



HOW DAD-FRIENDLY IS OUR SCHOOL?

Key Findings of the East Lothian Father-Friendly Schools project

in partnership with Prestonpans Infant School & The University of Edinburgh

INTRODUCTION

“When we have asked dads what makes us a father-friendly school, they 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... 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

This leaflet presents the recommendations of the East Lothian Father-Friendly Schools (ELFFS) project, a pilot study that took place between January and June 2017. It was designed and delivered by Prestonpans Infant School with support from DadsWork and Fathers Network Scotland. The University of Edinburgh was commissioned to deliver the research.



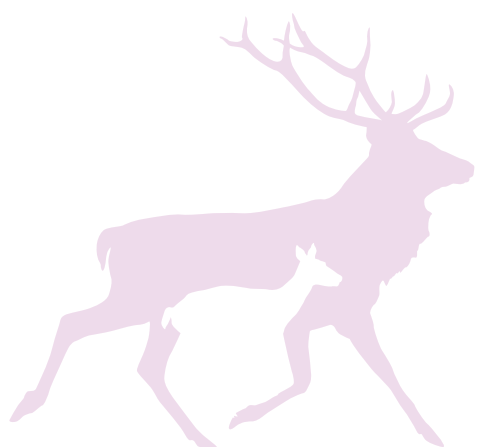
WHY WE DID IT

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, and is supported by policies such as '*getting it right for every child*'¹, (*Scottish Government 2012:6*) and the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education, in order to reach the government's vision for Scotland to be 'the best place in the world to grow up'.

Despite ample research on the positive impact of paternal involvement in education on children's development, dads in Scotland are significantly less likely than mums to form a positive partnership with their child's school. We sought to better understand the barriers in order to help dads and schools understand each other for the benefit of the children.

WHAT WE DID

- We surveyed 116 dads and 56 staff members in the 6 participating schools
- We interviewed teachers, fathers and spoke with children
- We drew on the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) – a large scale survey of children and their families



¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright>

KEY FINDINGS

PERCEPTIONS OF FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL

School staff recognise the great importance of the involvement of dads in education, serving as positive male role models and bringing a range of benefits for children, schools and wider society by demonstrating an equal approach to parenthood.

'Often you had a different view point when the father came because they saw different things in their child to what the mum had seen.'

FATHER INCLUSION CHAMPION

But **dads** do not think of themselves as equally knowledgeable about child education when comparing themselves to mums or teachers with only 11% of dads believing they know as much as teachers about education. While 91% of staff members agreed that their school values the views of fathers on children's education, only 38% of fathers shared that view.

'Nobody is telling fathers: 'your involvement is important!'

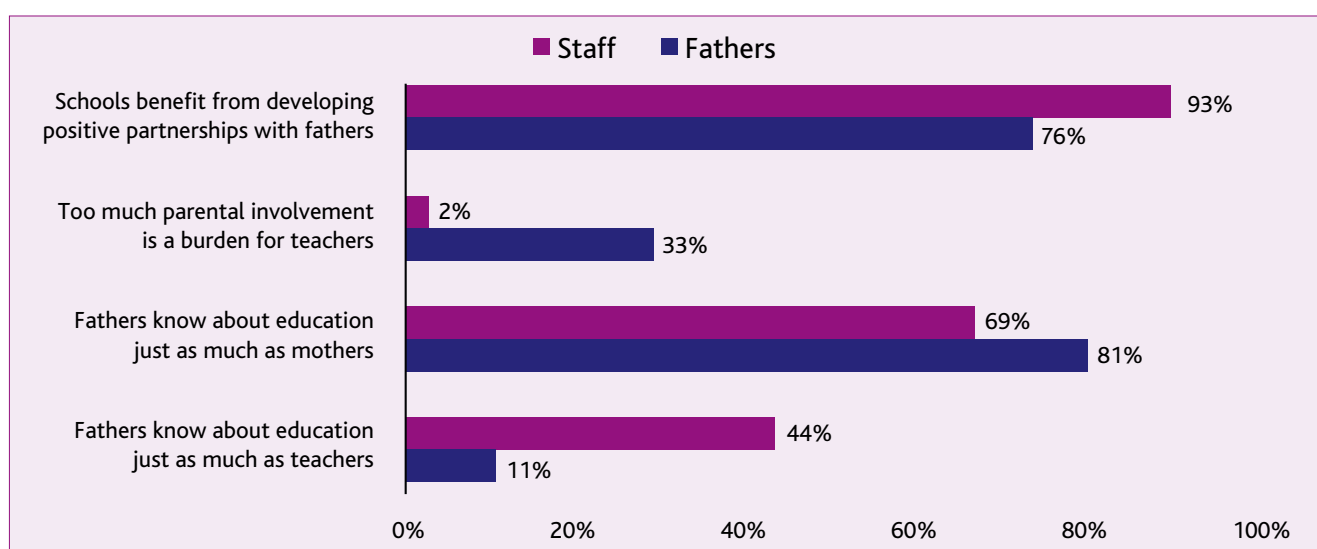
CHAMPION

Children are keen to see their fathers get involved in school because they want them to be part of their everyday lives and to celebrate achievements together. Dads do this by supporting their children with topics related to school and activities outside of school.

'I want my dad to be proud of me.'

GIRL PUPIL

Figure 1: Percentage of fathers and school staff who strongly agree with the following statements (n staff= 55, n fathers=79)

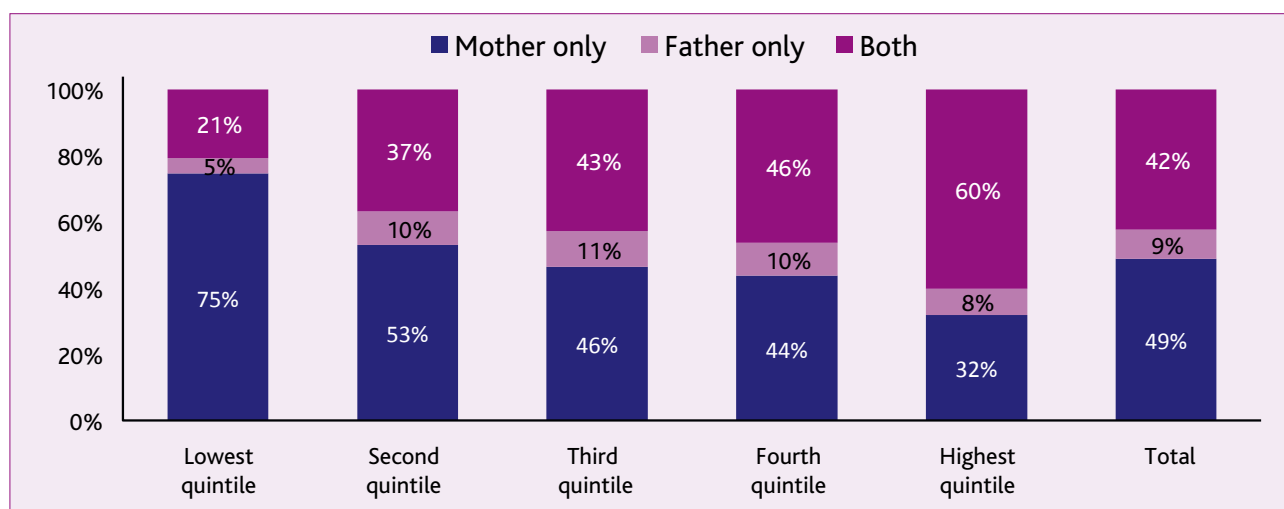


BARRIERS TO FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT

Society's expectations of dads and income

In Scotland, fathers' direct involvement in primary school is still limited in comparison to mothers' involvement. Class and income both affect dads' involvement: those in higher income households, with higher education or in higher-status jobs, tend to get more involved in their child's primary school compared to disadvantaged dads. This association is not found with mothers. This means that the families most in need of dads' positive impact may not be benefiting from their involvement and therefore widening the attainment gap between poorer and more affluent households.

Figure 4: Who attended a parents' evening, by household income (n unweighted = 1079, MCS3 Scottish sub-sample)

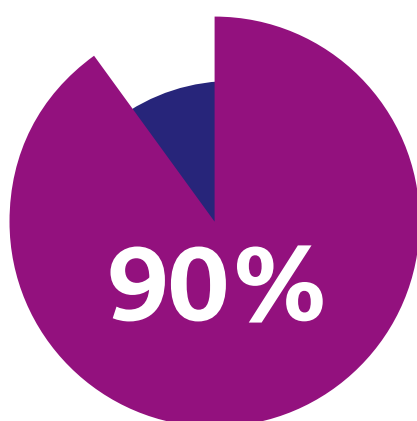


Work

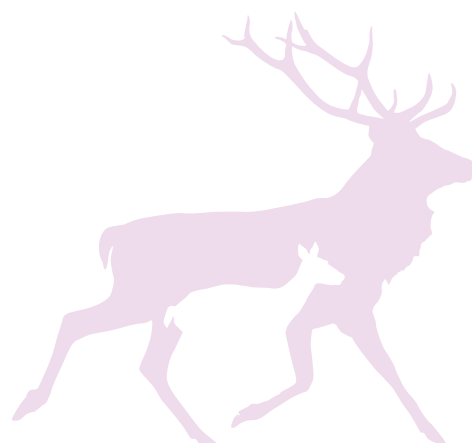
Work commitments are a major barrier to fathers' involvement in primary school, especially for dads who work long hours or have inadequate access to family-friendly policies such as flexible working so that they can attend school events.

'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



**OF FATHERS
REPORTED
WORKING LONG
HOURS AS AN
OBSTACLE TO
PARTICIPATION
IN SCHOOL**
(ELFFS project 2017)



Poor communication

Staff communicate more frequently with mums, who often act as the 'first port of call'. There is also a lack of sufficient knowledge about the lives of pupils, including their family's circumstances such as parent separation.

'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 (mum and dad)'

CHAMPION

'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?'

CHAMPION

School is traditionally a female environment

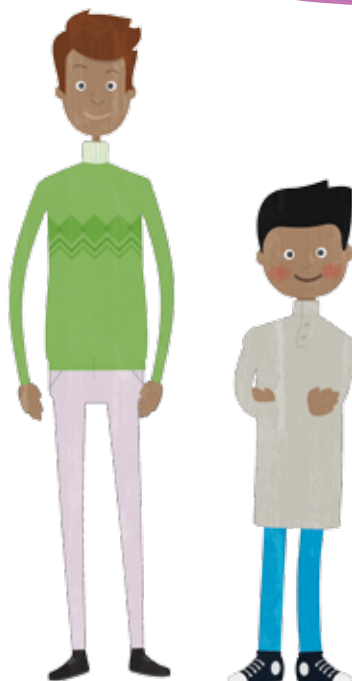
Staff automatically use language which assumes mums are the main carers. This is evident in the materials the school produces for parents, and in the learning resources it uses. Dads lack the network of friends mums tend to have, and this makes the school environment less approachable for dads.

Negative personal experiences of school

If dads have had a poor experience when they were at school themselves, or have low literacy and numeracy skills, they may be less confident to get involved. This means that some of the most vulnerable families do not fully benefit from father involvement thus widening the attainment gap. Cultural differences can also play a significant part.

'We also have refugee families in our school and... it's a completely different culture and father didn't know he was allowed to come to parents' night.'

CHAMPION



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO FATHER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

This new guide by Alison Cameron and Chris Wilson was well-received by school staff. They said it was a clear and helpful guide with strong links to current educational policies, particularly 'How Good is Our School'. This was regarded as useful in informing school procedures, as well as measuring their progress. The links to policy also meant that staff could use it as part of their professional development.

(Access the guide at www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/dad_friendly_schools.)

*'The guide is a thinking tool.
The guide is something to spark people's imagination, to get people to question... and it's whatever you can take from that to raise awareness.'*

ALISON CAMERON,
AHT AND PROJECT FACILITATOR

Recommendations for schools

- **Use the father inclusion guide:** to measure how schools already involve fathers, identify areas where work is needed, and inform staff and parents what they could be doing differently.
- **Appoint staff to champion father-inclusive work:** the champion/s needs to be supported by their leadership team and, where possible, have opportunities to share practice with colleagues with a similar role in neighbouring schools.
- **Raise awareness of barriers to fathers' involvement in school:** instead of viewing parents as having similar needs, address the specific barriers that hinder the involvement of fathers to cultivate a more dad-inclusive school culture. Inform and train school staff about what it means to be inclusive including training on gender stereotypes and their impact on children.

'We get to understand the whole family - how we can support people, how they can support us, how we can support the children'

ALISON CAMERON,
AHT AND PROJECT FACILITATOR

- **Integrate your "father inclusion" programme with existing school policy:** embed father inclusion into the school's improvement plan, diversity and inclusion policy to address the attainment gap & maximise impact.
- **Get the school community involved in designing dad friendly activities:** children, dads, mums and staff members can all contribute to developing effective "father-friendly" policies and programmes, resulting in greater family involvement and a more inclusive school culture.



JOIN US!

Everyone benefits when dads are empowered as caregivers – women, children, families, employers and society at large. So help us build a world where diversity is celebrated and the nurturing role of fathers is recognised and respected.

What does 'Man Up' mean in a world where caring and earning are shared responsibilities? At Fathers Network Scotland we believe it's time to **#DadUp** instead – and create father-friendly services, workplaces, homes and schools.

For more resources, information and access to our dad-friendly directory of groups and services, go to www.fathersnetwork.org.uk

This summary is taken from a full research report Father Involvement in Primary Schools – A Pilot Study in East Lothian, commissioned by Fathers Network Scotland and written by Dr Gitit Kadar-Satat, Reka Szaboki and Dr Ania Byerly University of Edinburgh.

For access to the full report, Father-Inclusive Guide and other educational resources, visit: www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/dad_friendly_schools.



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