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# Why Fathers' Involvement in Primary Schools Matters

## Recent trends in Scotland

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# Section A: Introduction, Background and Methodology

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction to this report

This report summarises the key points of a mixed-methods study on fathers' involvement in primary school and children's development. The research in this report was conducted by The University of Edinburgh in collaboration with Fathers Network Scotland<sup>1</sup>. The focus of this report is on fathers with primary school children in Scotland, who live in a two-parent household, and are in employment. We use the term 'father' throughout this report to refer to any men with a parenting role. This definition includes biological fathers, adoptive fathers, foster fathers, partners of single mothers, grandfathers and other men in the immediate or extended family, as well as non-kinship male caregivers in new types of families. The report focuses on a specific domain of paternal engagement in education, namely fathers' involvement in the life and work of school as manifested by their direct participation in school activities and events.

The following sections present the report's aims (1.2) and research questions (1.3). Subsequent sections provide a brief review of theoretical literature and empirical evidence on fathers' engagement in childcare and education (2.1 to 2.4) and situate the present study in a policy context (2.5). The report then describes the methodology that was used (3.1 to 3.3) and illustrate key findings (5.1 to 5.3). The report concludes with a discussion section (6) following which it outlines recommendations for research, practice, and policy (7).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/>

## 1.2 Aims

### The report has three aims:

- a. To present findings from the Growing Up in Scotland survey (GUS), a nationally representative study of children and families in Scotland. This includes evidence on the socio-economic determinants of fathers' involvement in school and the relationship between fathers' involvement and children's wellbeing and attitudes to school.
- b. To present evidence from the East Lothian Father Friendly Schools (ELFFS) Project and subsequent research (see Section 1.4). This includes the evaluation of the ELFFS project's effectiveness in raising awareness of father-inclusive practice in schools, and in strengthening the partnership between fathers and schools. In this respect, this report builds on, and extends, earlier work titled 'Father Involvement in Primary Schools – A Pilot Study in East Lothian'.<sup>2</sup>
- c. To outline recommendations for further research, practice, and policymaking around the implementation of father-inclusive practice in primary schools, strengthening the partnerships between fathers and schools and maximising the positive influence of fathers on the development of children in Scotland.

## 1.3 Research Questions

### The report considers the following research questions:

1. What are the socioeconomic and demographic determinants of fathers' involvement in primary schools in Scotland?
2. Is there a relationship between fathers' involvement in primary schools in Scotland and children's wellbeing and attitudes to school?
3. To what extent has the ELFFS project supported the implementation of father-inclusive practice in schools?
4. What are the main enablers and barriers to implementing a father-inclusive practice in school and using the 'Father Inclusion Guide'?<sup>3</sup>

To answer these questions, we applied a mixed-methods approach. We analysed data from a large-scale representative survey of children and families in Scotland, namely the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study, and primary qualitative and quantitative data from two primary schools in East Lothian. Section 3 of this report provides further information about the study's methodology.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/36xiIGX>

<sup>3</sup> See the guide in the Appendix

## 1.4 Description of the East Lothian Father Friendly Schools (ELFFS) project

The East Lothian Father Friendly Schools (ELFFS) project is a school-led initiative that took place in six primary schools in East Lothian in 2017. The main aims of the ELFFS project were to raise awareness of fathers' involvement and support the participating schools in developing and implementing father-inclusive practices. To this end, the project engaged in professional peer discussions and made use of a new tool - the 'Father Inclusion Guide' – a practical guide on how to engage fathers in the education of their children and strengthen the father-school partnership.

The project was designed and facilitated by Alison Cameron and Chris Wilson (at the time Deputy Head Teacher and Principal Teacher in Prestonpans Infant School, respectively), and Kevin Young, director and founder of DadsWork community project<sup>4</sup>. At the outset of the ELFFS project, in January 2017, each of the six participating schools appointed one (or more) staff member(s) as a Father Inclusion Champion. In total, eight champions and three facilitators participated in the project. In the following months, the School Champions participated in 4 monthly peer meetings, with the project facilitators. These meetings lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours and provided an opportunity for the school champions to:

- discuss the topic of father involvement in school with respect to their school-specific context and broader social values;
- examine their school's pedagogy, approach, and procedures concerning parental engagement and family learning through the lens of fathers' involvement;
- become familiar with the Father Inclusion Guide, a practical resource for schools on promoting fathers' participation in their children's education and school.
- develop and implement father-inclusive practices in their respective schools.

To support the champions' work, they were invited to share their views on and experiences of engaging with the project in the monthly peer meetings. In addition, the school 'father-inclusion' champions received ongoing individualised support from the project's facilitators via telephone, email and school visits. The school champions have also participated in one-to-one research interviews at the beginning and the end of the project as part of a small-scale pilot study evaluating the ELFFS project. Findings from this pilot study can be found in a 2017 report titled 'Father Involvement in Primary Schools - A Pilot Study in East Lothian'<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.dadswork.co.uk](http://www.dadswork.co.uk)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/research>

## 2. Theoretical and empirical background at a glance

### 2.1 Why focus on fathers?

The influence of fathers on the development of their children has become an area of increased interest among scholars, practitioners and policymakers in the last two decades. Subsequently, there is now an emerging body of literature on fathers' engagement in education, their involvement in school, and the benefits for the developing child. Nevertheless, scholarly research around parents' engagement in childcare and education has traditionally focused on women, while the role of men and their contributions to child development has remained comparatively under-researched. Similarly, studies in this field have focused primarily on parental engagement in education in the early years and paid less attention to the middle and late childhood years<sup>6</sup>. The lack of qualitative research also makes it difficult to consider what impacts on the lived experiences of modern fathers. Therefore, fatherhood and fathering research in the UK, and in Scotland in particular, remains scarce.

Nowadays in the UK, fathers are expected to play an active role within the family-school partnership, as well as to share care responsibilities more equally with their partner (O'Brien & Wall, 2017). Indeed, fathers in the new millennium are more involved in the lives of their children than ever before (Burgess, 2008) and aspire to spend even more time with their children (Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018). Fathers report that they are willing to make career sacrifices so that they can engage in their children's lives to a greater extent, including choosing less stressful jobs and giving up on promotion opportunities (Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018, Working Families, 2017).

However, there is evidence that the UK still has a long way to go in becoming a father-friendly nation, inclusive and supportive of all father-figures. Research demonstrates worrying trends whereby about 5 in 10 fathers feel that their role in society is not valued, and this opinion is more prevalent among fathers who live in low-income than those in high-income households. A similar number of fathers reported lacking good role models for being a father (46%), and a majority (78%) felt that they have less support than mothers (The Centre for Social Justice, 2016). Mothers also feel more involved in their child's education than fathers (Peters et al., 2008). Therefore, modern fatherhood appears to involve complex challenges for many men across the UK. Increasing the opportunities for fathers to engage with and influence their children's school could potentially reduce their levels of isolation and empower them to increase their contributions to children, families and society as a whole.

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<sup>6</sup> Roughly defined as ages 6-12 years, see Parkes et al (2017).

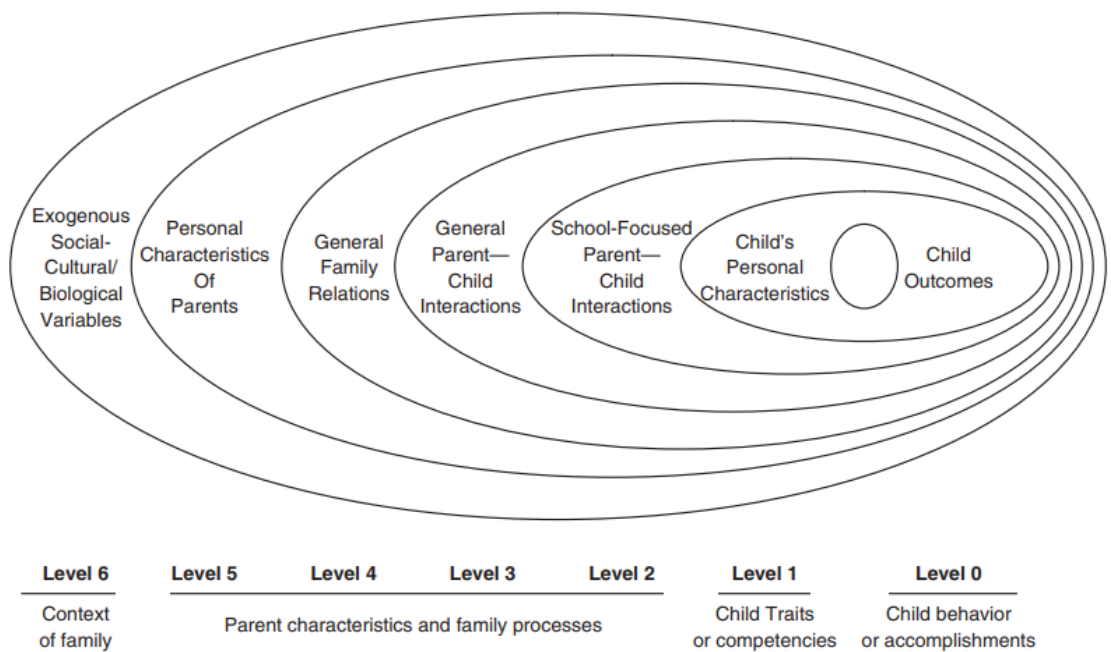
## 2.2 The effect of fathers' involvement in childcare and education on children's outcomes

### Theoretical frameworks

Fathers' involvement in their children's education can take place in three key domains: at home, at school or in the community. Home-based engagement in education includes such activities as discussing the school day with the child, offering emotional support and encouragement pertinent to learning, assisting them with homework and providing play and enrichment opportunities within the home environment. School-based involvement includes behaviours such as attendance at school events and meetings, communicating with the school and teacher and volunteering in the classroom and helping with other school operations. Community-based involvement in education refers to families' and children's participation in groups and organisations such as out-of-school clubs, community centres, and religious services.

The crucial role fathers play in the life of their children can be considered through the lens of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The model emphasises the interconnected systems that affect human development and stresses that 'proximal processes', namely social interactions with peers, teachers, the family, and the environment, are fundamental 'engines of development' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.789). Microsystems like the home and the school provide a fertile ground for such interactions, which, in turn, create opportunities for the child to grow, learn and develop. Positive partnerships between the family and school form a 'mesosystem' that boosts children's development through further interactions and collaborations. Similarly, the Family-School Relationship model (Ryan & Adams, 1995) outlines the multiple nested proximal and distal structures and processes that influence child outcomes, emphasising the fundamental impact of interactions and relationships on children's development (Figure A, cited in Rogers et al., 2009). These theoretical models highlight the importance of the father-school relationship and calls for exploring what structural elements within each system encourage or impede fathers' involvement in their children's education and school.

**Figure A: The Family-School Relationship Model**



The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler analytic model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) proposed a slightly different approach to fathers' involvement in school. This model views family engagement as 'a process that begins with families' decision-making about being involved and culminates with student outcomes' (Whitaker, 2019, p.422). This hierarchical model specifies six levels of parental involvement. Level 1 describes the factors that motivate (or discourage) parents to becoming involved in their children's schooling. This includes such motivators as cultural norms, a sense of self-efficacy, individual experiences and family life circumstances, and perceptions of invitations to be involved. Level 2 of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model outlines the different forms of involvement parents may choose to apply, for example, communication with the school and teacher, or involvement in a range of school activities. Level 3 considers the learning mechanisms parents use when they engage in their children's education and school: encouragement, modelling, reinforcement, and instruction. The next two levels take into account child/student characteristics. Level 4 considers their perceptions of the learning mechanisms his/her parents' use – encouragement, modelling, reinforcement, and instruction. Level 5 considers student attributes pertinent to learning, including intrinsic motivation to learn, self-regulation and self-efficacy. Level 6 then analyses the student outcomes. The model calls for paying attention to the processes that influence fathers' decision-making concerning involvement in their children's education and school.



## Empirical evidence

Prior empirical evidence lends compelling support to the premise that parents' involvement in education makes a unique contribution to their children's wellbeing and development, even though there is relatively little research on the individual and independent impacts of fathers. Parental involvement was found to be linked to better classroom performance (Topor et al., 2010), higher levels of student literacy (Hampden-Thompson et al., 2013) and fewer behavioural problems (Flouri, Midouhas, & Narayanan, 2016). Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017) demonstrated that a positive family-school relationship and high levels of satisfaction with the school are linked to better attainment among secondary school students in England.

Baker (2018) showed that fathers' involvement in nursery school is related to better achievement in early reading and mathematics assessments among children in the US. She further demonstrated that the positive effect of the father-school relationship on pre-schoolers' academic outcomes is independent of and additional to the impact of the mother-school relationship. Opondo et al. Redshaw (2017) demonstrated that father involvement in the early years is linked to a reduced risk of experiencing depressive symptoms at age nine years and 11 years. Research also shows that a positive father-child relationship reduces the risk of experiencing adverse outcomes, regardless of whether the father resides with the child in the same households (Harper & Fine, 2006).

Analyses of data from the UK's National Child Development Survey (NCDS) demonstrated a positive relationship between fathers' (and mothers') involvement in their children's education in middle childhood, on the one hand, and academic motivation and attainment of school leavers, on the other (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Jaynes' (2015) meta-analysis illustrates that the positive effect of fathers' involvement in school on students' academic and behavioural outcomes is stronger in middle childhood than in the adolescent years. Fathers' involvement was found to be linked to higher grades and enjoyment of school (Nord et al., 1997), decreased risk-taking behaviours (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006; Flouri, Midouhas, and Narayanan, 2016) and better well-being among adolescents (Hawkins, Amato & King, 2007).

Parks et al. (2017) explored the effects of positive father-child emotional connection on children's development in Scotland. They showed that when children report that their fathers provide them with high levels of emotional support, they also tend to report less social and emotional difficulties. Similarly, fathers' supportiveness reduces the risk of poor adjustment to school, disliking school and having a negative relationship with the school teacher, among 10-year-olds in Scotland (Parks et al., 2017). The positive effect of high-quality father-child relationships on children's outcomes was independent of and additional to the impact of the mother-child relationship and the family's socioeconomic status.

## 2.3 Trends in fathers' involvement in childcare and education

In Britain, fathers' involvement in childcare in the early years has increased from 15 minutes a day on average to around two hours in the three decades between the 1970s and 1999 (Fisher, McCulloch, & Gershuny, 1999). This increase in fathers' involvement in childcare reflects a change in social attitudes towards the role of men and women in family life (Livingston & Parker, 2011) and shifts in the cultural meaning of fatherhood (Sayer et al., 2004). Public opinion research shows that people's support of traditional gender roles associating fathers with breadwinning and mothers with homemaking has been in decline (Burghes et al., 1997; Curtice et al., 2019). There is a general trend towards convergence in the parenting roles of mothers and fathers; while women spend more time than men on domestic work, the gender gap of time spent on this work has decreased (Fagan et al., 2014; Calderwood et al., 2005), and this is partially due to the increased amount of time fathers are spending in childcare (McMunn et al., 2017).

A more recent analysis of time-use trends in the UK, however, shows that between the years 2000 and 2014, the overall time fathers spend in childcare has stalled (Henz, 2019), despite the increase in the rate of families with dual full-time earning and decline in fathers' average working hours (Connolly et al., 2016). There is still a considerable gender gap in the division of labour within the home domain, with women spending a disproportionate amount of time in caring activities and housework (Fagan & Norman, 2016). Furthermore, previous research in Scotland has shown that fathers are less involved than mothers in a range of school activities, including attendance at parents' evenings, PTAs, school committees, class visits and volunteering opportunities (Kadar-Satat et al., 2017). This indicates that, in the UK, 'actual behaviour has not caught up with changing attitudes' (Park et al., 2013, p.8).

While the disparity in the level of involvement in childcare and education by parents' sociodemographic characteristics is well documented, there is little Scottish-based national-level evidence on the socioeconomic and demographic determinants of father involvement in primary school. Involvement levels tend to be lower among non-resident fathers and those in turbulent relationships than among stably co-resident fathers (Turney & Halpern-Meekin, 2017). Studies show that fathers tend to be more involved in childcare and spend more time with their children, if they are highly educated, live in high-income households, or are employed in high-status occupations (Gray, 2006; Hill, 2004; Hook & Wolfe 2012; Sani & Treas, 2016). Among non-resident fathers, high income is linked to more contact with the child (Guarin & Meyer, 2018).

There are multiple reasons why parents from high and low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds engage with their children's school differently. For example, there is evidence that high SES parents have more knowledge than lower SES parents about educational policies and procedures, gained through broader social networks (Lareau & Cox, 2011). Higher SES parents tend to be more proactive in their involvement in school than lower SES parents and are also more likely to collaborate with other parents to promote their agenda (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau, 2003). As a result, parents from advantaged socioeconomic groups tend to have more influence on decision making within schools while parents from disadvantaged backgrounds have less power and more 'ambivalent relations with school staff' (Auerbach, 2007, p. 253). A recent qualitative study in Scotland shows that, despite targeted policy interventions aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of poverty on children's school experience, low-income families on in-work benefits struggle to meet the costs of the school day and fully participate in school (Treanor, 2018). This study demonstrates that difficulties in affording school uniforms or paying for school trips and being a recipient of Free School Meals are stressful and alienating experiences for families and pupils in poverty. The next section takes a closer look at the range of factors influencing fathers' involvement in school.

## 2.4 Factors influencing fathers' involvement in school

A variety of interwoven life circumstances affects fathers' engagement in the life and activities of their children's school. Distal conditions include such factors as cultural norms around the role of fathers and mothers and the provision of child and family services and policies such as family-friendly work entitlements. Proximal conditions include family dynamics, the social and economic context of the family and the community, the father's philosophies on fathering and their sense of parental agency.

Working fathers (and mothers) report being unable to engage in childcare and education to the extent they want due to 'unmanageable workloads that do not reconcile well with raising a family' (Working Families, 2017, p.20). Work commitments were mentioned as a significant barrier to engagement in a child's education by 44% of working parents (Peters, 2008) and this is also the situation among fathers in Scotland (Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018). International comparisons show that men are more likely than women to experience spill over of work onto their non-work life, whereas the reverse is true for women for whom non-work life tends to interfere with paid work (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2013).

Research shows that despite the growing availability of family-friendly work policies aimed at mitigating work-family conflict<sup>7</sup>, many fathers do not make use of such entitlements (CIPD, 2019; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018; Moran & Koslowski, 2019). There are multiple reasons why fathers would not use policies that could potentially support them in balancing work and family life and enable them to engage more in their children’s upbringing. First, some working fathers are not eligible for family-friendly policies. Second, employed fathers are not always aware of their entitlements or do not know how to access them. Lastly, fathers may be reluctant to exercise their rights due to economic constraints and other structural, social and psychological barriers. Research indicates that the main reasons for using flexible work arrangements among UK fathers and mothers are ‘caring responsibilities (especially for women) and increasing leisure time (especially for men)’ (CIPD, 2019, p.5). Although family-friendly work entitlements could mitigate work-family conflict, there is also a concern that such working patterns, along with technological innovations, might lead to blurring of the boundaries between paid work and family life (Gambles et al., 2006).

Paternal involvement in childcare and education is therefore hindered by a range of barriers, including societal factors, individual parent and family factors, child factors and parent-teacher factors (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Table 1 illustrates the various barriers to father involvement in school.

**Table 1.** Barriers to father involvement in school

Societal factors	Individual parent and family factors	Child factors	Parent-teacher relationships and school-specific factors
The traditional division of care and work along gender lines;	Fathers' socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds;	Child's age and gender;	The school's ethos and culture, as manifested by institutional policies and procedures;
Stereotypical views of parenthood distinguishing between the role of mothers and fathers in their child's care and education;	Fathers' own childhood schooling experience and prior experience in their child's school;	Additional support needs;	Staff attitudes and language;
	Marital status and relationship with the child's mother;	Behavioural problems, gifts or talents.	The quality and frequency of home-school communication.
Structural constraints, such as access to family-friendly work arrangements.	Living arrangements (co-resident or non-resident) and geographical proximity to the child's school; Fathers' health and wellbeing.		

(Adapted from: Kadar-Satat et al., 2017)

<sup>7</sup> For example: statutory shared parental leave, access to flexible and remote work, and job sharing and career breaks

## 2.5 The policy context of father involvement in school

Promoting child wellbeing and reducing the attainment gap between pupils from advantaged and disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds have been at the heart of the Scottish Government's political decision-making since devolution in 1999. The ultimate vision and mission is to make Scotland 'the best place in the world to grow up', a country where children and young people 'grow up loved, safe and respected'<sup>8</sup>. These political aspirations are evidenced by an ongoing commitment to cementing the values of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Scottish society through domestic law and policy. Article 18 of the UNCRC is explicit about the critical role both the family and the state play in the healthy development of children. It asserts that all children have the right to be cared for and have access to learning opportunities that will enable them to develop their full potential. The article further states that 'both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children'<sup>9</sup>.

UNCRC principles concerning children's rights to education, healthy development and wellbeing have informed the development of a range of Scottish bills and national frameworks, including the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and associated Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) integrative model, The National Parenting Strategy (2012), Education (Scotland) Act 2016, and the new Children (Scotland) Act 2020 which is currently being considered in Holyrood.

The endeavour to formally introduce parental engagement in education into government policy and integrate it within school policies and practices is relatively new. In Scotland, the National Improvement Framework and Learning Together (2018-2021) Action Plan are among a range of models designed to increase the partnership between the family and the state in sharing responsibility for the education of children and young people. These frameworks make it the professional responsibility of schools and teachers to promote parental engagement in education and attempt to remove barriers to parents' involvement in their children's schooling.

In order to understand trends in parental engagement at a national level and support improvements at the school and local authority levels, the Scottish government has recently conducted a pilot census on Parental Involvement and Engagement (PIE)<sup>10</sup>. The PIE census, which will be rolled out across all local authorities in the 2020/21 academic year (and every two years thereafter) aims to explore parents' and carers' views of, and relationships with, their children's school. This new research endeavour further demonstrates the importance policymakers in Scotland currently place on parental engagement as a tool to improve child development and wellbeing.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-rights-consultation-incorporating-uncrc-rights-child-domestic-law-scotland/pages/2/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNCRC\\_summary-1\\_1.pdf?\\_ga=2.155339827.90498859.1575802204-1622345474.1575802204](https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNCRC_summary-1_1.pdf?_ga=2.155339827.90498859.1575802204-1622345474.1575802204)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/parental-involvement-and-engagement-census/>

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 The Growing Up in Scotland Survey

We addressed research questions 1 and 2 by analysing secondary data from the Growing Up in Scotland survey (GUS)<sup>11</sup>. These data enabled us to explore fathers' involvement in primary school and the relationship between such involvement and children's socio-emotional wellbeing and attitudes to school.

GUS is a nationally representative longitudinal cohort survey that follows the life circumstances and experiences of children and families in Scotland since 2005. As such, GUS collects data repeatedly, either annually or biennially, on a wide range of topics, including families' home and community environment, parents' socioeconomic status, their use of childcare, and their children's schooling and development. Commissioned by the Scottish Government and managed by ScotCen, GUS serves as a rich data source that can be used by researchers and other stakeholders to inform relevant policy areas and devise evidence-based programmes and interventions.

The initial sample for GUS consisted of 3,000 children aged around three years ('Child Cohort - CC') and 5,000 babies aged around 10-months ('Birth Cohort 1 - BC1'). In 2011, a new sample of about 6,000 ten-month-olds was added to the study ('Birth Cohort 2 - BC2') and the Child Cohort was terminated, leaving GUS with two Birth Cohorts.

To cover the whole of Scotland and generate a geographically representative sample, GUS used a multi-stage clustered sampling framework to select families for the survey. In the first stage, aggregated Data Zones were used to select 130 areas in Scotland at random. In the second stage, babies and children were chosen at random within each of these areas from the Child Benefit records, provided they were born on dates that qualified them for inclusion in CC or BC1.

While GUS uses a range of methods of data collection, its primary tool is a face-to-face computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) with a self-complete (CASI) section, administered in each sweep to a 'main respondent'. In 98% of all cases, this is the child's mother. So far, nine sweeps of data collection have been completed, and a 10th sweep is currently in fieldwork. Data from sweeps 1 to 8 is available on request through the UK Data Service (UKDS). We were granted a license to access and analyse data from GUS, following a careful screening process by the UKDS and the Scottish Government. This process requires us to provide a detailed account of our approach to ethical and data protection guidelines.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://growingupinscotland.org.uk/about-gus/>

In this report, we focused on children who were selected to Birth Cohort 1 (BC1). We analysed data from the 7th sweep GUS, for which data was collected in year 2012/13 when the cohort children were aged around seven years and ten months. At that time, 84% of respondents (n=2,899) reported living in a couple-family and 16% in a single-parent household. Our analyses were restricted to parents in couple families because these families provided information about fathers' involvement in school. Consequently, our analyses do not represent trends for fathers and mothers in single-parent families. The analyses were further restricted to primary respondents who identified as the study child's mothers (including biological, adoptive and foster mothers), producing a total sample of 2,825 respondents. We chose to use the 7th sweep of data collection because, in this sweep, mothers were asked to report on their, and their partner's, involvement in their children's school. The analyses we present here use the mothers' reports to explore fathers' participation in primary school. It should be noted that there could be a discrepancy between mothers' and fathers' reports on the rate of father involvement in school (Charles et al., 2018).

The stratified and clustered sampling design used in GUS requires applying technical adjustments when analysing the data. For example, there is a need to use 'selection weights' in both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses to statistically correct the sample's unequal selection probabilities. In longitudinal analyses, 'non-response' weights should also be used to statistically correct for any bias created by selective attrition of respondents across sweeps. A failure to use these adjustments could generate inaccurate statistical results which could, in turn, lead to misleading inferences. For example, non-weighted analyses could show that there is a statistically significant difference across groups when the differences are, in fact, not significant. To resolve this, we used the required statistical adjustments as described by ScotCen's analytical guidelines<sup>12</sup>. We created a complex samples plan file in SPSS that takes this into account. We also used the SVY package in Stata to retrieve some of the post estimations.

The analyses were conducted in two stages. In the first stage, we explored the bivariate associations between fathers' involvement in school and SES. Bivariate tests examine the relationship between two variables at a time, for example, father involvement in school and household income. This was followed by multivariate regression models that were used to predict the likelihood of a father being highly involved in their child's school, after controlling for other factors, including SES. The analyses of associations between father involvement in school and child socio-emotional difficulties and attitudes to school took a similar two-stage approach. In both bivariate and multivariate analyses, we set the level of statistical significance at  $p < 0.05$ , meaning the probability of obtaining the observed results by chance (and thus an estimate not being representative of the general population) is no more than 5%.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://growingupinscotland.org.uk/using-gus-data/practical-help/>

## We used the following variables:

### Involvement in school

- **Father involvement in school** 13, 14 – whether the father participated in, or attended the following events/activities in their child's school since their last interview 15: a) parents' evening; b) a Parent Council, PTA, School Board, etc.; c) a school event in which their child participated; d) a school event in which their child did not participate; e) a visit to the child's classroom; f) an open meeting; g) volunteering in the classroom, school office or library; h) volunteering on a trip or school event; i) volunteering without having been asked; j) helping with fundraising; k) something else; l) none of these.
- **Level of father (and mother) involvement in school** – a composite 'involvement in school' score for each respondent, based on whether they participated in the eleven activities mentioned above. Scores ranged from 0 for a parent who did not participate in any school activities, to eleven, for a parent who participated in all activities. We further distinguished between three levels of involvement in school: Low (participation in 0-2 activities), moderate (participation in 3-4 activities), and high (participation in 5 or more activities).

### Socio-economic and demographic variables

- **Father (and mother) social-class (NSSEC):** a) managerial/professional/intermediate occupations; b) small employer or self-employed; c) lower supervisory/technical occupations; d) semi-routine/routine occupations.
- **Father (and mother) education:** a) Degree or equivalent qualifications; b) Higher Grade or equivalent qualifications; c) Standard Grade or lower.
- **Household equivalised income:** a) Top Quintile ( $\geq$ £46,428); b) 4th Quintile ( $\geq$ £31,553 < £46,428); c) 3rd Quintile ( $\geq$ £20,182 < £31,553); d) 2nd Quintile ( $\geq$ £13,000 < £20,182); e) Bottom Quintile (<£13,000).
- **Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2009):** a) 20% least deprived areas; b) Second quintile; c) Third quintile; d) Fourth quintile; e) 20% most deprived areas.

### Parents' self-reported health

- **Father's (and mother's) general health** (as reported by the primary respondent): a) excellent/very good; b) good; c) fair/poor.

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<sup>13</sup> In sweep 7 of GUS, the child's mother reported on whether their partner participated in these activities.

<sup>14</sup> We also used the main respondents' version of this variable to explore mothers' involvement in school.



### Child characteristics and outcomes

- **Child's sex:** a) boy; b) girl.
- **Child socio-emotional difficulties as measured by the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ):** a) low Child Difficulty (SDQ score of 0-4); b) moderate Child Difficulty (SDQ score of 5-9); c) high Child Difficulty (SDQ score of 10 or more)<sup>16</sup>. The composite 'Child Difficulty' variable captures four sub-domains: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, peer problems, and inattention/hyperactivity.
- **Mother's report on how often her child is looking forward to going to school:** a) more than once a week; b) less frequently than once a week.
- **Mother's report on how often her child is reluctant to go to school:** a) not at all; b) once a week or more.
- **Child's report on how often he/she dislikes school:** a) never/sometimes; b) often/always.

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<sup>16</sup> A high score on the SDQ is evidence of greater social and emotional difficulties than a low score.

### 3.2 East Lothian primary schools

We addressed research questions 3 and 4 by using a mixed-methods approach within a case study framework. Case studies use multiple sources to explore real-life phenomena in a specific context. They often intend to understand the experiences of people and illustrate both similarities and variations within these experiences. Case studies typically collect data from small non-probability samples (Pearson et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). As such, the goal of case studies is not to make statistical inferences concerning the wider population, but to ‘investigate “how” and “why” questions about contemporary events...where there are many variables of interest and limited ability to exercise control in the setting’ (Pearson et al., 2015; p.3).

We collected qualitative and quantitative data in two primary schools in East Lothian in 2018-2019. These two schools have previously participated in the six-month 2017 ELFFS project<sup>17</sup>. Pupils in the two schools from which data were used in this report come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The percentage of P4-P7 pupils who were registered for free school meals in these schools in 2018 is between 8% and 11%. To protect the study participants’ identities, we will refer to these schools as School A and School B and will present aggregated information from the two samples. At both times, we focused on fathers with children in P1 and P7.

Our qualitative data collection included a total of 16 one-to-one in-depth interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from 38 to 64 minutes. We interviewed two school champions, two project facilitators, six fathers, and six mothers. To select information-rich cases that would illuminate the study’s topic in-depth, we interviewed school champions who were involved in the ELFFS project in 2017 and continued in this role in 2018. We also conducted two Child focus groups with thirteen P7 pupils in total. The Child focus groups ranged from 45 to 55 minutes in length. We used a convenience sampling technique to select participants for the father and mother interviews, and the child focus groups. The interview and focus group recordings were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis in NVIVO.

Our quantitative data collection included a Father Survey (n=55) covering a range of questions about father participation in school events and the father-school relationship. A questionnaire was sent home with the child, describing the nature of the study, explaining the ethical guidelines that were implemented, and inviting fathers to complete a set of closed-ended questions. Since we used a non-probability volunteer sample in these surveys and given the small number of responses, the data should be regarded as preliminary. The sample is likely to be biased towards fathers who are already relatively involved in school and those who have an interest in the topic of this research. The risk, therefore, is that their responses and views are not representative of other father groups within the school, for example, fathers who tend not to get involved in school or those who live remotely. The readers of this report are invited to evaluate the results accordingly. Table 2 displays the characteristics of the respondents in the Father Survey.

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<sup>17</sup> Since six schools participated in the ELFFS project, this data should be considered indicative rather than representative of the ELFFS schools’ experiences around raising awareness of father involvement in school and developing father inclusive practices.

**Table 2.** Father Survey - Sample Characteristics (n=55)

Characteristic	Options	%
<b>Father's age</b>	30 years and under	13%
	31-40	51%
	41-50	33%
	50 years and over	4%
<b>Number of children (&lt;16ys)</b>	One child	22%
	Two children	51%
	Three or more	27%
<b>Marital status</b>	Married/civil partner	93%
	Single/Divorced/	7%
	Separated/Widowed/Other	
<b>Highest educational qualification</b>	Secondary school	49%
	Undergraduate degree	33%
	Postgraduate degree	7%
	Other	11%
<b>Paid job status</b>	Full time	90%
	Part-time	5%
	Not working	5%
<b>Child's gender</b>	Boy	49%
	Girl	51%
<b>Relationship to child</b>	Biological father	89%
	Foster/Step Father/Other	11%

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

The ethics committee of the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh reviewed and approved this study, including its consent procedure, survey design, and interview and focus group schedules. We adhered to the BERA (2018) ethical guidelines and informed the participants by letter, and again at the start of the individual semi-structured interview and focus group, about the purpose of the study, explained how we will use the information they share with us, and described the procedures we put in place to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality.

The parents, children and teachers in our study provided oral and written consent prior to the commencement of their interview or focus group. We ensured participants were aware that they did not have to take part in the study and were free to refuse to answer any given question, as well as to ask for their responses to be removed from our data (within the first month of their participation). We delivered the survey to respondents via their school. Here, too, we sent a letter informing staff and fathers in the two study schools of the project's aims, methodology, and procedures, including its voluntary and anonymised nature, before inviting them to complete a questionnaire about fathers' involvement in school.

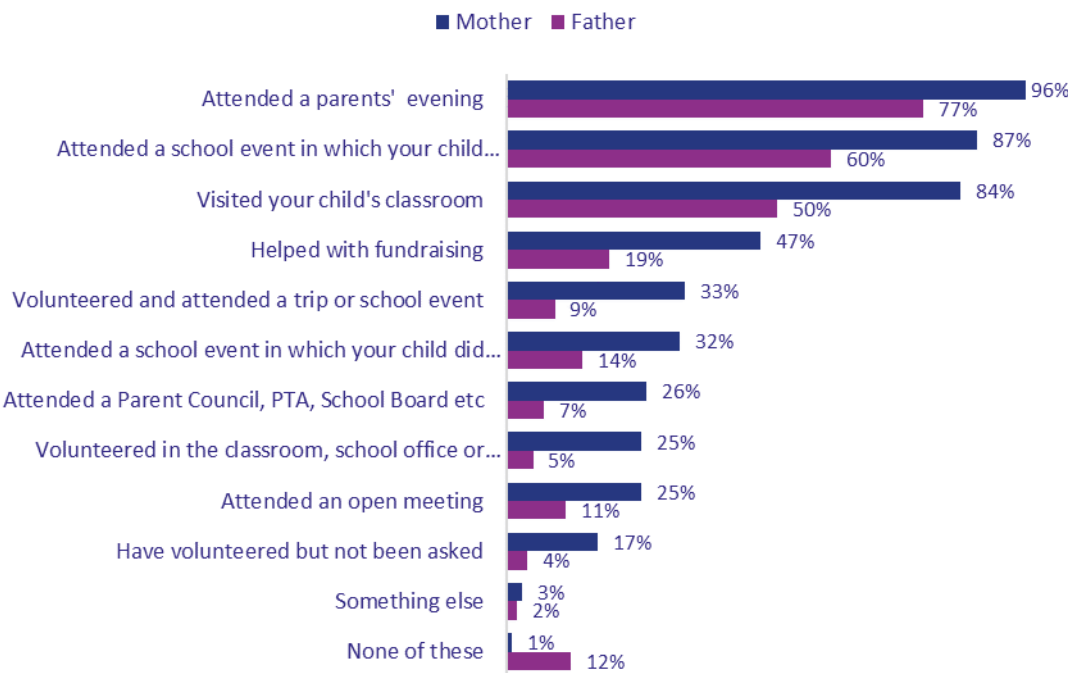
## Section B: Findings and Recommendations

### 4.1 Socioeconomic determinants of fathers' involvement in primary school

#### Overall trends in father involvement in school activities

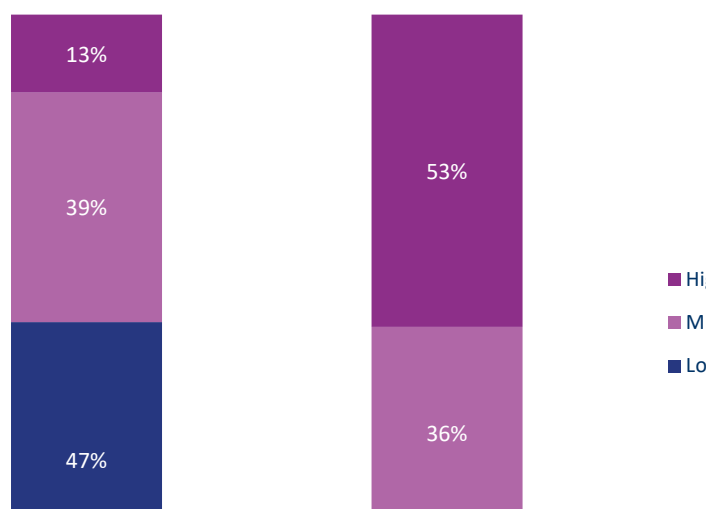
The analyses in Section 4.1 examine the relationship between fathers' involvement in primary schools in Scotland and a range of socio-economic and demographic factors. Figure 1 displays the percentage of fathers and mothers who participated in a variety of activities in their child's school since their last GUS interview (held in 2010/11). The figure shows that fathers were generally less involved than mothers in their 7-8-year-olds' school. The percentage of fathers who participated in each of the eleven school activities outlined in the figure is lower than that of mothers. For example, while almost all mothers reported attending a parents' evening in their child's school (96%), only 77% of fathers did so, according to their partners' reports. The difference between the participation rates of fathers and mothers is particularly prominent in some school activities. The difference between the participation rate of fathers and mothers is particularly noticeable in some school activities. For example, while there is a difference of 19 percentage points in the rate of fathers' and mothers' attendance at parents' evenings, the difference in the rate of fathers and mothers who reported visiting their child's classroom is 34 percentage points. Furthermore, the fathers' participation rate is below 15% in seven of the school activities outlined in Figure 1, compared to one activity in which mothers reported a participation rate below 15%. On average, fathers participated in 2.7 of the eleven activities listed above while mothers participated in 5 of those activities.

**Figure 1.** Percentage of fathers and mothers who participated in a range of activities at their child's school (GUS bc1 sw7, weighted, n=2,824)



As can be seen in Figure 2, 13% of fathers were identified as highly involved in their child’s school, compared to 53% of mothers. By contrast, almost half of fathers (47%) had low levels of involvement in school, compared to 10% of mothers. Further analysis shows that there was a moderate positive correlation between the level of participation of fathers and that of mothers, in the activities mentioned above ( $r=0.4$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), meaning that in couple families, when one of the parents is highly involved in their child’s school, their partner also tends to be very involved.

**Figure 2.** Levels of involvement in school, by parents' gender (GUS, bc1 sw7, weighted, n=2,824)



The individual and group interview data collected in two East Lothian schools showed that parents, children, and teachers were all aware of the gender gap in fathers’ and mothers’ direct involvement in school, whereby men are less frequently involved than women in school activities

*I’ve not seen that many fathers get involved in things, really. To be honest...even the official aspects, like the Council, all the stuff is done by mothers*  
(Dad 1)

*He picked up the children a couple of times when he was home. I suggested it would be a nice surprise for them*  
(Mum 6)

*At school, we use an App. So it's for behaviour, but it's also a messaging system as well. I think out my class every single one that is signed up to it is a mum. And I've got two dads that are signed up as well as the mums*  
(Teacher 1)

*My dad doesn't really come to my school. He hardly ever comes to anything. Because he lives quite far away from here*  
(Boy 2)

In their ELFFS qualitative interviews, parents and teachers situated the discussion around fathers' participation in school activities within the frameworks of shared-parenting and equal-parenting. They noted that gender differences in involvement in school are manifested in multiple and interlinked ways, and often depend on the work and care configurations in the household. Moreover, they articulated that it is not uncommon for each parent to assume different (sometimes complementary) roles and responsibilities when engaging with their child's school, with mothers typically leading processes and managing the child's learning environment.

*I get the impression – this is only my impression – that mothers are generally more involved with certain aspects of both the learning and the information that the school pass on.*

(Dad 5)

*We both went together to the Parents' Evening. But I think I was more kind of...talking and asking the questions.*

(Mum 3)

*...Committee meetings are open for everybody and there's always dads. But the mothers...do the management of things most of the time.*

(Mum 1)

*If they do both come, it's the mum that asks the questions. It's not very often that the dad says very much. As an example, I had a pupil who was displaying some behaviour difficulties, and I knew that he had a real interest in football. So when they came to the parents' evening the mum was leading it...so I was speaking to her, and the boy had his football kit on, and I said to the dad 'what do you think we should be doing because I know that you're with the football team – that's a discipline, what do you recommend?' And he shrug his shoulders.*

(Teacher 1)

The interviewed mothers, but less so the fathers, reflected on their engagement in invisible labour in the service of schooling, which often required considerable investment of mental, social and emotional capital. Mothers frequently immersed themselves in activities such as networking or research which empowered them with the individual agency needed to make decisions and lead interventions concerning their child's education.

*I do occasionally walk up to the teacher and ask how things are going. And I read about it in my spare time. About how to motivate my child a bit more...and I ask him to work at home on things that I think he's not doing so well at school.*

(Mum 4)

The relationship between fathers’ involvement in school and socio-economic status (SES)

Some fathers are more involved in their child’s school than others. Data from the GUS survey shows that there is a relationship between socio-economic status and fathers’ involvement in their 7-8-year-old child’s school. Figure 3 shows a statistically significant association between the level of area deprivation and fathers’ levels of involvement in their child’s school activities. Fathers from less deprived areas tend to be more involved in their child’s school compared with fathers in more deprived areas. For example, 6% of fathers from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland have a high level of involvement compared to 16% of fathers from the 20% least deprived areas. Similarly, the percentage of fathers with low involvement is 62% for those who reside in the most deprived areas, compared to 41% for fathers from the least deprived areas.

Figure 3. Fathers' level of involvement by Scottish index of Multiple Deprivation (GUS, bc1 sw7, weighted, n=2,824)

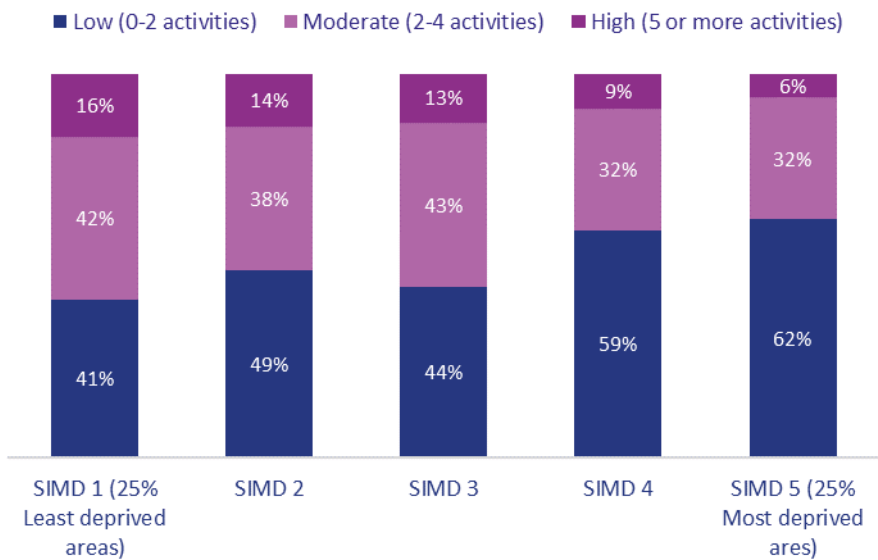
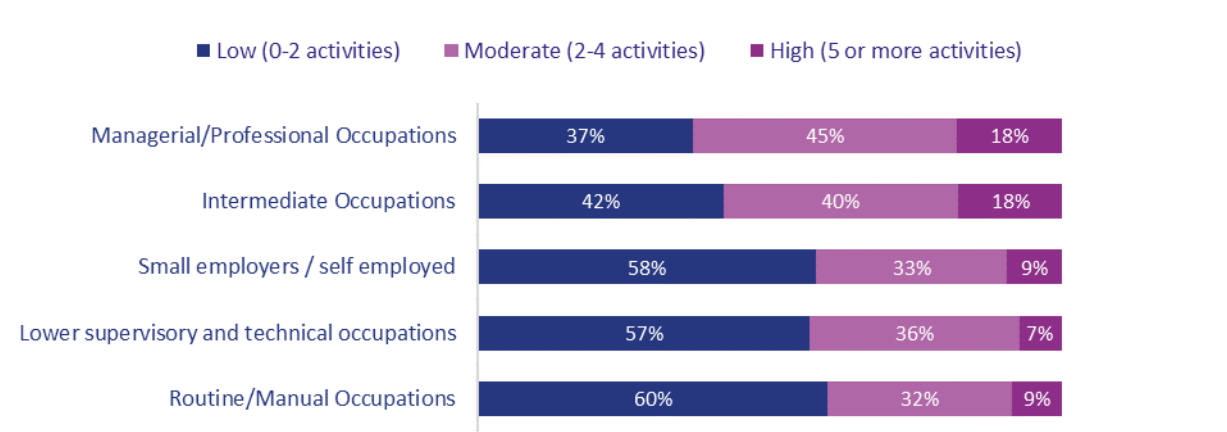


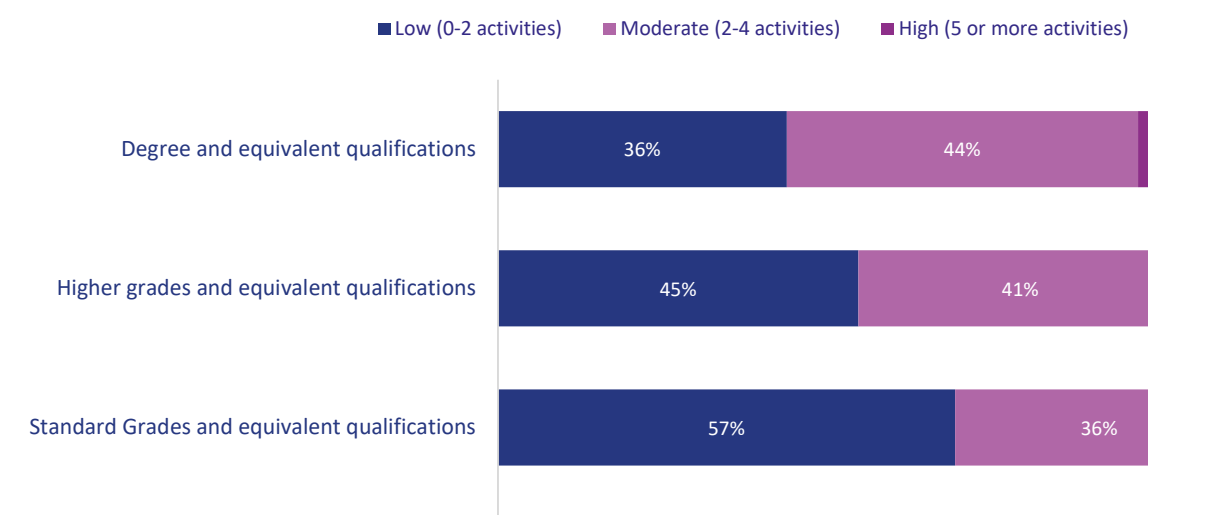
Figure 4 displays the bivariate relationship between fathers' social class (occupational status) and their level of involvement in their child's primary school. Among fathers with 'managerial/professional occupations' and 'intermediate occupations', 18% were reported by their partner as highly involved in school, compared to 9% of fathers who worked for 'small employers', in 'routine occupations' or who were 'self-employed'.

**Figure 4.** Fathers' level of involvement by type of occupation (GUS, bc1 sw7, weighted, n=2,753)



There was also a positive association between fathers' highest qualification and their level of involvement in their child's school. Fathers who were highly educated were reported as more involved in school than those who were less highly educated. As can be seen in Figure 5, 20% of fathers with 'degree or equivalent qualifications' were highly involved in school compared to 5% of those with 'none/other qualifications'. Similarly, 36% of fathers with 'degree and equivalent qualifications' had a low level of involvement, compared to 72% of those with 'none/other qualifications'.

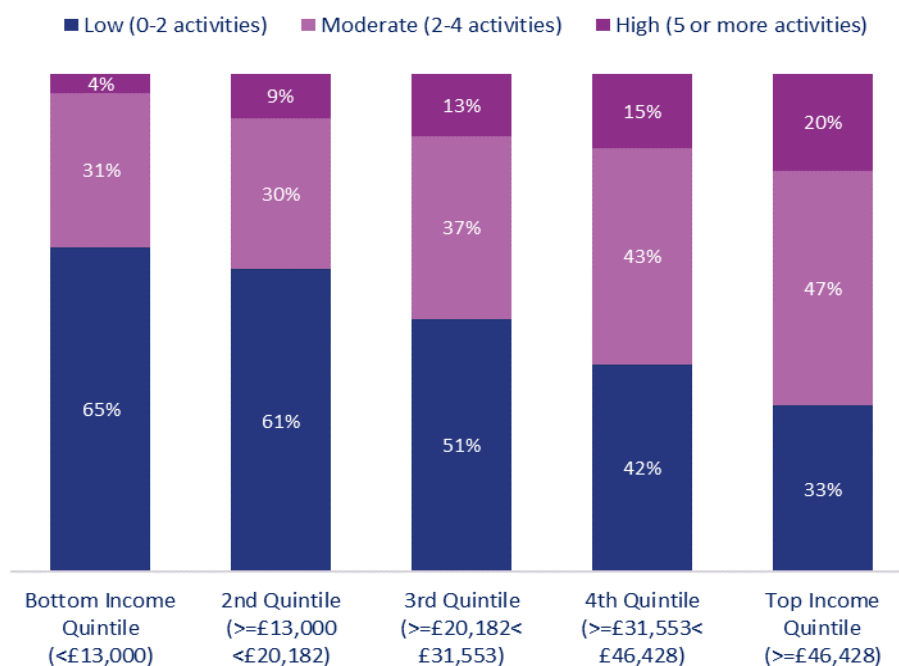
**Figure 5.** Fathers' level of involvement by highest qualifications (GUS, bc1 sw7, weighted, n=2,753)





Fathers' involvement in their child's school was found to be linked significantly and positively to the household income. Fathers in high-income households were reported as more involved than those in low-income families. According to Figure 6, 20% of fathers from the 'top income quintile' were highly involved in school compared to 4% of those from the 'bottom income quintile'. Similarly, 33% of fathers from the 'top income quintile' had a low level of involvement compared to 65% of those from the 'bottom income quintile'.

**Figure 6.** Fathers' level of involvement by household's income (GUS, bc1 sw7, weighted, n=2,753)



The bivariate analyses presented in figures 1 to 6 were complemented with an ordinal regression model that explores the unique and independent effect of each SES factor on the level of father involvement in school. As can be seen in Table 3, fathers who work for small employers or who are self-employed are less likely to be included in the highly involved category compared to fathers in semi-routine or routine occupations (OR 0.64,  $p<0.05$ ). The effect of mothers' occupation type on fathers' involvement in school is different. Fathers whose partners are employed in managerial, professional and intermediate occupations, work for small employers or are self-employed, are between 1.5 and 1.6 times more likely to be highly involved in school compare to fathers with a partner in a semi-routine/routine occupation ( $p<0.001$  and  $p<0.01$  respectively).

Parents' education was also related to fathers' level of direct involvement in their 7-8-year-olds' primary school. Fathers whose highest qualification was a Higher Grade (or equivalent professional qualifications) were more likely to be found in the high involvement group than those with Standard Grades or lower qualifications (OR 1.37,  $p<0.01$ ). There was no statistically significant difference in the level of involvement between fathers who had a degree (or equivalent qualifications) and those with a Standard grade. Fathers whose partners had a degree or equivalent qualifications were more likely to be included in the highly involved category than fathers whose partners had a Standard Grade or lower qualifications.

**Table 3.** An ordinal regression model predicting the probability of fathers' level of involvement in school, by SES (n=2,428)

Fathers level of involvement in school (baseline – low)	B	S.E.	O.R.
Fathers Involvement - Moderate	2.32***	0.205	10.20
Fathers Involvement - High	4.65***	0.202	104.6
<b>Fathers occupation type (reference Semi-routine/Routine)</b>			
Managerial/Professional/Intermediate	0.20	0.12	1.23
Small employers/self-employed	-0.44**	0.17	0.64
Lower supervisory/technical	-0.24	0.14	0.79
<b>Fathers highest qualification (reference: Standard Grades or lower)</b>			
Degree or equivalent	0.21	0.13	1.23
Higher Grade or equivalent	0.32**	0.11	1.37
<b>Household income (reference: Bottom Quintile &lt;£13,000)</b>			
Top Quintile (>=£46,428)	0.25	0.17	1.29
4th Quintile	0.19	0.16	1.21
3rd Quintile	0.00	0.16	1.00
2nd Quintile	-0.12	0.17	0.89
<b>SIMD (reference: 20% most deprived areas)</b>			
20% least deprived areas	-0.15	0.18	0.86
4 <sup>th</sup>	-0.13	0.15	0.88
3 <sup>rd</sup>	0.23	0.16	1.26
2 <sup>nd</sup>	-0.15	0.16	0.86
<b>Mothers occupation type (reference Semi-routine/Routine)</b>			
Managerial/Professional/Intermediate	0.41***	0.13	1.50
Small employers/self-employed	0.47**	0.17	1.60
Lower supervisory/technical	0.04	0.22	1.04
<b>Mothers highest qualification (reference: Standard Grades or lower)</b>			
Degree or equivalent	0.26*	0.12	1.30
Higher grades or equivalent	0.12	0.13	1.13
<b>Mothers involvement in school</b>			
Mothers involvement score (0-11)	0.37***	0.02	1.44
Pseudo R Square (Cox and Snell)	0.21		
Test of parallel lines	F <sub>(19,47)</sub> =1.29, p=0.23		
Wald X <sup>2</sup> <sub>(19)</sub>	534.00, p<0.001		
Log-likelihood	2164.34		

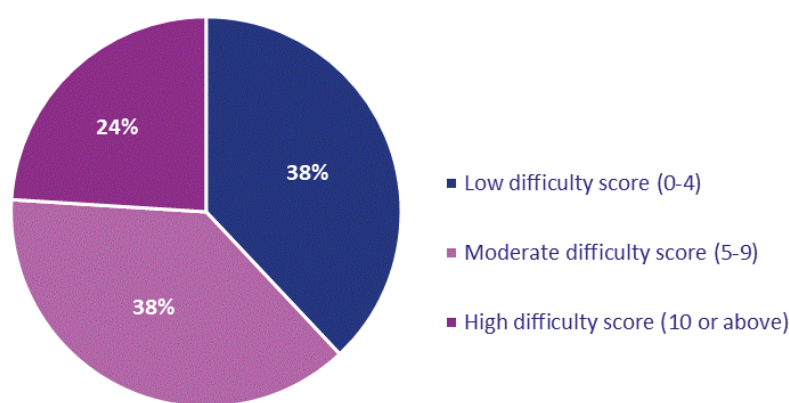
\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001. Parents' working hours were excluded from the model due to incomplete data, although this, and a range of other factors, may contribute to explaining their level of involvement in school.

Both the household income and level of area deprivation were not statistically significant predictors of how involved fathers were in their child's school. Fathers whose partners had a high level of involvement in school were more likely to be highly involved in school themselves (OR 1.44, p<0.001). Overall, the model suggests that parental educational level and occupation type and mother's involvement in school may be better predictors of fathers' participation in school than the household income or the level of deprivation in the area in which the family lives.

4.2 Fathers' involvement in school and children's developmental outcomes

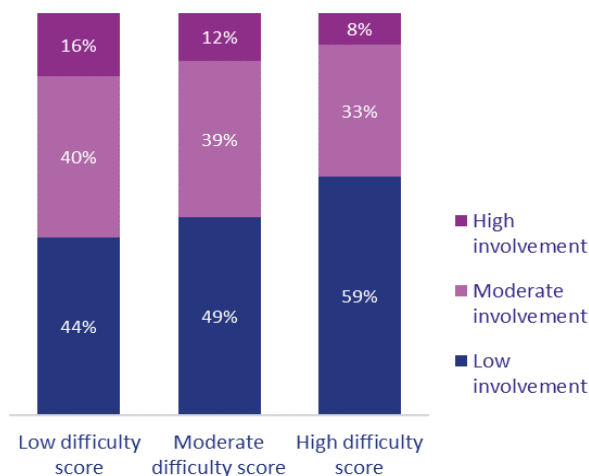
Section 4.2 presents a set of analyses exploring the relationship between parental involvement in primary school activities and children’s developmental outcomes, focusing on their wellbeing and attitudes to school. The distribution of social-emotional difficulties scores (Figure 7) shows that 38% of the surveyed children experienced a low level of difficulty and an equal number of children experienced a moderate level of difficulty. 24% of the GUS children scored ten or over and were included in the high social-emotional difficulties group.

**Figure 7.** Percentage of children with low, moderate and high socio-emotional difficulty scores (GUS, bc1, sw7, n=2,806)

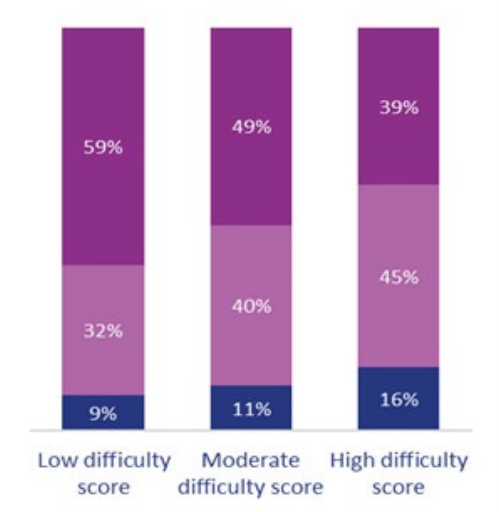


Figures 8 and 9 display the distribution of difficulty scores by fathers’ and mothers’ levels of involvement in school. As can be seen in Figure 8, there is a relationship between the child’s difficulties score and their father’s level of school involvement.

**Figure 8.** Level of Child Difficulty by father's involvement (GUS, bc1 sw7, n=2806)



**Figure 9.** Level of Child Difficulty by mother's involvement (GUS, bc1 sw7, n=2806)



The share of children with a high difficulty score is significantly higher among those who have fathers who are less involved in school than among same-age children with highly involved fathers. A similar trend is observed in Figure 9, whereby the children of mothers who are highly involved in school are less likely to score highly on the strength and difficulties questionnaire than those with mothers who are less involved. Taken together, these two figures indicate that having involved parents reduces the risk of experiencing a range of social and emotional difficulties.

Table 4 displays multivariate ordinal regression models predicting the probability of reporting high child social-emotional difficulty, by parental involvement, parents' general health and socioeconomic status. Model 1 shows that mothers reported higher SDQ scores for children whose fathers had a low level of school involvement. Compared to children whose fathers were highly involved in school, those with fathers who were in the low involvement category were more likely to experience a broader range of social and emotional difficulties (OR 1.00 versus 1.41 respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ). A similar relationship was found between mothers' levels of school involvement and their children's difficulties score, indicating that high parental school involvement reduces the risk of poor social and emotional outcomes among 7-8-year-olds. Model 1 also demonstrates a link between a child's difficulty score and his/her parents' general health. When the mother and father are in excellent or very good health, primary school children are less likely to score highly on the SDQ. Furthermore, boys were found to be more at risk of experiencing poor social and emotional wellbeing than girls, according to their SDQ assessment.

Model 2 in Table 4 shows that the inclusion of a range of socioeconomic characteristics reduces the association between a child's SDQ score and their father's involvement in school and general health to a non-significant level. The effect of mothers' involvement and general health on children's social-emotional difficulties weakens but remains statistically significant. Fathers' levels of education and mothers' occupation types are both independently linked to SDQ scores. The children of fathers who are highly educated are less likely to experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties than those with fathers whose highest qualification is a Standard Grade or lower (OR 0.81 vs 1.00, respectively,  $p < 0.05$ ). The share of children with a high difficulty score is greater among those whose mothers work in semi-routine/routine occupations compared to those who are in managerial, professional and intermediate occupations, work for small employers or are self-employed. Children in households that fall into the top income quintile were reported as having lower SDQ scores compared to those living in the poorer 20% of households.

Overall, the results in Table 4 indicate that mothers' involvement in school has a positive effect on a child's social and emotional wellbeing, taking into account the level of their partner's involvement and general health, child's gender, and the family's socioeconomic status. In contrast, fathers' involvement in primary school seems to be less strongly linked to their children's difficulties score once a range of other factors, including the father's socioeconomic background and health, are taken into account.

**Table 4.** Ordinal regression models predicting the probability of reporting a high social-emotional difficulty score, by parental involvement, general health and SES (GUS, bc1, sw7)

Child socio-emotional difficulty score (baseline – low)	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	OR	B	OR
Child's socio-emotional difficulty score - moderate	-0.85***	0.43	-1.36**	0.26
Child's socio-emotional difficulty score - high	0.89***	2.45	0.45	1.56
<b>Fathers involvement in school (reference – high)</b>				
Fathers Involvement - low	0.34**	1.41	0.18	1.20
Fathers Involvement - moderate	0.15	1.16	0.11	1.12
<b>Fathers general health (reference – poor)</b>				
Fathers general health - excellent/very good	-0.47***	0.62	-0.18	0.83
Fathers general health - good	-0.19	0.82	-0.06	0.94
<b>Mothers involvement in school (reference – high)</b>				
Mothers Involvement - low	0.53***	1.70	0.33*	1.39
Mothers Involvement - moderate	0.42***	1.52	0.29**	1.33
<b>Mothers general health (reference – poor)</b>				
Mothers general health - excellent/very good	-0.79***	0.45	-0.70**	0.50
Mothers general health - good	-0.23	0.79	-0.21	0.81
<b>Child sex (reference – girl)</b>				
Boy	0.55***	1.73	0.54**	1.71
<b>Fathers occupation type (reference Semi-routine/Routine)</b>				
Managerial/Professional/Intermediate			0.13	1.13
Small employers/self-employed			0.01	1.01
Lower supervisory/technical			0.06	1.06
<b>Fathers highest qualification (reference: Standard Grades or lower)</b>				
Degree or equivalent			-0.24*	0.79
Higher Grade or equivalent			-0.21*	0.81
<b>Mothers occupation type (reference Semi-routine/Routine)</b>				
Managerial/Professional/Intermediate			-0.28*	0.76
Small employers/self-employed			-0.35*	0.71
Lower supervisory/technical			0.03	1.03
<b>Mothers highest qualification (reference: Standard Grades or lower)</b>				1.00
Degree or equivalent			-0.18	0.83
Higher Grade or equivalent			-0.16	0.85
<b>Household income (reference - Bottom Quintile &lt;£13,000)</b>				1.00
Top Quintile (>=£46,428)			-0.39**	0.68
4 <sup>th</sup> Quintile (>=£31,553 < £46,428)			-0.29*	0.75
3 <sup>rd</sup> Quintile (>=£20,182 < £31,553)			-0.13	0.88
2 <sup>nd</sup> Quintile (>=£13,000 <£20,182)			-0.15	0.86
<b>SIMD (reference – 20% most deprived areas)</b>				1.00
20% least deprived areas			-0.13	0.88
4 <sup>th</sup>			-0.10	0.90
3 <sup>rd</sup>			-0.03	0.97
2 <sup>nd</sup>			-0.11	0.90
N	2,806		2,418	
Pseudo R Squares (Cox and Snell)	0.09		0.11	
Wald	X <sup>2</sup> <sub>(7)</sub> =223.43		X <sup>2</sup> <sub>(25)</sub> =232.96	
Log-likelihood	2916.5		2474.8	
Test of parallel lines	F <sub>(9,57)</sub> =0.78, p=0.63		F <sub>(27,39)</sub> =0.78, p=0.75	

Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001. All models were adjusted for the survey's complex sample design.

In the 7th sweep of the GUS study, mothers were asked to report on their children's adjustment and attitudes to school, among other things. Table 5 presents the mothers' responses to two of these questions – 'How often your child is looking forward to going to school?', and 'How often your child finds school boring?' – by the level of father involvement in school. The table shows that almost 90% of mothers reported that their child looks forward to going to school more than once a week, and 85% stated that their child rarely or never finds school boring.

Table 5 further demonstrates an association between parental involvement in school and how often 7-8-year-olds in Scotland are looking forward to going to school or find school boring ( $p < 0.01$ ). The percentage of children who look forward to going to school frequently, and rarely find school boring, is higher in families where the father and mother are highly involved than in families with lower levels of parental involvement.

**Table 5.** Distribution of mothers' report on their child's perception of school, by father's and mother's involvement in school (GUS, bc1, sw7, n=between 2,822 and 2,816)

	How often your child looks forward to going to school?		How often your child finds school boring?	
	Less than once a week	More than once a week	Usually sometimes /	Rarely / never
Overall	11%	89%	15%	85%
<b>Father's involvement</b>				
Low	14%	86%	18%	82%
Moderate	10%	90%	12%	88%
High	6%	95%	8%	92%
<b>Mother's involvement</b>				
Low	16%	84%	19%	81%
Moderate	14%	86%	16%	84%
High	8%	92%	12%	88%

The bivariate trends displayed in Table 5 were further explored in binary logistic regression models estimating the likelihood a child will be reported as looking forward to going to school more than once a week and rarely finds school boring. The results are presented in Table 6. As can be seen in Model 1, children of fathers with low levels of school involvement were less likely than counterparts with fathers with high school involvement to be viewed by their mothers as often looking forward to going to school. This effect is independent of mothers' involvement, which also positively impacts on the chance a child will be perceived as being keen to attend school. Mothers', but not fathers', levels of education and occupational status were found to be positively linked to how often a child looks forward to going to school. Children of highly educated mothers and those with mothers who work in managerial, professional and intermediate occupations, were more likely to look forward to going to school often than children of less well-educated mothers or mothers in semi-routine/routine occupations.

Model 2 in Table 6 shows that children of fathers with low ‘involvement’ scores were less likely than those of fathers with high school involvement to rarely or never find school boring. This effect is independent of and additional to the impact of mothers’ involvement in school. Fathers’ general health negatively affects the likelihood a child will rarely find school boring. The effect of mothers’ general health is reversed – when mothers are in excellent, very good or good general health, their children are less likely to find school boring, than if the mother is in poor health. These opposite trends could indicate that mothers' and fathers’ general health have a differential impact on their children’s school life. The relationship between mothers’ reports on their child’s interest in school and the health of their partners, as well as their own health, requires further analyses which are beyond the scope of this report.

**Table 6.** Binary regression models predicting mothers’ reports on their child’s attitudes to school (GUS, bc1, sw7)

	Model 1: How often your child look forward to going to school?		Model 2: How often your child finds school boring?	
	B	OR	B	OR
Intercept	2.90**	18.16	2.49**	12.08
<b>Father’s involvement in school (reference – high)</b>				
Father's Involvement - low	-0.78**	0.46	-0.45*	0.64
Father's Involvement - moderate	-0.69**	0.50	-0.26	0.77
<b>Father’s general health (reference – poor)</b>				
Father’s general health - excellent/very good	-0.56**	0.57	-0.16	0.85
Father’s general health - good	-0.27*	0.77	-0.16	0.85
<b>Mother’s involvement in school (reference – high)</b>				
Moher's Involvement - low	-0.26	0.77	-0.56*	0.57
Mother's Involvement - moderate	0.04	1.04	-0.42	0.66
<b>Moher’s general health (reference – poor)</b>				
Mother’s general health - excellent/very good	0.62***	1.86	0.52**	1.68
Mother’s general health - good	0.36	1.43	0.18	1.19
<b>Child’s sex (reference – girl)</b>				
Boy	-0.86***	0.42	-0.67***	0.51
<b>Father's occupation type (reference Semi-routine/Routine)</b>				
Managerial/Professional/Intermediate	0.42*	1.52	0.03	1.03
Small employers/self-employed	0.10	1.11	-0.23	0.80
Lower supervisory/technical	0.19	1.21	-0.24	0.79
<b>Father’s highest qualification (reference: Standard Grades or lower)</b>				
Degree or equivalent	-0.43*	0.65	0.09	1.10
Higher Grade or equivalent	-0.09	0.92	0.25	1.28
<b>Mother's occupation type (reference Semi-routine/Routine)</b>				
Managerial/Professional/Intermediate	0.13	1.14	0.62***	1.86
Small employers/self-employed	0.03	1.03	0.35	1.42
Lower supervisory/technical	0.00	1.00	-0.09	0.91
<b>Mother’s highest qualification (reference: Standard Grades or lower)</b>				
Degree or equivalent	0.41*	1.51	-0.27	0.77
Higher grades or equivalent	-0.03	0.97	-0.02	0.99
n	2,616		2,622	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> (Cox and Snell)	0.04		0.04	

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001. All models were adjusted for the survey’s complex sample design. Income and SIMD were removed from the models as they were not statistically significant.

Further analyses (not presented in this report) indicated that parental involvement did not predict mothers' reports on how often their child was reluctant to attend school. We also analysed children's self-reported attitudes to school. Our binary and ordinal regression models show that there was no statistically significant relationship between how often the child reported he or she was looking forward to school and their father's (or mother's) level of school involvement. Similarly, there is no association between children's self-reports of disliking school and their father's (and mother's) involvement in school.

Taken together, the analyses of data from the Growing Up in Scotland survey show that some, but not all, aspects of child wellbeing and attitudes to school are related to how involved in school their fathers tend to be.

11-year-olds' views from the ELFFS project provide insights into the importance of both father and mother involvement in education. These accounts demonstrate the different way by which the involvement of male and female caretakers might help complement and consolidate the child's learning experiences, stimulate curiosity, and boost their appetite for learning

*Well, my stepdad helps me learn Maths because he's quite good at it and my mum's not. Also just like how to behave in general and stuff.*

(Boy 3)

*My mum and her boyfriend, they help me with how stuff helps you in life...like what jobs and all that. I've told them I wanted to work with animals and [they] told me that I need to study Biology and Zoology and all that stuff.*

(Girl 1)

*My dad sometimes just helps me, like just overall general knowledge and things. And like what's happening. Like, things are happening in the world and just like random things that could be useful.*

(Girl 2)

Taken together, quantitative data from the GUS study and qualitative data from the ELFFS project lends compelling support to the idea that bidirectional supportive relationships within the child's microsystem, which include participation of fathers in school activities and their support for learning, increase a child's socio-emotional wellbeing and positive attitudes to school.

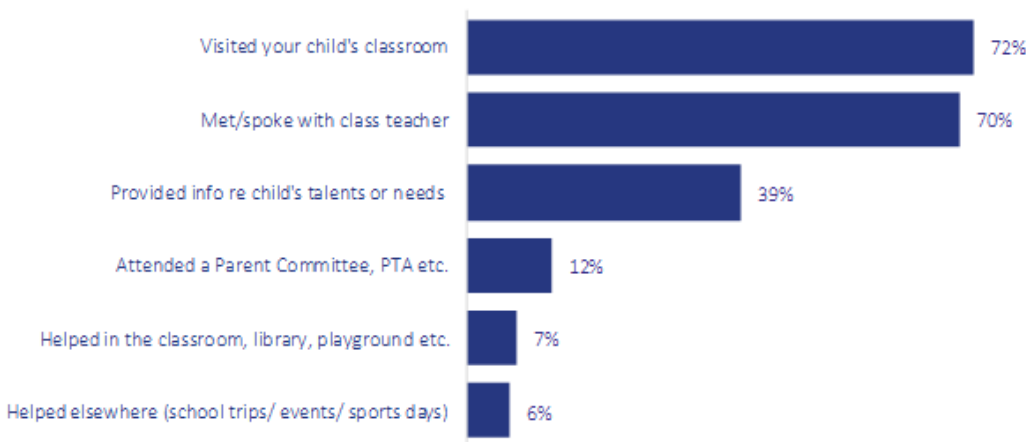


## 5. Research in East Lothian – a case study on developing a father-inclusive school practice

### 5.1 Fathers' self-reported involvement in, and communication with school

Findings from the ELFFS project show that the rate of fathers' direct involvement varies across different aspects of the school. As can be seen in Figure 10, the majority of fathers stated that they attended a school event since the beginning of the school year (74%). This percentage is higher than the 60% attendance rate reported in GUS for a similar activity (see Figure 1).

**Figure 10:** Since the beginning of this school year, have you done any of the following things in your child's school? (ELFFS project, n=55)



While this finding may indicate that fathers in schools that participated in the ELFFS project attend school events at higher rates than the national average, other factors can be brought forward to explain this discrepancy. For example, the East Lothian Father Survey collected data from P1 and P7 children. In contrast, the analysis of GUS focused on 7-8-year-olds, and fathers' involvement may be linked to the child's age or peak in transition points, namely the beginning and end of the primary school years. The ELFFS survey collected data directly from fathers, whereas the GUS study used mothers' reports on their partners' behaviour, which could result in a variation across the two surveys. In addition, the timing in which the Father Survey and GUS were administered could mean that fathers in the East Lothian study had more opportunities to participate in school events than fathers in the GUS study. Differences in the rate of fathers' attendance at school events may indicate that the respondents in the East Lothian Father Survey come from a selective group of relatively involved fathers.

As can be seen in Figure 10, the majority of fathers in the ELFFS survey (72%) stated they visited their child's classroom, compared to a minority who helped in the classroom, library or playground (7%), helped elsewhere (6%), or attended committees and other such school meetings (12%). There are various reasons why fathers will attend an event or visit their child's classroom but will not participate more actively in school life. Such barriers may include, among other things, time pressures caused by difficulties to balance work and family life, limited suitable opportunities to getting involved, little awareness of suitable opportunities, lack of clarity about how to become involved, lack of confidence in participating in the activities on offer, and other barriers (see Table 1).

Figure 11 presents the percentage of fathers in the two study schools who stated that, since the beginning of the current school year, the school had been in touch with them about various school and child-related topics. 74% of the fathers indicated that the school had been in contact with them to provide general information and 66% reported that they had received information about their child’s progress with his/her learning. 60% of fathers were provided with information about their child’s talents and success, and 57% received information about his/her difficulties and needs. 60% of the surveyed fathers indicated that the school had been in touch with them regarding opportunities to volunteer in the school.

**Figure 11:** Since the current school year started, did the school get in touch with your child regarding the following things? (ELFFS project, n=55)



Figure 12 displays information about communication channels the school uses to communicate with parents. The majority of fathers in the ELFFS survey stated that they received a letter from school (80%), through the school’s newsletter (73%) or during a face-to-face meeting (67%). Less than half received information via social media (43%), text messages (39%) or email (33%).

**Figure 12:** Since the beginning of this school year, have you received information from your child's school in the following ways? (ELFFS project, n=55)

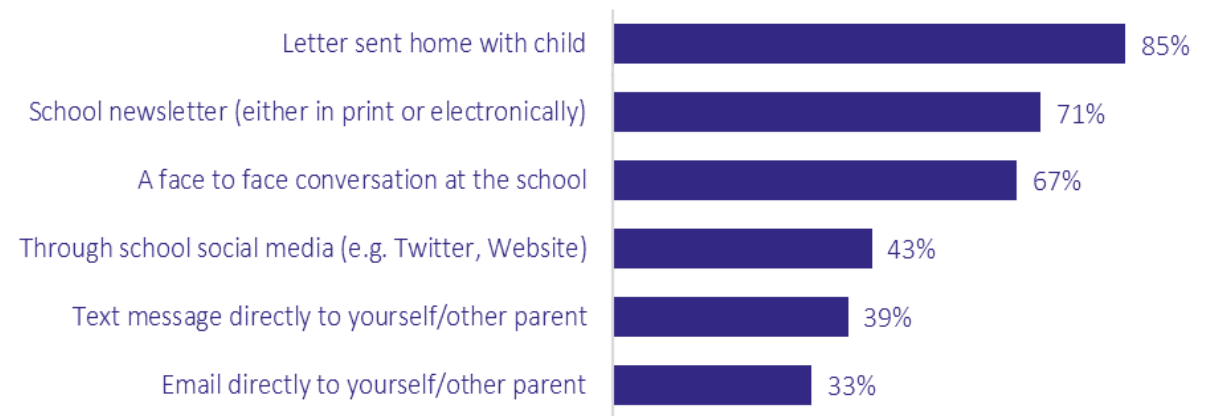
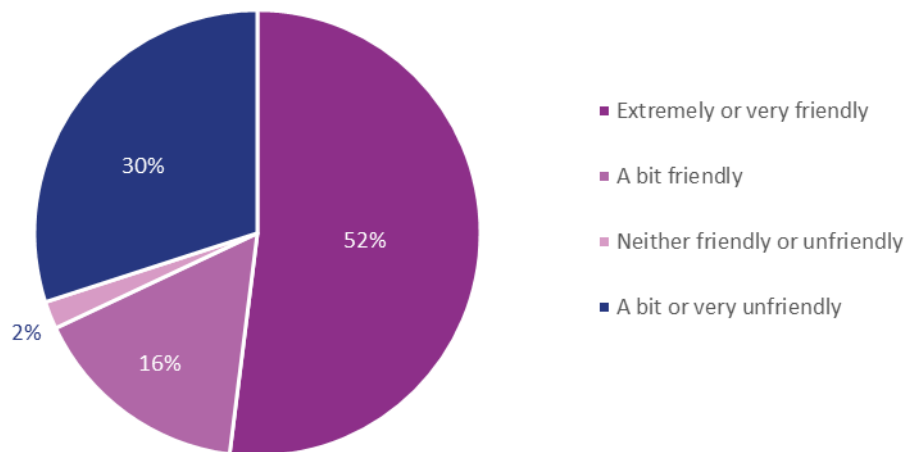


Figure 13 shows that 68% of the fathers in the ELFFS survey rated their child’s school as father-friendly, with 52% of those considering it extremely or very friendly. 30% of the survey fathers viewed their child’s school as neutral, and a minority (2%) experienced it as unfriendly to fathers. As can be seen in Figure 13, 11% of the ELFFS project fathers felt they were very involved in their child’s school life. The majority of fathers (61%) said they were reasonably involved. Just over a quarter of fathers reported not being very involved, or not being involved at all, in their child’s school

**Figure 13.** In your opinion, just how ‘father friendly’ is your child’s school? (ELFFS Project n=55)



**Figure 14.** How involved do you feel in your child’s school life? (ELFFS Project n=55)

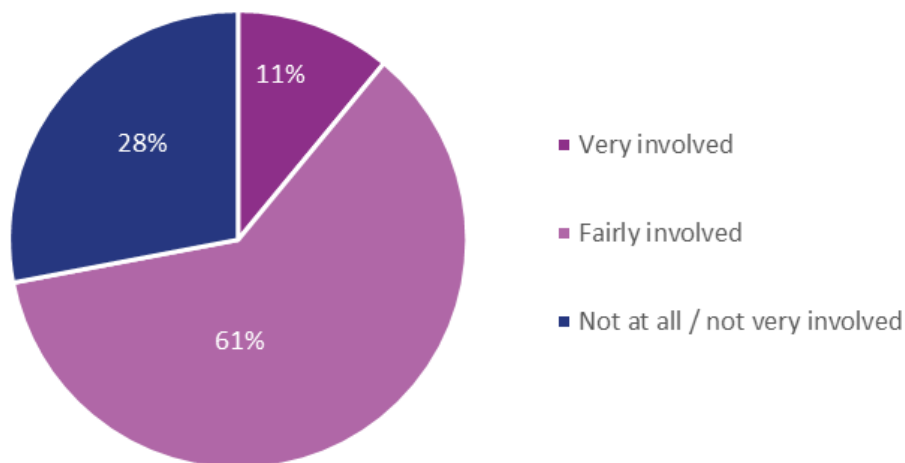


Figure 15 shows that 95% of the responding fathers feel welcomed at their child’s school and comfortable visiting it. 85% reported that they also feel comfortable talking with their child’s teacher. 62% thought the school makes it easy for fathers to get involved and 52% felt the school values the views of fathers on children’s education. Therefore, while the majority of fathers who responded to the ELFFS survey feel included in their child’s school, only a half agree that the school also values their opinions.

**Figure 15.** Percentage of fathers who strongly agree or agree with the following statements about their child's school (ELFFS project, n=55)

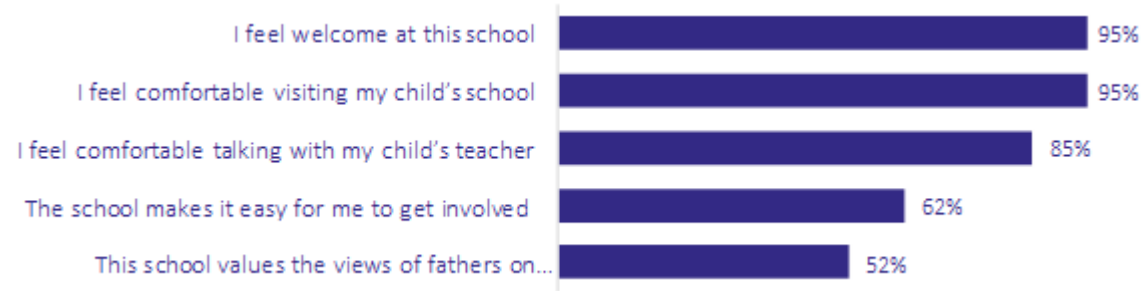


Figure 16 displays the percentage of fathers who stated that they know the full name of their child’s class teacher and believe the teacher knows their full name. As can be seen in the figure, just over a half of the responding fathers reported they know the full name of their child’s class teachers and about a quarter thought the teacher knows their full name.

**Figure 16.** Percentage of fathers who indicate they know that full name of their child's class teacher and believe the class teacher knows their full name (ELFFS, n=55)



## 5.2 To what extent has the ELFFS project supported the implementation of father-inclusive practices in school?

### Strengthening the father-school relationship through inclusive communication

The teachers interviewed in this study confirmed that since taking part in the ELFFS initiative in 2017 they have increased their efforts to engage with fathers, paid more attention to the inclusion of dads living in various family conditions and were more mindful of applying a father-inclusive approach to communication:

*I've ensured that the split families, both mum and dad are connected on it, and the dads have all said they really appreciate that because usually, the mums are getting all the information. I do the text messaging service to both. For parents' evening, I create appointments for both*

(Teacher 1)

Bi-directional communication was mentioned by parents and champions in the 2018-19 ELFFS interviews as an essential factor in building and maintaining positive relationships between families and schools. The parents in the 2018-19 ELFFS study articulated that the family-school communication in their child's school is fair, appropriate and inclusive of both mothers and fathers:

*I think that the fact that the school encourages both parents to sign up for Parent mail and stuff like that is really good. I think that if only one parent gets the notifications, that's a big barrier. So I'm glad they're sending all the information to both of us*

(Mum2)

Nevertheless, the qualitative data indicated that mothers use a wider range of communication channels, and more frequently, in their engagement with the school than fathers. In their interviews, the mothers stated that while their partners occasionally receive information directly from the school, this is typically done via emails or through the school's social media, but rarely in the form of a face-to-face conversation with school staff (formally or informally), a phone call or a letter exchange. In this respect, four of the six fathers interviewed in the ELFFS project reported that all school emails go directly and only to their partner. In reflection on how this situation came to be, they proposed that this is either because the school required only one (primary) email address per co-parent family or because there was not enough space on the school form to include the account details of more than one person. The fathers interviewed in the ELFFS project neither challenged the situation or viewed it as excluding even though this 'primary contact person' arrangement meant that information from the school was not always shared within the family unit:

*I mean, if I'm honest, I just said to my wife if you get those emails, please send them to me so that I know. I have never kind of thought, well... I go to the school, "Right, could you send me those emails too?"... My wife is so busy, and I don't mean to sound like I'm putting her down here, but she'd often get information that she then doesn't pass on*

(Dad 5)

Furthermore, the data suggested that the mother-school interaction was often a two-way activity, whereby both parties initiate discussions, whereas the communication between fathers and school tended to be more one-sided, with information typically flowing from the school to the father but less regularly vice versa. The interviewed parents suggested that infrequent and general communication with the school may negatively affect their child's progress and development:

*I attend the Consultations, but I mean those aren't necessarily that frequent...which means you're not going to pick things up maybe as quickly as you want. And unless you are actually getting feedback from the teachers on a regular basis, you may miss six months and not realise there's a problem*

(Dad 6)

*They tell you 'well your daughter is working hard, she's making good progress'...you never really know...how your child's doing*

(Mum 1)

Fathers, as mothers, appreciated being provided with clear practical strategies and guidance on how to support their child's learning at home:

*If we took reading as an example, when we went to see them, they then gave us a few pretty simple tools to use with our daughter and questions to ask her after we've done her reading...I now spend an evening with my daughter where she will read several pages and you can start asking her questions. And these questions are prompted by the teaching staff who have said, "You know, use this tool"... they've given me a set of laminated questions to ask, and that's made a vast improvement*

(Dad 5)

Thus, while the ELFFS initiative seems to have led to more inclusive family-school communication, more work is required to strengthen the relationship with fathers and encourage a more frequent two-way connection that invites fathers to participate while also stressing their value to the school community and unique positive contribution their involvement can make to the developing child.

## Strategies for promoting father involvement in school activities

Teachers who were involved in the ELFFS project recognised that the inclusion of fathers means not only being responsive to fathers' needs and constraints and creating more opportunities for them to get involved in school, but also to implement a proactive approach to engagement:

*I think it's important that you see all the parents and you report to them. So, for example when one parent came last time on the Tuesday, and the father came on the Friday on one of the later appointments. I've got no problem with that because I think 'I've got the gaps – I've got the space'. Even if I didn't, come another night, because I'm here and I want to see you, and it's important that we speak about your child*

(Teacher 2)

In their individual and group interviews, teachers, parents and children proposed a range of ideas for father-inclusive activities for schools to consider. They were mindful of social and emotional aspects that may increase (or decrease) fathers' motivation to participate and contribute to their overall levels of engagement. For example, creating a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere within the school was seen as more favourable than inviting fathers into more formal settings. Similarly, the interviewees showed awareness of the need to include fathers with a range of interests and skills, who may not fall into stereotypical gender divisions:

*I think it's maybe just a good idea to have a kind of almost a dad-only time. I think sometimes everything's open to everybody. But I suppose dads do bring a particular dad-ish thing to activities. Sometimes it's nice just to do things just all the boys together. And there's equally no reason why you shouldn't have a moms-specific day*

(Dad 2)

*I think if they would arrange something like Father's Day, that could be really fun and a lot of the fathers would be happy*

(Mum 4)

*You could have like big sports things, like to get them involved in what a lot of their kid like. You can have like with football matches, races like that. And you can have for people who are not interested in doing sports, they can have like a movie on or something where they relax and just talk with other people and just see how other people are doing*

(Girl 2)

While the above-mentioned suggestions focus on leisure activities, some interviewees were also keen to see the school develop more opportunities for fathers to engage in direct learning activities with their children:

*Perhaps the school can invite dads to kind of join in, come to class and help work on a topic. So that they really know what our children are learning*

(Mum 4)

*I'll probably say that, like every classroom will have something different in it. So they can get a taste of what is going on because, like dads don't actually know what's going on inside their daughter's or son's school so...yeah*

(Girl 3)

Previous research has shown that participation in the ELFFS project had led to short term positive impacts for schools in East Lothian. School champions who took part in the project reported that they were inspired to develop and implement a range of father-friendly activities and saw a rise in the number of fathers attending the school (Kadar-Satat et al., 2017).

Specifically, interview data from June 2017 demonstrated that, throughout the 6-month ELFFS project period, the participating schools used a new tool – the 'How Dad-Friendly Is Your School' father inclusion guide - to explore and celebrate father-friendly practices already in place within the school, identify domains within the school where more work around the inclusion of fathers was required; think more critically and creatively on the concept of family learning and initiate discussions regarding what it truly means to include fathers and father-figures in the school community. According to the 2017 interviews, participation in the ELFFS project enabled the champions to advance the school's familiarity with the unique individual life circumstances of their children and families, identify the talents and strengths of men in the school community, and form new partnerships with fathers. The champions further reported that working with the father inclusion guide encouraged them to consider how they might promote the visibility of fathers (and men in non-gender stereotypical roles more generally) in the curriculum and subsequently increase their engagement in pedagogical innovation.

In their 2018 interviews, the champions reaffirmed the positive outcomes that were identified in 2017. In addition, their accounts demonstrate that where the champion continued to engage with father inclusion work after the ELFFS project was completed, the school has achieved further successes. For example, the champions reported seeing more fathers and men coming into the school:

*We've done movie nights...and actually the first one we had to delay the movie starting because we thought they weren't going to stop coming in. The queues...I've never seen so many dads in this school ever. It was just amazing. And the dads were all talking, and it was just...it was just brilliant*

(Teacher 1)

*More dads are coming, do you know what I mean?...I've been here a lot of years. And I am seeing more and more.*

(Teacher 2)



Participation in school activities was seen as contributing to increased confidence levels of fathers and stronger, more positive, family-school and father-child relationships:

*Once they're in the school, they're more likely to say 'that's not bad, I can come in and do things*

(Teacher 2)

*I had a couple wee girls coming up to me and say 'thank you cause my dad doesn't normally come to anything with me and this is just the best night'. And we're just thinking it makes it all worthwhile*

(Teacher 2)

While the champions expressed satisfaction with some aspects of their work around the inclusion of fathers, they recognised the (still) highly unbalanced nature of the family-school connection and openly acknowledged their school still has a long way to go in order to become genuinely father-friendly, and that this journey is not necessarily linear and consistent:

*Even through it appears to get better, it is still not, there's still not as many dads coming in as we would like*

(Teacher 2)

*We go one step forward two steps back. So we think we've achieved something else but actually we haven't quite got there yet... I think I have more contacts certainly with the mums than I do with the dads. Historically, in my teaching career, that's always been the case*

(Teacher 1)

The findings in section 5.1 suggest that father-inclusion champions who participated in the ELFFS project have generated positive processes with respect to the partnership with fathers in their respective schools. However, the data also indicates that the journey towards becoming an organically father-friendly school requires unremitting school attention to diversity and continuous commitment to identifying and nurturing the father-school relationship.

### 5.3 What are the main enablers (and barriers) to implementing father-inclusive practices in school and using the father inclusion guide?

#### The implementation of father-inclusive practice require collaboration and support

Participation in the ELFFS project in 2017 has enabled the father inclusion champions to work with colleagues toward a shared goal. The 2018-19 interviews revealed a strong appetite for further collaborations with staff in their school and across schools the local authority. The opportunity to engage with community organisations was reported as imperative for driving change and promoting father inclusion in the school:

*...looking at what sort of what other schools have done... we're keen to go and see the one in Prestonpans so we can get inspiration and know that we're going in the right direction*

(Teacher 1)

*But even just giving us sort of ideas. Cause when you see them you're like 'yeah, yeah, why did I not think of that?'. It's really good*

(Teacher 2)

Furthermore, interviews with the father-inclusion champions demonstrated that engaging with expert community organisations and more experienced staff not only served as a channel for knowledge transfer, but also supported the development of resilience and provided opportunities to refine the offering of father-friendly opportunities by schools:

*So the coffee morning last Friday which we put out. We had four responses, which, speaking to Kevin from Dads Work, he said that even if we have got one reply we still go ahead with it because we could end up helping somebody or getting somebody involved. So we had one dad turn up and he sat a good hour and a half and we just chatted....so it was worth it, even just for the one person to turn up. It was good*

The champions have also reflected on the need to communicate the work around father inclusion to parents, children and colleagues sensitively, in order to gain support and empower the school community with a more critical mindset concerning the issue of inclusivity:

*We did have...further up the school there was one or two mums that were complaining, especially the Christmas one: 'this is the second one – why does it have to be, my husband's not around or his dad's not around, why can I bring him?'. And it was just that sort of...there was a couple of awkward moments with that. But once we explained it to them, they kind of, they understood that it didn't have to be his dad. They hadn't picked up on the fact that it could be any suitable male. So once they understood that they kind of came round to a bit but...*

(Teacher 1)

*I had very positive feedback because I had...all of my mums were like that: 'I got to watch Coronation Street all by myself'. And the Christmas one we found that the parents...dads took them all away and mum could actually get ready for Christmas because it was just before the Christmas Holiday, wasn't it? So the mums were like over the moon in the Nursery all the children and dad were away doing that, and then they could...rather than juggling everything all together*

(Teacher 2)

The champions' reflections suggest that for strategies for increasing father involvement in school to be effective and sustainable, they should be embedded in and integrated with school procedures and policy. Father inclusion practices, therefore, need to be cultivated and promoted by senior school leaders:

*Our School Improvement Plan is all about parental engagement so the 'fathers friendly schools' is in our Improvement Plan. It was in last year and in for the next year as well. It's something that as a school we're keen to take forward and focus on*

(Teacher 1)

*It is at Headteacher level to take this whole project and push it a bit further*

(Teacher 2)

While the implementation of father inclusive practice calls for a 'top-down' approach and ongoing support from the school senior leadership, commitment and persistence of highly dedicated staff is also crucial for success and sustainability:

*It is our own time. It is not our working time. It's wanting to do it for the children, do you know what I mean? So it's like...it's a lot of extra work outwith our own hours that we do work*

(Teacher 2)

*I would say it's our own choice and our own time that we're doing that because school day is busy as it is. The partnership with the children and the parents is just really important for me*

(Teacher 1)

According to the school champions, successful implementation of father inclusive practice also requires organisational investments of budgets and human resources:

*I had no budget. Everything was free, and that was stressful, frustrating, really hard work. But... we've now been given permission that we can fundraise to bring in funds*

(Champion 2)

The champions reflected on several further barriers, including resistance to change among school staff and parents and in particular, female staff and mothers who may feel excluded. They articulated that the inclusion of children in complex family situations calls for special attention to children who may not have a father in the immediate locality, or have a complicated family relationship.

### Use of the Father Inclusion Guide

The school champions described the 'How Dad Friendly Is Your School' – a father inclusion guide for schools – as comprehensive, straightforward and user-friendly resource. The guide was perceived as a tool that could support schools to rigorously evaluate and monitor their approach, identify best practice, and further develop their partnership with fathers and families:

*There's a lot of food for thought in here that 'what can we be doing?'. And they've got ideas as well. So it's not as if you're starting from scratch. Somebody's done the groundwork. It's taking it now and doing something with it*

(Teacher 1)

*...And it really makes you think and question your practice 'are we doing these things?', and if we're not, how could we be doing it or how could we be doing it a bit better*

(Teacher 2)

While it was notable that the champions have had little direct engagement with the guide since the completion of the 2017 ELFFS project, they felt that their familiarity with the guide's core principles has solidified their thoughts, grounded their father-inclusion work and provided a reference point for future activity. Specifically, their reflections demonstrated that working with the guide during the 2017 ELFFS phase allowed them to put forward numerous ideas around the inclusion of fathers and effectively communicate the project to colleagues in the school:

*I think that sometimes when we're promoting new initiatives...it's kind of...you can get a little bit of "oh, what's the latest thing that we're told to do". I think the way to get teachers on board is to develop an understanding and a belief that you're doing it for the right reasons*

(Teacher 1)

The champions offered some critical comments, for example, they suggested the guide could benefit from presenting accessible high-level theory and empirical evidence to provide links between father involvement in school and child development

*I would like maybe some recommended reading...I've not read any research. I would just like to do a bit more background reading on it so that you're not doing it for the sake of it, you understand why you're doing it. But maybe nothing too onerous but something that gives us a bit more. I like to understand about the theories behind things*

(Teacher 1)

The champions felt that one strength of the guide is that it can be used creatively in different ways, at different times (e.g. in-service days, staff meetings, parents' evenings), with various stakeholders and organisations (school staff, parents, other childcare services), and in different social and cultural contexts (for example, with marginalised groups):

*The way it's set out is great because it gives you...it's got the indicators 'how does everything fit in with different aspects of the school'. So obviously is almost like an Improvement Plan in itself. So having this running with the school one because the father-friendly schools is within the Improvement Plan with the Parental Engagement. So having this running alongside and maybe using this to work out if we've reached the goals we set out in the Improvement Plan. So having this as a document that we as group work with and then we feed back at the end of the year: 'this is what we've done'...*

(Teacher 2)

At the same time, the champions mentioned that the time and mental energy required to assess how best to use the guide may be an obstacle given the evidently demanding nature of the teaching profession, suggesting that linked case studies demonstrating effective use or ideas for activities may be helpful. In the same vein, they indicated that, moving forward, sharing the guide with parents and pupils may also bring to light new ideas around the inclusion of men and create further opportunities for collaboration and shared learning.

## 6. Summary

The report explored fathers' involvement in school activities and children's outcomes. The case-study research in this report applied a mixed-methods approach and analysed nationally representative secondary data from the Growing up in Scotland survey, and primary quantitative and qualitative data from the ELFFS project. The key findings are as follows:

### 6.1 Socioeconomic status (SES) and involvement in school activities among fathers with 8-year-olds

- Consistent with international studies and previous research in Scotland, the present study found that there is a relationship between SES and fathers' involvement in a range of activities in their child's school.
- 16% of fathers from the 20% least deprived areas in Scotland were highly involved in their child's school compared to 6% of fathers from the 20% most deprived areas. A high level of involvement in school is defined as participating in 5 or more activities within the school.
- 18% of fathers with 'managerial/professional occupations' or 'intermediate level occupations' were highly involved in school, compared to 9% of fathers who work for 'small employers', in 'routine occupations' or who are 'self-employed'.
- 20% of fathers with a degree or equivalent qualifications were highly involved in school compared to 7% of fathers whose highest qualification is at the Standard Grade level.
- Multivariate analyses that took into account the independent effect of household income, level of area deprivation, mothers' education and occupation and fathers' education and occupation show that:
  - Income and area deprivation levels do not have an independent effect on how involved fathers are in school, when also considering the fathers' and mothers' individual socioeconomic statuses (e.g. education and occupation).
  - Fathers' occupation has an independent effect on the level of involvement, above and beyond the effect of mothers' SES, household income and level of area deprivation. In particular, fathers who work for small employers or who are self-employed, are less likely to be highly involved in their child's school compared to fathers in semi-routine or routine occupations. However, fathers who work in managerial, professional, intermediate and semi-routine/routine jobs, are equally likely to be highly involved in their child's school.
  - Fathers' education also has an independent effect on their level of involvement, above and beyond the effect of mothers' SES, household income and level of area deprivation. Fathers whose highest qualification is a Higher Grade (or

equivalent professional qualifications) are more involved in school than those with Standard Grades.

- Mothers' levels of involvement have an independent effect on the level of fathers' involvement, above and beyond the effect of fathers' socioeconomic status, mothers' socioeconomic status, household income and level of area deprivation. When the mother is highly involved in school, her partner is also more involved in school.
- Overall, the multivariate analysis suggests that parental educational level and occupation type, and mothers' involvement in school, might be better predictors of the level of fathers' involvement in school than the household income or level of deprivation in the area in which the family lives.

## 6.2 The relationship between fathers' involvement in school and 8-year-olds socioemotional difficulties and attitudes to school

### Children's social and emotional wellbeing

- Children with highly involved fathers are less likely to experience many social and emotional difficulties. 16% of children with a low difficulty score had highly involved fathers compared to 8% of those with a high difficulty score.
- Fathers' education is linked to child socioemotional wellbeing. The children of highly educated fathers are at lower risk of experiencing a wide range of social and emotional difficulties compared to those of fathers who are less highly educated.
- Mothers' involvement in school also has a positive effect on child socioemotional wellbeing. When the mother is highly involved in school, her child is at lower risk of experiencing many social and emotional difficulties.
- Mothers' involvement in school seems to be more strongly linked to child socioemotional wellbeing than fathers' involvement.
- Mothers' occupation is also related to child wellbeing: children of mothers with managerial and professional jobs are less likely to experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties than those whose mothers are not working in managerial and professional roles.
- Children in low income households are at higher risk of experiencing poor social and emotional wellbeing than those in high income households. The negative effect of the family's income on child socioemotional wellbeing is independent of, and additional to the impact of both the mother and father involvement in school.

### Children's attitudes to school

- Children whose fathers are highly involved in school were reported by their mothers as having more positive attitudes to school than those whose fathers are not very involved.
- When fathers are highly involved in school, children are more likely to look forward to going to school frequently. This positive effect of the father involvement on how often their child looks forward to going to school is additional to and independent of the level of mother involvement in school.
- Children of highly involved fathers are less likely to report that they find school boring than children whose fathers are not as involved in school activities. The effect of father involvement on reducing the frequency their child will be bored at school is additional to, and independent of the level of mother involvement in school.
- Girls are more likely than boys to frequently look forward to going to school and rarely find school to be boring.
- There was no statistically significant relationship between fathers' (and mothers') level of involvement in school and how often children are reluctant to go to school or seen as disliking school.



### 6.3 Has the 2017 ELFFS project supported the implementation of father inclusion practice in school?

- The father inclusion champions in the 2018-19 phase were very positive about the initiative and felt empowered to devise opportunities for children, fathers and staff to build positive relationships and learn together through engaging in fun, relaxed activities.
- The school champions have led to the implementation of more inclusive communication systems that take into account fathers in a range of family conditions. Interviews with parents suggest that a routine review of communication strategies can improve the inclusion of fathers.
- The school champions reported seeing more fathers coming into the school, participating in events, and offering to volunteer.
- They also stated that some fathers seemed more confident and expressed more positive attitudes toward school.
- The champions noted that participation in the ELFFS project provided them with opportunities to gain new skills, develop their knowledge and network with colleagues in the local authority.
- The champions felt that while their school has made progress in its journey toward becoming a genuinely father-friendly school, more work is needed to strengthen the partnership with fathers.

## 6.4 What are the main enablers (and barriers) to implementation father inclusive practice in school?

- Working in partnership with colleagues in the school and the local authority during the ELFFS supported the school champions in developing and implementing father-inclusive practices in their respective schools.
- Being supported by expert community organisations was reported by the champions as imperative for bringing about change and promoting father inclusive practice in the school, as well as for developing personal and professional agency.
- Engaging in innovative inclusion practices invited some criticism and resistance, especially from mothers. The school champions addressed such issues sensitively and diplomatically in order to gain support and empower the school community with a critical mindset concerning the inclusion of fathers.
- A top-down approach in which father-inclusion work is embraced, cultivated and promoted by senior school leaders was deemed vital for success and sustainability by the champion.
- Successful implementation of father inclusive strategies also requires organisational investment of resources such as budgets and manpower.

### Use of the Father Inclusion Guide

- The school champions described the 'How Dad Friendly Is Your School' – a father inclusion guide for schools – as comprehensive yet straightforward and user-friendly.
- The guide was perceived as a tool that could allow a school to rigorously evaluate and monitor its approach, identify best practise around the inclusion of fathers, and further develop the partnership with fathers and families.
- The school champions reported that familiarity with the guide contributed to their work as it solidified their thoughts, grounded their father-inclusion work and provided a reference point for future activity.
- Consulting with the guide enabled the school champions to put forward numerous ideas around the inclusion of fathers and effectively communicate the project to colleagues in the school.
- Those who worked with the guide suggested that it could benefit from presenting accessible high-level theory and empirical evidence to provide links between father involvement in school and child development.

## 7. Recommendations

### 7.1 Recommendations for schools

- **Adopt a whole-school approach and allocate resources.** A school's journey towards becoming truly father-friendly is more likely to be successful if relevant strategies are incorporated into a whole-school approach to parental engagement. Equally, such endeavours require the investment of school resources, including staff time and funding.
- **Appoint a member of staff to champion father-inclusive practice in your school.** The research in this report shows that an informed and motivated school champion, who is well supported by the school senior leadership team, can increase father involvement in school activities. The father-inclusion champions in our research promoted fathers' engagement and generated positive change in the family-school partnership.
- **Set up (or join) a dedicated professional peer network** so that experiences, pedagogies, practices and success stories can be shared among father-inclusion champions. Access to knowledge exchange opportunities and support networks within or outwith the local authority are crucial for developing, implementing and maintaining a father-inclusive practice in schools.
- **Seek external support from father-inclusion specialists and community organisations.** Schools can benefit from the expertise of external father-inclusion specialists, parental engagement officers and community organisations specialising in supporting families. Attempts to involve fathers are more likely to be effective with support from relevant external organisations who can galvanise the school community into action.
- **Create space for fathers in their child's school.** Offering more opportunities for fathers to network with peers may strengthen their confidence to involve themselves in school, increase their knowledge about school life and how their involvement contributes to their children's learning. Activities and events at the school should therefore be targeted at fathers and other significant males, while also showing sensitivity to mothers. In addition, there is a scope for diversifying the curriculum so that it better represents men in caring and other non-stereotypical roles.
- **Train school staff on how to include fathers.** Our study shows that teachers are keen to include fathers. Teachers value the views of fathers and want to see them more involved in school. Yet, school staff may have limited knowledge about how fathers experience their child's school. If teachers are to contribute effectively to increasing father involvement in school, they should be provided with opportunities to learn and acknowledge what makes fathers feel included or excluded. Schools wishing to implement father-inclusive practices and strengthen the partnership with fathers could benefit from providing staff with relevant resources and professional development opportunities.

- **Teachers can help fathers understand their child's school experiences and become more effectively involved in their learning.** The study presented in this report indicates that fathers are keen to know more about their children's school life and how to support their learning. However, fathers do not always know the kind of approach or techniques that could help their child learn better. Therefore, fathers can benefit from more information about the kind of learning experiences their children receive. Frequent and accessible guidance for fathers on how to support their children with learning at home could also be useful in increasing engagement.
- **Involve children in shaping father-inclusion activities.** Pupils can make useful contributions to developing the school's approach to father inclusion. The children of the ELFFS study voiced that they would be keen to see more fathers and other significant males involved in school activities. They offered unique insights on the importance of father involvement in school and articulated a desire to take part in developing activities that will bring together pupils and parents. Schools can harness the potential of pupils to inform and influence a culture shift around the inclusion of fathers.
- **Use the father inclusion guide to inform school processes and procedures.** Schools can benefit from using the 'How Dad Friendly Is Our School' guide. The guide is linked to key education policy around parental engagement and is a useful resource for initiating discussions around a range of aspects related to father-inclusive practice, evaluating the school's approach to father inclusion and identifying areas for more work.
- **Develop bi-directional communication with fathers** to keep them informed and connected to school. Fathers can benefit from direct invitation to participate in school activities and specific, detailed and directive information on how to get involved in school life more generally. Equally, fathers can benefit from understanding that their involvement in school is valued, appreciated, and can make a positive impact on their children's learning.
- **Improvements to the father inclusion guide** will include case studies and success stories from experienced schools who can demonstrate pathways to increased involvement and strengthened father-school partnership. A section on theory and empirical evidence concerning the relationship between father involvement in school and child outcomes will enable teachers to situate this work within broader pedagogical and research contexts.

## 7.2 Recommendations for policymaking

- **Children benefit when their fathers are involved in school activities.** The findings in this report indicate that fathers contribute to their children's development in ways that are unique and independent of mothers. When fathers are highly involved in school activities, their children are less likely to experience many socioemotional difficulties and more likely to have positive attitudes to school. It is important for policy makers, employers, communities and schools to work together to make it easy for all fathers (and mothers) to participate in the life of the school.
- **Improve and extend the provision of family-friendly work entitlements.** Working fathers find it difficult to be involved in their children's school to the extent they wish, due to increasing labour market demands. This report shows that fathers working for small employers and self-employed fathers are significantly less likely to be involved in their child's school. Thus, there is scope for developing specific interventions and targeted policies to tackle this imbalance and make it possible for all working fathers in Scotland to get involved in school activities. Another recommendation could be for the self-employed to seek to acquire the rights of employees with regard to statutory paternity leave and pay.
- **Fund and support community organisations.** The ELFFS research shows that father-inclusion specialists and community organisations working with families play a crucial role in a galvanising change in schools. Community-based initiatives related to father inclusion could support schools in developing and implementing strategies to increase involvement in school. Collaborations with specialist community organisations could also lead to a more sustainable long-term cultural shift around father inclusion in schools.

### 7.3 Recommendations for research

- **The situation of fathers in specific employment situations should be given further attention.** Self-employed fathers and those working for small employers seem to struggle to participate in their child's school activities in comparison to fathers in other employment arrangements. More research is needed to unpack what makes it easier or harder for self-employed fathers and those working for small employers to involve themselves in their children's school and education. There is also limited research on parents working shifts and the challenges they experience in getting involved in their children's education.
- **Involvement of fathers in diverse life circumstances.** Fatherhood research in Scotland is still scarce. Much is unknown about what makes fathers in specific social, economic and cultural circumstances engage (or disengage) in their children's school and education. For example, research on the involvement of non-resident fathers is lacking. There is also little empirical evidence concerning the levels of involvement in school by fathers of children with SEN. Similarly, little is known about the experience of immigrant fathers with their children's schools in Scotland. The inclusion of all fathers in school requires a broader and deeper exploration of the experiences of different groups of fathers.
- **Specific types of data are required.** Longitudinal data is required to assess change over time. Data from fathers, mothers, teachers and children will give fuller information about the implications of parental involvement for child development. Research in this field should be informed by theory and explore a fuller range of strategies used by parents when they engage in their children's school and education.
- **Limitations of the research in this report.** It is worth bearing in mind that the analyses in this section focused on direct involvement in school as manifested by mothers' reports on fathers' participation in 11 school activities. Further exploration of both direct and indirect involvement in school, which includes fathers' reports, and the inclusion of a broader range of activities, would provide additional input on the impact of fathers' involvement in school on child developmental outcomes.

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