuals were aware of other services supporting families, opportunities for genuine multi-agency work seemed to be limited to very specialised staff. Teachers in schools or keyworkers in nurseries did not seem to be as informed on other services and often did not see multi-agency work as part of their job. As they are often the first point of contact for families who may be struggling, it is important to ensure that they can direct families and see themselves as working in partnership with other agencies as a matter of routine.

Supporting parents

- *Ensure that all services are prepared to help parents towards employment.* Access to paid work is key to lifting families out of poverty and services should be committed to helping parents in securing employment. This may mean support with directing parents to relevant agencies, support with filling in forms, or support in building relevant skills, such as literacy skills, positive self-esteem and confidence.

- *Increased provision of and easier access to parenting classes.* Parenting classes that are not patronising of parents and are run in partnership by different agencies are very popular with families. Provision of classes by Social Work was still unwelcomed. Classes that dealt with management of children's behaviour, parenting skills, curriculum and other learning support etc. were most valued.

- *Offer better support for specific groups such as those with addictions, lone parents and literacy needs.* Staff in nurseries and schools were often confronted with parents' personal experiences of addiction, struggle to cope as single parent or illiteracy. These groups need further support through specialist provision.

- *Ensure greater consideration of the needs of parents at transition and their involvement in the process.* Although much progress has been done to provide appropriate programmes for children at transition, parents' involvement at this stage could be more meaningful. While parents are kept informed of events for children, activities for adults, for example in relation to children's learning and how to support it, are few and tend to be provided during the working hours.

6.7 SUMMARY

This section of the report presents, firstly consideration of data available about the target group and secondly, the views of key informants from health, education and social work services in West Dunbartonshire.

While the education service has extensive data about children in West Dunbartonshire and Clydebank, it cannot easily identify the target group of children living in severe and persistent poverty within those datasets.

Frontline services such as health visitors and early years practitioners were critical in identifying families that required further support in relation to parenting and helping their children learn. Many families were coping with other difficulties (lone parents, housing problems, addiction) which meant their children and their children's education were not a priority; it was essential that they were directed towards other sources of support while being encouraged to see that they could support their children's development. Parents who had limited educational success were not confident in becoming involved with the education system.

The most successful ways of engaging with families in poverty and coping with associated difficulties were through developing relationships and building trust; early years centres and schools had to be welcoming and supportive. Informal activities at which parents felt valued and were given confidence were more successful than formal events.

Success of working with children and parents in poverty was generally identified in small, progressive steps, for example, improved health and wellbeing, confidence, settled behaviour, the ability to relate to adults and peers, making progress in learning. These indicators are mainly subjective and are not easily turned into measurable outcomes to monitor success of services.

The broad view was that services worked well together but that communication could be improved and there was the need to continue to develop an understanding of each others' roles.

7. THE PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES

This section summarises the findings from the interviews conducted with the school and EECC staff from the 3 schools and 3 EECCs involved in the study. Two schools and one EECC affiliated to each of these were approached in Clydebank, an area of high deprivation, with a high proportion of children in each of the schools in entitlement of free school meals. A school and an EECC outside the Clydebank area were also involved in the study, as they were mentioned as an example of good practice by some of the key informants we spoke to. All settings were invited to participate and told they could refuse participation with no repercussions for their setting. All agreed to participate. In all settings, the head teacher/head of EECC was interviewed and a focus group was conducted with at least 3 staff who volunteered to participate. No incentives or rewards were given to staff for their participation. In total, 3 head teachers, 4 EECC managers, 10 teachers and 10 early years practitioners were interviewed. An interview schedule was used for both interviews with heads and staff (see Appendix A), but this was used as a guide only, staff were encouraged to take the lead in the conversation. Interviews took on average between 30 and 60 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed afterwards for analysis. Findings presented in this section are organised thematically, to present the combined views of all staff involved.

7.1 IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING WITH FAMILIES LIVING IN POVERTY

When asked about the ways in which families in poverty were identified, most managers and staff talked about using their intuition and observations of children and parents' appearance to identify them. Information about families was not collected in any systematic ways and it was mainly informally that staff gathered information on children's home circumstances:

> *You know because of their clothing, because of the poverty of their language … there are a hundred different ways of seeing it …. You also know the families, this is an area people don't move out of, we have third generation children in the school and lots of big connections …. very strong family networks …(head teacher)*

> *Usually when they enrol they have to give emergency contact and work details so you can usually tell who works. And just through talking to them [you find out their situation]. A lot are keen to share things. A lot will come up and tell you. Children will tell you if mum and dad have split up. (EECC practitioner)*

> *Some children tell you they've got every gadget. Some don't. Just by listening to them. How they appear. Clothes. Even the way they talk, language can be different. Both appearance and language are quite judgemental, but you can't help that, you don't have anything else. (EECC practitioner)*

Staff said that it was hard to know families' circumstances, the conditions they lived in, their employment and income situation, unless parents volunteered information, which means that potentially, some of the most vulnerable children may slip through the net, as staff may not know of their situation, especially if families are trying to hide poverty:

> *For the majority of the families, you don't know how they are getting on. Some wee families are struggling, but just get on with it. You find out as time goes on. (EECC practitioner)*

> *Sometimes there's been a referral through the health visitor - or through the social work…they'll maybe give us a wee background to the children, or the circumstances.*

But then sometimes if they've come in here and they're not known to somebody else, it's only through building up a relationship with the parents that you find out. And then you think, oh, this family could do with a wee bit of support. (primary school teacher)

If there's a problem and social work etc are involved you would know. The head would tell us. Or maybe a referral from health visitor. You don't always get that. (EECC practitioner)

The lack of formal mechanisms to identify families who are vulnerable means that staff could not always give the support needed. One additional service offered was provision during the summer holiday for the most vulnerable children and staff said they 'just knew' who was vulnerable and needed this service:

One of the difficulties is that there are 7 – 8 weeks before they are back and this is a tragedy in some circumstances for some of our families. We offer a skeleton service [over the summer], but this is only for the most vulnerable families. (head of EECC)

Basically it is about good communication and being responsive to what they (the parents) need. We know the parents and the children who need to be in (during the summer) for key educational reasons and for vulnerability and it is not difficult to work that out. (head of EECC)

Although it is clear that staff in EECCs and schools are very perceptive of people's needs and can spot some of the most disadvantaged children, a more systematic approach to collecting relevant data on disadvantage may help when it comes to supporting families through additional provision or through other agencies. This is especially the case for families who may be in and out of poverty, the ones who may be too embarrassed to discuss their situation with the staff or for families whose circumstances change (bereavement, addition, bad health etc.) and suddenly become poor.

7.2 PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Head teachers, EECC managers and staff expressed the view that good home-school links were essential and it should become more of a priority for the schools to find ways of successfully engaging a wider range of parents and carers with activities taking place in the school, as well as through home-based and out-of-school activities.

I believe that most parents want the best for their child. They want the best but they might not be able to do it as well as you or I or their neighbour, but deep down inside they want the best for their child. And it's how we tap into that. (EECC manager)

Most school staff considered that parents are children's best educators and schools/EECCs should build on that. One EECC head talked about having parental involvement as the ethos of the centre, something which they were doing on a regular basis rather than an add-on:

We have parental involvement as a, not only in the improvement plan, it is the ethos, it is what we believe in. (head of EECC)

If we engage parents from very early, make them feel welcome, and the simple thing is that the benefits from this parent who feels involved in their child's learning or life or feeling good are enormous. And that is just going to spill over into school and into the next stage and the next stage and the next stage. And the parents feel good at what they're doing, and feel good about being able to work with their children and to be happy with their children. (head of EECC)

However, some staff raised issues about the limited value that some parents might place on formal education, which would influence their readiness to be more involved in children's learning:

> *If parents are not interested, there's not much you can do.* (EECC practitioner)

Parents were all keen to highlight the benefits of their involvement with children's learning. The main advantages they mentioned were: knowing how well a child is doing at school, knowing how to support a child's learning at home, emotional bonding with the child and a sense of being a 'good parent' if becoming more involved in activities at school. Their views are detailed further in section 8.

7.3 PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

There were four categories of barriers that impeded on successful involvement of parents in children's learning in the schools/EECCs that we involved in the study:

a) Parental barriers

School staff spoke about some parents' lack of confidence to engage with children's learning, often due to parents' own bad experiences of education. Poor literacy and numeracy skills were also often mentioned. Staff also thought that many parents were not aware of the significance of their support for children's learning and thought that it was the school's job to teach children new things. In early years, some staff said that parents saw nurseries as places where children 'spend their time', without much learning taking place, so it was a matter for staff to challenge this view. Several staff members also talked about the 'poverty of aspirations' in deprived areas, where parents had very low expectations of children's achievements and did not infuse children with enthusiasm for learning.

Sometimes, schools detected a lack of commitment on parents' part, but this was often associated with complicated family circumstances (alcohol abuse, drug use, mental health issues). This mainly translated into the child not being brought to nursery/school on time, prolonged absences without informing the staff, not turning up at parents' evenings or events or not asking about a child's progress.

> *The parents who sit down and do board games with their children, the parents who do all these things, I'm going to get them anyway. It's the other parents that I have to work very, very hard with and the only way to do it is that they feel that I'm not somebody up there on a pedestal. (head of EECC)*

> *Some people are in places that they would choose not to be in if they could. They don't choose to be a drug addict. They don't choose to be in poverty. They don't choose to be a victim of domestic abuse. They don't choose to be living in a house with dampness. They don't choose to have anti-social neighbours. They don't choose that. Life has hit them hard, a fairly rotten blow, but that's where they are at the moment. And that's why, if we can understand that, and we can work with these parents at a very early age then I think that will reap the benefits in future. (head of EECC)*

> *Some are illiterate themselves. We've got a couple of parents who have difficulty reading or can't read. But because we know who they are if there's letters going out or forms we take our time to sit with them and tell them what it's about. And help them fill the form in. (EECC practitioner)*

Some parents don't have the knowledge as well of what they can actually do with their child that won't cost them money. (EECC practitioner)

b) *Staff barriers*

Staff and parents often talked about the importance of having committed school staff (teachers, administrators, school nurse, outreach workers, health visitors etc.) who are non-judgemental, dedicate time to support parents and listen to their suggestions. In settings where staff did not believe that parental involvement was essential, provision was more limited and parents' attitude to engagement, more detached.

Some staff did not see it as their responsibility to work with the families and give them additional support. Some teachers thought that their main job was to teach the children and not to deal with other issues that families might be faced with. Limited time and resources was the main reasons given. Also, other staff thought that they did not have the knowledge of services available or the expertise to support vulnerable parents.

Parents talked at length about the importance of being made welcome in the school locale/nursery and being treated with respect by the staff. The provision of a parents' room and a warm environment to discuss their concerns were also mentioned.

c) *Community barriers*

In delivering programmes through other services, attitudes to provision varied, as some parents would welcome home visits, while others would find it stigmatising, due to the association with social work services. In the case of events organised at the nursery/school, territorialism manifested in the community and conflict between families would sometimes stop parents from attending. Community barriers were also linked to availability of the school locale after the working hours and support from other local organisations to deliver programmes for parents. Also, parents' access to other services that enable them to educate themselves was seen as key in empowering them to engage with their children's learning:

My wish is that there were adult education classes they [parents] could go to, drop the kids off at school, go there, that it was a welcoming place, they could have tea and coffee, and I'm not talking about formal qualifications, but I do think that community learning should be tied to the school, and you could through in a library, too …People are more likely to go if it's on their doorstep. (head teacher).

d) *Other barriers*

More recently, the need for parents to complete a Disclosure Scotland check before being able to help out in schools/early years centres or out-of-school events means that parents are reluctant to go through a police check, especially in areas of criminal activity. Schools often rely on a limited pool of parents that they can involve in classes and these are usually the unemployed, more active mothers.

7.4 HOME-SCHOOL LINKS AND STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING FAMILIES IN CHILDREN'S LEARNING

All schools/EECCs involved in the study had a wide range of initiatives in place aimed at involving parents in their children's learning. Senior managers acknowledged that even if parents in areas of deprivation are more likely to have complicated family circumstances (unemployment, addiction, mental health issues etc.), they all want their children to do well in school and are generally very interested in their children's progress. Managers thought that it was important to be aware of parents' own values and family circumstances and try and fit

the events for parents around the parents' needs and availability. They also emphasised the importance of finding the best channels of communication that suit a specific group of parents and of trying out different types of events for parents.

Schools and EECCs involved in the study used a range of strategies to ensure that parents had opportunities for involvement in their children's learning. However, some settings, more than others, made it a priority to provide constant and varied opportunities for parents to be involved. In settings where leaders saw parents as key educators alongside the school staff, efforts for effective and varied communication with the home were made on a regular basis. Observations and conversations with staff showed clearly that leadership was key in framing the provision for parents to be involved.

Some of the strategies for parental involvement in learning consisted of a combination of more formal approaches:

- Invitations to participate in parents' nights or parents' group meetings;
- Sending home Newsletters and Information Packs about initiatives at school and what parents could do to help children's learning;
- Communicating through letters about important events at school – national initiatives and programmes;
- Organisation of formal curriculum events or transition programmes for all parents;
- Inviting parents to events organised in schools by other agencies- e.g. behaviour management course, health initiatives etc.

and some informal strategies:

- Inviting parents for drop-in sessions and open afternoons;
- Speaking to parents informally on a regular basis about help that their child requires;
- Pointing out opportunities for parents and services that might help;
- Inviting parents to take part in after-school clubs and out-of-school events, such as educational trips and mini-projects;
- Using homework diaries to communicate with parents regarding the curriculum tasks completed at school;
- Asking children to enlist the help of an adult in researching a topic;
- Asking parents to discuss with children their learning;
- Sending home leaflets about events in the community, attractions etc.
- Creating learning materials that are made available for all parents to pick-up and use at home (mainly for literacy and math).

These are some extracts from the interviewees' input, to illustrate the range of activities developed to engage parents in their children's education:

> *we've got things like our science box, we got our physical sack, story sacks. We give learning packs for self-sufficient parents. We got our teddy home in the sack and all this kind of thing, taking it home in a case. We have got all these things going on at the one time and we know that sometimes they won't come back, but it doesn't matter. (head of EECC)*

> *We have an Open Day for parents, we are trying to make it fun. So when the parents come in, they will be given a map and it will show you 7 of the learning zones, for example, when they come in they go to the 'wild garden' and it will be under the headings of ACfE. So, the parents will have a map, and we will be working in the garden, the children and everyone. And all the mammies and daddies and grannies, and aunties, wee babies… they can come and see the how the children problem*

solve and use technology to build their den. How they use numeracy and mathematics using the old guttering round the back. How the use art by using the stuff that is on the ground in the wild garden. I think that's a good way of letting the parents see how learning happens. (head of EECC)

The parent workshops – we offered them endlessly and parents don't come – can't keep banging your head against a brick wall, it is demoralising for the staff. And that's why we've gone on to the curriculum afternoons, when the parents come in and the children tell them what they are learning. The parents do the work the children have been doing; it's a whole school thing, at P1 and P2 most of them come. (head teacher)

Although staff mentioned the important role of the family support workers and health visitors, there did not seem to be a close involvement of these workers with staff in early years centres or schools in coordinating provision for the most vulnerable families. The role of the Pupil and Family support workers was detailed above (see section 5.2). There seems to be some scope for outreach support workers to be more actively involved in the schools/EECCs, to help develop more targeted strategies to engage the most deprived families. The role of the pupil and family support workers could be expanded to include:

- Visiting parents at home to discuss how they could support children's learning; possibly involve school staff in these visits;
- Using learning packs and resources with parents to show them how to engage the child in learning activities;
- Supporting parents in accessing other services (health, community education, transport, child care, employment);
- Organising events at school for targeted parents, including cooking sessions, healthy eating, sports events, yoga and relaxation, reading initiatives, behaviour management and positive parenting classes etc.
- Involving parents as helpers in the school or involving them in the organisation of school events etc.

One aspect which was also less mentioned was that of supporting children and parents' learning in the home through learning packs or workshops for parents on how to support their children learn. Some examples were given of successful activities, such us a curriculum workshop for parents in primary 1 or an open day for parents in a nursery to come and experience the type of learning children are involved in, but these activities could be more systematically developed and offered to parents. Similarly, learning packs that parents can use with their children at home (such as literacy, math or science packs) are an excellent way of supporting parents support their children's learning and should become a more regular feature of the home-school/EECC links.

7.5 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS BETWEEN SCHOOL/EECC AND FAMILIES

Most settings we visited (early years and schools) were very good at keeping parents informed on a regular basis not only on their child's individual progress, but also on opportunities for involvement in children's learning at home and at school. Staff talked about the importance of being available and visible to the parents on a daily basis, to build a good relationship and let parents know that support is available:

Because they know we are here when they need us …. if they say they are having problems with 'wee Johnny's reading' they know if they ask us we'll say here is how you do it. If they have a problem they'll come and ask me ….. I'm now trying a new

tack and we are having curriculum afternoons …. open afternoons and they are coming in their hundreds. (head teacher).

A range of strategies were used by schools to communicate with parents, most often a combination of formal and informal ways (see Table 7.1 below):

Table 7.1 Methods of communication with parents used by schools and EECCs

Formal ways of communication	Informal ways of communication
School report – usually twice a year	Chat with parent at arrival/departure
School/EECC Newsletter – usually monthly	Communication through child
Letters about events	Phone call at home
Meetings with parents	Home visits
Curriculum events	Ask parents to inform others about events
Requested appointments by parents	Open days at school/centre
Homework diaries	'Drop in' sessions
Notice boards in schools /EECCs	Coffee mornings for parents
PTA/School Board/Parent Councils	Use of outreach workers/health visitors

Some staff considered that more informal ways of communicating about events were more effective in drawing parents in. They were aware that communicating through written language poses the main advantage of reaching all parents in the most economical way (however, children were often blamed for forgetting to pass on letters), but that letters were also a significant problem with many parents due to increased rates of adult literacy problems in deprived areas and the negative attitude that some parents might have to formal communication through official letters.

> *A letter from the 'headie' is not the best way to convince you to come in, we need more informal ways to communicate with the parents, but we don't have the resources.* (head of EECC)

However, some head teachers thought that communication through letters and more formal events was the only viable option to engage with parents, mainly due to limited resources and perceived limited time on the part of the parents to receive more information or be involved in other events at school:

> *We send letters and Information Letters, most parents are very busy, they need time to arrange the childcare and they wouldn't want any more information or events; they are happy to come and see their children's achievements, but they wouldn't be happy to help, because this often shows up their flaws. (head teacher)*

It became clear that the communication strategy of every setting is directed by the manager (head teacher/head of centre) and for good communication to happen with the homes the presence of a leader who is committed to working closely with parents and reaching the most vulnerable is key:

> *I can remember when we couldn't get a parents council on at all. We just couldny do it. And I've got to say, I think it comes from leadership. Because the head teacher we had here, she couldn't get anybody to join a parents council, the fundraising and everything, we just didny get it, and it was hard. (EECC practitioner)*

> *The head is just brilliant, she is friendly with the children, she gets the parents feel welcome when they come in and that makes a huge difference (…)She knows how to*

create a good atmosphere, she's got the staff ethos and we all pull together. (primary teacher)

Staff also said that it was very important to use soft skills in getting to know the parents, gain their trust and develop good relationships on a daily basis:

It is the way we speak to people, it is the way we approach them, it is about respecting them, it is about not targeting them or judging them or anything like that. It is about relationships, it is about people who sometime in their life they're not in a very good place. (head of EECC)

We got the parents' respect because we talk, we listen, we respond and we don't judge. (head of EECC)

We don't live with the children. What can we do? All we can do is listen and say, what can we do to support. What can we do? (head of EECC)

We have a good rapport. We build up the relationship. You get to know their characteristics and you learn from them about their lifestyle. We go by first names. Some places are more formal. Taking away the title everything just becomes more relaxed. They see you as a person, they know they can talk to you and you are not judging. (EECC practitioner)

Non-attendance at events or involvement in other activities was often due to parents working or being unable to attend at times that suited the school/centre staff. In settings successful at engaging with families, flexible provision was in place and parents knew that staff are available when parents can attend:

So we have parents' evenings and if they say, I can't come that day, we say, ok, come another day then, when can you come, and we'll speak to them then. (EECC practitioner)

We had a garden project, I was saying about getting them all involved and I had a two week spot, there was some of the parents come up to us and said 'Well we're working, we can't do that in the week, can you do it at the weekend?' So I've done two or three days at a weekend where I've invited them all in and I mean the first one I had something like 14 parents come in with the big brothers and sisters and the wee ones-all helping in the garden. (EECC practitioner)

7.6 SUPPORT AT TRANSITION STAGE

All settings visited had some sort of provision for supporting children at transition stage from early years to primary (These programmes were discussed and analysed in section 5.4 above). The extent of the programmes developed and of the staff involvement depended substantially on the willingness from the school to engage with the EECCs:

Some schools are more willing than others, and I think now they're realising just how beneficial it is for the children. With the new Curriculum for Excellence, they have to take it on board. One school has totally changed recently, they weren't too keen in the past. (EECC practitioner)

When schools were committed, the programme of activities was well developed and children, parents and staff were involved:

Yesterday we had a visit from the nursery children and they were taking part in a lesson with our current primary 1 children; we were reading them a big book story and involving them in the story – it was about rhyme – and we had things out on the table and the current primary ones were being the teachers and they were teaching the nursery children how to play the games. It was fantastic. (primary school teacher)

The keyworkers brought the children from the nurseries and taking lots of photographs … it is good for the keyworkers too to see what they do. The children were seeing me again and seeing my face and remembering me from the visit to the nursery. They'll have another visit in June with their parents.   So they see us a few times before they come in in August. (primary school teacher).

Although staff in schools and EECCs were often involved in events and activities, transition was generally seen as mainly the head teacher's/ EECC head's responsibility by staff:

The head has got a transition plan up and running and it's fantastic. The children go and visit the school, whatever school that they're going to they go and visit, and they have a buddy as well, so our children I think are really excited about going to school, and they're not frightened because they've been already. (EECC practitioner)

When asked if transition events were targeted at parents also, most staff implied that events organised are for children, with less involvement from parents. Although parents could visit the school in open days and could drop off children for events, there was little in terms of involving parents actively in organising events or in attending events that would guide them through the transition process and how to support their children best at this stage:

They just drop the children off and come and get them, but that's it really. They can maybe come and have a wee look around. And they maybe have an enrolment day and some do an induction. (EECC practitioner)

We are very good at transition. Children go [to school] for lunch, PE, music… this afternoon they have a concert. But it's just the children are involved. Parents are involved because we tell them what's happening. Parents don't need to get involved in this part, they're invited in later on. (EECC practitioner)

When parents bring them to the school for their formal visit we have a kind of informal chat with them then …. and that's really all for that stage … but we don't usually have contact with the new start parents until the formal visit in June (P1 teachers).

7.7 INDICATORS OF SUCCESS IN WORKING WITH FAMILIES

When asked what counted as 'success' in working with families, most practitioners in early years and schools mentioned indicators such as good attendance; children who are clean, happy and well behaved; communicative and engaged parents, willing to speak to staff on a daily basis, attend events and generally involved in their children's well-being and education.

In relation to attendance, staff were aware of the difficulties some families had, due to complicated home circumstances, in getting the children to the nursery or being on time. Some settings were more proactive than others in addressing these issues:

The head would phone and speak to them and ask them how they are and when are they coming, and then I think maybe a letter gets sent out eventually if it's the case,

but we always keep in contact with them, there's never an issue…Once we went to their house, the head and I, and brought the child back in. (EECC practitioner)

One family had a taxi allowance, to bring the children in, but they are not allowed that anymore, budget cuts, so we said we'll go and pick them up in the morning. They are so vulnerable, they should be here for safety and all sorts of things, it shouldn't be a matter of money. And they [different services] are arguing about who should support them, if it's education or social work. The cost of a taxi is nothing if you look at the money that's wasted on other things. (EECC practitioner)

Some of the schools had the support of the pupil family support service when families had difficulty in getting the children to school. It was the practice in at least one of the schools for a learning assistant to check which children had not arrived and to phone home to see if they were OK. In such cases children were supported:

You know it isn't the child's fault …. I would eat anyone alive that said to a child that came in at half past nine ….'why are you late'… not that they would ….. a greeting to a child that comes in at half past nine is 'good, I'm glad you've got here'.   The learning assistants say that, the office staff say that, because some of the kids do have a job getting themselves here (Headteacher).

Staff thought that they were successful in supporting children when they looked happy during the day, engaged well in the activities offered and when interacting with other children and showed positive behaviour:

We've got a positive behaviour policy and we work with parents.   There are all different things because not all children are the same, as we know.   And we work with parents on managing behaviour of children and we consult and collaborate on working together between home and here. (EECC manager)

Other indicators used were to do with parents' response to initiative and communication with staff:

The proof of the pudding is that the parents are happy in here and that's the proof that they will come, they'll do anything for you, and that gets recognised within an authority and nationally as well. And the parents return. (EECC manager)

When they [parents] come in smiling, when they clap their children in the awards ceremonies, when they say to me that so-and-so went to football training … when there is pride in their children's achievement, whatever the achievement, I would say that was success. (head teacher)

7.8 INTER-AGENCY WORKING IN SUPPORTING FAMILIES

When asked what services were most useful in supporting families, most interviewees mentioned the family support workers and health visitors, who had direct access to families in homes and often provided a much needed link between families and other services, including education:

The support workers are very good, they help families a lot. Also, they in and out the nursery all the time. We see them more often than we would ever see a health visitor. I've only ever spoken to health visitors on the phone. (EECC practitioner)

We have Pupil and Family Support … we have a PFS worker for half a day …. but we could really have a PFS worker full time attached to the school and the particular skills of that worker are fantastic (School depute head).

Some children might have had social work referrals, so you're working in conjunction with them. And maybe health visitors. We had an outreach worker. She was a nursery nurse but she did home visits, family liaison type thing. She was not based in a nursery, she goes out to families. Just for pre-fives. It was children you knew there was a problem with and she was going in to the house to speak to them to help them deal with problems, and telling us what was going on to bridge the gap. That was very useful. She also helped with play. But there were only 4 posts for the whole of WD. We've not got anybody anymore. (EECC practitioner)

We used to have an outreach worker, she was very good. We were getting feedback 'cause they were seeing the home life. We were getting the whole picture. We should have a person like that for every nursery. They could help with the transition also, 'cause you get some children who come in and are really upset because they don't know anybody… to see a friendly face. (EECC practitioner)

Schools and EECCs seemed to be relying on informal input received from parents on families' home circumstances. Home visits by staff from schools/EECCs were rarely mentioned and they seemed to rely on information from other services (health visitors or family support workers) on what children's home circumstances were like:

Some children have got family all around them, but some of our families are isolated, they are on their own, and the only time they actually speak to somebody out with their children and their house is when they come to us or if a health visitor comes in or a social worker…so for a lot of our children, their social capital is what they got in here (in the nursery). But sometimes we don't know that, because we don't do home visits. (head of EECC)

Working with other services was mainly seen as the responsibility of the head teacher or head of centre. Some staff were pleased to have this task delegated to the head, others felt that they could be much more involved and involvement would recognise them more as professionals:

It's usually the head who deals with these sort of things [speaking to other agencies]. (EECC practitioner)

The head, she's so knowledgeable, she knows what groups are going on and what classes and stuff, I mean that's kind of her wee thing, so she tells parents where to go and what's available. (EECC practitioner)

How involved staff were also depended on the ethos of the school/centre and on the attitude of the head to the staff involvement. In one EECC, the head wanted all staff to be directly involved in each case, so she took key workers with her in home visits and involved them in multi-agency meetings to discuss individual cases:

For some children, you have the meetings and you've got the psychologist and you've got the outreach worker, you've got the social work department (…) you're invited to go to the meetings (…) And everybody, we usually meet in the parents room through there, so you've got your chance to talk to, to let them know how you feel and to find out different things in that way. But it is only with certain children that you'll get that. (EECC worker)

One staff member said that although there was a range of agencies they were aware of in the area, their involvement with these agencies was limited:

> *I had to do an audit of all the agencies that we work with and the professionals, and I wrote down a list of 32 or something and it could have gone on more than that. That to me was a big learning curve for me because I just kind of concentrate in here, I don't know what goes on in the community out there. (EECC practitioner)*

In general, key workers in EECCs and staff in schools saw the head/head teacher as the main individual responsible for liaising with other agencies:

> *We don't have any direct involvement in that work [liaising with other services], you tell the head what you think about the child and then the head would take over, she'd go to meetings, speak to social workers or speech therapists. (EECC practitioner).*

Asked if they wanted to be more involved in working directly with other agencies, staff had mixed views: some thought more involvement would be in line with their professional status, while others saw it as possibly an additional burden, as it would be very time consuming:

> *We keep saying it would be brilliant to have a parents group but then you think when would we fit it in and who would cover our position? Difficult from staffing point of view (EECC practitioner)*

Issues were raised in relation to collaborations with community-based services that could not maintain the level of involvement due to funding cuts.

> *We used to get here a lot were the community police used to come in, and that was actually a very good thing. we had children who were really, really vulnerable, so we would ask them to check on the families. But it was especially the fact that they could keep us informed about a lot of the families that had real problems with drugs or alcohol or prostitution, you know they could tell us and we could also tell them. (EECC practitioner)*

> *In the past, we used to work very closely with the health workers …. they worked with the children in the nursery and the primary and they were a huge help to us and since they've been withdrawn, all we've done is try and find ways to plug that … and that was a full-time worker, and now you have the school nurse who is part-time and covers 10 schools, you've got the pupil and family support who have a very small number covering lots of schools as well as having in-house jobs to do …. that's a huge loss to us and to the families. (head teacher)*

Some of the staff and organisations that were mentioned in relation to provision of support for families, not only in relation to children's learning, but also related to children's and families' well-being included:

- outreach workers and health visitors- working with families in homes;
- Community Education Services – for adult literacy classes, family learning;
- the police; social workers and psychological services;
- Active School workers – delivery of sport events for families;
- Health Centres- delivery of healthy living programmes for families;
- Voluntary organisations and churches, although few were mentioned by name.

7.9 KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL HOME-SCHOOL LINKS

A range of factors emerged as key in ensuring successful provision and support for successful home-school links and involvement of parents in their children's education:

- *Leadership.* Leadership and commitment of the management to the idea of home-school links and parental involvement was probably the most influential factor. In schools/EECCs where leaders were positive about the idea of working with parents and valued parents' role in children's education, engagement was higher and provision was more diversified. As school/EECCs managers are also gate openers for other agencies, schools with committed leaders showed better links with the wider community, more openness to input from outside agencies and a more diversified range of agencies involved in supporting the families and providing joint events.

- *Commitment of school staff.* Leadership was also essential in motivating staff to value parents and generate opportunities for parents to ask teachers/key workers for help, discuss learning, organise events for parents etc. Parents spoke about the importance of having committed teachers, who do not judge or label and provide individualised support. In one nursery, staff were doing home visits if children would not attend and would open the nursery over the week-end if needed for parents to engage with a garden project.

- *Presence of a dedicated home-school link worker.* The presence of a dedicated YFSS or PFSS worker was key to the whole parental involvement process. In the case of families with multiple needs, the school/EECCs staff do not have the capacity to contact relevant services and support parents individually. Outreach workers seem to be very successful at building relationships of trust with the families, which makes it easier to involve them in school-based events, home visit to provide support for learning at home and contact them when children were struggling and needed support.

- *School/EECC ethos and staff attitudes towards parents.* Parents talked about the importance of feeling welcome in the school/nursery locale and being treated with respect by staff. Interviews revealed that in settings where leaders thought that parents were unable or unwilling to engage with the curriculum materials or learning in general, provision was more limited.

- *Effective communication with parents.* Establishments that had a high rate of parental engagement considered that an important part of their success was due to the communication methods used by staff – formal (through Newsletters, letters sent home, information leaflets about events, parents' notice board) and informal (conversations with parents when coming to leave/collect children, use of parents to inform other parents, phoning etc.). Parents also emphasised the importance of being kept informed about their children's progress and events available.

- *Involvement of parents in decision making.* Managers and key workers who had a good response rate to parental events implied that some of these events were based on parents' suggestions in terms of what support they would need and what barriers they encountered in supporting their children's learning. Parents who were asked by the school for regular feedback felt a sense of ownership and pride and felt more motivated to continue with their involvement. However, on the whole, involvement of parents in decision making processes appeared quite low- this could be an area of further development.

- *Flexible provision.* Previous research shows the importance of offering events that are available at times and places that suited a wide range of parents. Most activities mentioned by staff in this study seemed to take place during the staff working hours, which means that parents in employment found it difficult to attend. Settings that provided activities at different times and 'drop in' sessions for parents after the regular school hours had better response from parents. Also, learning activities that could be done at home by the parent with the child were scarce, but when available, they were widely praised by parents and children.

- *Funding and facilities.* In settings that had a range of learning activities that involved parents, additional funds were crucial to pay for materials, specialist staff, sessional workers/visiting staff to provide activities etc. Some of these funds were raised by the EECC/school managers, with some parental involvement. Also, the allocation of a dedicated parents' room was a feature of settings with successful parental involvement and home-school links.

7.10 ASPECTS IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT

The key areas for development and improvement in terms of parental involvement in children's learning, as emerging from the data collected from staff, were as follows:

- *Support staff in schools and EECCs to identify and support vulnerable families.* Data shows that in the absence of a formal referral from a health visitor or social worker, staff relied mainly on informal networks, through chatting with parents and children and observations, in identifying the families who were more vulnerable. Staff should have access to more reliable information on children who are vulnerable and training on how to support vulnerable families. As they are the first point of contact for families, key workers in nurseries and teachers may find it hard to give support, especially when families raise sensitive issues or have complicated circumstances. This would increase staff confidence in dealing with sensitive issues and in supporting better families.

- *Support staff in schools and EECCs to engage parents more meaningfully in children's learning.* Some staff thought that they needed more ideas and training to be able to engage parents in meaningful ways in children's learning, especially when parents have low levels of education themselves and limited confidence. Staff thought that they did not know enough about the difficulties that parents living in poverty might face when it comes to supporting their children's learning and that parents needed more support from other services (e.g. adult learning, health etc.) to be able to engage in their children's learning.

- *Develop communities of practice, for staff to share successful practices of home-school links.* Staff interviews revealed that most EECCs/schools were working in isolation from other EECCs/schools when engaging parents. Staff suggested opportunities for the development of communities of teachers and EECC staff, to facilitate the exchange of ideas and materials between schools and to hear examples of successful practice. One other idea was to organise placements or exchanges of staff between settings to allow applied exchanges of ideas and practices to happen.

- *Provide support for staff to engage parents and pupils in meaningful consultation.* There was only one setting we visited in which consultation with parents was happening on a regular basis. Staff also suggested that their skills in consulting parents and facilitating parents' forums were limited and other agencies could help, either by

facilitating parental consultations or by providing support for staff to consult with parents in more meaningful ways.

- *Develop materials that would allow parents' flexible involvement, at school or at home.* As one of the priorities in the Parental Involvement Act is 'Learning at home', more needs to be done to create a wide range of materials that parents could use to support children's learning at home. Packs such as Adventure Ted (literacy) and Play Along Math (numeracy) used by other local authorities and are well received by parents and children, and similar packs can be developed for other topics, such as Science, technology, health etc. Some examples of good practice were identified in the settings visited, but this area needs further development across the authority.

- *Provide joint events for staff and parents, to learn together.* The cultural barrier between parents and schools was often identified as one of the main problems in parental engagement. Some staff thought that events which would bring together staff and parents (and possibly children) as partners in learning would help to bridge that gap.

- *Raise awareness of parents' role in children's learning.* Some school staff thought that parents in deprived areas were more likely to lack confidence in supporting their children and not to be aware of how important their input was for a child's progress. In this sense, events that raise awareness about how important parents' help is for children from a very young age, not only in terms of learning, but also in terms of raising aspirations and role modelling, were suggested. On the other side, attitudes to parental engagement were sometimes too pessimistic, as some staff did not think that parents with poor education would be able to make a huge contribution to children's learning. Events that challenge these attitudes would also be beneficial.

- *Develop skills and knowledge of key workers in EECCs and teachers in schools to be sensitive to parents' needs.* Staff in schools and nurseries are often the first point of contact for families in need, by often seeing parents on a daily basis when they drop off/collect children. Parents would often raise sensitive issues with staff, to do with their family circumstances and the impact of poverty on their ability to support their children. Most staff did not feel confident to support parents when sensitive issues were raised and tended to delegate this activity to head/managers. Staff said they would benefit from training in knowing how to support such families.

- *Develop skills and knowledge of key workers in EECCs and teachers in schools to engage more with other services*. In general, teachers and key workers thought that they did not know very much about other services available and what sort of support they could provide to families. Most thought that their direct contact with other services was rather limited, as this was a task often completed by the manager/head. Opportunities could be created for interested staff to undertake short-term placements with other local agencies to allow staff in EECCs/schools to become more aware of how other agencies can help families. More opportunities should be created for all staff to find out about services available and how to direct families to these agencies.

- *Training events for inter-agency work.* Although schools were aware of the importance of involving other agencies in working with the parents, many said that the majority of staff were not trained to work with other services and similarly, other services said that it was sometimes difficult to enlist teachers' collaboration. More joint training is suggested in this sense, to develop genuine communities of practice, in which staff at all levels feel involved. There should also be more chances for interested staff in

schools/nurseries to be directly involved in family cases rather than delegate this to head teacher/manager of centre; staff said they sometimes felt excluded from complicated cases (e.g. referrals from social work), while others were not interested in being involved due to the other demands on their job.

- *Support with funding for events, sessional workers and materials.* Settings said that increased participation of parents meant also increased expense, to fund events, pay for sessional workers or invited speakers and purchase materials that could be used with parents in schools/nurseries or at home. Additional funding or support with fundraising were considered essential for the successful development of such programmes. Better facilities, especially dedicated parents' rooms, and access to resources and specialist staff who could provide events for parents in nursery/school settings are always needed, to build on the good relationships staff develop with parents and trust they have to make parents attend events;

- *Make increased use of outreach workers to support families in their own homes and also to provide support for staff in nurseries/schools.* The role and contribution of outreach workers was highlighted by all staff. Teachers/key workers in general said that they could not afford the time to do home visits and information received on families from health visitors and outreach workers was crucial in informing them on a child's home circumstances and support needed.

7.11 SUMMARY

This section has provided the analysis of the data collected in EECCs and schools, from managers, head teachers, teachers and key workers. Findings show clear commitment from staff at all levels in engaging with parents through a diverse range of activities and communications. The strengths of current provision are directly linked to individuals' skills in getting to know the parents and gaining their trust before involving them in activities at school, nursery and at home. There were clear examples of good practice in providing activities that interest parents and benefit children's learning and well-being. Areas for further development include training of staff at all levels in supporting families with difficult circumstances in engaging with learning activities, opportunities for genuine inter-agency collaboration, more opportunities for parents to engage in genuine consultation and through flexible provision and activities and increased use of outreach workers, who can support families in their homes and mediate access to other services.

8. PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES

This section summarises the findings of the interviews conducted with parents. There were six parent groups involved in the study, three from EECC / Nurseries and three from Primary Schools. Twenty five parents were interviewed with all but two parents interviewed in focus groups. Of the two individuals, one was interviewed on site in the education establishment and one through a telephone interview. The parents were chosen by the managers of centres based on specific criteria agreed by the research team (i.e. parents who were unemployed or on low income, single parent on low income, parents known to staff to require support from other services). All focus group interviews took place within the EECC / Nursery or Primary School the parents' children attended with each session lasting between forty five minutes to one hour.

8.1 LIVING IN POVERTY

Several parents talked about how having severe financial difficulties had an impact on their lives and ability to engage in children's education. However, parents did not use limited funds as an excuse or gave this as the main reason for their other issues, their comments were more a reminder of the reality of their situation. Poor housing, being a lone parent, being a young parent with more than two young children, poor health, addiction and domestic violence were some of the issues parents interviewed were faced with. These issues had a detrimental effect on parents and children and were often cited as being part of families' daily existence.

Parents were in agreement that finding ways to respond to the day to day care of their children, feeding, clothing, supporting their children's development was a constant worry and challenge. They talked about how they dealt with some of these challenges such as shopping in budget stores for food and clothing and trying to find worthwhile activities for their children that required little or no financial outlay. Many parents commented on the efforts they made to find such family activities, especially at weekends and holidays. The majority of interviewees took their children to their local parks, but these outings were reliant on good weather. Swimming and other pursuits such as joining dancing, karate or other organized classes were expensive, especially if there was more than one child in the family, which was the case with the majority of the parents interviewed. Children's safety was paramount and even where there were local play areas, parents were concerned about their children being exposed to anti-social behaviour:

> *If it's a good day, you probably just sit oot the back and let them play with their toys or something like that or take them to the park…but the weather just now, you're in two minds. (parent from an EECC / Nursery)*

> *But where the swings are, it's a bog. (parent from an EECC / Nursery)*

> *I try to do like loads of different things wi them. We've got Play Dough and paints and different things if we can't get out. (parent from a primary school)*

> *Sunday morning, we'll go to the pictures for the 11 o'clock pound showing. It's like older films. Like Space Chimps and stuff… Yeah it's the one that the kids all enjoy mare. But I've no been to that fir ages. (parent from a primary school)*

A number of parents suggested they would welcome support from education establishments and local authorities to organise enjoyable activities for families at a low or if possible at no cost. Some parents seemed more resourceful and knew of smaller park areas and activities

that took place in their local libraries and community centres. Few of these however were completely free of charge.

Several parents said that birthdays and Christmas were for them particularly stressful. Children's requests for specific gifts and upmarket toys and expensive games were often outwith their financial means. Not being able to provide these gifts or allow their children to be the same as their peers added to parents' stress and, in some cases, feelings of inadequacy.

A major factor that contributed to families' difficulties was living in undesirable housing. A number of parents had to move house often and this was due to a variety of domestic and personal problems. Having to move house gave them little or no choice on the type of housing and indeed no choice as to which area they wished to reside in. This brought many other problems, such as being placed in unfamiliar districts with few or no friends or relatives, being surrounded by violence and drugs with the immediate fear of their children being exposed to anti-social and criminal activity. There was also fear for the future of their children, who could be influenced and drawn into this criminal culture.

> *Where I live, it's basically the garbage dump for all the ones that they don't want to put in decent areas.(parent from a primary school)*

> *(…) These guys were up the back wi swords and knives and they're shouting, 'We're goinnae put yir winndaes in the night'. So we barricaded ourselves into one room. And I went doon to the council the next morning and they wouldn't move me, told me I had to give up my tenancy, which I did, withoot even thinking…And they gave me twenty four hours to get ma stuff out the house, which A did…ma kids had seen hundreds there. (parent from a primary school)*

A number of children had specific health issues including asthma, stunted growth, iron deficiencies and mobility issues. In some cases, staff in education centres had identified these issues and drawn the parents' attention to the problem. Parents had been grateful to the staff for their vigilance and flexibility in providing alternative learning experiences to maximise their children's strengths, while supporting and acknowledging their specific needs:

> *My child has got asthma and I've gone in and given them (the teaching staff) the inhalers and stuff and they've asked me absolutely everything about what to do so they know it inside out. If he has an asthma attack, what to do and when he needs his inhaler…even if they're not with him and he's runnin' aboot, they can tell when he needs his inhaler. (parent from an EECC / Nursery)*

Parents often suffered from stress, with symptoms of sleeplessness, lack of energy and feelings of great anxiety. Some parents were also carers for their parents and this added responsibility had a detrimental effect on their own health and the time and energy they could give to their children. Many of the interviewees and their children had experienced extreme trauma, with some losing family members through ill health, violence or drugs. No question was asked on issues of health, drugs or violence experienced by the families, but these came up, as parents talked about possible causes of their children's challenging behaviour.

All tried to shield their children from the effects of these traumatic events, but had limited resources and support networks. 'Spoiling' their children to make up for their loss was many parents' initial response, but this also created further problems. Access to specific services for support was not evident, but families had other informal support networks, through extended family or friends. Support offered in schools/nurseries, for example for behaviour

management and aspects of learning, was very valued. Parents involved in these activities felt empowered and confident to share these issues with staff and other parents who then gave guidance and support. Parents stated that staff would always take time to listen and this eased their stress and helped them look at ways of trying to alleviate children's problems.

8.2 CHALLENGES FOR PARENTS

Most of the interviewees agreed that they had been given the opportunity to participate in learning activities at the nursery/school and welcomed this involvement. However, many thought they lacked the skills and experience to contribute effectively to the formal learning environment and were more comfortable contributing to social activities. Little or no educational success of their own had given them few enriching opportunities to participate in a formal educational environment. A number of the parents interviewed were in their early twenties and had two or more children. Many were lone parents with little or no family or friends to provide guidance or support with child care and development. This lone parent status had a further impact on their self-esteem and feeling of self-worth:

> *Like the other day,…saying, 'You're lookin' well.' …compliments you, and you're looking brilliant. (parent from a primary school)*

> *See cause av got the four weans and am young, av no quite developed yet and am finding it hard wi' a' the weans. (parent from an EECC)*

Some had little or no adult interaction other than with staff in the education establishments or social work. This isolation meant they did not gain, on a regular basis, either praise for success or guidance to overcome difficulties they were experiencing in supporting their children's development.

Illiteracy or poor literacy skills were evident with a number of parents, indicating that their inability to read added to their feelings of low self-esteem. Some said that they felt inadequate and unable to help with their children's homework because of this. The majority of parents in this group were more than willing to address their poor literacy skills, but said that no one spoke to them about adult literacy classes.

> *A cannae read and write, a don't know ma A,B, Cs, so a can't help him with reading and writing (parent from an EECC)*

> *A can hardly fill in forms and that. Am struggling with application forms to get a job and that. (parent from a primary school)*

8.3 WHAT DO PARENTS VALUE IN HOME-SCHOOL LINKS

Parents said they felt valued whenever they were consulted over issues to do with their children, not told what to do, and given credit for small successes, like improved behaviour or reading skills. Some commented that knowing that they had made a difference in their children's education at an early age had encouraged them to take a greater interest in their children's learning and development. This also made them realize that they could work closely with education staff to support their children's learning. Most parents commented on the encouragement they were given by staff to engage in decisions about their children's needs, especially in relation to special needs. Parents whose children had particular learning needs were encouraged to attend meetings where decisions were to be made on their children's future provision. When probed, parents said that staff provided them with detailed information on how their children were progressing, but the decisions made remained with the staff who were seen by parents as the 'experts'.

The range of involvement and opportunity for involvement across the settings varied, from some in which parents were actively involved in a number of activities as part of the transition programme to primary school, supporting classroom learning and extra curricular activities to other settings where parents' main contact with staff was when they dropped off or collected children or at parents' evenings. Some parents said that they knew staff were willing to chat to them at any time and they could get access to them easily, although they were not involved in any sort of activities.

All interviewees indicated that they were looking for the best opportunities for their children. They valued and saw education as the key to enabling their children to move beyond their present circumstances and to be able to create a life that was more enriched than they were experiencing at present. All spent time with their children and were proud of their children's small successes:

> *You want the best for your kids, A want better for ma kids, better than A had for masel. I'm doon here all the time. A think am a bit too pushy sometimes with the kids and am always down here[at school]. (parent from a primary school)*

Interaction with all staff was highly praised by parents interviewed. There was great respect for the teaching staff, for their skill in working with the children, but also for the time and energy they gave to the parents. Many parents spoke of strong interpersonal relationships with staff that enabled them to tackle some serious education and personal issues. There was a feeling of shared responsibility for the education of their children and they looked to the teaching staff to help them develop and understand more of their children's needs:

> *The staff helps you know what avenues to pursue to get help. Everyone wants the weans to come on. (parent from primary school)*

The positive relationships parents had with the teaching staff were evident through the confident and knowledgeable perspectives many gave on the progress of their children's learning.

Such relationships fostered positive outcomes in relation to their own literacy issues. In one school, parents said they were more comfortable in working with the teaching staff who were teaching their children, as they were aware of their illiteracy and were supporting the parents as much as the children:

> *The school helps us – it interacts with us as parents. The teachers do the reading with the parents and the children. Am learning as ma kids are learning. And if a cannae deal with it, A come to the school and A say, can you help me? Through that I'm learning the A,B, Cs.(parent from primary school)*

Parents welcomed the informal approaches teaching staff used, for example by speaking directly to parents in advance of newsletters:

> *It's more face to face. It's more telling you and the head teacher is there to help you with any problems whatsoever even if it's not involving the child. (parent from primary school)*

A number of those interviewed had children who required additional support for learning and those parents valued and praised highly the individual attention given to their children by pre-school and primary staff. Other expertise, such as speech and language therapists, were called upon to support their children's development, but visits with these specialists were few, with most of the support done through nurseries/schools and at home. Some parents

commented on the learning strategies and approaches they had learned from staff and from other specialists to support their children's development.

However, a number of the interviewees felt ill-informed on how best to support their children's education. They wished to understand more of the curriculum and indicated that they would welcome more information and greater knowledge on how to engage their children in meaningful learning experiences:

> *I don't know what they are learning every day. …I would like a wee book with the curriculum and that so A would know what was being taught but A don't know that they [the nursery] would do that? A know they've got a curriculum. A never knew that before but A don't know what it is that they do. (parent from a EECC)*

Interviewees made suggestions on what they would find useful. Some were in favour of working alongside staff when they were teaching. Those who offered this suggestion indicated that this would improve their skills in assisting with their children's homework and gain insight into behaviour management. Others welcomed an after school homework club, when parents could join their children, supervise their homework and get help from the teaching staff.

> *After school work, say 30 minutes after school and I would come in and work with them in class. (parent from primary school)*

> *See trying to get the weans to do homework it's really hard so I would like to know how A could help them with their homework at that time. (parent from primary school)*

Parents made very positive comments on their children's experiences in each of the education establishments. All praised the skill and dedication of the teaching staff and the positive impact this had on their children's learning:

> *They are just loving teachers. And they've got so much time for the kids as well. Patience. I know that's part of the job, but I think they go that extra mile with the kids here. (parent from an EECC)*

8.4 EXPERIENCES OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING

Interviewees who had strong relationships with staff in the education centres disclosed a number of domestic difficulties that required intervention from other agencies. Suggestions of parents approaching their health visitors were generally well received, but intervention by other agencies, specifically social work, was not generally welcome. For many, there was still the stigma of being involved with social work services and although they recognised that there were services open to them to help with a range of issues, there was a fear, and two parents voiced this strongly, of their children being taken away from them.

One particular initiative had proved successful in breaking down barriers, where members of the teaching staff joined the parents and social work staff in workshop activities:

> *The thing was, I hated social work and I thought they were out to get me and take away my weans. But speaking with the other mothers, I know that they were only there to help. They are there to help. It can only get better, it cannae get worse. (parent from a primary school)*

> *We actually made friends with the social workers at that workshop. (parent from a primary school)*

The parents were strong in their views on the type of support and the approaches that were of value.

Interviewees who had been involved in the joint education and social work project were much more relaxed about working alongside staff and commented favourably on group activities that took account of their many different circumstances. This group of parents were also the group who were most aware of their own growth. One interviewee from this group gave an example of how her confidence had developed during the classes and how she found herself taking a leadership role and facilitating group discussion:

> *It's gein me confidence. A never thought A would write on a board on different things and point things out on a board for people to discuss. A never thought for a minute that A would be standing up in front of people and pointing things out on a board and starting a discussion and then moving on to the next. (parent from primary school)*

The project encouraged parents to share their experiences with each other and some of the activities were particularly challenging. But as one parent stated,

> *we had our eyes open. (parent from primary school)*

and this positive experience has motivated the group to explore ways in which the work could continue. Strong group relationships have developed amongst this particular group providing a safe environment where parents can disclose difficult issues. These parents have also found that they are more relaxed about listening to advice and accepting offers of support and guidance.

This type of parenting class created strong supportive communities, encouraging help from all those involved in the programme:

> *You had learned to hide things, but we can now tell each other. (parent from primary school)*

> *And if one of us have problems, we gather around to help. X (names other mother) needs more strength in other departments, for example being firmer with her children. But she has learned. (parent from primary school)*

> *She (referring to the named person) would say I've learned this and I've learned that but sometimes there were problems and we would say well if that doesn't work then try this. Because it doesn't work all the time and she did try the things out. (parent from primary school)*

Not all interviewees were aware of parenting classes and, although interested, some were still cautious because of the involvement of social work. However, having role models from within the community who had participated in these initiatives was beneficial. During the interviews, parents talked about different strategies they had learned on the programme and the positive results this had on their relationships with their children:

> *They (EECC staff) put me in touch with a key worker as well, and the key worker was coming oot to the house and kind of assessed (names child) and looked for strategies in dealing wi' like the problems I was huvin wi' her. And it worked fine. (parent from EECC)*

> *I came in and spoke to (names member of staff) to ask for a full time place and it was then she (names member of staff) advised me to go to my health visitor. (parent from and EECC)*

8.5 COMMUNICATION

Parents spoke warmly and enthusiastically about some of the initiatives that had been implemented by the EECCs and school and the skill of the staff in helping them join in with these initiatives. All were impressed by the time and effort all staff, including the head teacher, teaching, auxiliary and janitorial staff took to welcome and involve their children and themselves in the daily routines. Parents liked it when they could bring their children into the building and were met by staff. This was also seen as an opportunity to be informed on their children's achievements, the difficulties they may be having and the general business and activities. This routine also gave the parents the opportunity to consult staff in a less formal situation, which they welcomed.

> *You can come in and speak with them any time. They are always there for you. And every time you need them.* (parent from EECC)

All interviewees said that newsletters were issued on a fairly regular basis, but there was a difference in the number of organized parents' evenings, with some citing four or more opportunities and others a maximum of two. The newsletters, although appreciated and welcome, were seen as only one method of communication, with face to face interaction seen as desirable and, for many, a more valuable method of passing on information.

> *More talking with the parents instead of getting' letters all the time, you know what A mean? And then you might get to meet other parents and get talking to other people. (parent from an EECC)*

> *…no bombard us wi mare paper, but like…be more open about what's actually happening in the school. (parent from a primary school)*

> *They do the wee note home things and my daughter comes home with hunners of them but I don't know what they're for. It just says, 'She's done good work today'. But it doesny explain yi know what it was that she did, and so A can't follow up. (parent from primary school)*

The parents' evenings received mixed comments, with the most successful evenings being those where parents participated in activities that exemplified the curriculum and clarified how exactly could parents help their children's learning and where parents shared their own learning experiences. This created an open and interactive environment, where parents' previous negative experiences of school were challenged.

> *Everybody went in and all the teachers got a shot of speaking about their eco footprint and the stuff their learning. Loads of English and Math and stuff but aye, loads of physical stuff as well. And then after that you get a chance to try things.(parent from an EECC)*

Parents with literacy issues appreciated when staff took the time to speak to them directly and this was usually done when they brought their children to school or pre-school or they were telephoned at home. All parents in this category who wished to be issued with a newsletter generally had someone at home who would read to them and often that person was one of their older children.

An example of a successful communication strategy was where a traffic light system was set up in the education building and used to alert parents to future events. This system was useful as a memory jogger and used to encourage parents to approach staff for further details of what was involved and the benefits of parents being participants.

8.6 HOME-SCHOOL LINKS

Parents in the vast majority of cases could give examples of how children had progressed in their learning and were very interested in finding out from staff how were their children getting on. Many spoke of the differences between their own and their children's learning experiences, identifying how much richer the learning environment was for children nowadays. Parents also spoke about the value of the shared learning that they had been encouraged to participate in at home. When probed on the method of engaging their children in learning at home, examples were given of tasks and activities that were sent home with the children where parents could help. Most parents of children in nurseries could cite specific examples of participation in children's learning:

> *The story sacks. Like (name of child) got a dinosaur one, like little dinosaurs, and there's a sheet map thing that they put out and your child gets to tell you about dinosaurs, and it kind of brings them on.* (parent from an EECC)

> *…and then they've got science boxes as well and lots of other things.*(parent from an EECC)

Interviewees saw the benefits of these packages and demonstrated surprise and pride in their children's achievements. Parents did say that some activities were easier than others and sometimes felt they needed more support to be able to help their children. Because of these experiences the parents were able to speak knowledgeably and confidently about their children's development.

> *The Rainbow box, it made a mess, but it was probably ma fault but…needs an adult to help and you need to write what's done. What your child thought about it. So, it was both of us getting into it… Aye the cleaning up wisnae very good, but the rest of it was fine, it was brilliant.* (parent from an EECC)

Some establishments had implemented evaluations to find out in what had been learned and these gave parents an opportunity to say whether they would be willing to participate in similar activities and what help they needed.

Many parents however had limited experience of these learning packages, as these opportunities happened only in some establishments. Others stated that their children were not offered these types of home activities:

> *Ma two didnae get that, probably make too much mess.(parent from an EECC)*

Behaviour management strategies were high on the parents' agenda. All were looking to the nurseries and schools to provide help and give guidance on improving their children's behaviour. After children had entered formal education, all parents said they saw improvement in their children's behaviour and commented on the difference this had made to their interaction with their children at home. Each parent actively sought advice from the different education establishments and implemented the strategies that had been suggested to them. The benefits of these strategies could be seen by the parents on their children's general behaviour and in the progress with their learning. Many suggested that they would like to see more of how the staff interacted with their children and would welcome opportunities to be more actively involved in the learning environment.

An example of success, already identified under inter-agency working, was with a group that consisted of parents, staff from social work and staff from the education establishment their children attended. The approaches used in this programme were highly successful and although this programme had come to an end, the parents had found the experience

extremely valuable and had initiated meetings with education and social work staff with a view to finding funding to continue with the programme. This group of parents were extremely enthusiastic, citing ways in which they could take the initiative forward, by widening access to other parents.

> *We've been helped and we can help other people. And the success we've had so far has been good. And then to run it in other schools would be fantastic. (parent from primary school)*

> *It's no finished, but Rome wasn't built in a day. We are thinking about the school building up a group like – doing things ourselves, days out meet once a week and make decisions and get other parents involved. There are parents that are too scared to interact but that way, if they see us doing things for ourselves then they will start. (parent from primary school)*

A number of parents were eager to highlight that although they were faced with many similar issues, they all had individual family challenges where often specific support was needed.

8.7 TRANSITION FROM EARLY YEARS TO PRIMARY

All interviewees agreed that they had been made fully aware of transition arrangements, although the extent to which the parents and children were directly involved in these experiences varied between settings. In some places, those parents whose children were about to enter primary school gave many more examples of transition involvement than those whose children were already in primary one, reflecting recent progress in the establishments' transition programme.

Interviewees were in agreement that the transition arrangements were essential in supporting their children's move from pre-school to primary education and welcomed the initiatives that had been undertaken between the pre-school and primary sectors. Some programmes were more developed than others, ranging from parents and children visiting the primary school twice towards the end of the summer term, to activities organised by schools in collaboration with EECCs starting at the beginning of the final year of pre-school. Few programmes invited involvement from all children, parents and staff in exchanging information, sharing experiences, working on joint activities and contributing to presentations.

> *See they work that close with the school and they go every fortnight. (parent from an EECC)*

> *My child knows everyone now [at the school]. A' think they've even met the janitor and that. (parent from an EECC)*

> *…he's gonnae miss everybody obviously but he'll be doon here all the time teaching other kids and so by that time the kids down here will be at school next year and that's gonnae help him along as well. (parent from an EECC)*

Most of the transition programmes included a buddy system with a child from the primary school matched to a child from pre-school. Almost all the buddy systems involved primary seven children, but one school operated a programme where children from primary one were the buddies for the pre-school children. The children were then encouraged to continue the relationships that had formed once the pre-school children had entered primary one. Interviewees whose children were involved in this particular system indicated that they had not heard of any other arrangement like this between pre-school and primary school and were delighted with the uniqueness of the programme.

…and he's got a wee buddy in primary one and they come up from the Pr. 1 and they have printed off the letter and it is an invite for my boy to come up [to the school] and they've all got one on one primary buddies …she sends him an invite so the nursery go down to the school and she shows him what she's doing in school, so he's getting use tae…how they do it? He's gonnae fit right in and be used to everything…that wee girl will still be his buddy for the first year. (parent from an EECC)

Parents whose children required specific support spoke highly of the arrangements that had been put in place prior to the start of the new school term. These arrangements included the educational, social and, in some instances, transport solutions. Helping the children adapt to the means of transport was integral to the success of this form of support, an example of which was given by one of the parents:

And through the summer holidays the teacher is goin' to go up to the house and that so that he gets used to her and there is a taxi that will take him. They are sending the taxi driver up so that he can get used to him, get to know him so that he will not freak out when he gets into a taxi and all that. A' think he will be fine. (parent from an EECC)

There was evidence in each EECC and school of a developing transition policy, with teaching staff and in some instances parents reviewing and evaluating the success of these programmes. Although there had been considerable progress made across the sector boundaries, staff were aware of the necessity to involve parents more in the decision-making process.

They have been involved with the transition. They have been informed, they know exactly what the children will be doing and they know what the learning outcomes are. A stage further would be to get them (the parents) involved in the planning of the transition. (head teacher in school)

Also, more opportunities could be created for parents to be directly involved in the process, through events and curriculum-related activities, to capitalise on their interest and excitement when their children move to school. Staff seemed to often consider involvement of parents as the equivalent of informing the parents on activities. There is scope for more direct involvement, especially in relation to support for children's learning.

8.8 CHILDREN'S VIEWS

This section summarizes the findings of the interviews conducted with the children. The children chosen belonged to the parents who were interviewed in each of the six education centres ie three EECC / Nursery and three Primary sector centres. Parents had given their permission for their children to be interviewed and the children were also asked if they wished to participate. Two researchers worked with each group of children and on a couple of occasions a member of education staff who knew the children well was present while the interviews were taking place.

Two activities were used to engage the children in the interview process. One focused on drawing where the children were encouraged to answer questions about the activities they engage in within their homes and in the areas in which they lived. As the children were drawing, they were asked to describe the images they created. In the second activity the children were shown photographs of the area in which they lived and were asked about what sort of activities they did in those locations. The images shown were of local play parks, leisure centres, schools, libraries, shopping areas and health centres.

All but one of the interviews were conducted within the buildings of the EECCs / Nurseries and Primary schools, one interview was conducted in an open-air classroom. The spaces provided for the interviews / activities were in areas where there was less opportunity for distraction. The children in all but one of the groups were aged between 4 – 7 years and in total 26 children participated.

Drawings varied considerably in detail with some, from a small sample of children in the EECC / Nursery sector, that consisted mainly of dots and wild lines to drawings from a few children in the primary sector that were much more developed in structure and form. When asked to provide further information about what they were drawing, again there was a wide range of response from those children who were articulate and clearly understood the focus of the enquiry to those who had profound communication difficulties.

The majority of the children were eager to participate in the drawing activity and all could make some comment on being at home in a family structure where they played games and watched television. Pets featured frequently in drawings and in conversations with the children. Some children talked about having pets at home, while other children were expressing a desire to have a pet. Most of the images featured and discussed centred on their parents and family circumstances such as other siblings, visits from and to a grandparent, parent's role as cook, mothers mainly helping with homework, although one child made specific reference to his father assisting with his homework. In a couple of instances a child would speak of someone who had 'gone to heaven'. The activities depicted and referred to in the drawings were of a general nature, e.g. 'just play' and 'draw and paint and 'play with my toys'. Some other activities mentioned were computer games, watching DVDs and outdoor play, such as riding bikes and skateboarding.

Photographs of local services were used to elicit information on type and frequency of use and children's views of services. Children became very animated and excited when they were able to recognise images of places they knew and frequented. All had visited the park and play areas, with some having to travel by bus or train from home to reach these locations. The majority of the children spoke eagerly about the activities in the park areas, although one child said he wouldn't go to parks ('I hate parks'). The other images of schools, libraries and shopping areas prompted discussion of specific experiences. Comments from some children on road safety, 'careful crossing' and 'no running' were forthcoming when shown photographs of pre-schools and primary schools. These images also prompted comment on making group trips to schools 'to visit'. Library images prompted comment on borrowing books they read with parents. Swimming was the main activity connected to the leisure centres and shopping featured often in children's daily lives. Health centres were also familiar to the children and they referred to these locations as, 'the hospital' or 'the doctors'.

These photographs also prompted the children to speak of outings that took them beyond their local areas. A few spoke of visiting other parents and relatives, with some having been on holiday. When asked where they wished to go most said 'the play park', going swimming, 'sleeping in a tent', but some children mentioned specific places such as 'Airdrie', 'Alton Towers' and 'Disneyland'. Several children said they have not been anywhere outside the local area.

Most of the activities in the home focused on leisure pursuits, such as playing with toys, drawing and sometimes painting, watching DVDs, playing computer games and playing with other siblings. All children referred to family units with other siblings. There were some children in one parent families and occasionally reference to a grandparent whom they visited or who was regularly in their company. Formal learning activities did not seem feature highly, although the children mentioned reading with their parent/s and being given support with their homework. Outside activities focused mainly on the play park locations, with leisure centre visits taking place less often. Where there were older siblings in the family,

the children reported that they were often involved in sport and other physical activities with their siblings.

School and pre-school images prompted the children to comment on how they were expected to conduct themselves in and around these locations and those who were about to enter P1, they were anticipating new experiences. Children at transition spoke excitingly about going to school and mentioned the visits to the school location. They seemed to look forward to the transition to school and few anxieties were mentioned, mainly to do with making friends and not knowing anyone. Some worried about the discipline and rigour of the school timetable.

Although the children's drawings have not been included here as the purpose was to use this activity to prompt discussion, it is worth noting one specific example of detailed drawing depicting a family group of dad, mum brother and the child himself. The mother's belly looked like a shelf with several family members lying inside the outline of the mother. The child spoke about the important role his mother had in nurturing the whole family.

8.9 ASPECTS IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT

The key areas for development and improvement in terms of parental involvement in home-school links and children's learning, as emerging from the data collected from parents and children, were as follows:

- ***Develop materials and opportunities for parents to get involved in genuine home-school links.*** Parents seemed genuinely interested in supporting their children's education and well-being through involvement in home-school links. Involvement seemed to be high in early years, and to a lesser extent in primary. Parents need genuine opportunities to help their children in their learning, for example through well-designed home learning packs, and support at transition to school to maintain their interest.

- ***Support parents' confidence and skills in supporting their children's learning.*** Parents often talked about lacking the confidence and the knowledge and skills to support their children's learning. Staff in educational establishments were very good at supporting parents' confidence and self-esteem. More opportunities need to be provided for parents' own education, in relation for example to their own literacy skills or how different aspects of the school curriculum are taught.

- ***Provide opportunities for parents to get involved in meaningful ways in their children's education.*** Parents emphasised how important is to be kept informed about a child's learning in order to be able to help at home and continue learning. Some said that they had limited insight into what is going on in classrooms and how children learn at school because schools have changed since they attended. The learning process in schools needs to become more transparent for parents.

- ***Provide learning events for families, rather than targeting parents only.*** Parents, children and staff agreed that more events for families, to help them learn together and model positive parent-child interactions, would benefit children. With the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence, it was thought that opportunities for these types of activities that conceptualise achievement more widely should be increased. In settings that did this, parents felt more valued and involved in their children's education.

- ***Expand the work of the outreach workers, who provide excellent support and a link between parents and educational services.*** Parents seemed to think that they often needed more guidance in supporting their children's education and in accessing educational, health and leisure services. The role of the outreach workers was seen as crucial for many in ensuring parents' willingness and ability to get involved with learning activities at home or at school/nursery.

- ***Make participation possible for parents who work through flexible provision and accessible facilities, by providing transport and childcare at events.*** Parents' availability to attend educational events or engage in activities at the nursery or school often depended on work hours, cost of transport and available childcare. Often the ones excluded were the most vulnerable.

- ***Increase parents' involvement in the decision making processes in educational establishments.*** Although some settings consulted with parents on a regular basis, genuine involvement of parents in the decision making processes when it comes to important decisions seems to be still limited. This may require specialist staff training, to ensure that staff manage a range of consultation techniques.

- ***Provide specialist training for staff in engaging with parents who have complicated lives and challenge negative attitudes in relation to working with parents.*** Although many staff members were very positive and skilled in engaging with parents, some staff still saw parental involvement as the responsibility of the manager and did not think they were skilled or required by their job to engage with parents in a meaningful way. Reporting to parents at parents' evenings was sometimes seen as the only opportunity for contact. In contrast, some staff were very dedicated, going the extra mile in supporting families through home visits, dedicated time or specially designed materials.

8.10 SUMMARY

This section of the report presents the views of groups of parents in West Dunbartonshire. The majority of the interviewees were faced with the challenge of trying to overcome severe financial difficulties, inadequate housing, coping with lone and often young parent status and a number had also experienced major traumatic events. Many said they struggled at times to provide the day to day care for their children, but all demonstrated a range of approaches they employed to support their children's well-being. All parents acknowledged the value of improving their children's educational experiences and were willing to participate in pursuing this goal. Views on how to involve parents more in their children's education were varied, with interviewees citing examples of initiatives that had been successful and offering specific examples on how best to involve parents in ways that acknowledged and respected their particular circumstances.

Parents cited many examples of positive interactions with staff in both pre-school and primary school, with emphasis being placed on the success of relationships that had been built between families and staff. Most parents felt they were well-informed on their children's educational progress and encouraged to participate in activities at the nursery/school. There was however little evidence on the whole of parents being part of the decision-making process.

Parents measured the success of home-school links through how well-informed they were about their children's progress, how effective they found the methods they were asked to use to assist with their children's learning and how welcome and comfortable they felt engaging with teaching and other staff members. They all thought staff were helpful and approachable, but could give few examples on guidance from nursery/school staff on how to

support their children's learning at home. Learning packs and curriculum events were mentioned, but these did not seem to be embedded in routine practice.

Examples of the most successful partnerships were those that worked across sectors, recognised and found a variety of methods to encourage shared responsibility for children's learning, gave credit to parents for the successes they had with their children and where there was a strong parental and community support network.

9. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1. Data on poverty. Data available locally on poverty levels are good, but its use can be improved, to ensure early detection and tracking of the poorest children. While the education service has extensive data about children in West Dunbartonshire and Clydebank, it cannot easily identify the target group of children living in severe and persistent poverty within those datasets. Staff in educational establishment said they 'just knew' who were the children in severe poverty who needed most help. Although staff in schools/nurseries showed excellent skills in engaging with all parents, more reliable ways of identifying poor families could be identified.

There is a range of agencies that hold income-based data on families, some at central level, and some locally. These include the Department of Work on Pensions, with data on employment and benefits claimed, the Social Work department, who can identify the families out of work through the Care First System. The Council holds data on families receiving Council Tax benefits. The Education Department also holds data on children on Free School Meals entitlements and clothing grants. A more successful sharing of this data could be put in place to ensure early identification of families in severe poverty and coordinated support. We suggest that a combination of income-based, attainment-based and pupil-based indicators (see Appendix E) would be the best way of identifying the neediest children and targeting support. This is in line with the requirements of both GIRFEC and Early Years Framework, which encourages the development of data sharing, through systems like eCare (http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/PublicServiceReform/efficientgovernment/DataStandardsAndeCare).

For more general support at local level, area-based indicators are useful (See Appendix E, point B), but to ensure effective and long-lasting benefits for poor children, a combination of area-based and targeted support should be provided.The Education Department can rely on attainment-based indicators to track children from very early on, through the baseline assessments done by the Early Intervention Unit and school assessments; they can also make use attendance and exclusion data. These can be investigated according to pupil-based indicators (mobility/turnover, looked-after children and other vulnerable groups, ethnic minority children, ASN children). However, to be able to track the progress of children identified as being in severe and persistent poverty some way of identifying them within the datasets is required.

Recommendations

- *Develop a system of bringing together available data and share information between services to ensure the poorest families are identified and supported early on.*

- *Develop a way of identifying poor children early on, before they enter formal education. Children below 3 are currently at most risk at falling through the system, unless they are under Social Work care.*

- *Continue to collect pupil-based data through schools, to track progress and improvement in delivery long term. Agree additional criteria and data collection in relation to children in severe and persistent poverty.*

- *A range of data sources is available at local authority level on families' economic situation (e.g. income, employment, housing etc.). These data sets need to be made available at community level to services that provide the support, and presented in a accessible and user-friendly manner for the key service providers.*

FINDING 2. Services and initiatives. *A range of initiatives are in place to support children in families in West Dunbartonshire. While not specifically targeting those living in poverty, interviewees considered that many who were involved would be among the most deprived.*

The Young Family Support and the Pupil Family Support Services were highly valued by key informants and early years centres and school staff, who highlighted in particular the value of the home-visiting aspect for developing trusting relationships that made support acceptable to the service users. There was evidence that managers and keyworkers in nurseries were highly committed to the role of engaging with families on a one-to-one basis, developing relationships that would enable them to engage parents in their child's learning, and also supporting parents in other matters. However, some practitioners were not confident in this role. Working with parents did not appear to be a focus for professional development for staff in early years centres or schools.

Initiatives that focused primarily on enhancing the learning experience for children in both nursery and school (Early Intervention, Transition Pilots, Nurture Groups) also sought to engage parents. The Transition Pilots and Nurture Group Pilots having focused initially on establishing the programmes were considering strategies for involving parents more. The approaches to transition that had been piloted were seen to be particularly beneficial to children, early years workers and teachers, and demonstrated characteristics of good practice as identified in the literature (see Chapter 3). These approaches are to be introduced across the authority in 2009-10. At the time of the research, ongoing provision of nurture groups was still under consideration.

An inter-agency 'parenting strategy' was emerging at the time of the research. From the views expressed through the interviews, it appeared that parenting support, in terms of groups or classes, was somewhat *ad hoc*. There was good practice in terms of classes organised by outreach workers and parent initiated and school mediated support groups, but there was also evidence that the neediest parents were not being supported and some did not know how to access support.

Recommendations

- *Increase the size of the teams that provide family support both from birth to 5 and at primary school.*

- *Support key worker and teacher development in working with families, in recognising children and families at risk, and their awareness of other services available to support families through CPD and job exchange opportunities.*

- *Continue the work of the Transition Pilot with the pilot schools focusing on ways to engage parents, particularly in relation to identifying and involving low income families. This will build on the transition work already achieved and will serve as a pathfinder for other schools as they developed enhanced transition programmes.*

- *Build on the success of the nurture group pilot and on the research evidence on these and provide additional funding for schools to run such groups; children and parents clearly benefit from tailored care and support in these units and early intervention may reduce the need for further interventions later on through escalated problems.*

- *Ensure coherent provision and effective promotion of parenting support groups through the development and implementation of the Parenting Strategy. Schools and early years centres should be supported in both raising awareness and mediating access to parenting support that takes account of what parents say they need and want.*

FINDING 3. Staff development. In general, staff showed very high levels of care and engagement with the parents, giving support not only with their children's learning, but also with other issues families were faced with. Further staff development could focus on specialist support for parents and the development of communities of practice for staff from a range of services.

In the absence of other sources of information, staff relied on informal chats with the parents and the children to identify the most vulnerable children. Also, some staff did not feel confident in supporting families with complicated circumstances, although they were often seen by parents as a source of support. Some staff thought that they needed more ideas and training to be able to engage parents in meaningful ways in children's learning, especially when parents have low levels of education themselves and limited confidence. An issue that came up in parents' focus groups was the manner in which they were addressed by staff; parents valued if staff were not patronising and valued their input into the children's education.

Some practitioners said they would like to know more about how to identify families in need, in particular how to recognise drug abuse and mental health issues, and how to deal with them as a frontline worker; what services and resources they could direct people to. Staff thought that they did not know enough about the difficulties that parents living in poverty might face when it comes to supporting their children's learning.

A recent study from the University of Strathclyde into CPD priorities (Condie *et al.,* 2009) for those working with children under 3, working with parents was identified as a topic not well addressed through current CPD but one which practitioners identified as a priority for their own development. Practitioners also indicated that effective ways of learning were through engaging with peers on a community basis and visiting other centres. Short experiences of job shadowing or job exchange could be beneficial for staff, particularly to allow access to centres and schools recognised as demonstrating 'good practice'.

Recommendations

- *Support all staff in schools/EECCs with skills and knowledge to identify, target and support families at disadvantage in an effective and sensitive manner.*

- *Develop a coherent training programme on working with parents and carers, with a focus on vulnerable groups, and implement it with staff at all levels.*

- *Promote the development of communities of practice between establishments in the same area of work (early years, primary etc.) and cross-services.*

- *Create opportunities for staff to observe and share good practice in developing successful home-school link activities through exchange visits or placements.*

FINDING 4. Inter-agency working. There were clear examples of effective co-ordination between services and multi-agency working, for example, in relation to transition from early years to primary. However, the staff in schools and EECCs thought that inter-agency working was mainly the managers' responsibility.

In general, teachers and key workers thought that they did not know very much about other services available and what sort of support they could provide to families, although they were able to name some of these services. Most thought that their direct contact with other services was rather limited, as this was a task often completed by the manager/head. Similarly, some interviewees indicated that they felt that strong professional barriers between service providers still existed.

Recommendations

- *Develop skills and knowledge of key workers in EECCs and teachers in schools to engage more with other services as part of their professional development.*

- *Develop joint events for staff in schools and from other agencies working with parents, to increase confidence and skills of school/EECC staff in working with families.*

- *Promote knowledge of parenting and how to support families across all services dealing with children and families and provide training to this effect.*

- *Set up projects that require genuine inter-agency working, with a clear focus on co-ordinated support for families.*

FINDING 5. Family support workers. *Parents and other informants praised the work of the family support workers, who provided key support to families, not only in terms of access to other services, but also with key skills. EECC staff and teachers also saw them as a source of knowledge on how to engage with the most vulnerable families.*

A major barrier to parents' ability to contribute to their children's learning was often their own poor literacy and numeracy skills and bad experiences of schooling and this had an impact on their self-confidence and self-esteem. Evidence suggests that those parents who are given the opportunity to share their experiences with each other have gained in confidence and become more involved with their children's learning.

Other barriers were parents' lack of understanding on how to engage their children effectively in learning and how to sustain their interest. The role of the family support worker was key in this sense, not only in helping the family navigate the system and access other appropriate services, but also in helping education staff understand better individual circumstances and target the support in learning accordingly.

Recommendations

- *Make increased use of outreach family support workers. Although this is costly at local authority level, it will provide valuable support to families early on and potentially reduce the need for involvement of other services.*

- *Develop the role of the family support worker, to include liaison with teachers and staff in EECCs in a training capacity also, through a more systematic transfer of knowledge and joint training opportunities with staff.*

- *Provide opportunities for parents to share their experiences in a supportive and confidential atmosphere.*

- *Identify ways of supporting children in developing their resilience in adverse circumstances and cope with change and transitions.*

FINDING 6. Home-school links and parents' involvement in learning. *Most parents were interested in supporting their children's formal learning, but sometimes lacked the confidence and skills to do so. Also, they often found the methods of teaching and the curriculum materials sent home too difficult to engage with.*

A major barrier to parents' ability to contribute to their children's learning was often their own poor literacy and numeracy skills and bad experiences of schooling and this had an impact on their self-confidence and self-esteem. Other barriers were parents' lack of understanding on how to engage their children effectively in learning and how to sustain their interest.

Parents in the study were aware of new approaches to teaching, but had limited knowledge of how these methods were employed in the classroom. Not being able to engage with their children's learning caused difficulties between the parents and the children, sometimes leading to frustration and disharmony within the family unit. Some examples of parenting classes were given, where parents volunteered or were targeted by professionals. These were valued when the delivery was not patronising and the content too simplistic. Delivery of such classes needs however to be included in a programme of interventions and through collaboration between services and between professionals and parents. Attendance and successful outcomes most often depend on the relationship of trust developed between the professionals organising/delivering the programmes and parents in need.

Recommendations

- *Promote further collaboration between schools/EECCs and other agencies to encourage more openness towards engaging in literacy and numeracy support.*

- *Collaborate with other agencies to develop confidence-building initiatives for parents.*

- *Parents need more opportunities to be shown how to help their children's learning. Promote the idea of homework clubs, where parents can attend, with teacher support available.*

- *Parenting classes, where available, should be appropriate for children's developmental needs and parents' parenting needs. Those involved should be targeted by a range of professionals and classes should be offered in combination with other forms of support.*

- *Learning materials that are sent home need to be more accessible for parents to engage effectively with their children's learning.*

- *Support the development of imaginative, attractive and accessible materials and information packs that encourage parent and child interaction and shared learning.*

- *Promote joint learning events for families where parents, children and teaching staff work together. Make these events available at times that suit parents in work, with funded crèche and transport if needed.*

- *Involve parents in events that are interactive and non-threatening and encourage family members to contribute to the planning and implementation of these sessions. Encourage parent-led initiatives and activities in the school/EECC.*

FINDING 7. Transitions. *There were good examples of cooperation between schools and EECCs in managing transition for children. However, parents' involvement in the events and support for parents in general was more limited. Parental involvement tends to be high in early years and then reduces considerably after transition to primary school.*

Transition from early years to primary marks a shift in parents' attitudes to engagement in children's education. Teachers talked about parents being very enthusiastic when children arrive in the first year of primary education, but then participation drops considerably over the years, as children get older. At transition stage, parents were pleased with the events in place, with events organised for children to familiarise themselves with the school and the staff and a successful buddying system, but were less involved in events or decisions to do with the transition process.

Recommendations

- *Encourage schools to work with EECCs closely, to capitalise on parents' enthusiasm for involvement in their children's learning in early years by developing events that parents can attend from the first stages of primary school or joint events.*

- *Support the role of home-school link workers to provide one-to-one support for families and moral support for engagement for the less confident parents.*

- *Promote materials that parents can use at home, to allow them flexible involvement.*

- *Organise transition events for parents and ensure provision is flexible, for example after the school hours, to allow parents who work to get involved.*

- *Identify ways of engaging with parents more in transition events and decisions about their children's education made at this stage.*

- *Identify ways for children to gain some ownership and control over the transition process.*

FINDING 8. Communication and decision making processes. *Communication with parents is mainly through newsletters although there were examples of more informal approaches to communication that were more acceptable to the majority of parents, for example, through daily informal chats with the parents.*

Communication with parents is more effective when a range of methods are employed. Also, parents are more likely to participate in events if they feel their contribution is genuine and valued by the staff. Rates of successful attendance also increase when there was a face to face engagement between parents and staff. Involvement of parents is often done in schools' terms, with limited consultation with parents or children in terms of support parents require or events that they might like to get involved in or organise themselves, although examples of good practice exist. Parents are invited to meetings to discuss their children's progress and future provision. Those parents whose children require specific learning support are involved more frequently in such meetings, although the evidence suggests these meetings focus mainly on parents being informed with the educators making the decisions. There was limited evidence on parental involvement in decisions to do with the learning, the curriculum or the management processes.

Recommendations

- *Promote a combination of formal and informal strategies in communication with parents.*

- *Support schools in the use of modern technologies to communicate with parents, by improving the meaningful use of parents' pages on school websites, use of emails, phone and texting.*

- *Extend the use of outreach workers in drawing parents in by building rapport and one-to-one support.*

- *Fund alternative ways of communication with hard-to-reach parents who do not engage with formal communication, either due to their literacy skills or cultural barriers.*

- *Develop opportunities for parents and children to evaluate and contribute to the communication process.*

- *Support schools/EECCs, through resources and staff training, to increase opportunities for parental consultation and to make parents' involvement in decision making processes more meaningful and representative.*

FINDING 9. Long term outcomes. A number of long term outcomes can be used to evaluate changes in the system of support for families with young children. Most of these require longitudinal measurements of tracking well-being and success many years later.

The key outcomes that could be used as indicators of successful support and intervention are as follows:

For children

- improved attainment
- better achievement
- reported well-being
- better engagement with formal learning
- staying in school after 16
- successful employment later on
- low use of support services later on (social work, benefits, health etc.)

For parents

- increased involvement in activities at EECC/school
- reported well-being
- reported increased self-esteem
- reported satisfaction with provision
- less use of other support services
- improved skills (academic, parenting etc.)
- further education and/ or employment

For professionals

- reported increased confidence in working with parents
- creative home-school links activities
- increased opportunities for multi-agency work
- reported good collaboration with parents
- shared decision making processes with other professionals or parents
- positive ethos in schools and other services.

Recommendations

- *Identify mechanisms of collecting feedback on any initiatives from staff, parents and children involved, to ensure close monitoring of changes.*

- *Develop longitudinal measurements of improvement in children's and families' lives, as interventions often show results many years later.*

The authors are aware that not all findings and recommendations in this report can be included in strategic planning in the medium and long term of the two partners. However, we thought it was important to provide the full range of findings and state clearly the recommendations that may be followed up by the users of this report. Further reflection is required on the practical, professional and cost implications of any of the above recommendations.

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APPENDIX A- INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

a) Interview schedule- Key informants

Introduce the project, explain focus on support for poorer families in relation to children in early years and first year of primary, confidentiality of recording and use of data (informant to sign consent and keep a copy)

Explain focus of study, leaflet, focus on early years and transition to primary

Background of informant

Tell me a bit about your background and your job - specific responsibilities

Support for the poorest families- initiatives and how are these implemented

Tell us a bit about the key areas in which the LA is focussing at the moment in terms of working with parents in early years

What forms of support, if any, are available through the early years settings specifically for the poorer parents and children?
(describe initiative, how widely implemented, rationale)

What kind of support is available at transition between early years and school? How are initiatives at school linked to early years support?

In relation to the poorest families, how does the LA know of the type of support that they need?

How is communication with parents about these initiatives taking place? How do they know about the support available?

From what you know, what are the parents' attitudes to this sort of support?

What specific difficulties are there in working with poorer families?

What info you have on parents who are not involved in these initiatives? E.g. parents who don't use the early years provision, then don't attend local initiatives etc.

What other services or organisations provide support in this area for poorest families?

What works?

What counts as *success* in these initiatives? Prompt in relation to:
- attendance
- personal and social development
- learning – literacy, numeracy, other
- behaviour

Have there been any evaluations of these initiatives? (ask for copies of documents)

Is there any information on what parents and children think of these initiatives?

What is the support available for staff working in these initiatives?

Are there any other agencies involved? (voluntary organisations, charities etc.)

How successful is inter-agency work in relation to poor families? (description, effectiveness, any barriers?)

Areas of improvement

Are there any areas that are not entirely successful in supporting the poorest families? Which ones?

What are the factors that contribute to this limited success? What are the barriers?

How is the LA addressing these issues?

What gaps are there in collecting data on these families, especially in relation to parents less involved with formal services?

Plans for future initiatives

Are there any plans for future initiatives in terms of supporting the poorest families?

Is there anything else about parental involvement in the poorest families that you would like to mention?

Can you think of any areas that would be worthwhile exploring research-wise to provide evidence for best ways of supporting poor families and their children? Any contacts to follow up?

Thank you.

b) Interview schedule- Head teacher/Manager of EECC

Introduce the project, explain focus on support for poorer families in relation to children in aged 4 to 7, confidentiality of recording and use of data (informant needs to receive Consent Form to sign in advance and also keep a copy)

Background information

Tell me a bit about the specifics of your school –type of catchment area, numbers, learning ethos, community links etc.

How do you support parents to engage in their children's learning?

Can you think of examples of initiatives that have been successful in supporting parents to engage with their children's learning?
- homework clubs
- curriculum events etc.

What kind of support is available at transition between early years and school? How are initiatives at school linked to early years support?

How is communication with parents taking place? How do they find out about initiatives?

Support available for poorest 10%

What forms of support, if any, are available through the schools specifically for the poorer parents? (Do you target families for certain initiatives?)

What specific difficulties are there in terms of working with poorer families?

What do you think are the main barriers for parents to engage with their children's learning?

What else could be done (at a general level, not only in this school) to support parents even more in engaging with their children's education?

What info you have on parents who are not involved in these initiatives? E.g. parents who don't use the early years provision, then don't attend local initiatives etc.

(point out that it is usually the more middle class mothers that are engaged, what do we do about the other groups – fathers, less educated mothers)

What works?

Can you identify some examples of good practice from your school/centre in terms of supporting the poorest families? (Prompt for what exactly is working well, results)

How do you measure the success of these initiatives?
- attendance
- personal and social development
- child's behaviour
- other?

Is there any information on what parents think of these initiatives?

Which other agencies are you involved with in supporting families?
- health
- community education
- social work
- charities etc.

How does collaboration with other agencies work?
- positive aspects, how successful are the collaborations?
- barriers and difficulties

What else would be needed?

Which areas are less successful in your work with the parents? Why?

Can you think of any areas in which Save the Children could contribute to support parents engage more in their children's learning?
- support for staff
- support for families
- support for children

What professional development issues can you identify for staff?

Are there any initiatives that you would like to develop in the school to support parents more?

Is there anything else about parental involvement in the poorest families in general or in relation to your school that you would like to mention?

Are there any other relevant contacts that you would recommend?

Ask for any relevant materials – evaluations of parent programmes, leaflets for parents etc. Also ask for distribution of letters to staff and parents.

Thank you.

c) Interview schedule- Teachers/Early years practitioners

Introduce the project, explain focus on support for poorer families in relation to children aged 4 to 7, confidentiality of recording and use of data (informant needs to receive Consent Form to sign in advance and also keep a copy)

1.   Background information

Tell me a bit about the specifics of your role (allow each person to introduce themselves briefly)

We are interested in the poorest families and how they support their children's learning. What can you tell me about the families that you are working with from this group?

How do you get your information about these families - their living conditions, circumstances etc. What other info would be useful?

How do you support parents to engage in their children's learning in general? Are there any targeted activities for the poorest families?

How is communication with parents taking place? How do they find out about what's going on in the centre/school?

2.   Support available for poorest 10%

What specific difficulties are there in terms of working with poorer families?

What has been happening in your school/centre that has been successful in supporting parents to engage with their <u>children's learning</u>?
- homework clubs
- family learning activities
- literacy classes etc.

What do you think are the main barriers for parents to engage with their children's learning?

What else could be done (at a general level, not only in this school) to support parents even more in engaging with their children's education?

3.   Transitions and home-school links

What kind of support is available at transition between early years and school? How are initiatives at school linked to early years support?

What are the main issues that children from poorer families are faced with at transition? What about the parents?

How are links between home and school set up? What is being done to ensure parents know how to support children's learning?

What about the hard to reach families? The ones that refuse to engage with the centre/school? How do you deal with them? (point out that it is usually the middle class mothers that are engaged, what do we do about the other groups – fathers, less educated mothers)

4. What works?

Can you identify some examples of good practice from your organisation in terms of supporting the poorest families? (Prompt for what exactly is working well, results).

Why do you think they work particularly well?

How do you evaluate the success of these initiatives?
- attendance
- personal and social development
- child's behaviour
- other?

Which other agencies are you involved with in supporting families?
- health
- community education
- social work
- charities etc.

Do you collaborate with any of these agencies in working with poorest families?

How does collaboration with other agencies work?
- positive aspects
- barriers and difficulties

5. What else would be needed?

Which areas are less successful in your work with the parents? Why?

Can you think of any areas in which Save the Children could contribute to support parents engage more in their children's learning?
- support for staff working with poor families
- support for families
- support for children

What professional development issues can you identify for yourselves?

Are there any initiatives that you would like to develop to support parents more?

Is there anything else about parental involvement in the poorest families in general or in relation to your organisation that you would like to mention?

Thank you.

d) Interview schedule- Parents

Introduce the project, explain focus on involvement of parents in their children's learning, confidentiality of recording and use of data (informant needs to receive Consent Form to sign in advance and also keep a copy).

Background information

What do you think about your child's school?
- ethos
- role in community
- promotion of learning and well-being

Are you pleased with how your child is getting on at school?

School support for parents

What do you think about how the school deals with the parents?

Do you feel you have enough opportunities to get involved with the school?
- do you think parents have a voice in the school, are represented?

What kind of things do you go to in the school?
- parents' evenings
- parents' board
- activities for parents: curriculum, cooking, sports etc.
- classroom helper

Would you like more opportunities like this in the school or less of them? Why?

(if said MORE above) What kind of activities would you like for parents?

What help would you need to make it possible for you to attend these activities?
- transport
- child care
- a friend to come
- supportive environment etc.

Family activities

What kind of activities do you normally do with your child at home?

Do you do any specific learning activities or more outdoor activities?
- reading, math
- science activities etc.

What about week-ends? Do you do different things then?

Do you think you have enough time to spend with your child at home?

Do you think you need to spend more time at home on what the child learns at school or do you want him/her to learn different things at home?

How important is for you if your child does well at school?

Communication with the school

How do you know about what your child has learnt at the school in a day?

What do you think about how the school staff keep you informed? (attitudes of school staff, communication style)

How do you know how your child is doing at school or if there are any problems?

Would you want to have more information on what s/he learns? What kind of information would that be?

How do you find out about events for parents?

Recommendations

What would make it easier for you to help your child with his/her learning?
- information from school
- additional support for methods
- other support (parenting classes, behaviour management etc.)

What would make you go to more school events for parents?

What types of activities would you like in school for parents?

Is there anything else that you want to say about this and I've not asked you.

Thank you for your time! (give voucher)

e) Schedule for activity with children's groups

STAGE	METHOD	TIME (30 MIN)
Welcome, chat	Explain the purpose of the activity, remind them about consent (they can leave at any time), ask again for verbal consent, answer children's questions	2 mins
IMAGINARY FAMILY	Ask children to draw an imaginary family that would live in their area. If they do not include a parent, do not prompt for the traditional family. Prompt for: - things they would do at home - things families would do at the school - things they would do somewhere else (local clubs, museums, trips etc.)	8 mins
DISCUSS	Discuss with children: - why is it good to do things with your family; - what do you learn with your family; - who helps with homework; - who is the person you learn most from (if they mention a teacher, ask about a second person that they learn from)	5 mins
SERVICES	Show children pictures of local services and ask them to discuss issues of access and activities they do there (Photos to include leisure centre, library, school, church, cinema etc.)	8 mins
BARRIERS	Are there any things that children would like to do with their family, but they can not? Prompt to discuss the reasons why children can not do these things: - cost (Is it too expensive?) - things not available in their area - transport (too far?) - parents don't' want to (things your parents don't like, don't allow)	5 mins.
Closing of session	Thank the children and distribute presents/gift vouchers	2 mins.

Materials:

- 2 recorders and batteries
- Two sets of coloured pens
- Sheets of paper for drawing
- Gift vouchers/presents
- Certificates for children

APPENDIX B- GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD (GIRFEC) AND EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)
(http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/childrensservices/girfec)

8 areas identified as **wellbeing indicators**:

We all want our children and young people to be fully supported as they grow and develop to be:

- **Healthy** … experiencing the highest standards of physical and mental health, and supported to make healthy safe choices
- **Achieving** … receiving support and guidance in their learning – boosting their skills, confidence and self-esteem
- **Nurtured** … having a nurturing and stimulating place to live and grow
- **Active** …offered opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities – helping them to build a fulfilling and happy future
- **Respected** … to be given a voice and involved in the decisions that affect their well-being
- **Responsible** … taking an active role within their schools and communities
- **Included** ... receiving help and guidance to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities; accepted as full members of the communities in which they live and learn
- **And above all, to be safe** … protected from abuse, neglect or harm

The core components of *Getting it right for every child*

Getting it right for every child is founded on 10 core components which can be applied in any setting and in any circumstance. They are at the heart of the *Getting it right for every* approach in practice and provide a benchmark from which practitioners may apply the approach to their areas of work.

1. A focus on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families based on a shared understanding of well-being

2. A common approach to gaining consent and to sharing information where appropriate

3. An integral role for children, young people and families in assessment, planning and intervention

4. A co-ordinated and unified approach to identifying concerns, assessing needs, agreeing actions and outcomes, based on the *Well-being Indicators*

5. Streamlined planning, assessment and decision-making processes that lead to the right help at the right time

6. Consistent high standards of co-operation, joint working and communication where more than one agency needs to be involved, locally and across Scotland

7. A *Lead Professional* to co-ordinate and monitor multi-agency activity where necessary

8. Maximising the skilled workforce within universal services to address needs and risks at the earliest possible time

9. A confident and competent workforce across all services for children, young people and their families

10. The capacity to share demographic, assessment, and planning information electronically within and across agency

***Getting it right for every child*: values and principles**

The Getting *it right for every child* approach is underpinned by **common values and principles** which apply across all aspects of working with children and young people. Values and principles are reflected in legislation, standards, procedures and professional expertise and are for everyone with a part to play in promoting the well-being of children and young people. The values and principles are:

- **Promoting the well-being** of individual children and young people: this is based on understanding how children and young people develop in their families and communities and addressing their needs at the earliest possible time
- **Keeping children and young people safe:** emotional and physically safety is fundamental and is wider than child protection
- **Putting the child at the centre:** children and young people should have their views listened to and they should be involved in decisions that affect them
- **Taking a whole child approach:** recognising that what is going on in one part of a child or young person's life can affect many other areas of his or her life
- **Building on strengths and promoting resilience:** using a child or young person's existing networks and support where possible
- **Promoting opportunities and valuing diversity:** children and young people should feel valued in all circumstances and practitioners should create opportunities to celebrate diversity
- **Providing additional help should be appropriate, proportionate and timely:** providing help as early as possible and considering short and long-term needs
- **Supporting informed choice:** supporting children, young people and families in understanding what help is possible and what their choices may be
- **Working in partnership with families:** supporting wherever possible those who know the child or young person well, know what they need, what works well for them in their family and what may not be helpful
- **Respecting confidentiality and sharing information:** seeking agreement to share information that is relevant and proportionate while safeguarding children and young people's right to confidentiality
- **Promoting the same values across all working relationships:** recognising respect, patience, honesty, reliability, resilience and integrity are qualities valued by children, young people, families and colleagues
- **Making the most of bringing together each worker's expertise:** respecting the contribution of others' and co-operating with them, recognising that sharing responsibility does not mean acting beyond a worker's competence or responsibilities
- **Co-ordinating help:** recognising that children, young people and families need practitioners to work together, when appropriate, to provide the best possible help
- **Building a competent workforce to promote children and young people's well-being:** committed to continuing individual learning and development and improvement of inter-professional practice.

All of the values and principles are relevant at all times but some are particularly relevant when working in a multi-agency environment. By placing children and young people at the centre of policies, activity and planning and by having common principles and values we can secure better outcomes.

Scottish Government (2008) *The Early Years Framework* **Edinburgh: Scottish Government**

Child at centre of delivery – parents and community crucial.

10 elements of transformational change (see part 2 for elaboration of these).

- A coherent approach (SOAs, Community Planning, and ICS planning; GIRFEC)
- Helping children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves
- **Breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years**
- A focus on engagement and empowerment of children, families and communities
- **Using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and intervention**
- Putting quality at the heart of service delivery
- Improving outcomes and children's quality of life through play
- Simplifying and streamlining delivery
- More effective collaboration (p 4-5)

SOAs and community planning process are the key local mechanisms for putting the framework into practice.

Some key elements for action:
- More help to develop **parenting skills with ante-natal and post-natal** care and developing the capacity needed to deliver this
- Renewed focus on 0-3 as the period of a child's development that shapes future outcomes
- **Break down barriers between education and** childcare through a move towards more integrated, flexible services
- Improving play opportunities and addressing barriers to play
- More consistent access to **intensive family support services** in the early years
- More help for informal support networks
- **Nurseries, schools and childcare centres developing their role in family and community learning**
- Adult services such as housing, transport and development planning putting a greater focus on the needs of young children and families
- Developing common values in the workforce, enhancing workforce skills and developing broader workforce roles
- Building on work already in progress through *Getting it Right for Every Child* and *Curriculum for Excellence* to provide child-centred, outcome-focused services. (p5)

APPENDIX C - MULTI-AGENCY TEAM CHECKLIST

This checklist is derived from the results of the MATCh project (Anning et al., 2006) exploring the functioning of multi-agency teams. Team members should complete the checklist individually and teams should then discuss the findings collectively. Results may indicate areas of team function that need to be clarified with stakeholder agencies and/or areas of team function that would benefit from more discussion within the team. Where there is divergence of views within a team, members should consider why this is and whether changes to the way the team operates would facilitate team functioning.

Domain 1- Structural- systems and management	Strongly disagree/ never	Disagree/ Sometimes	Agree/ often	Strongly agree/ Always
The team has clear objectives that have been agreed by all stakeholding agencies.				
The team has clear workload targets that have been agreed by all stakeholding agencies.				
The team has the authority to make decisions about the day-to-day team function (as long as in accord with agreed targets and objectives).				
There is clarity about line management arrangements for all team members.				
There are clear mechanisms for coordinating the work of all team members.				
Clear mechanisms exist to inform part-time team members about what has taken place in their absence.				
Team members are co-located in shared buildings.				
Structures exist for communication with all stakeholding agencies (e.g. a steering group).				
Stakeholding agencies have made transparent efforts to minimise inequalities caused by the different terms and conditions of service for team members employed by different agencies.				
Domain 2- Ideological- Sharing and redistributing knowledge/skills/ beliefs	**Strongly disagree/ never**	**Disagree/ Sometimes**	**Agree/ often**	**Strongly agree/ Always**
Different theoretical models are respected within the team.				
Different professional groups are accorded equal respect within the team.				
Supervision of work is attuned to the needs of the individuals within the team and their various professional backgrounds.				
The team encourages members to share skills and ideas with each other.				
The team has an awareness of the potential impact of multi-agency working on both professional identity and service users.				

Domain 3: Procedural- participation in developing new processes	Strongly disagree/ never	Disagree/ Sometimes	Agree/ often	Strongly agree/ Always
The team has been able to develop new processes and procedure in order to meet its agreed objectives.				
Team members do not necessarily have to follow inappropriate agency of origin procedures when they conflict with agreed objectives.				
Opportunities exist for team members to have time away from the immediacy of delivering services in order to reflect on practice and develop new ways of working (e.g. team away-days, joint team training events).				
The team engages in joint client-focused activities, such as shared assessment and/or consultation with families.				
There are regular opportunities for whole team discussion of client-focused activities.				
Stakeholding agencies continue providing ongoing support for the professional development of their staff in multi-agency teams as well as supporting team development activities.				
Domain 4: Inter-professional- learning through role change	**Strongly disagree/ never**	**Disagree/ Sometimes**	**Agree/ often**	**Strongly agree/ Always**
The team has good and clear leadership.				
Roles within the team are clear.				
The team does not allow certain individuals or professional groups to dominate.				
The contribution of part-time team members is acknowledged.				
The team allows individual members to retain and develop their 'specialist' skills.				
Team members are able to learn new ways to practice from each other.				

There are no right answers but teams where most members tend to agree with the statements are likely to function more efficiently and effectively.

Taken from: Anning *et al.* (2006) *Developing Multiprofessional Teamwork for Integrated Children's Services*, Open University Press, pages 128-131.

APPENDIX D- DOCUMENTS SUPPLIED BY KEY INFORMANTS OR SOURCED FROM INTERNET

Local authority papers

- West Dunbartonshire Single Outcome Agreement – 2nd Draft, June 2008
- Integrated Children's Services Plan: Review of Progress 2005-08 and Interim Plan 2008-09
- West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership (2009) Single Outcome Agreement http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/library/577-single-outcome-agreements/681-phase-2-single-outcome-agreements-2009-onwards/view-category/-2/

Early Years

- Admissions Policy to Centres providing Early Education and Childcare and information about Admissions Panels

Educational Psychological Services

- Additional Support for Learning: Transition Planning Guidelines and Staged intervention Transitions Calendar: Pre-school Year to Primary 1.
- Leaflet for parents about Pre-School Assessment Team
- Nurture Groups Evaluation Reports
- Information on Integrated Assessment Framework as developed in W Dunbartonshire. Documents and training materials available at http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/childrens-services/integrated-assessment-framework/

Education Services: Transition

- Parents leaflet on transition from pre-school to primary school

Support for parents and children

- Short paper on Parenting Strategy and Intervention programme
- Fairer Scotland Fund Project Monitoring Report April-December 2008
- Evaluation of Young Families Support Service
- Review of Family Support Services, March 2009
- Diagram highlighting the range of activities of the Pupil and Family Support Service
- Information on Social Work's Children and Families Service's 'Groupwork and Family Support Team' (Focus on ages 8 to 18) http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/childrens-services/groupwork-and-family-supportgroupwork-and-family-support/
- Domestic Abuse Pathfinder Clydebank Project Newsletters and local reports http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/childrens-services/dvaw-pathfinder/

Educational outcome data

- Attendance figures for 08/09 for 8 primary schools in Clydebank
- 5-14 attainment in reading, writing and maths for all primary schools from 2001 to 2008, with 2009 target
- 5-14 attainment as above, but for 8 primary schools in Clydebank.
- Paper for Council on Exclusions in W Dunbartonshire
- Numeracy and Literacy baseline assessments for schools and EECCs and partner providers in Clydebank.

APPENDIX E- INDICATORS OF DEPRIVATION (TREASURY/DFES REPORT, 2006)

A. INCOME-BASED INDICATORS

1. **Free School Meals Entitlement (FSM)**

2. **"Income Deprivation Affecting Children" Index (IDACI)**[9]

3. **Other benefits based measures:**
   - Children in households receiving IS/JSA
   - Adults in receipt of benefits
   - Households in receipt of Housing or Council Tax benefit

4. **Estimates of average Income**:
   - ONS ward based model estimates
   - Paycheck (CACI/ACORN)
   - Wealth/Poverty Index (Experian/Mosaic)

B. COMPOSITE AND OTHER CENSUS (AREA-BASED) INDICATORS

1. **Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2004**
2. **Commercial geodemographic classifications**
   - i. ACORN (CACI)
   - ii. Mosaic (Experian)

3. **2001 Census data** - ONS geodemographic classification and other indicators using census data.

C. ATTAINMENT BASED INDICATORS

1. **National Curriculum SATs Based Indicators**
   - KS1-3 levels and scores and FFT standardised scores

2. **Foundation Stage Profile**

3. **Other test data**
   - CATs
   - PIPs/MidYIS
   - other test data

D. OTHER SPECIFIC (PUPIL-BASED) INDICATORS

- D1.Mobility/turnover
- D2. Vulnerable Children (Looked After Children and other children at risk)
- D3. EAL or other language assessments
- D4. Minority Ethnic groups
- D5. Refugees or asylum seekers/Other groups]

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[9] An equivalent indicator was not used in Scotland; SG statisticians indicate that it was investigated but did not provide information different from that available through the SIMD datazones. In England, this indicator is based on 2001 data and will not be updated due to changes in benefits. The DFCS now uses HMRC Work and Child Tax Credit datasets.