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# How Father-Friendly is Our School?

## A Practical Guide to Father-Inclusive Practice

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# How Father-Friendly is Our School?

## Forward

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

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

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

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

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

What's not to like?

**Gary Clapton**  
Senior Lecturer in Social Work The University of Edinburgh



# How Father-Friendly is Our School?

## Introduction

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



This guide has been piloted by a number of schools in East Lothian and a report including recommendations can be found at:

[www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/education](http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/education)

Please feedback how you have found using this guide and its impact on helping you work with your dads to Fathers Network Scotland at:

 [info@fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@fathersnetworkscotland.org.uk)

# How Father-Friendly is Our School?

## Leadership and Management – How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?

Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement.	There are effective systems that collect the views of male carers about the quality of service provided by the school and its commitment to father-inclusive practice.	How do you collect information from military dads, dads in custody, off shore workers, dads with English as an Additional Language, travellers, etc.	Drop-in chats, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, blogs/diaries, gender statistics of attendance at school events.
	Collegiate working and professional learning activities have a clear purpose and are linked to the results of self-evaluation and the agreed areas for improvement.	To what extent are staff critically engaging with research and policy relating to father-inclusive practice and fathers' impact on children's outcomes?	Include all staff members, where possible, to support an ethos of sharing ideas, transparent working and collective responsibility.
	Families are regularly involved in evaluating school improvement through a variety of ways, suitable to the needs of different types of families.	How do we share the impact of your agreed areas for improvement in relation to father-inclusive practice with parents and carers?	Create a 'parents apart' directory with up-to-date contact details to enable parents apart to be easily contacted and to aid clear communication.
		How do we know father-inclusive practice has improved outcomes for children? What evidence do we gather?  How well do we encourage dads to tell you about their skills and how they would like to get involved in school?	

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
1.2 Leadership of learning	Senior Leaders establish links with local and national organisations.	To what extent are you familiar with local and national organisations engaged in father & family inclusive practice? Is your knowledge up-to-date?	Fathers Network Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland. Father Network Scotland and local fathers' groups can support this training.
	Local individuals, groups and projects are invited to contribute to the development, delivery and evaluation of the school's father-inclusive initiatives.	Are you working in partnership with stakeholders to develop father-inclusive practice? How well are you using evidence to drive forward father-inclusive practice in your school?	Gather the views and opinions of community partners such as Community Learning and Development, Parent Council, HomeStart.
	Staff are trained in father-inclusive practice.		Highlight Father-friendly practice during induction.

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
1.3 Leadership of change	All staff understand, share and are committed to the school's aims, values and actions relating to father-inclusive practice.	Have you explained your father-inclusive approach in your school handbook?	Establish an Equality and Diversity Champion, with a father-inclusive remit.
	The school community are actively involved in the development of the school improvement plan.	Are fathers involved in the development of the School Improvement Plan? How have you used their contribution to inform your next steps for school improvement planning?	Include the views of Parent Council, Pupil Council and partner agencies.
	The School Leadership Team ensure that all staff are aware of the different family compositions in society and are given clear guidance on our inclusive approach to families.	Are all staff knowledgeable about the variety of family compositions in the local community and do they understand circumstances affecting children's life and learning?	Use Stonewall Scotland materials on 'Different Kinds of Families'.
	The school team and wider school community evaluates the effectiveness of father-inclusive practice/events. This feedback is used to make adjustments and improvements	Are you using theory and policy to guide the collection and analysis of data on the impact of father-inclusive practice?	Ensure that the school community are informed of the impact of their contribution.
	The school team are committed to disseminating their knowledge on, and experience with father-inclusive practice internally and with the wider community	Do you provide a range of options for the dissemination of information?	Share case studies to demonstrate and celebrate good practice with other schools in your Local Authority/Nationwide.

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
1.4 Leadership of management and staff	The School Leadership Team are approachable and operate an open door policy for all.	To what extent do dads in your organisation use your open door policy?	Be aware of the gender balance within your staff team.
	The school aims for a gender balance in recruitment and selection of staff.	Is there a gender balance within your Leadership team? If not, how can you address gender balance in your decision making?  How many male teachers or support staff do you have in your school?	Actively encourage male members of the school community to join the Parent Council. Train and include them in the recruitment process for new members of staff.
	The school community is pro-active in tackling prejudiced based discrimination and unconscious gender bias.	Are you proactive in identifying and organising training for parent council members in father-inclusive practice?  How do you know that staffroom chat is free of gender bias and comfortable for all members of staff?	Training and awareness of unconscious bias and the impact of gender stereo typing.

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
1.5 Management of resources to promote equality	The School Leadership Team ensures the use of financial resources are transparent and deliver equity for all.	How effectively are resources allocated to sustain improvement priorities relating to father-inclusive practice?	Ring fence money to ensure that the development of father-inclusive practice is safeguarded.
		To what extent are your father-inclusive improvements impacting on learning and teaching?	Make links with dads groups and ask for literature and explore their websites. Explore the link between engaging fathers and attainment.
	Posters, leaflets and displays around school promote father-inclusive practice. Time is taken to ensure that all images of male carers are positive ones.	Have you updated displays regularly to ensure accuracy and relevance of information? (e.g. paternity and shared parental leave policy).  Have you included this updated information in your school newsletter, website and social media?	Where possible, be proactive in offering regular space in your school to a variety of parent groups.
	Space and facilities are provided for a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities and community groups promoting father-inclusive practice in education.  Curricular materials are regularly screened and updated to ensure appropriateness and equity.	Do your curricular resources promote equity?	Check older resources for gender stereotyping.

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## Learning Provision – How good is the quality of the care and education we offer?

Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
2.1 Safeguarding and child protection	<p>All staff are trained in Child Protection and are aware of their responsibilities in relation to father-inclusive practice.</p> <p>Policies in school are monitored to ensure there is no gender bias or discrimination regarding family circumstances.</p>	<p>How do you ensure fathers' rights are protected within your Child Protection procedures and systems?</p> <p>Have you considered how you will share any school procedural or legislative changes with dads who live apart from their child?</p> <p>Are father-inclusive records up to date?</p>	<p>Promote opportunities for enhanced child protection training for all staff.</p> <p>Attach this responsibility to a staff member.</p>

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
2.2 Curriculum	<p>Through our teaching and learning, staff ensure that gender stereotyping in modern day employment is challenged.</p> <p>All staff contribute to father-inclusive practice within the school.</p> <p>The school community are actively involved in the development of the school improvement plan.</p> <p>The role of the father in different cultures and communities around the world is discussed throughout the curriculum.</p> <p>Collegiate time is allocated to discussing Equality, specifically father-inclusive practice, in line with local, national and international guidelines and developments.</p>	<p>Are staff critically reflecting on gender stereotyping in their teaching?</p> <p>To what extent do your learning materials feature balanced gender roles?</p> <p>Are staff made aware of the programmes or initiatives in place to promote father-inclusive practice and how they can become involved?</p> <p>Are your parent council involved in the development of your father-inclusive practice?</p> <p>To what extent do your learning materials reflect cultural diversity? Are male and female caregivers equally represented in such materials?</p> <p>Have you considered opportunities for Equality matters when developing your calendar of collegiate activity?</p> <p>Do you consider parents working patterns when planning curriculum events?</p>	<p>Consider in all curriculum discussions.</p> <p>Address this through whole school assemblies?</p> <p>Summative reports/school photos etc should be given to each parent.</p> <p>Include the views of Parent Council, Pupil Council and partner agencies.</p> <p>Think about the inclusion of cultures already present in your school community.</p> <p>Appoint an Equality and Diversity champion with a father-inclusive remit to develop and implement up-to-date knowledge of relevant law and best practice</p>

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	Meaningful assessment and evaluation strategies are identified to produce quality evidence, relating to father-inclusive practice, which informs future curricular planning.	How are Children's Rights related to father involvement?	Have you included pupil voice around their views of father-inclusive practice in your planning?  Use National supports such as Children's Parliament.
2.4 Personalised support	The school understands that families, including fathers, may need personalised support. The school uses its links with external agencies, including fathers groups in the community, to recommend services that might help. In all cases, support is handled sensitively and professionally.  The needs of each child and family are met and treated on an individual basis, with a firm focus on reducing any potential barriers to learning.	Have you considered that these individual needs can be met by any member of your school team?  Are you aware of the significant male carers in the lives of the children in your school?  How are you ensuring that they are effectively involved in decisions regarding their child?  Where there are complex family dynamics, have you considered getting advice and support from your Council legal team to ensure equity?	Invite all significant adults to school meetings, e.g. staged intervention processes.  Provide crèche facilities at all school events to enable attendance of all significant adults.

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
2.5 Family Learning	The school is creative and proactive in organising family learning opportunities, which are dad-inclusive, both within the school grounds and in the local community.  Family learning activities promote equality, fairness and diversity, linked meaningfully to family needs.	Could you use your outdoor space/community spaces to develop a family learning programme that includes fathers?  Are you considering the practical organisation of such events to ensure maximum participation from male carers?	Encourage staff and community partners with extracurricular skills to lead these events.  Engage in dialogue with families to determine specific needs.
2.6 Transitions	At all transition events, steps are taken to ensure that a range of times, dates and activities are offered to families.	Are you ensuring that parents living apart are provided with equal opportunities to participate in transition events?  Are there systems in place to collect the details of parents living apart to maximise participation at transitions?  Are details of families apart shared with the next school to ensure continuity of support for families, without families having to retell their stories?	Provide information about school events well in advance to make it easier for dads to become involved.  Develop a family 'passport' which the children could develop along-side staff.

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
2.7 Partnerships	Members of the school community have a good understanding of the school's ethos, vision, values and aims and how they relate to father-inclusive practice.	Do your parents know what your school vision, values and aims are?  Is the role of fathers reflected inherently in your vision, values and aims?	Invite the local community to contribute to the creation of the schools aims and values.
	Local individuals, groups and projects are invited to contribute to the development, delivery and evaluation of the school's father-inclusive initiatives.	Have you been proactive in making contact with local dads groups?	Establish links with local Dad organisations to assist in this process. Develop a directory of local community organisations.
	Local events, which recognise and celebrate working with male carers, are made known to the school community and the school engages with, and learns from, local, national and international groups and organisations who are working to address father-inclusive issues.	Could you advertise their activities to parents?	Follow relevant organisations on social media. Subscribe to their newsletter.
	The school's work towards father-inclusive practice is based on knowledge and understanding of national legislation, current research and good practice.	Do you have a school Equality and Diversity champion with a father-inclusive remit who can lead on these issues?	

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## How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?

Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
3.1 Improving wellbeing equality and inclusion	<p>Equality issues are discussed openly and constructively amongst pupils and staff who are empowered to challenge discrimination and intolerance when they come across it.</p> <p>The school's work towards father-inclusive practice is based on a knowledge and understanding of national legislation, current research and good practice.</p> <p>Diverse family circumstances are recognised, valued and promoted as a positive feature of the school and its community. Positive steps are taken to ensure that all parents are treated equally, with respect and in a fair and just manner.</p> <p>Communication with parents and carers is careful to avoid gender assumption.</p>	<p>How well are you using pupil voice to meaningfully address wider contentious issues?</p> <p>Are staff trained in Equality Legislation?</p> <p>Do you have a school champion for father-inclusive practice who can lead on these issues?</p> <p>How can fathers' experience and skills be used to enhance the learning experiences of your children?</p>	<p>Use Pupil Council to discuss key issues and to canvas opinion of pupils.</p> <p>Refer to Fathers' Network Scotland guidance in relation to legislation and good practice.</p> <p>Take time to learn the range of skills and interests of your male carers.</p> <p>Try to use images of current pupils and their male carers where appropriate.</p>

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
3.1 Improving wellbeing equality and inclusion	<p>The images that are portrayed in school displays and on communications via newsletters, the school website and social media are reviewed before publishing to ensure gender equity.</p> <p>Male carers visiting the school feel valued, safe and comfortable.</p> <p>Male members of staff are supported throughout their own child's development.</p> <p>All staff are aware of current legislative frameworks related to wellbeing, equality and inclusion.</p>	<p>Do you have a designated member of staff who takes responsibility for this?</p> <p>Are you familiar with your local authority's Customer Care Charter?</p> <p>Does your School Leadership Team take time to informally speak with male carers in the playground?</p> <p>Is there up to date and accessible information on paternity leave and other employer support initiatives pertinent to male staff?</p> <p>Are all staff given opportunities to take part in professional learning around current legislation?</p>	<p>Do you have a noticeboard dedicated to father-inclusive practice?</p> <p>Identify potential barriers to dads being part of milestone events such as first day at school/school concerts, etc.</p>

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Quality Indicator	Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge Questions	Ideas
3.2 Raising attainment and achievement.	Male carers, regardless of living arrangements, are given regular updates and opportunities to engage in conversation relating to their child's development and progress.	Do you ensure that parent contact details are routinely updated and shared with staff?	Contact parents who do not live with their child and encourage them to share their child's special moments and achievements with the school.
	Parents and carers are made aware of the benefits of a male carer being actively involved in their child's education and the positive impact their engagement can have on raising attainment.	Do you ensure that the effectiveness of father-inclusive initiatives in the school improvement plan has been shared with all parents and carers?	Share success stories where fathers have helped children to learn new skills on an achievement display board.
3.3 Increasing creativity and employability	The school curriculum is designed to support children to develop and promote their understanding of equality, diversity and discrimination, specifically in relation to gender.	Is your curriculum designed to empower children and give them the confidence to challenge discrimination (gender) when they encounter it?	Develop problem solving skills by including children in the planning process on your journey towards becoming a father-inclusive school.

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### A Practical Guide to Father-Inclusive Practice