Father Involvement in Primary Schools

A Pilot Study in East Lothian

Research Report Commissioned by Fathers Network Scotland in September 2017

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

Introduction to this report

This report presents the key findings and recommendations following a pilot study exploring fathers’ involvement in school in Scotland. This pilot study has two purposes:

1. To explore what makes it easier or harder for fathers in Scotland to get involved in their child’s school.
2. To evaluate the piloting of a new Father Inclusion Guide designed to enhance fathers’ involvement in school (see appendix).

The study focuses on fathers’ involvement in primary school and uses the terms ‘father’ and ‘dad’ to refer to any man who is in a parenting role with children. This definition includes biological fathers, adoptive fathers, foster fathers, grandfathers and other male members of the extended family, as well as non-kinship male caregivers, who act as guardians.

This pilot study applied a mixed methods approach, and analysed:

1. Data collected from fathers, teachers and children in six primary schools in East Lothian. These six schools participated in the East Lothian Father-friendly Schools (ELFFS) project. The data consist of a survey of 116 fathers and 56 staff members, 13 one-to-one interviews with teachers who led a father inclusion intervention in the six participating schools, 10 interviews with fathers and one focus group with children in P7 case study school.
2. Data from the Scottish sub-sample of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) – a large scale longitudinal survey of children and their families. Nationally representative data for Scotland were used on 5-year-olds, 7-year-olds and 11-year-olds, and their parents.

Introduction to the East Lothian Father-friendly Schools (ELFFS) project and the Father Inclusion Guide

The East Lothian Father-friendly Schools (ELFFS) project is an initiative designed to raise awareness and promote the engagement of fathers with the education of their children, and more particularly to increase their involvement in primary schools across East Lothian. The main aim of the ELFFS project was to enable schools to develop and implement father-inclusive practices by using the ‘Father Inclusion Guide’ – a practical guide on how to involve fathers in the education of their children and strengthen the partnership between fathers and schools.

The ELFFS project took place between January 2017 and June 2017 and was designed and delivered by Alison Cameron from Prestonpans Infant School, Chris Wilson from Mayfield Primary School, and Kevin Young from DadsWork, with support from Fathers Network Scotland.
One (or more) staff member from each school volunteered for the role of Father Inclusion Champion. These Champions used the Father Inclusion Guide and led the implementation of a programme of father-inclusive practices in their school. To support the champions’ work, they all:

1. Participated in four monthly peer meetings with the other school Champions, facilitated by Alison Cameron, Chris Wilson and Kevin Young;
2. Fed back on the use of the Father Inclusion Guide;
3. Received ongoing one-to-one support from the three project’s facilitators via telephone, email and school visits.

The context of this report

Enhancing the engagement of parents in educational processes has become a key element of a range of UK family policies and educational initiatives designed to promote child health and well-being, close the attainment gap between rich and low-income families, and ensure positive school-leaver destinations. In Scotland, the critical role parents play in the education of their children is recognised and highlighted by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. The Act outlines a clear expectation for schools to engage families in their children’s education and develop two-way partnerships with parents. The overall aim of all education policies in Scotland, including the Parental Involvement Act is ‘getting it right for every child’ and ‘making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up’ (Scottish Government, 2012, p. 6). However, despite ample research on the impact of parental involvement in education on children’s development, empirical evidence on fathers’ involvement in education and school is still limited, especially in Scotland. Little is known about what fathers in Scotland do when they are getting involved in their child’s schooling, or what makes it easier or harder for fathers to form a positive partnership with their child’s school. There is also a paucity of Scottish research on the impact of fathers’ involvement in school on child development.

Parental involvement in education and school can be defined, and measured, in multiple ways. Some definitions of parental involvement emphasise the actions parents undertake in relation to their children’s education. Such actions may include participation in activities within the school environment (eg: dropping off and picking up the child at the school gate, attending parents’ evenings or volunteering to assist in the classroom) as well as actions undertaken at home (eg: talking with the child about school, listening to him/her read and helping with homework). A different approach to parental involvement focuses on the facilitation of academic socialisation, namely the extent to which parents communicate educational values, goals, expectations and aspirations for academic achievement to their child at home.

A large body of literature lends support to the hypothesis that increased levels of parental involvement in education are beneficial to a child’s learning in infancy, school-aged children and young adults. Studies show that parental involvement is associated with:

• More positive attitudes to school;
• Higher scores on standardised achievement tests and teachers’ reports;
• Better performance at national examinations;
• Improved classroom performance score;
• Fewer behavioural problems;
• Enhanced level of life satisfaction.

1 http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright
Evidence indicates that the positive impact of father involvement on child's academic success is independent of and additional to the impact of mother involvement. There is a broad range of factors that can hinder fathers’ involvement in their child’s education and make it difficult for them to engage with the school to the extent they want such as:

**Societal barriers**, including
- The traditional division of care and work along gender lines;
- Stereotypical views of parenthood distinguishing between the role of mothers and fathers in their child's care and education;
- Structural constraints such as access to family friendly work arrangements.

**Individual parent and family factors**, including
- Fathers' socioeconomic and cultural background;
- Marital status and relationship with the child's mother;
- Geographical proximity to the child's school.

**Child factors**, including
- Child's age and gender;
- Additional support needs;
- Behavioural problems, gifts or talents.

**Parent-teacher relationships and school-specific factors**, including
- The school's ethos and culture, as manifested by institutional policies and procedures;
- Staff attitudes and language;
- The quality and frequency of home-school communication.

**Key findings**

**Perceptions of fathers’ involvement in school among dads, children and school staff**

Fathers, school staff and children all attribute great importance to the involvement of dads in education, associating such involvement with a range of benefits for children, schools and the wider community. Fathers and staff believe that active participation of fathers in school is necessary for achieving the best outcomes for children. Involved fathers are also viewed as providing a positive male role model for children, which reinforces the importance of education and demonstrates an equal approach to parenthood, appropriate for modern day Scottish society.

The involvement of fathers is portrayed as an invaluable opportunity for schools to deepen their understanding of the child's life circumstances. This enables schools to accommodate his or her learning and developmental requirements, ultimately maximising the likelihood of 'getting it right for every child'. Furthermore, school staff view the involvement of fathers as an opportunity to extend the supply of talent within the school community. The findings, however, also indicate that fathers do not perceive themselves as equally knowledgeable about child education when comparing themselves to mothers or teachers. Staff members share this perception.
For fathers, being involved in school means engaging in and respecting their child’s experiences, treating them as 'being' rather than 'becoming', strengthening the father-child relationship and ultimately, positively influencing their child's development and welfare. Children are keen to see their fathers get involved in school because they want them to be part of their everyday lives and to have the opportunity to celebrate achievements together. Fathers do this by supporting them with both curricular and extra-curricular topics. Children also appreciate this support and believe that it complements and extends their learning experiences.

**What do fathers do when they get involved in school? In which aspects of the school are they less involved?**

In Scotland, fathers’ direct involvement in primary school is still limited in scope and frequency in comparison to mothers’ involvement. For example, 51% of fathers with 7-year-old children attended a parents' evening at their child's school compared to 79% of mothers. 16% of fathers reported helping the school with fundraising and special activities compared to 40% of mothers. Fathers’ involvement in school is linked to their socioeconomic background: fathers in higher income households and those who are better educated or have higher status jobs, tend to get involved in their child’s primary school more frequently than their socio-economically disadvantaged counterparts. This association between involvement and socioeconomic background is not found in mothers. The socio-economic gap in fathers’ involvement in school could contribute to inequality in pupils’ academic achievement.

Fathers' participation rates differ across the various aspects of school life: most fathers have visited their child’s classroom (84%), were in contact with the class teacher (83%) and attended a school event (77%). However, only a small minority (less than 10%) has volunteered or helped in the school, suggesting that this aspect of engagement could be developed. Indeed, staff would like to see the number of fathers getting involved increase and to be able to capitalise on fathers’ talents and skills, to extend and enrich the school experience, but question whether fathers know that such contributions are welcome.

**Key barriers to fathers’ involvement in school**

Work commitments are a major barrier to fathers' involvement in primary school, especially for fathers who work long hours or have insufficient family friendly workplace policies, which could enable them to better balance their work and family life.

Poor communication between fathers and schools is also a key barrier to dads' involvement in their child's school. While schools communicate with parents frequently and through a range of channels, not all communication reaches fathers. For example, a letter sent home with the child is likely to be seen by the parent responsible for monitoring homework, but this is not always the father. Similarly, fathers might not engage with information shared via social media or specialised digital technologies used by their child's school. Moreover, fathers are sometimes perceived as a ‘missing link’ in the chain of communication between the school and the home. This is because staff communicate more frequently with mothers, who often act as the first port of call. There is also often a lack of sufficient knowledge about the life circumstances of pupils, including their family's situation such as separation.

Schools are traditionally a female-dominated environment, and this discourages father involvement. This feminisation of the school environment is manifested by unconscious gender bias in the language used by staff, but also by imbalanced representations of mothers and fathers, for example in the school space,
learning resources and the materials the school produces for parents. Fathers also seem to lack the peer networks that mothers develop or have, which makes the school environment less approachable to them.

Fathers might also refrain from getting involved if they have had a negative experience in school or within their community. Additionally, having low literacy or numeracy skills, or being in custody, can impact on a father’s ability to support his child’s learning, putting up a potential barrier to involvement in school. This means that the most vulnerable families do not fully benefit from father involvement thus widening the attainment gap.

Depending on their cultural background, some fathers may not be aware that they are expected to engage with their child’s school, may know little about how to participate in an education system unfamiliar to them, or lack the confidence to operate within the formal structure of the school or social norms.

Using the Father Inclusion Guide to enhance fathers’ involvement in school

The new Father Inclusion Guide was well received by the staff members who piloted it. It was perceived as a clear and helpful guide to increasing fathers’ involvement in school, especially in comparison to other policy documents and similar publications targeted at educators. Its content was deemed comprehensive, relevant and well presented. Staff engaging with the Father Inclusion Guide reported it sparking interest in father-inclusive practice, deepening their understanding of the meaning of father inclusion work in schools and increasing motivation to engage in such work.

The guide's high functionality was attributed to its strong links to current educational policies. This was regarded as useful in informing school procedures and pedagogy, as well as evaluating processes. The links to policy also meant that its usage enabled staff professional development.

Specifically, the guide was useful for school to:

- Identify and celebrate father-friendly practices already in place within the school;
- Explore opportunities where further work is needed;
- Initiate discussion and raise awareness of what it means to be truly father-friendly;
- Advance the school’s contextual knowledge of, and familiarity with, their children, fathers and families;
- Inform the development of teaching materials and increasing diversity in curriculum design and delivery.

After a short period in which the champions engaged with the guide, the following outcomes were reported:

- An increase in the number of fathers who got involved in school;
- Providing confidence to fathers to get involved in the school;
- Enhanced knowledge of pupils' life contexts;
- More opportunities for children, fathers and staff to develop positive relationships through engaging in fun, relaxed activities, and strengthen the whole school community;
- A way to identify talents and form collaborations within the school community to support the school experience for children and create future partnerships;
- Professional development opportunities for staff.
Challenges to implementation of father-inclusive practices included:

- Cultural sensitivity and resistance in the form of rejection of gender specific terminology, disagreement with the aims of the intervention and the activities proposed;
- Unwillingness to accept the need to eradicate unconscious gender bias;
- The busy, high-volume nature of teachers' work and multiple demands for the attention of school staff.

Recommendations

**Recommendations for educators and schools**

- **Become aware of the multiple barriers to fathers' involvement in school:** A tendency to view the family as a unit, making assumptions about parents as a homogenous group, could make it difficult to consider the challenges faced by different caregivers. Assessing and addressing the specific obstacles that hinder the involvement of fathers would lead to a more dad-inclusive school culture.

- **Implement a "father inclusion" programme:** Schools should take into account the range of barriers to fathers' involvement in school to develop targeted interventions to address the social and cultural needs of fathers within their community.

- **Integrate your "father inclusion" programme with existing school policy:** High-quality interventions require ongoing proactive efforts to make them work. Where possible, embed a father inclusion programme into the school’s improvement plan and other relevant policies such as diversity and inclusion to maximise impact.

- **Engage the school community in the process of designing father inclusion interventions:** Children, fathers, mothers and staff members can all contribute to developing effective "father-friendly" policies and programme. Engaging all parties in the process of designing interventions and activities would lead to greater family involvement in school and contribute to a more inclusive school culture.

- **Collaborate with father inclusion specialists:** Schools interested in becoming more father-friendly would benefit from engaging with father inclusion specialists, such as dads’ workers and agencies working with fathers in the community. Similarly, support from more experienced schools could help in developing knowledge about best practice and thereby drive change.

- **Use the Father Inclusion Guide:** The guide (see appendix) can be used to evaluate the extent to which the school already engages fathers, identify areas where work is needed, and inform the development and implementation of interventions.
• **Appoint a father engagement school champion:** Schools should appoint a father engagement champion to develop and deliver programmes raising awareness of fathers' involvement in school and implementing father-inclusive practice. The champion needs to be supported by their leadership team and, where possible, have opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues with a similar role in neighbouring schools.

• **Engage fathers informally, create opportunities for positive experiences:** Many dads are more likely to engage in hands-on and physical activities in the school environment. Activities exclusively for male caregivers and their children, which involve fun and relaxing activities, are useful for developing a positive, trusting relationship. Similarly, specific invitations from the school to share their skills and knowledge are useful for engaging dads who might otherwise hesitate to get involved.

• **Inform and train school staff:** Regardless of their role within the school, all staff members could benefit from more guidance on father-friendly practice. Any informed staff member who is aware of traditional gender divisions, unconscious gender bias and gender equality could break down barriers to fathers' involvement in school. This may also attract more males to work within the school.

• **Enhance the use of technology to strengthen communication with fathers:** For some fathers, using technology can help to stay connected to school while at work or attending to other commitments. Digital technologies might also help to communicate with non-resident fathers.

**Recommendations for policy**

• **Local authorities should develop the resources and incentives needed** to encourage school staff to improve communications and relationships with fathers. Attention should be given to supporting and sustaining father-inclusive interventions already taking place in Scottish schools.

• **Leverage the existing commitment to parental involvement:** Develop a continuous family involvement pathway from birth through secondary school, which includes a clear framework for involvement across ages; clarify expectations and targets to ensure quality.

• **Create systems and funding to build capacity within communities to engage fathers:** Secure resources to develop and strengthen father-inclusive agencies particularly in the third sector which could support the implementation of father inclusion practice in schools as well as support fathers in the community as part of the community education policy.
Recommendations for further research

• Fatherhood research in Scotland: A lot is unknown about the impact of father involvement in school on the development and well-being of children and young people in Scotland. One way to address this gap would be to include fathers in existing research projects, such as the Growing Up in Scotland study. It is important to collect information about fathers’ involvement in education, as well as children's outcomes such as attainment.

• "Fatherhood" specialists can contribute to research design: Those specialising in supporting fathers can contribute to developing research projects. Such specialists can maximise engagement with fathers who will benefit most from dad-friendly interventions as well as assist with designing interventions and assessments.

• Look at impact over time – longitudinal research: Collecting longitudinal data by interviewing the same group of fathers in various points in time would make it possible to address questions that are difficult to explore by analysing cross-sectional data. For example, what school-level and pupil-level outcomes are associated with schools’ engagement with father inclusion practice.

• Engage with the children to hear their voice: There is little research about children's perceptions and experiences of parental involvement in education and school. Even less is known about how children in Scotland view the involvement of their fathers in their school. Enabling children to voice their views, thus allowing their opinions and experiences to influence public policy in matters directly related to their future is important. This would also add to the knowledge of how we 'Get It Right For Every Child' and support the Child Rights Agenda.

• Monitor the implementation and impact of the new Father Inclusion Guide: Evidence from the pilot study presented in this report suggests that schools interested in developing a more dad-friendly culture would benefit from using the Father Inclusion Guide. A rigorous follow-up study is needed to monitor and elucidate the way in which the guide is used in schools to drive change over time, if at all. It is equally valuable to design a larger scale evaluation study to examine the extent to which the use of the Father Inclusion Guide is associated with positive outcomes for pupils, families and schools in Scotland.
Introduction

1 - Introduction to this report

This report presents the key findings and recommendations following a pilot study exploring fathers’ involvement in school in Scotland. This pilot study has two purposes. First, to explore what makes it easier or harder for fathers in Scotland to get involved in their child’s school. Second, to evaluate the piloting of a new Father Inclusion Guide to enhance fathers’ involvement in school, which has been developed by Alison Cameron and Chris Wilson at Prestonpans Infant School.

Following Hornby (2011, p. 1), we use the terms ‘father’ and ‘father figure’ in this report to refer to any man who is in “a parenting role with children”. This definition includes biological fathers, adoptive fathers, foster fathers, grandfathers and other male members of the extended family, as well as non-kinship male caregivers, who act as guardians. We focus our investigation on fathers’ involvement in primary school.

The study considers six questions:

1. What does ‘fathers’ involvement in school’ mean for fathers, teachers and children?
2. What do fathers do when they get involved in school?
3. What do fathers and teachers view as key barriers to fathers’ involvement in school? How might these barriers be removed?
4. What do fathers and teachers believe a ‘father-friendly school’ is like?
5. How might teachers use a Father Inclusion Guide to enhance fathers’ involvement in school?

To answer these questions, this pilot study applied a mixed methods approach, and analysed:

a. Data collected from fathers, teachers and children in six primary schools in East Lothian between January 2017 and June 2017. During this six months period, the study schools participated voluntarily in the ‘East Lothian Father-friendly Schools (ELFFS) Project’ – a project aimed at developing father-inclusive practices in schools (see section 1.2). At the outset of the ELFFS Project, the study surveyed 116 fathers and 56 staff members (most of whom are teachers) in five out of the six schools involved. The researchers also conducted in depth one-to-one interviews with fathers and teachers at the beginning and the end of the ELFFS project. Furthermore, a child focus group was conducted in one of the study schools involved in the project.

b. The Scottish sub-sample of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) – a large-scale longitudinal survey of children and their family. We used nationally representative data on 5-year-olds, 7-year-olds and 11-year-olds, and their parents. Data from the MCS were used to inform and complement the analyses of data collected in the ELFFS project.2

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2Another representative longitudinal survey suitable for this purpose is the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study, which asked mothers of 8-year-olds to report on their partners’ involvement in school. The decision to focus in this report on the analysis of data from the MCS, not GUS, is threefold. First, the MCS collected data on the age groups which were included in the ELFFS project. Second, the MCS collected data from both the mother and the father. Third, the short timeframe and strict timeline of the current study did not allow the researchers enough time to obtain a permission to access to the GUS data, as such a permission requires special approval.
This pilot study has been undertaken collaboratively by the University of Edinburgh and Fathers Network Scotland.

**2 - Introduction to the East Lothian Father-friendly Schools (ELFFS) project and the Father Inclusion Guide**

The East Lothian Father-friendly Schools (ELFFS) project is an initiative designed to raise awareness and promote fathers’ engagement with the education of their children, and more particularly to increase their involvement in primary schools across East Lothian. The main aim of the ELFFS project was to enable schools to develop and implement father-inclusive practices by using the ‘Father Inclusion Guide’ – a practical guide on how to involve fathers in the education of their children and strengthen the partnership between fathers and schools (see appendix 1). Consequently, a core element in the ELFFS project was the piloting of the new guide.

The ELFFS project was designed by Alison Cameron (Acting Head Teacher, Prestonpans Infant School) and Chris Wilson (Principal Teacher, Mayfield Primary School), co-authors of the Father Inclusion Guide, following previous father-inclusive work they have carried at Prestonpans Infant School. The ELFFS project took place between January 2017 and June 2017 and was delivered by Alison Cameron, Chris Wilson, and Kevin Young (Project manager, DadsWork), with support from Fathers Network Scotland.

Six primary schools in East Lothian volunteered to participate in the ELFFS project, with one (or more) staff member from each school volunteering as the role of a ‘father engagement’ school champion (hereafter a school champion/champion). Throughout the six-month project period, these school champions led the implementation of a programme of father-inclusive practices in their school. Of the six schools, five completed the project, and one school dropped out half way. To support the champions’ work, they all:

1. Participated in monthly peer meetings with the other school champions, facilitated by Alison Cameron, Chris Wilson and Kevin Young (four group meetings took place in total).
2. Explored and used the Father Inclusion Guide – a practical guide to father-inclusive practice in their schools.
3. Received ongoing one-to-one support from the three project’s facilitators via telephone, email and school visits, on using the guide and developing strategies and interventions aimed at strengthening father-inclusive practice within their school.

The report is laid out as follows:

Section A discusses the theoretical, empirical and methodological foundations of the study. The findings are presented in sections B and C. First, section B reports on trends and perceptions of father involvement in primary school in Scotland. Then, section C reports on the evaluation of the implementation of Father Inclusion Toolkit (FIT) by teachers in five primary schools in East Lothian. The report concludes with a summary of the main findings.
In addition to their involvement in the ELFFS project, each school champion was interviewed twice - once in February 2017, at the beginning of the project, and again in June 2017, at the end of the project. Each champion also administered questionnaires to fathers of children in either Primary 1 (P1) or Primary 7 (P7) classes (see table 1) on behalf of the research team, as well as a survey of all staff members in their school. The decision to focus on the involvement of fathers with children in either P1 or P7 (in light of the need to limit the scope of the study) was taken for a pragmatic reason. Firstly, P1 involves a phase of transition from nursery to primary school. Similarly, P7 involves a phase of transition from primary school to secondary school. These transitions phases may provide fathers with multiple opportunities to get involved in their child's school, as well as situations where they may struggle to do so, though more research is needed in this area. Table 1 provides information on the characteristics of the participating schools, the champion(s) appointed by each school, and the programme of data collection that each school has undertaken.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participating schools, the champion(s) appointed by each school, and the programme of data collection that each school has undertaken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School ID</th>
<th>School Roll 2017</th>
<th>% pupils registered for FSM</th>
<th>Stage in study</th>
<th>Champion’s Gender</th>
<th>Champion’s Role</th>
<th>February-March '17</th>
<th>June '17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Champion interview 1</td>
<td>Father &amp; staff survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Principal Teacher</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>10.15%</td>
<td>P1, Nursery</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Principal Teacher</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Principal Teacher</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Principal Teacher</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>25.30%</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Principal Teacher</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Facilitator</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Acting Head Teacher (AHT)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Facilitator</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Principal Teacher</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Facilitator</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Project Manager ‘DadsWork’</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section A - Literature Review and Methodology

3 - Literature review

3.1 - Situating father involvement in school in the Scottish policy context

Father involvement in education, at home and in school, is considered by researchers, policymakers, and educators to be a key facilitator in the positive development and well-being of children. Enhancing the engagement of fathers (and mothers) in educational processes has become a key element of a range of UK family policies and educational initiatives designed to promote child health and well-being, close the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils, and ensure positive school-leaver destinations (Day & Lamb, 2015; NPSF, 2017; Scottish Government, 2017).

In Scotland, targeted policy to enhance parental involvement in education was introduced by the devolved government in its Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act 2000. The Act required educational authorities to outline ‘...ways in which the authority will seek to involve parents in promoting the education of their children’ in their annual statement of improvement (Scottish Executive, 2000, p. 2). The vital role parents play in the education of their children was further highlighted in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 (Scottish Executive, 2006b). Among other targets, the 2006 Act aimed to help ‘schools, education authorities and others to engage parents meaningfully in the education of their children and in the wider school community’ (Scottish Executive, 2006b, p. 1). To support this initiative, the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) also published a practical toolkit entitled ‘Parents As Partners In Their Children’s Learning’ which provided parents, educators and other practitioners with a range of guidelines and ideas on how to support children’s learning (Scottish Executive, 2006a). Consistent with the 2006 Act’s recognition of the differing needs and circumstances of fathers, the toolkit introduced a number of recommended father-inclusive activities for schools.

To mark its 10th anniversary, the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) has recently presented to the Scottish Government a comprehensive review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act (NPSF, 2017). The NPFS found much to praise, stating that the Act ‘has helped to support a step-change in the way in which parents are recognised and supported to be involved in their child’s education’ (NPSF, 2017, p. 51). The report also highlights areas for improvement, including (but not limited to) the need for clarity around the definition of parental involvement and up-to-date guidance on how to develop and maintain successful school-home partnerships. Despite not referring specifically to the challenges involved in engaging fathers in education, the NPFS report does recommend to implement further inclusive strategies that will enable parents from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to participate in various educational processes and procedures (NPSF, 2017, pp. 56–69). Indeed, in a recent report by the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC, 2016), about 83% of parents stated their child’s school does not have any activities specifically targeting fathers and 62% said the school could do more to ensure fathers and male carers feel included within the school community.
Increasing meaningful and positive involvement of fathers (and mothers) in their child's education is a policy priority in Scotland, and there is growing pressure on schools to develop family inclusive practices that will enable parents from all backgrounds to participate in their children's learning. Therefore, important questions to answer are:

- **To what extent are schools equipped with the information, resources and support they need to adequately address the 'Parental Engagement' driver of the 2017 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan?** (Scottish Government, 2017).

- **What would be the benefit for educators & schoolchildren in Scotland from using a new Father Inclusion Guide designed to increase fathers' involvement in schools?**

### 3.2 - The benefits of fathers' involvement in education for children's academic success

A large body of literature lends support to the hypothesis that increased levels of positive parental involvement in education are beneficial to a child's learning in infancy, school-age children and young adults (Burgess, 2008; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). For example, US studies show that increased levels of parental involvement are associated with higher scores on standardised achievement tests (Griffith, 1996; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010), better grade point averages (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Wilder, 2014) and more positive attitudes to school (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Evidence from the UK's National Child Development Survey (NCDS) demonstrates that parents' involvement in their children's education at primary school is linked to better performance at national examination among school leavers (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Parental involvement also seems to be associated with improved classroom performance score (Topor et al., 2010) and fewer behavioural problems (Flouri, Midouhas, & Narayanan, 2016).

A meta-analysis of 25 studies examining the relationship between parental involvement and pupils' academic achievement found that parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's educational achievement are more strongly linked to students' test scores than helping with homework (Fan & Chen, 2001). Another meta-analysis which synthesised results from 51 studies exploring the relationship between a range of school-based interventions designed to increase parental involvement in education shows that overall, such interventions are associated with an improved academic achievement for both primary and secondary school pupils (Jeynes, 2012). In particular, 'shared reading' programmes and programmes designed to boost the communication between parents and teachers and increase the parent-school collaboration were all found to be positively associated with pupils' academic success (Jeynes, 2012). However, See and Gorard (2015) present a critical systematic analysis of 127 studies exploring whether a range of initiatives to enhance parental involvement in education are linked to better academic achievements. They propose that the positive relationship between parental involvement and child outcomes is less strong than initially suggested. The authors show that vast majority of studies in their review either find no such correlation or suffered serious methodological limitations that make any generalizability attempt questionable (See & Gorard, 2015) and call for more carefully designed studies. Furthermore, not all aspects of parental involvement are linked to improved academic performance. For example, frequent help with science homework is linked to inferior PISA science performance (OECD, 2017), possibly because pupils who struggle in school require more support with their learning at home. In contrast, discussing with the child how he/she is doing in school and 'spending time just talking' with the child on a regular basis is positively associated with pupils' PISA science performance and their overall life satisfaction (OECD, 2017, pp. 155–159). However, some evidence does show that the amount of homework student complete is positively linked to their academic achievement (Núñez et al., 2015).
Despite ample research on the impact of parental involvement in education on children’s development, empirical evidence on fathers’ involvement in education and school is still limited, especially in Scotland. Little is known about what fathers in Scotland do when they get involved in their child’s schooling, or what makes it easier or harder for fathers to form a positive partnership with their child’s school. There is also a paucity of Scottish research regarding the impact of parental involvement in school on child development, focusing specifically on the contribution of fathers. This gap in research can be partially explained by a traditional tendency in research to refer to parents as a unit and not record the gender of parents, as well as to overlook the independent role fathers play in their child’s education. Another potential explanation is the lack of appropriate data collected on the circumstances, perceptions and behaviours of fathers in relation to their involvement in education, possibly because ‘the contribution of the father to child development has often been assumed to be subordinate to that of the mother’ (McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005, p. 203).

The international and UK-based evidence that does exist demonstrates that increased positive involvement of fathers in their children’s education is linked to improved academic outcomes for pre-schoolers, school-age pupils (Burgess, 2008), young adults (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004) and adults (Hango, 2007). For example, father involvement in education at home is found to be associated with a reduction in peer relationship problems in school-age children (Flouri et al., 2016). Children with fathers who were highly involved with their children’s education at home and in school scored better than those with less involved fathers on ‘maths readiness’ test and demonstrated fewer behaviour problems (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999). More frequent communication between fathers and school staff is found to be linked to higher test scores, and improved teacher reports in 5 and 12-year-olds, irrespective of the how involved the mother is (McBride et al., 2005). Teachers’ reports on the level of interest of fathers’ in their children at age 11 and age 16 were positively correlated with the likelihood of obtaining educational qualifications by among 33-year-olds (Hango, 2007). These findings show that greater father involvement has an independent positive effect on child’s academic success. Recent analyses of data from the Growing Up in Scotland longitudinal study show that 10-year-olds who, at infancy, had a highly supportive relationship with their fathers, were less likely than peers with less supportive relationship to report ‘disliking school, a poor relationship with their teacher, high levels of victimisation from peers and low life satisfaction’ (Parkes et al 2017, p. 44).

Overall, the literature suggests that father (and mother) involvement in education and school is beneficial for their children’s socioemotional engagement in school and academic outcomes. Therefore, an important question for this project to answer is: what obstacles might fathers face in getting involved in their child’s school?

3.3- Factors associated with fathers’ involvement in education and school

There is a broad range of factors that can influence fathers’ involvement in their child’s education and their engagement with school. Among these are motivational factors and the sense of competence as a parent (Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007) but also contextual socio-cultural norms (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). Hornby and LaFaele (2011) suggest that the various barriers to parental involvement can be broadly identified as societal factors, individual parent and family factors, child factors and parent–teacher factors. Unquestionably, disentangling the unique effect of each factor on parental involvement is a complicated task, given that different types of barriers are often interrelated.
**Societal factors**

The social meaning attached to the role of a father has changed over time (Day & Lamb, 2015). Fathers are now expected not only to provide for their family, but also to become involved in family life, share responsibility for the upbringing and education of their children with their partner, and cultivate an enduring emotional connection with their children (Day, Lewis, O’Brien, & Lamb, 2005; Denny, Brewton-Tiayon, Lykke, & Milkie, 2014; O’Brien, Brandth, & Kvande, 2007). Research shows that fathers in 21st-century UK are more involved in their child’s upbringing than ever before (Burgess, 2008) and while they value their role as breadwinners, they ‘tend to prioritise childcare over paid work’ (Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2015, p. 225). Fathers also want to spend more time with their children and agree that both parents should be equally involved in the child’s upbringing (Kadar-Satat & Koslowski, 2015). Despite these social transformations around parenting norms, the context of contemporary fatherhood is ‘complex and contradictory’ (Miller, 2011, p. 10). Fathers and mothers are still infrequently portrayed as equal carers in the media, with fathers rarely perceived as their children’s primary caregivers. Clapton (2013) showed that the images and language used in welfare agencies’ publications, such as training materials for health practitioners and educators, often depict fathers as problematic, threatening or absent. Furthermore, a considerable gender division exists in the amount of time fathers and mothers devote to childcare (ONS, 2016). This includes reading to children, teaching children or helping children with homework. MCS data shows that fathers of 7-year-olds engage more frequently than mothers in doing physical activities with their children, but are less frequently involved in activities such as reading, playing indoors and outdoors, or in musical activities (Hansen, Jones, & Joshi, 2010). It has been argued that ‘there is a tendency for men to participate in the “fun” aspects of parenthood, while women are in charge of the rest’ (Johansson & Klinth, 2008, p. 60).

The provision of family friendly workplace policies, such as leave schemes for parents, career breaks and flexible work arrangements, varies considerably across countries, meaning that worldwide, fathers and mothers have different opportunities to get involved in their child’s upbringing and education (ILO, 2014; Kadar-Satat & Koslowski, 2015). Scholars and policy makers argue that the Nordic countries have developed effective strategies for reconciling parenting duties and employment requirements, partially by specifically targeting the needs of working fathers (Browne, 2013; Miller, 2013). For example, a generous non-transferable post-birth leave enables fathers in the Nordic countries to get involved in their child’s upbringing early on (Browne, 2013; Moss & O’Brien, 2006). The differential policies governments put in place to support working parents could also contribute to variations in the rate and extent to which fathers and mothers get involved in their child’s education during the school years. A survey of parents of 10-year-olds, spanning 18 countries, shows that only about 20% of parents in the UK reported that in the past year they had exchanged ideas on parenting, family support, or the child’s development with their child’s teacher, compared to 42% on average (OECD, 2017). Similarly, 26% of UK parents initiated a discussion with their child’s class teacher about his/her progress, compared to 55% across all 18 countries on average; 15% have done so to discuss their child’s behaviour (compared to 56% on average). However, a larger share of UK parents than counterparts in most of the other surveyed countries stated that they have talked with their child’s teacher about how to support learning at home, and have attended an event at their child’s school (OECD, 2017).

To sum up, even though societal attitudes towards the role of fathers are changing, parenting in the UK context remains gendered. Traditional gender divisions, stereotypical views of parenthood and structural constraints all still place barriers to fathers’ involvement in their children’s education.
Individual parent and family factors

Fathers’ socioeconomic status and cultural background are linked to their involvement in their child’s education. Research shows that fathers (and mothers) who live in higher income households are more likely than those in lower income households to get involved in their children’s schooling (Epstein, 2011; McBride et al., 2005). Lareau (2002) and Lareau and Cox (2011) suggested that such variations in the levels of involvement of parents from high and low socioeconomic status groups stem from different approaches to child’s development. They identified a tendency in middle-class parents to want to control and guide the development of their children, rather than just observe the child’s natural growth, or fully trust other professionals as much as they trust their own parental influence. By contrast, working-class parents tend to see themselves as ‘responsible for the care of their children but would otherwise presume that their children would spontaneously grow and thrive’ (Lareau & Cox, 2011, p. 134) thus turning responsibility to professionals within the school. In this respect, a study of ethnic minority parents who immigrated to the UK demonstrated that these parents did not believe their involvement in school was necessary (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Furthermore, Crozier (1997) and Crozier and Davies (2007) showed that working class parents tended to view teachers as professionals who hold superior knowledge on how children should be educated, a perception that led them to engage in their child's school very rarely. In contrast, middle-class parents exhibited a greater sense of ownership over educational knowledge and displayed an 'active consumer' approach to involvement in school (Crozier, 1997; Crozier & Davies, 2007). Research also suggests that regardless of their social class, parents tend to develop peer networks through their children’s out-of-school activities. However, there are social class differences in how parents use their networks when they get involved in school (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). For example, middle-class parents tend to use their network more frequently than working-class parents to gather information about their child’s school (Horvat et al., 2003). Middle-class parents also tend to act collectively rather than independently when they seek to drive changes within their child’s school and recruit the help of professionals, thus maximising their impact (Horvat et al., 2003).

Research shows lower levels of participation in school among single-parents (Epstein, 2011) compared to co-parents, with no difference between single-fathers and single-mothers (Goldman, 2005). Geographical constraints were found to be a barrier to parental involvement: parents who live or work far from the school are less involved than those residing in the school’s proximity (Epstein, 2011). This could be explained by time pressures as well as the financial costs associated with getting involved, which might be unaffordable for some fathers. Non-resident fathers could experience challenges in getting involved in their child’s education for various other reasons, including tensions and conflicts between the mother and the father, or the father and his children (Dunn, 2004; Trinder, Beek, & Connolly, 2002) and the lack of clarity regarding the division of parental responsibilities after separation (Trinder et al., 2002). Non-harmonious and dysfunctional relationships between the mother and the father could also be an obstacle for resident fathers’ involvement in his child’s education and school (Goldman, 2005).
Child factors

Child characteristics are found to predict the levels of parental involvement in education. Evidence shows that parental involvement in education and school tends to decline with child’s age (Epstein, 2011; Hill et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This decline could be attributed to a number of reasons. For example, adolescents might not want their parents to get involved as before. Parents might hesitate to participate if they have had a negative experience with the school in the past. They might also lack the confidence to effectively help their children with the more advanced learning material of secondary school (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Research also shows that parents tend to get more involved in their boys’ schooling than in their girls’ schooling (McBride et al., 2005). Other child factors that may positively influence father involvement in education and school are learning difficulties, behavioural problems, or gifts and talents (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). If the child is at either end of the performance spectrum, parents are more likely to get involved in their education because their involvement is required in ‘the process of implementing individual education programmes’ (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 43). However, in some cases, negotiating how to meet the child’s needs could be complicated and involve disagreements and tension, thus negatively affecting the parent-school relationship.

Parent-teacher relationships and school-specific factors

School ethos and culture, as manifested by institutional policies, procedures, staff attitudes and language, all play a significant role in determining the level to which a father will, or will not, engage with school. The ways by which schools communicate with families influence engagement. For example, parents are more likely to engage in their child’s education, at home and in school, upon receiving an explicit invitation to do so from the teacher, rather than a general one from the school (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Indeed, direct communication with all caregivers is key for engagement. In this respect, a recent survey shows that only about half of all local authorities in Scotland have developed specific strategies to communicate with non-resident parents (typically fathers) regarding their child’s progress in school. Even smaller numbers developed targeted activities to engage non-resident parents in their child’s education (Children in Scotland, 2014).

Teachers’ attitudes towards parents might also hinder involvement in school. Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that educators tend to view the ‘ideal parent’ as someone who accepts the teachers’ decisions and supports the school agenda. However, Crozier and Davis (2007) showed that parents are not always aware of teachers’ expectations regarding how to get involved in their child’s education. Their study demonstrated that teachers labelled uninvolved parents as ‘hard to reach’, perceiving their lack of involvement as an expression of not caring about their child’s education. Confusion and lack of clarity around expectations and the division of responsibilities is an obstacle for developing an effective home-school partnership. Furthermore, the range of family activities on offer in schools, as well as the delivery of such activities, matters for parental involvement. Research suggests that fathers are more likely to get involved in hands-on activities, activities taking place on evenings and weekends and where there are designated male practitioners who work with them (O’Mara, Jamal, Llewellyn, Lehmann, & Cooper, 2010).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that even when parents and teachers equally appreciate the importance of parental involvement, they may have a different view on what such involvement entails. Consequently, the school space may become a potential arena of conflict and the family-school relationship a source of tension and dissatisfaction.
3.4 - Models for parental involvement in education and school

There is no single definition for father involvement in education in the literature, and there is also a lack of consensus regarding the definition of ‘parental involvement’. Furthermore, the distinction between the terms ‘parental involvement’ and ‘parental engagement’. It has been suggested that the term ‘parental involvement’ focuses on mothers’ and fathers’ interaction with the school while ‘parental engagement’ focuses on their approach to children’s learning (Goodall, 2013). Thus, Goodall and Montgomery (2014, p. 400) suggest that ‘parental engagement will involve a greater commitment, a greater ownership of action, than will parental involvement with schools’.

Parental involvement in education and school can be defined, and measured, in multiple ways. For example, such involvement can be described as ‘parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children’ (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245). This definition emphasises the actions parents undertake in relation to their children’s education. Such actions may include participation in activities within the school environment (eg: dropping off and picking up the child at the school gate, attending parents’ evenings or volunteering to assist in the classroom) as well as actions undertaken at home (eg: talking with the child about school, listening to him/her read and helping with homework). A different definition of parental involvement focuses on the academic socialisation: the extent to which parents communicate educational values, goals, expectations and aspirations for academic achievement (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). This definition highlights the parents’ cognitive and emotional investments in their child’s education, and the ‘positive attitudes parents have toward their child’s education, school, and teacher’ (Topor et al., 2010, p. 184).

Efforts by scholars to conceptualise the multidimensionality of parental involvement have resulted in a number of theoretical models for parental involvement in education. Epstein et al., (2002, 2009) developed an influential model for ‘School, Family, and Community Partnerships’ that features six types of involvement in education: parenting, communicating, volunteering, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Table 2). The model includes a range of guidelines and practical ideas for schools on how to engage with families and create collaborative learning opportunities within the community. The model, however, can be criticised for placing only limited emphasis on the inclusion of parents from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1 Parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help all families establish home environments to support children as students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hornby’s (2011) model for parental involvement consolidates parents’ needs, on the one hand, with their contributions on the other. The model demonstrates that while all parents have some needs and some potential contributions, a smaller number have ‘an intense need for guidance, or the capability of making an extensive contribution’ (Hornby, 2011, p. 33). The model provides schools and educators with a useful template for auditing school procedures and practices, identifying strength and weaknesses within their school community and developing a tailored approach to parental involvement which takes into account the various life contexts of parents.

**Hornby’s (2011, p.34) model for parental involvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARENTAL CONTRIBUTIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOME</strong></td>
<td>POLICY FORMATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. PTA members, school governors, parent support/advocacy groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MANY</strong></td>
<td>ACTING AS A RESOURCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. classroom aides, fund-raising, supporting other parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOST</strong></td>
<td>COLLABORATING WITH TEACHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. home-school reading, maths and behavior programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL</strong></td>
<td>SHARING INFORMATION ON CHILDREN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. children’s strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, medical details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL</strong></td>
<td>CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. handbooks, newsletters, telephone contacts, homework diaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOST</strong></td>
<td>Liaison with School Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. home visits, parent-teacher meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MANY</strong></td>
<td>PARENT EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. parent workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOME</strong></td>
<td>PARENT SUPPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. counselling, support groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite not referring specifically to the challenges involved in engaging fathers in their child’s schooling, both Epstein’s model and Hornby’s model are useful analytical tools for exploring and understanding parental involvement in education or the lack of such involvement. The models were used in this study to inform the development of methods and guide the analysis and interpretation of data. In light of the need to limit the scope of the current study, the focus of the analysis is on direct involvement in school rather than other forms of fathers’ involvement in education.
4 - Methodology

This pilot study used a mixed-methods approach to gather data and answer the questions outlined above in section 1.1. This included secondary data from a large-scale longitudinal study and primary data collected for this study by using questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews. An overview of the various methods of data collection and analysis that were employed in this study are provided in the next sections (4.1 - 4.5).

4.1 - Fathers and school survey

Surveys were designed to capture both fathers' and school staff perceptions of involvement in school, as well as to identify what helps and stops fathers getting involved in their child's school. The surveys' development has been informed by Epstein's (2002, 2009) framework of six types of involvement and Hornby's (2011) model for parental involvement. The surveys were reviewed by the ELFFS project facilitators and piloted before being administered at the five East Lothian primary schools in February-March 2017. As a result of this review process, the survey was shortened. Also, small changes were made to the phrasing of some questions to make the survey more accessible to people from different backgrounds. The father questionnaire was translated into Polish and Greek upon requests from participating schools. Given the small sample size of the father and school surveys, the findings from these surveys should be taken as indicative rather than as representative of the views and behaviours all primary school fathers and school staff in East Lothian.
Respondents - Fathers’ survey

116 fathers from five primary schools in East Lothian completed a survey about fathers’ involvement in schools. Among these: 34 (29%) fathers have children in nursery school, 52 (45%) have children in P1 and 30 (26%) with P7 children. The demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3:ELFFS project - fathers’ survey - sample's characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father's age (n=116)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 years and under</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 years and over</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children (&lt;16ys) (n=116)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One child</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two children</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three children</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (n=115)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/civil partner</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single/Divorced/Separated/Widowed/Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest educational qualification (n=108)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid job status (n=114)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual income (n=96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£13,999 &amp; less</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£14k - £21,999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£22k - £29,999</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£30k - £37,999</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£38k - £45,999</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£46k – £53,999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£54k &amp; over</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (n=116)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's gender (n=116)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to child (n=116)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological father</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster/Step Father</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that the focus of this report is on father involvement in primary school, the analysis presented in sections B and C uses data collected from the 82 primary school Fathers and excludes fathers with nursery school children.
56 staff members at five primary schools in East Lothian completed a survey about fathers’ involvement in schools. The demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 4: ELFFS project – school staff survey - sample’s characteristics</strong></th>
<th><strong>Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>%</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher’s age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 years or under</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years old</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45 years old</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55 years old</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching role</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative role</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time worked at the school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years and over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time worked in education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years and over</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest level of education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate diploma</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNCs/HNDs/DipHE/CertHE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school diploma</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly working hours</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29 hours</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 hours or more</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 - Fathers’ and champions’ interviews

Overall 23 semi-structured one-to-one in-depth interviews were conducted for this study: 10 fathers’ interviews and 13 champions’ interviews, as described below:

Fathers’ interviews

In-depth one-to-one interviews with six fathers from one of the five ELFFS project schools were carried out for this project in February 2017. Four of these fathers participated in a one-to-one follow-up interview in June 2017, in which they were invited to reflect and elaborate on the themes discussed in the first interview. The interviews took between 20-60 minutes and were conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee. The youngest interviewees were in their early 30s and the oldest in their late 40s. Fathers had at least one child in either P1 or P7. The interviewees' jobs vary but can be classified as middle-class occupations. To protect the anonymity of the interviewees and their families, all names were changed at the transcription phase, and the report uses numbers to identify each respondent (e.g., 'Father 1', 'Father 2'). For the same reason, general phrases were used to refer to family members (e.g., 'my child', 'my son/daughter', 'my partner'). Given the small number of fathers interviewed for this study and their characteristics, the findings from these interviews should be taken as indicative rather than as representative of the population from which the sample was drawn.

Champions’ interviews

In-depth one-to-one interviews with six school champions, representing the six ELFFS project's schools were carried out for this project in February-March 2017. Five of these champions, representing five of the schools involved, participated in a follow-up interview in June 2017 (one school has ended its participation in the project mid-way). The follow-up interview intended to allow the champions to reflect and elaborate on the themes discussed in the first interview and discuss the implementation of father-inclusive practice in their school. Furthermore, two of the ELFFS project facilitators were interviewed in June 2017. Background information on the school champions and project facilitators is presented in table 1. The interviews took between 30-60 minutes and were conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the research team and coded by the first author (using N-Vivo 10.0 software). The second author independently coded a number of transcripts to complement the analysis. Following Mayo and Siraj (2015), two approaches were used to create the coding categories. A 'top-down' approach was used to identify themes based on the two models for parent involvement in education presented above in section 2.4. A bottom-up approach was used to reveal 'the perceptions of the participants as expressed in the interviews (Mayo & Siraj, 2015, p. 51). To protect the anonymity of the champions who volunteered to participate in these interviews, their names were changed at the transcription phase. In this report, they will be referred to as 'Champion 1', 'Champion 2' and so forth. It should be noted that the findings from these interviews should be taken as indicative rather than as representative of the population from which the sample was drawn.
4.3 - Child focus group

Data were collected in a semi-structured focus group discussion with five P7 children (3 girls and 2 boys) from one of the ELFFS project schools in June 2017. This method was chosen because it allows participants to 'stimulate, build upon, and query each others’ ideas through discussion' (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009, p. 448) and has been suggested as a way of 'breaking down the unequal power relationships between adults and children in the research process' (Boyden & Ennew, 1997, p. 132). A focus group protocol was developed to initiate and guide a conversation about children's perspectives on, and experiences of, their fathers' involvement in school. Participating children were chosen by the school's champion and the class teacher, and were diverse in terms of their family structure and ethnicity. The class teacher provided the selected children with initial information about the nature and purpose of the study, to determine if they were interested in participating in the focus group and to obtain oral consent. Written informed consent was also obtained from their parents, who were provided with a leaflet containing information about the research and the contact details of the first author.

The focus group took place in the children's school and lasted 60 minutes. At the onset, the researchers ensured that the children understand the purpose of the meeting and set out some ground rules for the conversation, before obtaining written consent from each participant. A short ice breaker activity was then carried out to create a relaxed atmosphere within the group. This was followed by a guided conversation in which the children were offered opportunities to discuss issues around fathers' involvement in education and school. The discussion was transcribed verbatim and was read several times by the first author to identify words and sentences that capture the core issues and thoughts expressed by the participants. In the next step of the analysis, these core issues were grouped into themes in keeping with the principles of thematic analysis.

4.4 - Secondary analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

Given the limited empirical evidence on trends in fathers’ involvement in schools in Scotland, data from the MCS were used in this study to inform and complement the analyses of data collected in the ELFFS project. The MCS is a large-scale longitudinal birth cohort survey, which collects data on children born between 2000 and 2002 across the four territories of the UK. The MCS visits the cohort children and their families at two-yearly intervals, gathering information on their health, education, family life and development (Hansen, Jonson, Joshi, Jones, & Mcdonald, 2010).

Data presented in this report were taken from the Scottish sub-sample of the third, fourth and fifth sweep of the MCS, when the cohort children were 5-year-olds, 7-year-olds and 11-year-olds, respectively.

4The MCS used a complex sampling framework to recruit participants which means that the data is clustered geographically. The MCS also oversampled participants from disadvantaged social backgrounds and those who identified themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority group. To statistically account for these structural elements in the MCS sampling process, all response frequencies presented in this report are based on weighted data as recommended by the survey documentation. Also, the "complex samples" procedure in SPSS was utilised in all analyses that report statistical significance. This method takes into account the survey’s weights, geographical clusters and socioeconomic stratification and gives more confidence that the findings from the surveyed participants can be generalised to the wider population in Scotland. The level of statistical significance in this project is set at p<0.05 which means that the probability of obtaining the observed results by chance (and so an estimate not being representative of the general population) is no more than 5%.
4.5 - Ethics statement

Ethical research practice on this project was guided by the ethical guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), available here: https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf?noredirect=1. The research team also used the 'Children in Focus - a Manual for Participatory Research with Children' (Boyden & Ennew, 1997) to inform the development and delivery of the study's child focus group. These guidelines were developed to guide social researchers in conducting research to high ethical standards and protecting research participants from harm of any kind throughout the research process.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social & Political Science (SSPS) at the University of Edinburgh.
Section B – Fathers’ Involvement in Primary School, Trends and Perceptions

5 - What does ‘fathers’ involvement in school’ mean for fathers, teachers and children?

Analyses of data from the ELFFS project show that fathers, school staff and children alike are very clear about the importance of father involvement in children’s education. Respondents in the ELFFS surveys and interviews, as well as the child focus group discussion, associated the involvement of fathers with a range of advantages for children, schools and the wider community. However, fathers, staff and children sometimes differ in the importance they attributed to different aspects of such involvement. Overall, the meaning of father involvement in school can be organised around three main themes:

- Supporting children’s learning;
- Influencing children’s development;
- Offering a positive male role model;

5.1 - Supporting children’s learning

A strong message from the interviews is that fathers and champions consider the meaning and value of fathers’ involvement in school from a ‘child-centred’ approach. There was an overwhelming agreement among all adult respondents that fathers and schools have a mutual goal - to achieve the best outcomes for the child, with fathers having a crucial role to play in this joint endeavour. For schools, the involvement of fathers was portrayed as an invaluable opportunity to develop a more rounded understanding of the child:

‘We get to understand the whole family, we get to understand how we can support people, how they can support us, how we can support the children...So we work together. You know, we know a lot about education, they know a lot about the family and their children, so we work together with all parents, then we can get the best for the children...’

(Alison Cameron, AHT and project facilitator)

‘I think the biggest benefit is that they [schools/teachers] are going to get a better understanding of the child. If you are always going to be engaging with the mum, you really only ever engage with half the child.’

(Father 6, interview 1)

‘And the other thing we noticed, we do stage assessment meetings for children who need support in school, and it tended to be the female carer who always came along to that, rather than the father. And then often you had a different viewpoint when the father came because they saw different things in their child to what the mum had seen.’

(Champion 5, interview 1)
The involvement of fathers was also seen as an effective mechanism for reinforcing the importance of education and subsequently boosting children’s engagement with school, especially among boys:

‘It shows the child that the father cares about the child’s education. Therefore it gives it value.’

(Champion 7, interview 1)

‘It’s really great for the kids to see both of their parents involved and especially for, I think, the boys. You find further up the school that the boys can become a bit more reluctant about the school...it’s not cool to do well at school...but if they see their father taking an interest, it’s a positive role model for them, and they think ‘Oh well, father says it’ll all right...’

(Champion 5, interview 1)

‘...I certainly feel as if I’m always trying to push the benefits of education onto my boys. They are probably sick of hearing it! But I don’t mind saying this time and time again because it is until they have actually gone through their education and have got a job and a career that they want, I think they need to be told that and they need to work hard, permanently.’

(Father 4, interview 1)

Evidence from the child focus group echoes the views of the dads and teachers, suggesting that children internalise the sentiments of their parents about education. The parents’ experiences provide references for children's understanding of the value of education and their educational aspirations, as this girl illustrates:

‘My dad...has taught me this mindset...my mum went to university when she was younger but my dad...no one really encouraged him to go, he just decided not to. So he has taught me this mindset that you have to go to university...and you have to get this education.’

(Child 2, Girl)

The interviewed champions reflected specifically on the role fathers play in raising pupils’ attainment, thereby enabling children and schools to succeed:

‘...Where we have a high parental engagement in the learning, we tend to see children’s attainment and achievement improving. So if fathers were also seeking involvement in that, or leading that, to me, it would only have a positive effect on raising attainment and achievement across the board...The support is needed from fathers to help us achieve our goals...which is obviously the successful education of each child.And raising the attainment and achievement of each child. So schools need fathers to be involved, so we have that double prong of attack.’

(Champion 1, interview 1)
Fathers also repeatedly highlighted the importance of education, but with no specific references to attainment, or comments on efforts to help their child’s school in reaching educational/policy targets. Data from the child focus group provide further insight into the critical role fathers play in their children's learning. In reflecting on the various ways by which their fathers helped them do well in school, one child recalled her dad assisting in developing the soft study skills needed for successfully adjusting to the requirements of the school:

‘My dad helped me learn my times table when I was little for school.’
(Child 1, Girl)

The children recognised that sometimes the father’s assistance complemented mother’s help, in which case they benefited from diverse approaches to supporting their learning at home:

‘My mum has actually gone higher in math than my dad has. But for a weird reason the way my dad explains math just makes it click in my brain.’
(Child 2, Girl)

A further observation shared in the child focus group was that fathers and mothers sometimes differ in their views about child education and development:

My dad also teaches me...what’s the best way to get a good job, and how I should like approach that... and he just encourages me to do the right thing. Whereas my step mum, she thinks that I'm gonna be young for ever, so she doesn’t like me to think about any of the older stuff.
(Child 4, Girl)

Regardless of the extent to which fathers directly engaged with formal learning support they were also portrayed by all children as providers of informal learning opportunities that extend beyond the school’s curriculum. Multiple examples were given in the focus group to illustrate how fathers enable skills development across various learning contexts:

‘My dad usually teaches me like more like rough stuff. Like building wood things and like building electronics because he like always does it for my family, like my mom just gets out of the way...and then we would build that together, like basically all the woodwork.’
(Child 1, Girl)

‘Like money, he taught me how the bills work.’
(Child 4, Girl)

‘My dad teaches me things that are a bit more practical. Like he enjoys gardening, so he taught me how to garden. He enjoys cooking, so he taught me how to cook.’
(Child 2, Girl)

‘My dad he teaches me stuff that helps me. Like he teaches how to run a shop, he teaches me how to, like building stuff and what to do when you're in this situation and stuff...’
(Child 5, Boy)
There was a strong view, particularly among the school champions (but to some degree among the interviewed fathers too), that schools could benefit from the range of talents and expertise fathers have:

‘Fathers could identify their own skills that they could bring into the school and could maybe provide their own groups that help the children in the long run... One Father in my class comes in on a Wednesday. He has got a good level of French, so he comes in at lunchtime on Wednesday and does a French group which the children go along too...’

(Champion 6, interview 1)

‘...parents that had, and again I want to say it’s both male and female, that had particular skill sets that could offer something to school would come in and often volunteer their services at that specific event or when it was needed...so, for example, the gardening club at school, a number of parents would come and help with that.’

(Champion 4, interview 1)

Figure 1 lends further support to the finding that school staff value the involvement of fathers. 93% of the surveyed staff members in the ELFFS project strongly agreed or agreed that schools benefit from developing positive partnerships with fathers. 76% of the surveyed fathers shared a similar view, suggesting that fathers are perhaps less convinced than staff members as to their potential contributions to their child’s school. A higher percentage of staff members strongly agreed or agreed that fathers know about education just as much as teachers, 44% compared to 11%, respectively. This finding may reflect a belief that fathers and staff are not equally knowledgeable about education and could indicate that there may be a power division between fathers and schools in relation to ownership over, and responsibility for, children’s education. The finding suggests that staff and fathers alike might benefit from shifting from a deficit-based model to a capabilities-based model in reflecting on fathers’ knowledge and skills, focusing on fathers’ strengths and respecting their role as partners working in partnership to co-construct support for children’s success.

Overall, responses to the ELFFS surveys and interviews reflect an agreement among fathers and staff members that fathers’ involvement in school is key for supporting positive child outcomes and espousing the importance of education. However, the findings also indicate that fathers are not perceived as equally knowledgeable about education as mothers.
5.2 - Influencing children’s development

Father involvement in school was universally cited in the adult interviews as an opportunity to actively expand the parameters of fatherhood, through being present in the child’s life and sharing everyday experiences. In turn, treating the child respectfully as a fully merited person, rather than as an adult in the making, was perceived as a way to deepen the father-child relationship:

‘I think for the fathers themselves, just that knowing that they have got that contact with their child. Not just going to work, coming home, having their dinner, child’s off out, doing whatever they are doing, then they come back... Gives them a bit more to talk about as well. Just to share. I can’t see how it can’t bring them closer together, instead of pigeon-holing it and saying: ’it’s not my responsibility’.

(Champion 7, interview 1)

‘It’s just fun, being a father, really! Trying to... do all the right things. It’s not always easy, knowing the right things to do, but I don’t think I’ve done too bad of a job with it... You can’t just section off parts of your children’s life...’

(Father 4, interview 1)

‘From fathers’ point of view, enjoyment and pleasure! Actually seeing what your child is doing. Seeing what they are getting up to between Monday to Friday between 9 and 3. And then there is the parents’ side as well... It can be a social side as well if all the parents know each other. The kids can go to a sleep over at one child’s one time, and their parents can go out and enjoy themselves. And then the kids can move around the houses so that everybody has a shot watching the kids, while everybody else has a chance to go out.’

(Father 6, interview 1)

Data from the interviews show that fathers wish to increase their positive influence on their children’s development and believe that involvement in school offers an invaluable opportunity to do so. The interviewed fathers verbalised the idea that being present and getting involved in their child’s education and school would enable them to build up an enduring tradition of caring and openness that might safeguard the child from future risks:

‘It may sound like we are making a big thing out of something small, but I want my son to know that he can speak to us about anything at all! Even if he thinks it is really trivial because I know that when he is older, there are things that are going to be not so trivial, that he can be scared to talk to us about. For example, when it comes to things like sex, drugs, the usual kind of ’dangerous’ stuff. So I want him to know that we are not going to judge, that he can speak to us. Because we can’t wrap him in cotton wool the whole life. So the only thing we can do is listen to him. And if he’s got something to say, we listen to him. So that’s the kind of main motivation, we want to be involved.’

(Father 2, interview 1)
In the children’s opinion, the presence of fathers and other male caregiver is very important for establishing a meaningful relationship. The children perceived the time they spent learning new things with their father as an opportunity to connect emotionally and as means of improving their own well-being:

‘My dad’s, when he’s not teaching me, I do it with my uncle, and in a way, I feel closer to my uncle than my dad. Because my dad is normally really busy. But my uncle teaches me; he taught me a lot of sport. He taught me what I actually need to know to get by in life.’

(Child 4, Girl)

‘My dad when I was little I loved to play golf, so it’s quite nice sometimes when I feel a little bit stressful just come and play golf [with him].

(Child 2, Girl)

‘He’s always there when I want someone to play with, and when I fall out with my mom, he is always there to have like a laugh with.’

(Child 3, Boy)

So, children and fathers alike value the time they spend together, for example learning new things, as this enables them to develop and maintain a positive relationship. The data show that fathers commit themselves to supporting their children’s learning and development, albeit this commitment is only partially exercised via direct involvement in school. However, the focus group discussion shows that direct involvement in school is very important for children because it means that the father is present in aspects of their lives that could otherwise go unnoticed. For example, children were keen to celebrate achievements together with their fathers:

‘I would like my dad to come to stuff that’s like assemblies or just like stuff that actually means to me… I want my dad to be proud of me or something.’

(Child 4, Girl)

‘[I] like my dad to come and see me for things like awards. Sometimes he can’t make it to every single one. Like I’m not saying that he can come to every single one, but I would like him to at least try… and even come in until five minutes then go away. Because he doesn’t actually have to see the whole thing.’

(Child 1, Girl)

The children were aware that due to work commitments it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, for their fathers to get involved in school. Nevertheless, they wanted to feel that their fathers appreciated their school lives. Children wished their fathers were involved, at least in the ’big things’, namely events that matter to them:

‘My dad does try. He comes to the big things, and it’s nice that he does try, but sometimes he has to work. It’s good to know that he takes value of that.’

(Child 2, Girl)

‘My dad doesn’t really come on any trips for the school because like he is always working… He just comes to the most important things. So like assemblies, any big plays and like any big dance shows that he likes to watch.’

(Child 1, Girl)
In the absence of perceived or actual barriers to participation, a father’s lack of willingness to engage in school was a source of disappointment and frustration, as one child reported:

‘My dad actually never came to assembly or anything with me because he always says he’s too busy, but most of the time he just either forgets or just don’t want to get involved. And so when I do ask him he doesn't actually come. So at my last my assembly that I asked him he said he would come but he always breaks his promise... so it’s like I always give up asking him to come to anything.

(Child 4, Girl)

5.3 - Offering a positive male role model

Fathers and school champions all emphasised the importance of a positive male role model for children, linking the concept of father involvement with egalitarian ideas: they perceived involvement in school as an opportunity for fathers to demonstrate a model of equal parenthood, appropriate for 21st century Scottish society:

‘Because they are learning and they shouldn’t really get an impression that mums are the only ones who pick people, em, children, from school. And things like mums are the only ones who cook dinner...You know, that kind of things has to be systematically removed, from the very beginning.’

(Father 3, interview 1)

‘I think it would reflect the aims of the rest of the society at the moment in Scotland. As in we are aiming for equality, and equity, as a nation. So this idea of 50-50 and balance, I would like to see the school reflecting these ideas and aims, in the sense of there being a balance and equality between genders. For a school to reflect that, and for parental engagement to reflect that.’

(Champion 7, interview 1)

School champions also highlighted the connection between positive male role models and education, suggesting that male role models are important for children’s engagement with learning:

‘My opinion would be, it’s the sort of image is the image of learning and the image of education. And how that is portrayed to the child, in terms of fathers being a role model for learning. Just that I can say being a male teacher, I can feel I am a role model for some in my class, or perhaps boys, you know, things like that. So I would say the same thing about the fathers.’

(Champion 1, interview 1)

A positive male role model has also been mention as helpful in preparing the child for a successful integration is society, an important aspect of the Curriculum for Excellence:

‘I think there would be a lot of male and female caregivers who would be happy to come and support not just their own children, but the children within the community... And supporting, demonstrating to children good citizenship, which is also one of the principles of Curriculum for Excellence.’

(Champion 4, interview 1)

Given the importance fathers and staff attach to dads’ involvement in school, a subsequent question is: what do fathers do when they get involved in primary school?
6 - What do fathers do when they get involved in primary school?

Fathers can do many different things, at home and in the school environment, to engage in the education of their children. To better understand what fathers do when they get involved in primary school, this study first analysed data from the Scottish sub-sample of the ‘Millennium Cohort study’ (MCS). Data from years 2006, 2008 and 2011 were analysed, when the cohort children were about 5-year-old, 7-year-old and 11-year-old respectively. The MCS asked parents to indicate whether they have been to a parent’s evening or a similar event in their child’s school since the beginning of the school year. This was followed up with a question on who attended the parents’ evening, which enables to record, for each child, whether the mother went alone, whether the father went alone, or whether both parents attended together.

Figure 2 shows that fathers attended their child’s parents’ evening in lower percentages than mothers: 41% of fathers with 5-year-olds stated that they have been to a parents’ evening in their child’s school compared to 71% of mothers. Similarly, about half (51%) of fathers with 7-year-olds indicated that they attended a parents’ evening compared to nearly 80% of mothers. There was no statistically significant difference between the attendance rate of those in lone-parent families and those in two-parent families.
Figure 3 shows that at age 5, in about 48% of all cases where at least one parent attended their child’s parents’ evening, the mother attended alone whereas in 9% the father attended alone, and in the remaining 43% both parents participated in the parents’ evening. A similar pattern can be seen for age 7 and 11: in about 43% and 51% of all cases, the mother attended her child’s parents’ evening alone, respectively. In 42% and 37% the mother and father participated in the parents’ evening together and in 16% and 12% it was the father who attended the parents’ night alone.

Statistically significant differences were found in the rate of attendance at parents’ evenings across households’ income levels in the primary school years. Figure 4 shows the participation rate at parents’ evenings at age five by partitioning the sample into income quintiles. Out of those families who had at least one carer attend a parents’ evening, about 74% of families from the lowest income quintile reported that they had only the mother attend a parents’ evening, 5% only the father, and 21% had both parents attend. In contrast, 32% of families from the highest income quintile stated that only the mother went to a parents’ evening, 8% only the father, and the majority (60%) had both parents attend. This variation in attendance at parents’ evenings by households’ incomes is also statistically significant at age 7 and age 11: the higher the family income is, the more likely both the mother and the father have attended a parents’ evening in their child’s school.
The next analysis shows that there is a variation in the rate of attendance at parents' evenings by parental occupation, but only among fathers. As can be seen in figure 5, in MCS3, of all fathers who were not in employment, about 21% attended a parents' evening compared to about 48% of those with routine/manual occupations, 50% of those working for a small employer or are self-employed and 54% of those with a managerial/professional occupation. Fathers with an occupation classified as 'intermediate' have the highest attendance rate at parents' evenings – over 60% of those MCS3 fathers had been to a parents' evening in their child's school. In contrast, mothers' attendance rate at parents' evenings is found to be independent of occupational status with no statistically significant differences in the participation rates of mothers with various jobs. This link between the father's (but not the mother's) occupation and his likelihood of attendance at parents' evenings is also found in MCS4 and MCS5, when the cohort children are aged about 7 years and 11 years, respectively.

Further analysis shows that there is also a variation in the rate of attendance at parents' evenings across the various stages of primary school by parental education, but again, only among fathers. Figure 5 shows that in MCS3, of all fathers with a university degree (or equivalent), about 54% attended a parents’ evening compared to about 48% of those with either sub-degree qualifications or secondary school qualifications, and 41% of fathers who do not have any formal educational qualifications. While there is also a variation in the percentage of mothers attending a parents’ evening by their level of educational qualifications the difference is not statistically significant. This link between fathers’ (but not mothers') qualifications and attendance at parents' evenings is also found in MCS4 and MCS5: highly educated fathers are more likely to attend parents’ evenings at their child’s school than less highly educated fathers.
Data from MCS4, when the cohort children were about 7-year-olds, show fathers’ and mothers’ involvement in a range of voluntary activities in their child’s school (Figure 7). Overall, across the seven types of parental involvement in school that were presented to the surveyed parents, the percentage of fathers who stated that they got involved is lower than the percentage of mothers who indicated that they got involved. While the difference between fathers’ and mothers’ participation in activities outside the class (e.g., with special interest groups like drama or sports) is small, it seems that fathers are much less involved than mothers in aspects of school such as helping in the classroom, joining school trips and taking part in parents’ committees.
This analysis of data from a nationally representative survey lends weight to conclusions from previous literature that parental involvement in childcare and education remain highly gendered in modern day Britain.

Findings from the analysis of data collected as part of the ‘East Lothian Father-friendly School (ELFFS)’ project are in agreement with the national trend in Scotland, according to which mothers are more involved in school than fathers. In their one-to-one in-depth interviews, all champions reported that they engage much more frequency with mothers than with fathers. Multiple examples were given by the champions to demonstrate that, in comparison to mothers, fathers are involved in fewer school matters and at a lower frequency. There are a number of reasons why teachers tend to engage in direct contact with mothers more than they do with fathers. These will be discussed in section 7 of this report.

‘My personal experience of fathers’ involvement is, I would say, minimal. In terms of meeting them and engaging directly with them. It is predominantly always been the mother. My experience would certainly be that the main times I would speak to fathers in my role would be at Parent Consultation evenings, twice a year. Informal communication between school and home usually always comes from the mother. So if I have a letter, a telephone call…9 times out of 10, it would be the mother that has done so.’

(Champion 1, interview 1)

“In terms of helping in the classroom, it is more female carers that would come in and take on that role. And we still have a higher proportion of females to males within our Parent Council.”

(Champion 2, interview 1)

‘A lot of the trips and visits that we go on, mums come on to help with that…’

(Champion 6, interview 1)

Fathers in two-parent families expressed a similar awareness of the gender involvement gap when they reflected on their parental involvement practice, as this father reported:

‘If I had a list of all the things that children do at school, I’d probably put a mother against all of them.”

(Father 2, interview 1)

An exception to that traditional gender division comes from a single father, who stated that:

‘Because being a single father and such... I am pretty much the only port of call they have had. So I’ve got be quite involved…”

(Father 6, interview 1)

Despite acknowledging the multiple barriers to involvement in school, all interviewees, be it fathers or champions, expressed the opinion that fathers should be as much involved as mothers in the education of children:

‘There’s nothing to stop male caregivers coming in and doing anything that female caregivers have the opportunity to do.’

(Champion 3, interview 1)

‘I think fathers could be a lot more proactive and express an interest, express more of an interest in the child’s education and make time to come into school to see what’s going on and to go along to events…”

(Champion 6, interview 1)
‘I don’t see any reason why fathers couldn’t do any of the stuff that mothers do. Putting more times into the stuff that the school is calling for, paying attention to what your child’s bringing. Even voice their opinion, or hear what’s going on.’
(Father 2, interview 1)

Consistent with findings from the MCS and with Hornby’s (2011) model for parental involvement, data from the ELFFS Father questionnaire (Figure 8) show that the rate of fathers’ involvement varies across different aspects of the school.

![Figure 8: Since the beginning of this school year, have you done any of the followings at your child’s school? (n=80-81)](chart)

As can be seen in Figure 8, the majority of fathers surveyed stated that they had visited their child’s school (84%) and had spoken with their child’s class teacher (83%) at least once since the beginning of the school year. Over three-quarters of the fathers have also attended a school event and 39% provided the school with information about their child’s talents or needs. The rate of participation decreases for volunteering activities: 9% of the surveyed fathers stated that they have contributed to special school activities such as school trips, school events or sports days and 4% volunteered in everyday school activities in the classroom, library, office or playground. Unquestionably, there are various reasons why fathers’ participation rate in voluntary activities in school is low, including a limited supply of suitable opportunities to volunteer or little awareness of such opportunities, uncertainty about how to volunteer or lack of confidence in participating in the volunteering activities on offer. The obstacles for involvement will be discussed later in this report.

The ELFFS school survey asked staff members to indicate how frequently they believe a typical father engages in various aspects of the school. The results are illustrated in Figure 9.
A comparison between Figure 8 and Figure 9 shows that while 16% of the surveyed fathers indicated that, since the beginning of the school year they had not visited their child’s school, staff members estimated that 5% of all ‘typical’ fathers had never done so. 17% of fathers stated that they have not met/spoken with their child’s class teacher, compared to an estimation by staff members that 2% have never done so. 96% of fathers indicated that they have not helped/volunteered in their child’s school (e.g., classroom, library, school office or playground), while staff members estimated that among ‘typical fathers’, 59% have never helped. Overall, this comparison shows that a smaller share of staff than fathers reported that father had not been involved in various aspect of the school. Of course, this discrepancy does not necessarily mean that the surveyed staff overestimated the extent to which fathers got involved in school or that fathers underestimated their involvement. This inconsistency could stem from variations in the questions used to record fathers and staff responses, from differences in how fathers and school staff interpreted these issues, and from dissimilarities in the characteristics of the fathers’ and school staff samples. Furthermore, it could be that staff reports are based on a small minority of very involved fathers, even though many other fathers don’t take part as frequently as those few distinct fathers.

To conclude, findings from the analysis of nationally representative data for Scotland show that fathers’ involvement in school is limited in scope and frequency compared to that of mothers. Survey and interview data collected in primary schools in East Lothian indicate that fathers are more inclined to get involved in activities that are directly related to their own child (e.g. visit his/her classroom, meet/talk with the teacher) than in voluntary activities with the entire class or school community. The findings show that fathers and staff alike are well aware of the gender gap in participation in various aspects of the school and believe fathers should be as involved as mothers as they have as much to give and children will benefit from their involvement. The next section, therefore, explores the following question: what do fathers and teachers view as key barriers to fathers’ involvement in school? How could these barriers be removed?

7 - What do fathers and teachers view as key barriers to fathers’ involvement in school? How could these barriers be removed?

Results from the father survey show that the majority of respondents (60%) feel they are fairly involved in their child’s school life (Figure 10). 11% of the fathers surveyed feel that they are very involved and 26% feel that they are not very involved. A small minority of fathers (2%) indicated that they are not involved in their child’s school at all.
There are many different reasons why fathers may not get involved in their child’s school to the extent they want. Data from the fathers’ and interviews suggest that key barriers to father involvement in school include:

- Work commitments and time pressures;
- Lack of adequate father-school communication;
- Gendered spaces and practices;
- Individual father and family circumstances.

7.1 - Work commitments and time pressure

Work commitments and time pressures were identified as a key barrier to involvement in school by fathers and staff alike. Working long hours was reported as an obstacle for participation in school by 90% of the fathers surveyed for the ELFFS project. 80% of these fathers stated that they also have other (non-work related) commitments that make it difficult for them to get involved in their child’s school.

Findings from the father interviews, although indicative rather than representative, lend support to the idea that fathers want to get involved in their child’s schooling in various ways, but find it difficult to do so due to their work commitments:

‘In my case, I’d like to be more involved, but to try to think about part time work – in what I do that’s not possible...’

(Father 2, interview 1)
‘I missed the Nativity play that the kids did because of work pressures. It was a morning, like 10:30 in the morning, a Monday. That was not suitable because Mondays are really busy at work. If it was 5 or 4:30 or even 2pm, I could like skip and come and then work later on. But mornings are pretty busy for most people... It’s a big no-no to have things on Monday mornings, to involve fathers.’

(Father 3, interview 1)

‘We’re certainly a family where I work full time and therefore don’t have the opportunity to [get involved] ... Whereas my partner works part time and so does have the opportunity to do the regular drop offs and pick-ups at school.’

(Father 5, interview 1)

Fathers reported finding it challenging to carve out time off work for pursuing greater involvement in their child’s school. Activities taking place during the school day seem inaccessible to working fathers, even in cases where these activities are specifically designed to engage parents or when the school has an ‘Open Door’ policy:

‘There is something else I’d like to do, but I cannæ do. Again, it is work, but they only offer it once a week. They offer for parents to come in on a Thursday afternoon, into the classroom, for half an hour, just after lunch. But it’s just a Thursday afternoon. And at lunchtime.’

(Father 6, interview 1)

In some cases, the pressures of work meant that fathers opted for using their family friendly work entitlements to get involved in their child’s school:

‘When my child started school...I took some parental leave to be able to take her to school and so on. I’ve also taken bits and pieces of leave to go to events at the school like recent Pirate Play and Christmas carol concert and stuff like that…’

(Father 5, interview 1)

However, using family-friendly workplace policies might prove difficult for some fathers. First, fathers might not be aware of their entitlements or have limited access to such policies. Second, traditional gender norms could make it challenging for dads to exercise their entitlements, as this father suggested:

‘Maybe mums find it easier to say, kids have a show at school, I’ll just come in at 10 instead of at 9. As opposed to fathers, who maybe think that it would take away part of their masculinity, thinking that it’s a weakness to say: “I want to go watch my bairn at school” as opposed to say coming into work.’

(Father 6, interview 1)

The champions interviewed for this project shared a similar view: they all felt that work commitments and time pressures prevent fathers from getting involved in their child’s education to the extent they want, and indicated that fathers are more likely to engage in activities that take place out with the regular school hours:

‘I think a lot of the time it’s not that the fathers don’t want to, but it’s because they can’t. I think work and jobs create a big problem. Just the logistics of it. As I said we deal with a lot of not working mums or those who work part time. So they have the availability to engage, just naturally they are afforded the opportunity. Whereas it seems to me that a lot of fathers are working longer hours, more hours, and therefore they don’t have that time to do so.’

(Champion 1, interview 1)
‘A lot of the things in the evenings, you always have a lot more fathers coming along to evening things because they have not got that work commitment.’

(Champion 6, interview 1)

When reflecting on possible ways to remove this barrier to involvement, all school champions expressed positive attitudes towards the prospect of introducing more activities out with the regular school hours. They also suggested that offering activities at the weekend could be an effective strategy to increase the involvement of working parents in their child’s education. At the same time, they flag up that extending the already overloaded working pattern of school staff may subsequently destabilise their work-life balance:

‘I think sometimes teachers are so busy and focused on their job that they forget that parents can come into school and support them in being involved... I suppose as a school we could look into ways in which we could adjust how we organise certain things, to try and bring fathers in at times that they can manage. But then that has an impact on the teaching staff within the school. And I don’t think in terms of teacher workload and school workload, that’s an easy option...’

(Champion 1, interview 1)

‘Problem is, as well, with your working time agreement. So you’re starting to get issue arising about teachers’ working time, unions and so on. There is a discussion in the staff room this afternoon, about the increased number of voluntary CPD sessions on Saturday afternoons...None of us mind coming in for events like the...But there needs to be a balance. And we need to have a chat about where that balance lies.’

(Champion 4, interview 1)

Both fathers and champions verbalised the idea that improvements in work-based family friendly policies are necessary to boost working parents’ involvement in school, with some referring specifically to models from Nordic countries, although questioning if such models are feasible within the contemporary Scottish context.

‘Some sort of grant that allows people to get a cover at work? Sounds very Scandinavian! I don’t see it happening in our current economic situation.’

(Champion 2, interview 1)

Another solution coming from the data is that working fathers need more notice of events in school. Extending the notice time given to fathers will not solve the problem of missing out routine, ordinary opportunities to get involved in school, but it could enable more working fathers to book time off for specific events or activities.
7.2 - Lack of effective communication

In this pilot study, the father-school communication was often portrayed as unsatisfactory in both quantity and quality.

Figure 11 displays the percentage of fathers in the ELFFS project who stated that, since the beginning of the current school year, the school has been in touch with them about various school and child related topics. 76% of these fathers indicated that the school has been in contact with them to provide general information and 73% stated that they had received information about their child’s progress with his/her learning. 59% of fathers were provided with information about their child’s talents and success and 53% received information about his/her difficulties and needs. Half of the surveyed fathers indicated that the school has been in touch with them regarding opportunities to volunteer in the school.

Figure 12 presents data from the school survey. Consistently across the seven school and child related topics presented in the survey, school staff were more likely to communicate with mothers than with fathers. For example, 82% of the surveyed staff stated that, in the past month, they have been in touch with a mother about her child’s difficulties and needs, compared to 65% who have been in contact with a father regarding such issues. Similarly, 56% of staff members have been in contact with a mother about opportunities to help/volunteer at the school, compared to 41% who have been in contact with a father about such opportunities.

The champions interviewed in this study confirmed that information about general school matters and activities would typically be addressed to the child’s parents, while when a need arises to contact a parent in person, it would normally be the child’s mother who is the first port of call. Both fathers and champions voiced the opinion that the latter practice is exclusionary of fathers. There could be a number of explanations for this practice, including a routine that took root in the school; subconscious choices made by teachers that reflect traditional gender divisions; or a practical approach leading to contact the parent who is more likely to be available, in many cases a mother who works part time or not at all. However, the champions reported that fathers sometimes block attempts to direct communication, by transferring responsibility to the mother:

‘If you are phoning somebody, and you get a dad on the phone he’d say: ‘Oh wait a minute...’ and he’d go get the mum!’

(Champion 7, interview 1)

‘...you would very rarely have a father come up to you [at the playground] and ask you a question or, if they had a wife, they would say ‘Oh, my wife is needing to speak to you about such and such’...’

(Champion 5, interview 1)

In this context, school champions argued that fathers may not be fully aware that they can get involved in their child’s school, or know very little of the different ways they might get involved. Champions thus suggested that fathers could benefit from more explicit invitations and clarification of expectations and procedures:

‘These children who just had a father, the father never ever came. They were always left without a parent or somebody there ...So I went down to the Fathers’ group, and some of my fathers were there ... and then one of them says: ‘Am I allowed to come up to your class like the mums? Naebody's going to think that I’m doing anything...? I say: ‘No. Not at all. We’re all parents.’

(Champion 5, interview 1)

A recurring theme in the champions’ interviews was that while mothers tend to get involved in school spontaneously, fathers need more encouragement, lending even more weight to the idea that fathers might benefit from specifically targeted, individualised communication:

‘Nobody is telling fathers: ‘your involvement is important!’

(Champion 1, interview 1)
The champions viewed the infrequent and sometimes fragmented communication with fathers as problematic. They reported that some fathers often have very little or no regular interaction with the school and they only come into contact with the school when something ‘goes wrong’ and the family feels the father’s involvement is needed as a ‘last resort’. In such cases the first contact between fathers and staff tends to be heated and emotive:

‘...Sometimes if the child is having a problem, quite often it’s the mum who comes in, and comes in, and comes in. And then father only comes in when it’s got to that stage when they feel, actually, this isn’t being sorted... Quite often when the father comes in says: “We’ve had enough! This is how it needs to go” ...So it’s about building that relationship before this happens, so it doesn’t get to that stage...’

(Champion 2, interview 1)

‘We have a lot of fathers who will not even pick up the phone; it’s mum who will do that. If it’s really serious and terrible, then it’s father. You know, it’s a mindset! I’m not saying that happens all the time, but there’s a bit of that somewhere. Letting father know that he’s here for the positive stuff as well.’

(Champion 7, interview 1)

Early communication, whether in person or via other means of communication was reported to be critical for establishing a positive father-school relationship. In this context, Figure 13 presents fathers’ responses as to whether or not, since the beginning of the school year, they have received information from their child’s school via different communication channels. 78% of the surveyed fathers received information by a letter sent home with the child. About three-quarters had a face-to-face conversation at school and received information via a school newsletter. 42% reported receiving information through social media and 23% via emails.

In their interviews, fathers reflected on how communicating with the school has helped them to support their child’s learning and get involved in school:

‘I have been informed how math is getting taught, how letters are being taught. And that has actually helped me to get the homework done.’

(Father 2, interview 1)

‘...Good things that happen just now, like we get the newsletter every few weeks that tells us what’s going on. And some feedback on things. And that’s been really useful ‘cause it means you can know what’s coming up, and you can think about getting a few hours off work to get involved. Or just generally just know about what’s on...’

(Father 1, interview 1)
However, all fathers questioned whether the communication channels currently used by the school are always effective. For example, some fathers criticised the practice of contacting the parents by sending home a letter with the child, volunteering that this practice could be exclusionary to caregivers who do not regularly do homework with their child or engage with the child about what is in the bag:

“You can fire as much information out via fliers as you want. I think a lot of the stuff that comes from the school is thrown into the bin. From what I know, I think stuff goes into the bag and gets thrown in the bin right outside the classroom.”

(Father 4, interview 1)

“I think there’s a little bit of a communication breakdown. It’s not like that school is not trying, but I think we miss out on some stuff, because of passing things through the child.”

(Father 3, interview 1)

“I think also that paper gets lost a lot. Kids stick it into their bags, they open it, it rips, and you may have no idea what was actually on it.”

(Father 6, interview 1)

Instead, fathers wondered if digital communications might be more effective in helping parents engage more easily and frequently, at least with some aspects of the school:

“Online communication would be really good ‘cause I can email from work, I can chat from work, do a lot of other things from work... All the schools in America are on Slack [Slack.com]... Slack brings it to another level because it is a project management tool so you can push things onto parents’ agenda.”

(Father 3, interview 1)

“...Most people now have a phone attached to their hand. So instead of sticking fliers out to a school bag, you have an electronic newsletter that just gets texted to people. At least then they maybe have more of a chance of reading it.”

(Father 4, interview 1)

At the same time, the interview data demonstrated that fathers engaged with digital technologies selectively, suggesting that the mere introduction of such communication channels by schools does not guarantee increased levels of engagement:

“There are already, em, kind of websites for the school, but I don’t know how many people use them. To be perfectly honest, I’ve not really used our website... Rightly or wrongly, hasn’t really interested me.”

(Father 4, interview 1)

“...I think they are on Twitter. Actually I should go on Twitter and check if they communicate that way.”

(Father 3, interview 1)
Indeed, the six primary schools involved in the study all had an up-to-date website and an active twitter account. However, fathers’ and champions’ data did not reveal much about the extent to which these generic social media channels were used, what content was communicated via these channels, and what procedures the schools used to monitor whether or not parents engage with the contents provided. On the contrary, the champions reported using a range of other digital technologies to share information and communicate with parents. This included using text messages to update parents on urgent matters, making videos of school events, meeting with non-resident parents on Skype, and operating online educational systems such as Google Classroom and Dojo:

“We have used Dojo for behaviour in school... [It’s] an online system so you can give points to children as rewards, so it picks up on the good things that they’ve been doing. So parents can link into that. They can see the points instantly. It allows them to send messages backwards and forwards as well. I was looking at myclass before I was coming down [here], and it’s majority female carers... I don’t think they [male caregivers] are aware that it can be both?... I wonder if we need to make that more explicit.’

(Champion 3, interview 1)

When reflecting on what might hinder fathers’ engagement with information delivered via their school’s digital communication channels, the champions offered some possible explanations. For instance, fathers might not be aware of all the different media the school uses. And even if they are, they might not have the appropriate knowledge to use these technologies. This suggests that fathers might benefit from a more explicit introduction of the various channels they, and the school, can use to communicate. Similarly, school staff might benefit from dedicated training on the how to engage fathers through digital technologies, including social media.

The champions offered an observation that sufficient contextual information about pupils’ lives is a prerequisite for effective home-school communication and indeed, crucial for supporting the individual learning and developmental requirements of each child. For example, they raised some issues around communicating with fathers living in non-traditional family structures, separated families or lone-parent families. They voiced the idea that their knowledge about the personal circumstances and family situation of fathers may be somewhat lacking and wondered whether it was sufficient to develop effective father-school communication channels. A related concern was that for some pupils, their relationship with their father, or the absence of such relationship, is a sensitive topic that requires a tactful approach:

‘I think because a lot of the children are coming from split families as well, I think information is not always passed on to both, or not all of the information is always passed onto both sets of parents. And I mean there are children in my class who I never met their fathers because they’re split up, and fathers don’t come to parents’ night, and I have not seen them... you don’t know do they know their fathers? Have they ever met their fathers? Does the mum know who the father is? And it’s almost awkward to then raise that discussion because - when do you have the opportunity to raise it?’

(Champion 6, interview 1)

‘...For example, if there’s been a behavioural issue, sometimes it’s a case of... if the parents are split, who’s that child is staying with tonight. Sometimes if they are together, who’s working who’s not, who’s working that day, who’s not.’

(Champion 4, interview 1)
The dynamic nature of schools means that, through no fault of their own, teachers sometimes lack basic information on their pupils’ circumstances. First, this may be because some data are not always easily accessible, for example, where there are communication barriers or when the required information is sensitive. Second, because circumstances change, for example, people move (both children and teachers), and the structure of families is not always fixed. Third, teachers face many competing demands during each school day, leaving them with little time to gather additional information. At the same time, data from the champions’ interviews show how information about the life circumstances of each child, and his or her father and family, can be gathered creatively. They reflected on inclusive communication practices their school has already put in place to engage with fathers, including: creating a list of all separated families and sharing it with class teachers; offering two appointments to parents in separated families for Parents’ Evenings, on different days, so that both parents could talk to teachers and did not have to meet the other; and being proactive in contacting absent fathers. One example comes from a champion who explained how her school communicated with a father in prison:

‘We had some parents who were in prison, who haven’t had any contact from school. So, we contacted them and spoke…and we got them the school report, and then we had a phone consultation at Parents’ night for that child.’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

Through getting to know the context of their pupils’ lives, educators are better positioned to engage with fathers, as well as to identify a range of other issues often hidden from the school’s view, including a recognition of a child’s greater need for support or his/her special achievement. However, in their interviews, some fathers reported that even when schools put in place inclusive communication systems, a breakdown in communication channels may occur, suggesting that suitable review procedures are also required:

‘And another thing, actually, is we gave the school both of our contact details, and it’s only my wife’s phone that gets all the communication.’

(Father 2, interview 1)

Finally, there are indications within the data that a tendency among some staff members to view the family as a unit, making assumptions about parents as a homogenous group, could make it difficult for them to consider challenges and possibilities faced by different caregivers:

‘Our school is very parent-friendly and works a lot with parents. A lot of what we do is aimed at parents rather than specifically mothers or fathers’.

(Anonymous teacher, school 5)

‘…I communicate and involve parents equally and rarely think of a ‘mother’ or ‘father’ divide and more as a ‘parent’.

(Anonymous teacher, school 1)

The findings suggest that although fathers’ involvement in school is highly valued, fathers are often ‘a missing link’ in the chain of communication between the home and the school. Removing the communication barrier is a complex task which requires schools and fathers to share information, expectations and knowledge. Early engagement with fathers could make fathers feel at ease, confident and reduce possible tensions. Signalling to fathers that their involvement is valued and their views matter might help in establishing such early relationships. Fathers might benefit from individualised messages directed at them, rather than to the parental unit.
7.3 - Gendered spaces and practices

Gendered spaces and practices were identified as another barrier to fathers’ involvement in school. Champions reported the need to raise awareness among school staff towards the use of unconsciously biased language that reflects traditional gender divisions and subsequently marginalises male carers, placing them outside the school discourse:

‘So… certainly some members of staff, you’ve got to say, you observe or hearing: “Tell your mummies when you go home…”. What about your father? Why do you need to tell your mum?…’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

Champions were also keen on promoting more balanced representations of mothers and fathers in the school environment and its communications (e.g., newsletters, leaflets, social media entries) as they saw a lack of positive male representation as a barrier to fathers’ engagement:

‘Are we making sure that if we have pictures, that we have a picture of a father with the children, as well as the mum? Or if we are celebrating success on the website, are we celebrating the success with the fathers and the mums? … I think it’s… not necessarily making huge changes, but it’s being more aware, and tactical, in what we’re putting out…’

(Champion 2, interview 1)

Champions also voiced a desire to see an equal reference to fathers and mothers in school activities and its curriculum:

‘We don’t really celebrate things like the Fathers’ Day… I tend to steer away from Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, anyway, although the Father’s Day isn’t even probably set up.’

(Champion 7, interview 1)

They also expressed the view that the school environment is a female dominated space, organised around a particular unspoken set of expectations and behavioural norms, wherein fathers might struggle to develop a sense of belonging:

‘So when a father is dropping off… See, women talk to one another. Whereas men, they drop off, and then they go. They don’t stop for a blether. They don’t do a blether and a chat!…What, do men not talk? Of course they do! They will have a blether in the pub.’

(Champion 7, interview 1)

‘More mums than fathers bring their children to the community cafe that we have, a lot more mums come along, but part of me thinks that because there is more mum coming, they make friendships and they come along and it’s almost like a social thing whereas when you have only one father he maybe feels not as included with the mums.’

(Champion 6, interview 1)
Some school spaces were identified as particularly ‘feminised’. The playground environment at pick-up and drop-off times was given as a prominent example of the spatial genderification in school, by champions and fathers alike:

‘… The playground can be a scary place to be, to walk into. I think it’s scary as a female, and when it’s full of females it probably is even more scary for males…I think, as a mum, when you walk into the playground, you are faced with a sea of people you don’t know, and people standing and chatting to each other, and if you’re not there every day, that can be scary, walking into that. Because you don’t know the people, you don’t know what’s expected…you may be worried…if you’re doing the right thing…”

(Champion 2, interview 2)

‘…My experience is that you tend to find that mums will naturally talk to each other. Mums will naturally be able to walk into the playground and join a group that’s talking. And it’s fine. I just kinda don’t have that ability.’

(Father 1, interview 1)

While the playground’s strong female camaraderie was described as male-carer exclusionary, in a different context, the very same physical school environment was presented as an example of a father-inclusive space:

‘We’ve had some fathers helping us with action days in school as well to like improve our school playground… That was a successful one for fathers because…I mean it’s probably stereotypical saying that there was a lot of outdoor work. It was like painting fences. It was building planters. It was gardening. It was digging…’

(Champion 5, interview 1)

The playground examples show that, in considering ways to increase fathers’ presence in the schools, both the spatial aspect and the social aspect of the school environment must be considered. Because schools are female dominated institutions, fathers find it more challenging to engage with the social aspect of the school environment than with its physical aspect. This, however, means that the challenges associated with getting involved with the social aspect of the school environment could be relaxed by introducing opportunities to engage with the physical aspects of the school as a first step. Indeed, one champion reported observing fathers chatting in the playground after they had been playing football together in a cross-school match, organised as part of the ELFFS project.

A consistent finding was that mothers establish and maintain stronger social networks than fathers. As a result, mothers are more informed than fathers about various school matters; they are better supported and more likely to cooperate to advance their children’s education:

‘By the way, my wife has brought to my attention a few months after my son started school, that on Facebook there’s a school’s parents group or something… and it’s all mothers! They organised themselves.’

(Father 2, interview 1)
These networks, which were reported to spread beyond the school gates, were not always seen by fathers as inviting:

‘… Some of the mums have such a strong network and it could be maybe harder for fathers, or it may put them off a bit from getting involved. I’ve never experienced it that strong myself, but I am aware that sometimes... well, I mean any social gathering with kids... you often go, and it’s mostly mums... Sometimes you go to a child’s birthday party, and the way mums chime away, you think, oh, it’s quite hard to break into that.’

(Father 1, interview 1)

All champions shared the opinion that fathers are keener to get involved in school when they are asked to contribute their skills or participate in activities involving elements of sport, and those that are organised around adults sharing with children what they do in their jobs:

‘Bringing someone in to talk about their career...you would get a lot of fathers coming in to do that, speaking about their jobs and what it entails, how they got into that line of work. We always had a lot more fathers coming in for that.’

(Champion 6, interview 1)

However, champions voiced concerns that, in fact, attempts to engage fathers in school by focusing on opportunities to participate in stereotypically male activities come with the risk of overlooking fathers whose interests lie elsewhere. Moreover, some champions contributed examples of how, even in more gender balanced school environments, fathers who have little familiarity with school might find it a site of confusion, anxiety and frustration:

‘It was quite interesting even at the show when a lot of the male carers came in. They have to come up and register, to get their ticket. They had to say which class their child is in. And so many of them came in and went: “I don’t know!”...How must that feel for them, to come in and say I don’t know.’

(Champion 2, interview 1)

Key findings from the interviews, therefore, are that implicit and explicit gendered practices presented in and around the school environment make it difficult for fathers to get involved in school. Thus, raising awareness of gendered practices among staff and increasing the portfolio of activities designed to engage fathers might help remove barriers to participation. Furthermore, the findings suggest that fathers might benefit from getting to know each other socially, thereby being able to form supportive networks.
7.4 - Social and structural constraints

Any father’s life circumstances, and thereby his ability and willingness to get involved in his child’s school, are embedded within a social context and structural constraints. Champions and fathers alike reflected on the idea that dads who had a negative experience in school when they were pupils, would be more reluctant to get involved in school as parents. Data from the champions’ interviews also suggest that fathers who have had negative experiences within their community may be more hesitant than others when considering whether or not to get involved in their child’s school, possibly due to feelings of shame and fear of rejection:

“We have quite a lot of young parents as well, and a lot of young fathers have had issues with school or addictions. Like we have fathers who are great, and they were helping in the garden, and then one of them says to me “Oh I’ll do it when the kids are not there...” And I say: “Come in when the kids are there. They like to join in”, but he says: “A lot of the mums... A lot of them know I used to be on drugs”, and we’re like “But that’s fine”, I say, “We’re here”, and I says, “we know that you’re not any more”... We persuaded him to come in, and it was grand. Nobody said anything... it was fine.”

(Champion 5, interview 1)

Social and cultural factors were also identified as playing a role in the extent to which fathers get involved in school. It has been suggested that, depending on their background, some fathers may not be aware that they are expected to engage with their child’s school, know little about how to participate in an education system unfamiliar to them, or lack the confidence to operate within the bureaucratic structure of the school:

“We also have refugee families in our school and... it’s a completely different culture and, em, father didn’t know he was allowed to come to parents’ night here and then...’cause we've never even seen father, and then we say to mum one day: ‘father’s allowed to come as well’ and she went “Oh!” and then when he came, he absolutely loved it. And now we see father all the time and father’s been on a school outing and everything with us, but he said that it wasn’t part of their culture back home.”

(Champion 5, interview 1)

The inclusion of fathers from minority ethnic backgrounds and immigrant families was deemed crucial, and the champions offered some examples of times when the challenges such fathers faced were addressed at the school. At the same time, fathers and champions alike were careful not to associate ethnic and cultural diversity with low involvement automatically:

“We don’t have a huge number of English as an Additional Language pupils. But of the ones we do, I would say they are more likely to come as mum and father, to school, or even father, is a bit more proactive than local parents.’

(Champion 7, interview 1)

‘A lot of other countries value education more than we do in Britain. My wife is not British, and she comes from a place where you value education because if you don’t have it, you don’t put food on your table. So she’s got a very strong view that it’s such a big gift to have, free education, so you should make use of it.’

(Father 4, interview 1)
Father’s ability to support his child’s learning (or the lack of such ability) was identified as another potential barrier to involvement in school. Low literacy and numeracy skills were described as an obstacle for engagement with the academic aspects of the school, suggesting that building a learning community and empowering fathers to use their strengths might prove useful for increasing the active participation of fathers in their children’s education.

‘Illiteracy might play a large part. Because... Nobody likes to feel stupid. And if they come into an environment, even if we know they are not going to be put on the spot, but they don’t want to create a situation where that’s even a possibility. And I don’t know... I have no idea if there are any parents of my pupils who are illiterate, but I would imagine that would be a major barrier.’

(Champion 4, interview 1)

Mothers’ involvement in their child’s educations has been mentioned in the interviews as a potential barrier in families where the relationship between the mother and the father suffered a breakdown, and the mother acts as a gatekeeper. At the same time, mothers were portrayed as gate-openers and catalysts to increased father involvement:

‘There’s been a few mums in our school who have been forcing their male counterpart to come in... Giving them a shove. And actually one of them was here yesterday at school, helping the nursery on a trip, and he says to me: ‘I was dreading this, my partner forced me to come, but actually I had a great time!’

(Champion 5, interview 1).

‘... if there’s any problem [in school], it can be almost dealt with by my wife. But she has always felt that it’s important that I touch base as well...’

(Father 4, interview 1).

Overall, fathers and champions alike seemed aware of a wide range of individual father and family circumstances that might stop or limit fathers’ involvement in school. The findings suggest that school champions are also aware of the needs to get to know each father and by so doing avoid the pitfall of over-generalising practices. Examples from the interviews clearly show that when schools make efforts to understand the unique life circumstance of male caregivers and tap into their strengths, they can put in place inclusive practices that remove barriers to fathers’ involvement.
8 - What do fathers and teachers believe a 'father-friendly school' is like?

There is no description of what constitutes a father-friendly school, and it is likely that people have very different perceptions of what such a school is like, or should be like. Findings from the ELFFS fathers’ survey show that 47% of the respondents felt that their child's school is 'extremely father-friendly' or 'very father-friendly' and further 10% felt it is 'a bit' father-friendly (Figure 14). Results from the staff survey show that 61% of respondents felt that their school is 'extremely father-friendly' or 'very father-friendly' and further 29% felt it is 'a bit' father-friendly. Taken together, these findings could indicate that staff members tend to view their school in a more positive light than fathers. An alternative explanation of the difference in the views of fathers and staff is that these two groups of respondents differ in their interpretation of the term 'father-friendly school'.

![Figure 14: How father friendly is your/your child's school? (n staff=56, n fathers=80)](image)

Figures 15 and 16 display analyses that attempt to identify what aspects of the school are perceived as more (or less) friendly to fathers. First, Figure 15 explores whether fathers and staff agree that their school has a father-friendly atmosphere. As can be seen, most of the fathers surveyed in the ELFFS study feel at ease in the school environment, a perception also shared by staff members. Specifically, fathers strongly agreed or agreed that they feel welcome in their child's school (89%) as well as comfortable visiting the school (93%) and talking with their child's teacher (94%), with no significant variation in the percentage of staff agreeing with these statements.
Next, Figure 16 shows that while 91% of staff members strongly agreed or agreed that their school values the views of fathers on children's education, only about 38% of fathers shared a similar perspective. This finding may indicate that fathers are not entirely aware of the importance schools attribute to their involvement in their children's education or may not feel they play a meaningful role in the school decision-making processes. Figure 16 also displays marked differences in the percentage of staff and fathers agreeing that their school makes efforts to communicate and involve fathers or that it regularly updates fathers on how their children are getting on in school. Only 30% of fathers think that the school makes efforts to communicate and involve fathers, compared to 83% of staff. Taken together, Figures 15 and 16 seem to indicate that fathers perceive some aspects of school as more friendly than others, while for staff, all aspects are equally friendly. Specifically, fathers have a positive opinion about the school and their child's class teacher, albeit many of them don't believe the school proactively seek their involvement or values their perspective on education very much.

Data from the fathers' interviews shed further light on these perceptions. Fathers' perception of the extent to which their child's school is 'dad-friendly' ranged from 'very friendly' through 'fairly friendly' to 'not unfriendly'. The most common criterion against which the interviewed fathers assessed the degree to which their child's school is a 'dad-friendly' institution is whether or not it discriminates parents by their gender. However the quotes below indicate that non-discrimination is not enough - it does not create father-friendly schools, it simply makes them not father-unfriendly:
"I think it's father-friendly, but only in a way that it doesn't discriminate against mums or dads... it's not father-unfriendly, to put it that way. Which probably is just as important, you know. I don't think it discriminates against that in any way. But generally speaking, I don't think it attracts dads' views specifically."

(Father 4, interview 2)

"I'd say, fairly friendly. Well, I mean, I don't think they are doing anything actively to dissuade fathers. My feeling is that the school isn't actively trying to discourage fathers, but it could maybe do more. See what's working well, and do more of it."

(Father 1, interview 1)

The minimal or lack of effort to engage with fathers did not seem to be factored into their impression of how well the school engages with parents:

"I think the school is pretty good at getting parents in general involved. There's nothing that I'm aware of that is fathers specific and nor do I think that that is a thing that must, you know, happen."

(Father 5, interview 1)

"I don’t think it’s either mum or father-friendly in any lesser or greater way. Whether then the fathers want to engage is up to them. Some do, and some don’t."

(Father 4, interview 1)

Champions’ responses to the question: ‘Just how father-friendly is your school?’ varied. Some champions characterised their school as ‘family friendly’, thereby also ‘father-friendly’:

"I would say the school is very family friendly and that there are many opportunities spread around the year to engage with families. I don’t think we do anything specifically targeted at dads."

(Champion 1, interview 1)

"In some ways, I would say we are father-friendly, but with a caveat that we don’t necessarily do anything that’s specific to fathers. I think it more follows under the heading that we’re caregiver friendly."

(Champion 4, interview 1)

Others felt that putting in place generalised inclusive practices is not enough for a school to become father-friendly:

"We do have an open door policy, but we are not actively working towards engaging our dads. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being very poor, I would put us down at about 2 or 3. And the reason is that we have nothing to target fathers."

(Champion 7, interview 1)

"There’s elements that are [father-friendly], and there’s elements that we have a long way, a long way to go."

(Champion 5, interview 1)

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Champions further characterised a father-friendly school in terms of engagement and reciprocal caring relationships:

'Where the school feels like a welcoming environment, where the male carers feel like they want to come in and share their experience, and share in their learning and lead learning, and be a part of what’s going on.'

(Champion 2, interview 1)

'When we have asked dads - what is it about our school that we do that makes us a father-friendly school? They quite often said to us: you know our name, you come and you speak with us, you know our children, you know our situation, and most importantly you really want to know, and you’re very interested, and it’s not superficial, you actually feel it, and you mean it, and you want dads, and mums, and grannies and granddads and all family members to be included in your school and in the children’s education.'

(Alison Cameron, AHT and project facilitator)

As well as in terms of gender equality:

'In an ideal world, you wouldn’t need to call it a father-friendly school because it would just be what school should be like. There should be positive images of male and female. There should be a balance of carers coming in and out. There should be no like gender bias on your resources or anything like that.'

(Champion 5, interview 1)

To conclude, fathers and staff assessed their school as welcoming but differed in their views on the extent to which various aspects of school are father-friendly, with staff members generally demonstrating a more positive impression than dads. A subsequent question therefore is: what can schools do to become more father-friendly? Could a new Father Inclusion Guide serve as a helpful resource for school staff in their endeavour to implement more dad-friendly practices in their schools? The latter question is discussed in the following, final section.
Section C – Evaluation of the Father Inclusion Guide

9 - How might educators use the new Father Inclusion Guide to enhance fathers’ involvement in school?

9.1 - Background on the implementation of the guide

Between January 2017 and June 2017, eight school champions, representing five primary schools in East Lothian, led the implementation of a programme of father-inclusive practice in their schools (see section 1.2). The starting point of each of the eight champions was different and depended on the extent to which he or she had previously engaged with father-inclusive work and was familiar with father-friendly practices. Some champions had such previous knowledge and experience, while for others the ELFFS project was the first opportunity to engage in father-inclusive practice. The participating champions also differed by their level of seniority and this familiarity with the school’s ethos and context. The project was supported by the senior management team in all of the participating schools.

To support the champions’ work, they were introduced to and engaged with a new Father Inclusion Guide – a practical guide to father-inclusive practice in schools (see appendix 1). None of the champions had previously worked with this Guide. The champions were guided to engage with the Guide and implement at least one of the following three activities in their school:

- Father inclusion in school – create a father-friendly display;
- Father inclusion around the school – develop a father-friendly walk-around routine;
- Father inclusion in the community – establish a link with a father-friendly organisation.

In addition to engaging with the Father Inclusion Guide independently, each champion participated in monthly peer group meetings with all the other school champions, where they discussed the guide and shared their progress with the above-listed activities. These meetings took place in Prestonpans Infant School on weekday afternoons, acting as CPD sessions for the champions. Each meeting lasted about an hour and was co-facilitated by Alison Cameron and Chris Wilson, authors of the Father Inclusion Guide, and Kevin Young from DadsWork. There were four group meetings in total between February 2017 and June 2017.

Throughout the project, the champions received ongoing one-to-one support from the three project facilitators via telephone, email and school visits, as and when needed. The combination of group meetings and one-to-one support intended to help each champion develop effective ways of using the Guide and build up father-inclusive practice within their school. The following sections discuss the champions’ use of the Father Inclusion Guide, the challenges they encountered when developing and implementing interventions, and their achievements throughout the project.

The Father Inclusion Guide was designed to offer educators and other practitioners working with families within the community an integrated approach to developing father-friendly culture within their institution. The guide is organised around the three ‘How Good Is Our School’ (HGIOS) quality indicators (Education Scotland, 2015): 1) Leadership and Management, 2) Learning Provision, and 3) Successes and Achievements. Against these three quality indicators, the guide features examples of highly-effective father-inclusive practices, as well as action-oriented ideas and challenge questions. The guide is described by one of its co-authors as follows:
'The guide is a thinking tool. The guide is something to spark people's imagination, is to get people to question...and it's whatever you can take from that to raise awareness and to think and put father-inclusive practices at the heart of your practice...and the guide in itself you can probably take out dads and put in other minority groups and it's not to be used as a 'this is only for dads in school' - this is a school where everybody is included and welcomed'.

(Alison Cameron, AHT and project facilitator)

This description suggests that the guide should be used flexibly and creatively, depending on the contextual requirements, circumstances and priorities of the school (or institution within which an intervention is sought). The guide is designed so that schools could either proceed systematically through each part or focus only on those aspects that are most relevant to them.

At the outset of the ELFFS project, each of the school champions involved received a paper copy of the guide. The champions were then guided to explore the guide and identify how it could be used to increase fathers’ involvement in their school. At the beginning of the project, the champions were also made aware that their engagement with the guide serves as a pilot exercise and therefore they will be asked to volunteer feedback on its usefulness and report on the ways they have used it to drive change in their school.

9.2 - Teachers general response to the Father Inclusion Guide

Overall, the guide was well-received by all school champions, regardless of whether they had, or didn’t have, previous experience with father-inclusive work, their role within the school or level of seniority. They said that they would recommend using the guide to others and expressed willingness to engage with it in the upcoming school year. When asked to describe the guide, they suggested that this is an instrument that:

‘Provides some really good questions, and suggestions, for how we could involve dads.’

(Champion 1, interview 2)

‘Allows you to really explore your school community. That allows you to look at some avenue for engaging with parents in a slightly different way.’

(Champion 2, interview 2)

The champions evaluated the guide positively in terms of its potential for increasing the involvement of male caregivers in schools and thought it could also be harnessed to raise the level of engagement of the whole family. Engagement with the guide, both independently and at group meetings, was mentioned in the champions’ interviews as an activity that sparked their interest in father-inclusive work and increased their motivation to contribute to the project. Furthermore, the champions commented that using the guide deepened their understanding of the meaning of father-inclusive practice, as this example demonstrates:

‘And it’s been interesting, and again a bit of an eye-opener in terms of the project. The work that we’ve done has been interesting, thinking about things in different ways and how to try and engage with dads has been...it’s just a different way of thinking about it compared with the normal things we do at school. So it’s been interesting.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)
Another champion, who had little previous experience with father-friendly practice remarked that the guide served as a useful introduction to father-inclusive culture:

‘I came into this very blind, and I didn’t have a huge knowledge at all… So again, it [the guide] was a very useful tool to begin conversations, and to point me in the right direction.’

(Champion 4, interview 2)

The champions praised the practicality of the guide, commenting that it is a well-presented, user-friendly guide, with a good volume of action ideas to get them started on their journey towards developing a more father-inclusive culture in their schools:

‘I like that it’s full of practical ideas for you to work with, and the questions really make you think about, and challenge yourself, so rather than you saying “oh yeah we do that”, the questions make you think, “Oh how can we further develop that, or how can we do better” I suppose.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

They further commented that the guide is clear and helpful, especially in comparison to other policy documents and similar publications targeted at educators, which are not always highly workable instruments:

‘The staff liked it because it is user-friendly. We liked the Challenge questions. Because sometimes you get things from the government, and you’re like: so what does that actually mean? And the language was very accessible for everybody, and it was very clear! So we liked it.’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

A recurrent theme in the champions’ interviews was that the guidance and support provided by the three ELFFS project facilitators created a strong foundation for early and ongoing engagement with the guide:

‘As teachers, we get a lot of documents that we are supposed to adhere to, and filter down and so on... and sometimes it can be very useful to have, as your first steps into it, some targeted guidance. So we thought it was very useful, and I certainly thought it was very useful.’

(Champion 4, interview 2)

Moving forward, the champions expressed keen interest in keeping the guide in their practice, but also desired to maintain the support network offered as part of the ELFFS project:

‘I hope it continues for next year and we can all support each other to enable it to keep going and have the focus to keep it going because it’s exciting...’

(Champion 3, interview 2)

‘In terms of the timescale of this project, I felt that it was a short timescale. And we’ve only done a couple of things in the time that we’ve had but we’ve certainly seen this as a bigger picture, and this is rolling into the next year and year after. Father-friendly school is going into our school improvement plan for next year, moving forward, because it’s something that we want to continue with...’

(Champion 6, interview 2)
To conclude: the champions responded positively to the guide stating that its content is relevant and well presented; that it is a comprehensive yet flexible resource, suitable for educators with different level of knowledge and experience in father inclusion work. They all thought that receiving guidance and support in using the guide was key for a successful implementation of change in their school. Thus, they questioned whether the mere introduction of the guide in schools would lead to its uptake.

9.3 - Usefulness of the guide for increasing father-inclusive practice in schools

First and foremost, the champions attributed the guide’s high functionality to its strong links to current educational policies. They appreciated that the guide uses common components and structures from such policies, stating that this enabled them to delve quickly into its content. The arrangement of the guide around specific quality indicators and familiar concepts was reported as contributing to the likelihood of it being disseminated within a range of processes already implemented in the school. Furthermore, there was a consensus among the champions that the guide's straightforward link to current education policy made it easier for them think of how it could be used to inform a range of school processes:

‘And then looking at linking it into our improvement plan and the fact that the quality indicators are in it helps you link it in quite easily with your improvement plan and with the standards for teaching, so that’s good too.’

(Champion 2, interview 2)

‘I like the fact that it links with the HGIOS – How Good is Our School document, so that’s great, because that is the way we are trying to approach everything in the school, and the school is trying to raise the profile of self-evaluation using HGIOS 4. So, it’s a user-friendly document.’

(Champion 1, interview 2)

Another champion reported that the guide proved to be a useful evaluation instrument which helped the leadership team to solidify and formalise their thoughts, prioritise activities, and work systematically towards targets:

‘We had a Quality Improvement Visit from our Council team. We had several indicators that we had to provide evidence for. As a management team, we had the first visit in December and a follow-up visit in June. So we took the several quality indicators; we shared them with whole staff to start with, and we all had a look at it... But then as a management team, we all had a look at the evidence that we had for each of the indicators, the ones that the team were coming in to inspect us on. And then we highlighted what we wanted to do; we used the Challenges questions...’

(Champion 5, Interview 2)

For some champions, the guide’s link to policy was found to be beneficial because they could use it within their existing practice in such ways that promoted individual and professional development:

‘Parental engagement is very much on my remit, in the work I do, so it has very much given me a slightly different perspective to consider how I could filter this through my areas of development for the school.’

(Champion 4, interview 2)
Also, some champions have used the guide to inform the development of teaching materials, an activity which subsequently advanced their understanding and application of equality and diversity in curriculum design and delivery:

‘We had looked at the curriculum... We were developing resources for it. So we made sure that when we looked at some of the things we bought, and if it was only female... orientated photos...that come in the photo pack. You know, and my colleague said ‘look at these photos, there’s only one of the 14 with a man in it! I’m gonna email the company and tell them!’ – on you go!’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

The champions further commented that engaging with the guide helped them to develop a better understanding of how their school culture and ethos influences their efforts to engage fathers. Additionally, the guide enabled them to evaluate what they are already doing well and to create a ‘baseline’ of father-inclusive culture within their school. It was highlighted that the guide could enable schools to identify and celebrate father-friendly practices they already use, as well as explore avenues where further work is needed:

‘And also working with the team on what our boards are going to look like and what opportunities that we can provide and celebrating the things that were already happening, for example, the sandpit in the nursery and the mud kitchen in the nursery, those were built by dads in our community so in... finding all these bases saying well this is great how can we build on this...’

(Champion 2, interview 2)

‘I want to share this with all the staff team, to think of things that we do, or things that we could do, moving forward.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

The champions emphasised that engagement with the guide made it easier for them to explain and discuss the nature and aims of their role as father inclusion champions with other people. They found the guide useful for initiating discussion and raising awareness within the school community regarding father-friendly practices:

‘So I would say this year for me has been very much an introduction to it and it’s raised the awareness of the need to increase fathers’ involvement in school, and it think it’s something that we would more fully take forward in the next session. So I’ve very much seen it as an introduction and a profile-raising experience.’

(Champion 1, interview 2)

In some cases, the process of raising awareness also extended to advancing staff members’ familiarity with their school community:

‘In the short period of time, I would say the main progress would be heightened awareness of the need to include fathers – it has raised its profile slightly. And it’s also enabled the teachers to know the children’s family background a bit more, because they may not have known otherwise. I certainly learned about some of my children’s background, that I haven’t realised.’

(Champion 1, interview 2)
Overall, the guide has been evaluated positively in terms of its scope to stimulate and boost critical thinking about the inclusion of fathers in schools. The champions piloting the guide reported a range of benefits from using it to develop a more father-friendly culture within their school. The next section elaborates on the outcomes from using the guide in the ELFFS schools.

9.4 - Key outcomes from the ELFFS project and Father Inclusion Guide

Engaging with the Father Inclusion Guide, even to a limited extent and for a relatively short period, seemed to have enabled the champions to promote understanding around father-inclusive practice in their school. There were different interpretations among the champions regarding what would a father-inclusive culture mean for their school, or what types of inclusive practices should be prioritised. The range of interventions developed and implemented by the champions included: creating a father-friendly display for a central notice board; developing a homework task that requires the engagement of a male caregiver/role model, gathering information about the life circumstances of pupils and sharing it with other teachers; creating or updating the school's 'parents apart' directory; increasing senior staff members' presence and informal communication with fathers at the playground; making links and collaborating with external agencies and father inclusion specialists such as DadsWork; holding events for fathers/male role models and children out with the school hours or at the weekend.

When asked to reflect on the outcomes of their work, some champions noted an increased level of father engagement in their school. For example, champion 5, who arranged a cross-school fathers’ football tournament, reported that:

‘My colleagues, they are Primary 1 staff, they are obviously out in the playground every day, they were saying that they find that dads are much more willing to talk. Because they came along to the football to support it, they’d seen us in a…maybe in a different environment.’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

Similarly, champions 2 and 3, who developed and implemented a father-friendly walk-around were encouraged by the improved level of confidence some fathers demonstrated in what has been previously described as a highly female dominated environment:

‘Seeing our dads becoming more part of this... becoming a team... and then wanting to drive things forward. I think in such a short space of time that’s a huge achievement that should be celebrated.’

(Champion 2, interview 2)

Other perceived benefits of putting in place activities exclusively for male caregivers and their children included the opportunity for staff, children and fathers to get to know each other better, as these examples illustrate:

‘We’ve found out more about kids because we have become more approachable.’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

‘My Head Teacher, she was the only woman present at this event, and she was walking around and saying: ‘Half these faces, I don’t recognise’.

(Champion 6, interview 2)
Getting to know each other and developing trust could, in turn, lead to better home-school communication and a better understanding of the child's learning and developmental requirements, thereby serving the aim of ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’\textsuperscript{5}. Furthermore, actively reaching out to fathers in targeted father-only activities was reported by the champions as an opportunity to identify talents and form partnerships:

‘So, and then, we had one who said – we did a cooking project this year, as part of the government funding, and he said: ‘how is it going, because my kids have been saying you’ve been cooking. I’m a chef; I’d happily come in...’ And we were like: we would have never known that! And my colleague also said: ‘I never knew that, even though I’d been here for 12 years’. And he’s volunteered to come and do something for us in the next year, some cooking lessons with the kids.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

In some cases, targeting fathers also meant building relationship with other family members. An example comes from champion 6, who organised a ‘dad-friendly’ event in his school, exclusively for male caregivers and their children:

‘So I would say the main progress has been that initial event, to create links, and it has been a positive experience for lots of dads. And granddads and stepdads and uncles, and people that have never been in the school before. One child in P1 doesn’t see her dad, and her mum’s brother had brought her along. He was saying he’d never been to a school before, and now it is something he would enjoy, and he would definitely bring that child back in again if we did an event like this again.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

Creating opportunities for fathers to get involved in school proved to be useful for improving and strengthening the father-school and the father-child relationships. This was achieved by offering both one-off activities where fathers, children and staff could relax and enjoy, and regular practices such as the playground walk-around:

‘It is good to get to know parents socially. One example would be one of the dads involved in this project – what a complete change! He used to come in and shout at us, and now, we are on good terms, and both himself and the staff are more confident in how to communicate and cooperate.’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

‘We’ve been out and walking in the playground... So that’s just going out and targeting mums and dads out in the playground and just going out and speaking and there’s definitely a raised confidence in terms of... They don’t go pull a face when you walk towards them because they’re not expecting you to say something negative you know it’s just there.’

(Champion 2, interview 2)

\textsuperscript{5}http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright
In addition to increasing fathers’ involvement in school and strengthening the father-school and father-child relationships, the champions felt that participating in the project was a meaningful professional experience. For example, involvement in the project enabled some champions to enhance their assessment and evaluation skills as well as develop leadership and management abilities:

‘I think the art of delegation has been very useful. Whereas I could have been running about and trying to set everything up myself, actually identifying and working with a group of people and having them take some of the responsibility has been very good. I think that professionally, everyone could do with learning how to share responsibility, rather than one person just organising the whole thing.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

One champion reflected on how participation in the project enabled him to explore avenues for career development:

‘I’m applying to do the Next Steps into Leadership course with East Lothian next year, because I’m thinking about the future and maybe going for promoted posts, and family engagement is my project I am looking at in terms of my professional learning.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

Others reported being more aware and in control of their own unconscious gender bias:

‘What I have done, content wise, what I have noticed is my own vocabulary used in class. Because often I’d say: ‘make sure your mum sees that later’, ‘make sure mum signs that’. So it’s catching yourself, and say: ‘dad can do that too’, ‘show dad this’. But we’re working against societal stereotypes here as well, so…’

(Champion 4, interview 2)

‘And it’s just things like, people will come to you and say: “we’re looking for helpers for a trip and no mums will come”. Have you asked the dads?’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

Being able to inspire colleagues and get them on board was described as another positive outcome of the project:

‘It’s been amazing to see my two colleagues really take this on and really be excited about the possibilities of working with our dads and one of them started his football team and then played a few games and he just loves it and seeing that enthusiasm from him is just lovely. And actually seeing them speaking to the rest of the staff and the enthusiasm that then brings has been really nice.’

(Champion 2, interview 2)
And so was the ability to engage with other schools and agencies:

‘But I think the support we have been given from everyone involved so far, has been really good. It’s almost been a little mini-network, working with colleagues from different schools.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

‘In terms of the 'dad-friendly school’ initiative, it’s been quite exciting seeing that beginning to happen and actually seeing it link in to ‘Support From The Start’ and making links across different agencies as well and beginning to see little things that we can start to really work on. That’s quite exciting.’

(Champion 2, interview 2)

Overall, the guide was well-received, and the champions were able to use it in creative ways in their schools to embark on a journey towards making their schools more 'dad-friendly'. However, they also encountered some challenges in engaging with the guide and driving change in their schools. These challenges are discussed in the next section.

9.5 - Challenges in using the guide

The extent to which each of the school champions engaged with the guide differed, but all champions felt that their engagement with the guide was limited and that they needed more time to explore and utilise it fully. The busy, high-volume nature of their day-to-day work and multiple demands for their attention acted as significant barriers to engagement with the guide:

‘It’s been quite a short time scale. And because it’s started late in the year, a lot of our staff training sessions were already done. Or they are all accounted for.’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

‘I think the only thing that frustrates me is not having time out of the class, to work on it. I think if we could be given a bit of time to work on that, that would be really useful.’

(Champion 6, interview 2)

Furthermore, the timing of the project, January to June, proved challenging and was unanimously mentioned as an obstacle to a meaningful implementation of change. The champions suggested that it would have been useful to start the project early in the school year, and embed the guide within longer term processes:

‘Because we got involved in this project late. Therefore our school improvement plan and our projects for the year have already been established and set up. So it became very difficult to accommodate this in the other workload that we already had.’

(Champion 1, interview 2)

Cultural sensitivity and expressions of resistance were reported as another challenge. According to the champions' interviews, a few fathers and mothers questioned whether focusing on male caregivers is appropriate in 21st century Scotland, suggesting that this approach is discriminatory, dated and patronising:
‘We had that one mum who didn’t think it was... because they didn’t have a dad. But when we explained what it meant...I mean, she was totally fine in the end, but it just made us aware that when we’re using the ‘father’, we have to explain that it can be any [male carer].’

(Champion 5, interview 2)

Such comments, however, initiated a useful dialogue between staff and parents about the role of positive action in promoting equality:

‘There was a comment about - are we being discriminatory against other carers?...but we talked about positive discrimination and the difference between discrimination and positive discrimination and how these things are still happening that have been happening in our school, but this is just another layer that might help with that engagement ... but mostly it’s been very positive.’

(Champion 2, interview 2)

The desire to treat parents of both genders impartially and the perception that putting a spotlight on fathers violates that principle was shared by staff members:

“So, the first thing that I did was speaking to other members of staff about why we’re doing it. And still, I would say, there are some members of staff who don’t fully understand it, and are very much: “Well, why are we only wanting dads, why are we not engaging mums?”.

(Champion 6, interview 2)

In thinking of ways to overcome the challenges involved in working towards creating a more inclusive culture within their schools, the champions expressed the opinion that support for such a change initiative, may be equally important to having a good intervention guide. They emphasised that within-school and cross-school support from peers is very important for the implementation of change. Support from various 'implementation specialists', namely people and organisation with knowledge of father-inclusive work, may also be necessary to drive change within schools:

‘I think it’s not going to be as effective without DadsWork [community project], and I wonder how... if they’ve got the resources to be able to support every school in East Lothian, effectively... And again this is a potential problem, that as soon as it becomes broader, does DadsWork have the capacity to support all the schools at their parents’ nights? And if not, what other opportunities can there be for them?’

(Champion 4, interview 2)

Despite the above challenges, all champions reported wanting to keep the guide in their practice in the future. However, they also voiced a strong desire to receive more support through engaging in peer meetings, collaborating with champions in other schools, and working in partnership with external agencies specialising in father inclusion. This suggests that supporting staff involved in change processes is necessary for positive engagement with the guide and subsequently a successful implementation of father-inclusive practice within schools.
Conclusions

10 - Conclusions

10.1 - Valuing fathers' involvement in schools

Analyses of data from the ELFFS project show that fathers, school staff and children attribute great importance to the involvement of dads in educational processes at school and the home environment, associating such involvement with a range of benefits for children, schools and the wider community. Fathers and staff believe that the active participation of fathers in school is necessary for achieving the best outcomes for children. Children report that their fathers support their learning in multiple ways. According to the children, this is mostly informal and covers both curricular and extra-curricular topics. Children appreciate this support and consider it as helpful, enjoyable and even entertaining. Furthermore, support from the dad complements and extends the learning assistance children receive from the mother.

The involvement of fathers is portrayed as an invaluable opportunity for schools to deepen their understanding of the child's life, thereby being able to accommodate his or her learning and developmental requirement and ultimately 'getting it right for every child'. Furthermore, schools view the involvement of fathers as an opportunity to extend the supply of talent within the school community. For fathers, being involved in school means respecting their child's experiences, treating them as 'being' rather than 'becoming', strengthening the father-child relationship and eventually, positively influencing their child's development, thus contributing to the welfare of their child. Involved fathers are also viewed as providing a positive male role model for children, which reinforces the importance of education and demonstrates an equal approach to parenthood, appropriate for modern day Scottish society.

The findings, however, indicate that fathers do not perceive themselves as equally knowledgeable about child education, compared to mothers or teachers. Staff members share this perception. This finding suggests that staff and fathers alike would benefit from developing their perceptions about the involvement of fathers in their child's school from a deficit-based model to a strengths-based model, which focuses on fathers' knowledge and skills. Raising awareness of fathers' strengths could increase their confidence in partnering with the school and enable both parties to be actively involved in constructing support for children's success.

10.2 - What do fathers do when they get involved in school?

Data from a nationally representative survey, the MCS, shows that fathers’ direct involvement in primary school is still limited in scope and frequency in comparison to mothers. This finding seems to be consistent across the primary school years. Further analysis of MCS data indicates that fathers’ involvement in school is linked to their socioeconomic background: fathers in higher incomes households and those who are better educated or have higher status jobs, tend to get involved in their child's primary school in higher rates than the less socio-economically advantaged counterpart. This association between involvement and socioeconomic background is not found in mothers. The socio-economic gap in fathers' involvement in school could contribute to inequality in pupils' academic achievement.
Analysis of data collected in the ELFFS project shows that fathers and staff alike are well aware of the gender gap in participation in various aspects of the school and believe that fathers should and could get more involved in their child’s school, despite facing barriers to such participation. Staff would like to see the number of fathers getting involved increase and be able to capitalise on fathers’ talents and skills to extend and enrich the school experience, but question whether fathers know that such contributions are welcome. Fathers' participation rate differs across the various aspects of the school: most fathers have visited their child’s classroom, were in contact with the class teacher and attended a school event. Only a small minority has volunteered or helped in the school, suggesting that this aspect of engagement could be developed.

10.3 - How to tackle the barriers to involvement

Data from the staff and fathers’ surveys show that both groups perceive their school as father-friendly, although staff members seem to have a slightly more positive view of their school than fathers. The vast majority of survey respondents reported that their school is welcoming to fathers. However, data from the interviews reveal a more critical approach towards evaluating what constitutes a father-friendly school. Specifically, both fathers and champions expressed the idea that not discriminating caregivers by gender is not enough. Schools need to make efforts to engage with fathers and families meaningfully and develop reciprocal caring relationships to qualify as ‘father-friendly’.

But, engaging with fathers means removing long standing social and structural obstacles. In keeping with previous research, work commitments are a major barrier to fathers’ involvement in primary school, especially for fathers who work long hours. Insufficient workplace family friendly policies which could relax the time pressures experienced by working fathers, or the lack of access to such policies, also make it difficult for fathers to get involved in their child’s school to the extent they want. Strategies proposed to overcome these barriers include giving more advanced notice about school events to allow fathers more time to reorganise their work, as well as increasing the portfolio of out-of-hours activities offered by the school. The latter strategy, however, should be exercised thoughtfully following consultations with staff, to minimise the tension between pressures on fathers’ time and pressures on staff time.

Insufficient and ineffective communication between fathers and schools is also a key barrier to dads’ involvement in their child’s school. While schools communicate with parents frequently about various aspects, and through a range of channels, not all communication reaches fathers. For example, a letter sent home with the child is likely to be seen by the parent responsible for monitoring homework, but this is not always the father. Similarly, fathers might not engage with information shared via social media or specialised digital technologies used by their child’s school. They might not be aware that the school uses these channels, have limited knowledge of how to use them, find the information conveyed irrelevant for them, or have little time to engage due to competing demands on their attention. Moreover, fathers are sometimes a ‘missing link’ in the chain of communication between the school and the home because staff communicates more frequently with mothers, who often act as the first port of call. However, the data suggest that even when schools do reach out to dads, dads sometimes choose to transfer responsibility to the mother, possibly discouraging the school’s attempt to include them. Also, there is a tendency among some fathers to only get in contact with the school when things ‘go wrong’, a situation that proves challenging for building effective home-school communication.
Removing the above barriers might be a complicated task, requiring an investment in early communication which involved explicit messages to clarify the schools’ expectation and procedures, as well as different ways to get involved. Sufficient knowledge about the life context of their pupils, including their family's circumstances, is a pre-requisite for establishing effective communication with fathers, and so is information about what fathers perceive as most suitable ways to communicate with them. The current study indicates that such knowledge is often patchy or lacking. Furthermore, schools could benefit from more specialised training on, and confident in, using digital technologies and social media for engaging fathers. Turning now to fathers' requirements, the study indicates that need to believe that their views are valued and that they are seen as equal partners in the education of their children, alongside mothers and teachers. Thus, they can benefit from targeted, individualised communication that highlights these issues.

Schools are traditionally a female dominated environment, and this does not encourage father involvement. This is manifested by unconscious gender bias in the language used by staff and imbalanced representations of mothers and fathers in the school space, in the materials the school produces for parents, and in the learning resources it uses. So, even when schools operate an open door policy and do not explicitly discriminate by gender, they are not necessarily perceived by fathers as welcoming and friendly. Thus, raising awareness of gendered practices among staff would prove useful in breaking down barriers to father involvement. Fathers also seem to lack the peer networks mothers form and operate within the school environment. As a result, their access to knowledge about the school is more limited, and the school environment is less approachable to them. Encouraging fathers to contribute their skills or participate in activities involving elements of sport, and those that are organised around adults sharing with children what they do in their jobs could raise their involvement. It should be noted that attempts to engage fathers in school by focusing solely on creating opportunities to participate in stereotypically male activities come with the risk of overlooking fathers whose interests lie elsewhere. Thus, getting to know fathers, their interests and skills, is important for successfully including them in school.

Fathers might refrain from getting involved if they have had a negative experience in school or within their community. Father’s ability to support his child’s learning is a potential barrier to involvement in school. For example, having low literacy and numeracy skills. Depending on their cultural background, some fathers may not be aware that they are expected to engage with their child’s school, know little about how to participate in an education system unfamiliar to them, or lack the confidence to operate within the structure of the school. In some cases, relationship breakdowns within the family could be an obstacle for fathers’ involvement. However, data from the current study show that, when schools make efforts to understand the unique life circumstance of male caregivers and tap into their strengths, they can put in place inclusive practices that remove barriers to fathers’ involvement. This means approaching the father as an individual, creating opportunities to explore the relationships within the family, alongside sharing mutual expectations and engaging in dialogue about ways to collaboratively support children's learning.

10.4 - Using the Father Inclusion Guide to enhance fathers’ involvement in school

The new Father Inclusion Guide was well received by staff members who piloted it. The guide was perceived as a clear and helpful guide, especially in comparison to other policy documents and similar publications targeted at educators. Its content was deemed comprehensive, relevant and well presented. Engagement with the guide has been reported as sparking interest in father-inclusive practice, deepening the understanding of the meaning of father inclusion work in schools and increasing motivation to engage in such work.
The champions who piloted the guide attributed its high functionality to its strong links to current educational policies. This was regarded useful in informing school procedures and pedagogy. The link to policy also provided opportunities for staff professional development. Specifically, the guide was useful for school to:

Identifying and celebrating the father-friendly practices already in place within the school;
Exploring avenues where further work is needed;
Initiating discussion and raising awareness within the school community regarding father-friendly practice;
Advancing the school’s contextual knowledge of, and familiarity with, their children, fathers and families;
Informing the development of teaching materials and increasing diversity in curriculum design and delivery.

Following a short period in which the champions engaged with the guide, the following outcomes were reported:

- An increase in the number of fathers who got involved in school;
- More confidence in fathers to get involved and be present in the school environment;
- More opportunities for children, fathers and staff to get to know each other better through engaging in fun, relaxed activities, contributing to more positive relationships within the school community;
- Enhanced knowledge of pupils’ life contexts, including raised awareness of their caregivers’ circumstances and knowledge of various significant others that play a role in the child’s life;
- An opportunity to identify talents and form collaborations within the school community to support the school experience for children, including creating partnerships for the future;
- Professional development opportunities for staff, including enhancement of their assessment and evaluation skills, development of leadership and management abilities, linking father inclusion work to school improvements and own career development.

Undoubtedly, the implementation of father-inclusive practice in school is an ongoing process which requires the investment of a considerable amount of time and effort. Challenges to implementation included individual instances of cultural sensitivity and resistance in the form of rejection of gender specific terminology, disagreement with the aims of the interventions and the activities proposed and unwillingness to accept the need to eradicate unconscious gender bias. The busy, high-volume nature of teachers’ work and multiple demands for the attention of school staff were reported as significant barriers to engagement with the guide. Supporting the work of the champions and providing them with guidance and resources are key for their success in enhancing the school’s father-inclusive culture. A senior management support is necessary for such intervention, and so is support from staff members within the school. Collaboration with colleagues from other schools working toward becoming more dad-friendly and with father inclusion specialists in external agencies is also an important aspect in interventions for father inclusion in school.
Acknowledgements:

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References


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How Father-Friendly Is Our School?

A Practical Guide to Father-Inclusive Practice

Alison Cameron & Chris Wilson

First Edition – September 2017
FORWARD

Involving fathers in the education of their children is one and the same time a good thing and not systematically done. That fathers’ involvement is a good thing has been shown time and again in research and in practice. For instance, fathers’ involvement with their children is linked with their higher educational achievement and higher educational and occupational mobility relative to their parents. For example, fathers’ involvement with their 7 and 11-year-old children is linked with their better national examination performance at age 16, and their educational attainment at age 20. This is true across all social classes – and whether the mother is highly involved too, or not. As well as this, children of involved fathers are more likely to enjoy school and have positive attitudes toward school. They are also less likely to fail a grade, have poor attendance, be suspended or expelled, or have behaviour problems at school.

We have known this for decades now, and yet it is also the case that mothers are often seen as the only parent with sole responsibility for not only childcare, but school attendance, performance in class and achievement. The lack of inclusion of fathers can be signalled as early as the school registration process, can be seen in the publicity for educational services and can be found in small but significant things such as to whom school-bag letters home are addressed.

We also know that fathers want to be more involved than they are at present.

And yet despite of all this, there is very little evidence of schools making a conscious and sustained effort to encourage fathers’ involvement. This is understandable given all the other pressures on schools and teachers to do better. However, education policy-makers might be missing a trick here. Rather than targets and league tables for schools, what if we were to act on what we already know about the positive effect of father involvement on pupil attainment?

This is why the work to include and involve fathers in Prestonpans Infant School is trail-blazing and offers much to everyone who has an interest in how children learn best. But what follows, as well as being easy to read and implement, embraces not just children. The suggestions here can help boost school educational performance levels, increase the number of ready-to-learn children, better share responsibilities in families and provide fathers (or father figures) with a chance to step up and take pride in playing their part in their children’s schooling.

What’s not to like?

Dr Gary Clapton
INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this Guide is to give staff working with dads some practical support around ways to include them naturally in their practice. It also serves a ‘thinking’ tool, offering a starting point for staff to begin or continue their journey of self-evaluation in this area. It is designed to work across the columns, starting from the Quality Indicator moving along to the Ideas section. This Guide has clear links to current Scottish educational literature and policy documents such as Getting it Right for Every Child, The National Improvement Framework 2017, How good is our school? 4th Edition and ‘Helping Children Learn – Involving non-resident parents in their children’s education’. Building a relationship with all family members, while recognising that families come in all shapes and sizes, is critical in supporting children throughout their learning journey. Parental engagement is key to raising attainment. We hope that you find this useful on your journey to being a Father-inclusive School.

Alison Cameron
Acting Head Teacher, Prestonpans Infant School

Chris Wilson
Principal Teacher, Mayfield Primary School
September 2017
Leadership and Management – How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?

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<th>Challenge Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement.</td>
<td>There are effective systems that collect the views of male carers about the quality of service provided by the school and its commitment to father-inclusive practice. Collegiate working and professional learning activities have a clear purpose and are linked to the results of self-evaluation and the agreed areas for improvement. Families are regularly involved in evaluating school improvement through a variety of ways, suitable to the needs of different types of families.</td>
<td>How do you collect information from military dads, dads in custody, offshore workers, dads with English as an Additional Language, travellers, etc. To what extent are staff critically engaging with research and policy relating to father-inclusive practice and fathers’ impact on children’s outcomes? How do we share the impact of your agreed areas for improvement in relation to father-inclusive practice with parents and carers? How do we know father-inclusive practice has improved outcomes for children? What evidence do we gather? How well do we encourage dads to tell you about their skills and how they would like to get involved in school?</td>
<td>Drop-in chats, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, blogs/diaries, gender statistics of attendance at school events. Include all staff members, where possible, to support an ethos of sharing ideas, transparent working and collective responsibility. Create a ‘parents apart’ directory with up-to-date contact details to enable parents apart to be easily contacted and to aid clear communication.</td>
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<td>Quality Indicator</td>
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<td>1.2 Leadership of learning.</td>
<td>Senior Leaders establish links with local and national organisations. Local individuals, groups and projects are invited to contribute to the development, delivery and evaluation of the school’s father-inclusive initiatives. Staff are trained in father-inclusive practice.</td>
<td>To what extent are you familiar with local and national organisations engaged in father &amp; family inclusive practice? Is your knowledge up-to-date? Are you working in partnership with stakeholders to develop father-inclusive practice? How well are you using evidence to drive forward father-inclusive practice in your school?</td>
<td>Fathers Network Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland. Father Network Scotland and local fathers’ groups can support this training. Gather the views and opinions of community partners such as Community Learning and Development, Parent Council, Home Start. Highlight Father-friendly practice during induction.</td>
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<td>1.3 Leadership of change.</td>
<td>All staff understand, share and are committed to the school’s aims, values and actions relating to father-inclusive practice. The school community are actively involved in the development of the school improvement plan. The School Leadership Team ensure that all staff are aware of the different family compositions in society and are given clear guidance on our inclusive approach to families. The school team and wider school community evaluates the effectiveness of father-inclusive practice/events. This feedback is used to make adjustments and improvements. The school team are committed to disseminating their knowledge on, and experience with father-inclusive practice internally and with the wider community</td>
<td>Have you explained your father-inclusive approach in your school handbook? Are fathers involved in the development of the SIP? How have you used their contribution to inform your next steps for school improvement planning? Are all staff knowledgeable about the variety of family compositions in the local community and do they understand circumstances affecting children’s life and learning? Are you using theory and policy to guide the collection and analysis of data on the impact of father-inclusive practice? Do you provide a range of options for the dissemination of information?</td>
<td>Establish an Equality and Diversity Champion, with a father-inclusive remit. Include the views of Parent Council, Pupil Council and partner agencies. Use Stonewall Scotland materials on ‘Different Kinds of Families’. Ensure that the school community are informed of the impact of their contribution. Share case studies to demonstrate and celebrate good practice with other schools in your Local Authority/Nationwide</td>
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<td>1.4 Leadership of management and staff.</td>
<td>The School Leadership Team are approachable and operate an open door policy for all. The school aims for a gender balance in recruitment and selection of staff. The school community is proactive in tackling prejudiced based discrimination and unconscious gender bias.</td>
<td>To what extent do dads in your organisation use your open door policy? Is there a gender balance within your Leadership team? If not, how can you address gender balance in your decision making? How many male teachers or support staff do you have in your school? Are you proactive in identifying and organising training for parent council members in father-inclusive practice? How do you know that staffroom chat is free of gender bias and comfortable for all members of staff?</td>
<td>Be aware of the gender balance within your staff team. Actively encourage male members of the school community to join the Parent Council. Train and include them in the recruitment process for new members of staff.</td>
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<td>1.5 Management of resources to promote equality.</td>
<td>The School Leadership Team ensures the use of financial resources are transparent and deliver equity for all. Posters, leaflets and displays around school promote father-inclusive practice. Time is taken to ensure that all images of male carers are positive ones. Space and facilities are provided for a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities and community groups promoting father-inclusive practice in education. Curricular materials are regularly screened and updated to ensure appropriateness and equity.</td>
<td>How effectively are resources allocated to sustain improvement priorities relating to father-inclusive practice? To what extent are your father-inclusive improvements impacting on learning and teaching? Have you updated displays regularly to ensure accuracy and relevance of information? (e.g. changing paternity policy). Have you included this updated information in your school newsletter, website and social media? Do your curricular resources promote equity?</td>
<td>Ring fence money to ensure that the development of father-inclusive practice is safeguarded. Make links with dads groups and ask for literature and explore their websites. Explore the link between engaging fathers and attainment. Where possible, be proactive in offering regular space in your school to a variety of parent groups. Check older resources for gender stereotyping.</td>
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<td><strong>2.1 Safeguarding and child protection</strong></td>
<td>All staff are trained in Child Protection and are aware of their responsibilities in relation to father-inclusive practice. Policies in school are monitored to ensure there is no gender bias or discrimination regarding family circumstances.</td>
<td>How do you ensure fathers’ rights are protected within your Child Protection procedures and systems? Have you considered how you will share any school procedural or legislative changes with dads who live apart from their child? Are father-inclusive records up to date?</td>
<td><strong>Promote opportunities for enhanced child protection training for all staff.</strong> <strong>Attach this responsibility to a staff member.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2.2 Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Through our teaching and learning, staff ensure that gender stereotyping in modern day employment is challenged. All staff contribute to father-inclusive practice within the school. The school community are actively involved in the development of the school improvement plan.</td>
<td>Are staff critically reflecting on gender stereotyping in their teaching? To what extent do your learning materials feature balanced gender roles? Are staff made aware of the programmes or initiatives in place to promote father-inclusive practice and how they can become involved? Are your parent council involved in the development of your father-inclusive practice?</td>
<td><strong>Consider in all curriculum discussions.</strong> <strong>Address this through whole school assemblies?</strong> <strong>Summative reports/school photos etc. should be given to each parent.</strong> <strong>Include the views of Parent Council, Pupil Council and partner agencies.</strong></td>
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<td>2.2 Curriculum</td>
<td>The role of the father in different cultures and communities around the world is discussed throughout the curriculum. Collegiate time is allocated to discussing Equality, specifically father-inclusive practice, in line with local, national and international guidelines and developments.</td>
<td>To what extent do your learning materials reflect cultural diversity? Are male and female caregivers equally represented in such materials? Have you considered opportunities for Equality matters when developing your calendar of collegiate activity? Do you consider parents’ working patterns when planning curriculum events?</td>
<td>Think about the inclusion of cultures already present in your school community. Appoint an Equality and Diversity champion with a father-inclusive remit to develop and implement up-to-date knowledge of relevant law and best practice</td>
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<td>2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment</td>
<td>Meaningful assessment and evaluation strategies are identified to produce quality evidence, relating to father-inclusive practice, which informs future curricular planning.</td>
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<td>Have you included pupil voice around their views of father-inclusive practice in your planning?</td>
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<td>2.4 Personalised support</td>
<td>The school understands that families, including fathers, may need personalised support. The school uses its links with external agencies, including fathers groups in the community, to recommend services that might help. In all cases, support is handled sensitively and professionally. The needs of each child and family are met and treated on an individual basis, with a firm focus on reducing any potential barriers to learning.</td>
<td>Have you considered that these individual needs can be met by any member of your school team? Are you aware of the significant male carers in the lives of the children in your school? How are you ensuring that they are effectively involved in decisions regarding their child? Where there are complex family dynamics, have you considered getting advice and support from your Council legal team to ensure equity?</td>
<td>Remember that supportive relationship between school and home can be forged by a range of staff, not exclusively the Senior Leadership Team. Invite all significant adults to school meetings, e.g. staged intervention processes. Provide crèche facilities at all school events to enable attendance of all significant adults.</td>
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<td>2.5 Family Learning</td>
<td>The school is creative and proactive in organising family learning opportunities, which are dad-inclusive, both within the school grounds and in the local community. Family learning activities promote equality, fairness and diversity, linked meaningfully to family needs.</td>
<td>Could you use your outdoor space/community spaces to develop a family learning programme that includes fathers? Are you considering the practical organisation of such events to ensure maximum participation from male carers?</td>
<td>Encourage staff and community partners with extracurricular skills to lead these events. Engage in dialogue with families to determine specific needs.</td>
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<td>2.6 Transitions</td>
<td>At all transition events, steps are taken to ensure that a range of times, dates and activities are offered to families.</td>
<td>Are you ensuring that parents living apart are provided with equal opportunities to participate in transition events? Are there systems in place to collect the details of parents living apart to maximise participation at transitions? Are details of families apart shared with the next school to ensure continuity of support for families, without families having to retell their stories?</td>
<td><em>Provide information about school events well in advance to make it easier for dads to become involved.</em></td>
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<td><strong>2.7 Partnerships</strong></td>
<td>Members of the school community have a good understanding of the school’s ethos, vision, values and aims and how they relate to father-inclusive practice. Local individuals, groups and projects are invited to contribute to the development, delivery and evaluation of the school’s father-inclusive initiatives. Local events, which recognise and celebrate working with male carers, are made known to the school community and the school engages with, and learns from, local, national and international groups and organisations who are working to address father-inclusive issues. The school’s work towards father-inclusive practice is based on knowledge and understanding of national legislation, current research and good practice.</td>
<td>Do your parents know what your school vision, values and aims are? Is the role of fathers reflected inherently in your vision, values and aims? Have you been proactive in making contact with local dads groups? Could you advertise their activities to parents? Do you have a school Equality and Diversity champion with a father-inclusive remit who can lead on these issues?</td>
<td><strong>Invite the local community to contribute to the creation of the school’s aims and values.</strong> <strong>Establish links with local Dad organisations to assist in this process. Develop a directory of local community organisations.</strong> <strong>Follow relevant organisations on social media. Subscribe to their newsletter.</strong></td>
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<td>3.1 Improving wellbeing equality and inclusion.</td>
<td>Equality issues are discussed openly and constructively amongst pupils and staff who are empowered to challenge discrimination and intolerance when they come across it.</td>
<td>How well are you using pupil voice to address wider contentious issues meaningfully?</td>
<td>Use Pupil Council to discuss key issues and to canvas opinion of pupils.</td>
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<td>The school’s work towards father-inclusive practice is based on knowledge and understanding of national legislation, current research and good practice.</td>
<td>Are staff trained in Equality Legislation?</td>
<td>Refer to Fathers’ Network Scotland guidance about legislation and good practice.</td>
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<td>Diverse family circumstances are recognised, valued and promoted as a positive feature of the school and its community. Positive steps are taken to ensure that all parents are treated equally, with respect and in a fair and just manner.</td>
<td>Do you have a school champion for father-inclusive practice who can lead on these issues?</td>
<td>Take time to learn the range of skills and interests of your male carers.</td>
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<td>Communication with parents and carers is careful to avoid gender assumption.</td>
<td>How can fathers’ experience and skills be used to enhance the learning experiences of your children?</td>
<td>Try to use images of current pupils and their male carers where appropriate.</td>
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<td>The images that are portrayed in school displays and on communications via newsletters, the school website and social media are reviewed before publishing to ensure gender equity.</td>
<td>Do you have a designated member of staff who takes responsibility for this?</td>
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<td>3.1 Improving wellbeing equality and inclusion.</td>
<td>Male carers visiting the school feel valued, safe and comfortable. Male members of staff are supported throughout their own child’s development. All staff are aware of current legislative frameworks related to wellbeing, equality and inclusion.</td>
<td>Does your School Leadership Team take time to informally speak with male carers in the playground? Is there up to date and accessible information on paternity leave and other employer support initiatives pertinent to male staff? Are all staff given opportunities to take part in professional learning around current legislation?</td>
<td>Do you have a noticeboard dedicated to father-inclusive practice? Identify potential barriers to dads being part of milestone events such as first day at school/school concerts, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>3.2 Raising attainment and achievement.</strong></td>
<td>Male carers, regardless of living arrangements, are given regular updates and opportunities to engage in conversation relating to their child’s development and progress. Parents and carers are made aware of the benefits of a male carer being actively involved in their child’s education and the positive impact their engagement can have on raising attainment.</td>
<td>Do you ensure that the effectiveness of father-inclusive initiatives in the school improvement plan has been shared with all parents and carers?</td>
<td>Contact parents who do not live with their child and encourage them to share their child’s special moments and achievements with the school. Share success stories where fathers have helped children to learn new skills on an achievement display board.</td>
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<td><strong>3.3 Increasing creativity and employability.</strong></td>
<td>The school curriculum is designed to support children to develop and promote their understanding of equality, diversity and discrimination, specifically in relation to gender.</td>
<td>Is your curriculum designed to empower children and give them the confidence to challenge discrimination (gender) when they encounter it?</td>
<td>Develop problem-solving skills by including children in the planning process on your journey towards becoming a father-inclusive school.</td>
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