

Committee Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date 5th May 2009	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Lutfur Ali, Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): Ashraf Ali Scrutiny & Equalities		Title: <i>Parental Engagement in Secondary Education: Report of the Scrutiny Working Group</i> Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report submits the report and recommendations of the Parental Engagement in Secondary Education Working Group for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Endorse the draft report.
- 2.2 That the Service Head for Scrutiny and Equalities be authorised to agree final report before submission to Cabinet, after consultation with the Scrutiny Lead for A Prosperous Communities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (AS AMENDED) SECTION 100D

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background paper

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

3. Background

- 3.1 A Working Group was established in September 2008 to review current policy and practices and suggest improvements in supporting and encouraging parental engagement in secondary schools.
- 3.2 The review had six main objectives:
- To consider the role of the Council in assisting schools to improve relationships with parents and carers
 - To review service provision offered to parents by schools and the Council
 - To establish a common understanding of the importance that parents/carers play in influencing the educational achievement of their children
 - To find out how parents feel about their relationship with their children's school and how this could be further developed
 - To find out from secondary schools the level of parental engagement and the issues that schools face in seeking to engage with parents
 - To make appropriate recommendations designed to support Children's Services improve responsiveness to the needs of parents /carers in the borough
- 3.3 The Working Group held two meetings with Council Officers to review the current parental engagement initiatives. The Working Group also visited four parenting programmes to ascertain views about the quality of parental engagement provisions.
- 3.4 The report with recommendations is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.5 Once agreed, the Working Group's report and action plan will be submitted to Cabinet for a response to their recommendations.

4. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)

The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. The attached report contains recommendations in relation to Parental Engagement in Secondary Education. It is open to the Overview and Scrutiny committee to agree the report for presentation to Cabinet.

5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

- 5.1 There are no specific financial implications emanating from this report.

6. One Tower Hamlets considerations

- 6.1 Recommendations 2 and 6, specifically ask that Children's Services develops clear and accessible information and communication networks for parents. The Working Group was told by BME parents that information given to them is difficult to read and understand. This has clear relevance for equal opportunity implications.

6.2 The report also considers factors that stop parents from attending parental engagement programmes including: childcare commitments, lack of confidence when interacting with teachers and feeling intimidated by other parents. These are significant when considering One Tower Hamlets implications.

7. Risk Management

7.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the Working Group's report or recommendations.

Parental Engagement in Secondary Education

Tower Hamlets Council
May 2009



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Acknowledgements

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Chair's Foreword

This report of the Parental Engagement in Secondary Education Working Group highlights the critical role parents play in educating their children and the way our Children's Services supports parents to engage more with schools.

There is extensive research evidence that demonstrates that if parents are actively involved in supporting their children's learning; their children will do well at school. The report provides information of a number of visits that demonstrate how important it is that schools and Children's Services support parents in actively participating in their children's education both at school and at home.

I hope that the report will be widely read and the recommendations acted upon. Investing time and energy, to work with parents, particularly the hard to reach, will reap dividends in higher standards of achievement. Families in Tower Hamlets experience multiple deprivations but through the Council, schools and the wider community working together to involve parents, standards of achievement will rise significantly. While we found evidence of good practice in Tower Hamlets schools, there is a great deal that we can do to improve this.

I would like to thank everyone who came to give evidence at scrutiny meetings and gave so generously their time and expertise. I would like to thank the Equalities and Parental Engagement team for their advice and support. Finally, I would like to thank members of the Working Group for their commitment and interest in the project.

Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar
Scrutiny Lead, Prosperous Communities

Recommendations

The Working Group recommendations set out the areas requiring consideration and action by the Council to improve parental engagement in Secondary education. The recommendations cover three main areas:

- Better access to information
- Support to access services
- Improved consultation with parents

- R1 That Children’s Services help to develop the Parent Support Partner (PSP) role within schools to ensure parents have access to the information and support they might need to access services, including parenting programmes.**
- R2 That Children’s Services develops clear and accessible information and communication networks for parents through development of the PSP role, publications and newsletters, websites, parent forums and rep schemes as well as face to face meetings.**
- R3 That Children’s Services in partnership with primary and secondary schools develops a seamless and effective transition process from year 6 (primary school) by running transition information sessions (Parent Information Point) for all Year 7 parents. This should be followed by a structured induction into year 7 through workshops and short courses enabling parents to learn more about how secondary schools work and how they can support their child’s learning.**
- R4 That Children’s Services supports secondary schools to offer transition information sessions for parents of children in Y9 (making curriculum choices) and Y11 (making post 16 choices) and pilots a Choice Advice Service for parents who find it difficult to engage with the process.**
- R5 That Children’s Services support schools to ensure that there is a dedicated area for parents to meet or attend programmes, either in the school or nearby (eg the Community House shared by schools in the LEO – Lawdale, Elizabeth Selby and Oaklands - mini-cluster).**
- R6 That secondary schools, with the support of Children’s Services, introduce regular consultation events to obtain parents’ views and build trust and confidence (Parent Voice), ensuring parents receive feedback and see results.**
- R7 That Children’s Services supports schools to develop a welcoming School with training for front-line staff, both in the**

office and the classroom, on how to make parents feel comfortable, particularly when discussing sensitive issues.

- R8 That Children's Services support schools to develop an ongoing programme of interactive activities and workshops for parents to learn more about the curriculum, how children are taught and how they can support their child's learning, as well as approaches to parenting teenagers.**

Introduction

1. The role of parental engagement in childrens' education is a central issue in educational policy and research. Improving parental engagement and family-school partnerships is a fundamental challenge to strengthen student achievement and reduce educational inequalities.
2. A Working Group was established in September 2008 to review current policy and practices and suggest improvements in supporting and encouraging parental engagement in secondary schools. Four councillors and a co-opted representative made up the membership of the review including the chair of the Working Group Councillor Abdul Aziz Sardar, Scrutiny Lead, A Prosperous Community.
3. The scrutiny review topic was identified to help ensure the right support is provided to parents to help their children reach their full educational potential.
4. The review had six main objectives:
 - To consider the role of the Council in assisting secondary schools to improve relationships with parents and carers
 - To review service provision offered to parents by secondary schools and the Council
 - To establish a common understanding of the importance that parents/carers play in influencing the educational achievement of their children
 - To find out how parents feel about their relationship with their children's secondary school and how this could be further developed
 - To find out from secondary schools the level of parental engagement and the issues that schools face in seeking to engage with parents
 - To make appropriate recommendations designed to support Children's Services improve responsiveness to the needs of parents /carers in the borough
5. The following timetable for review work was agreed:

Introductory Meeting (October 2008)

- To agree scoping document
- Review the Family Support and Parental Engagement Strategy
- Introduction to current Parental Engagement Initiatives in secondary schools

Meeting to consider current parental engagement initiatives in Secondary Schools (November 2008)

- In-depth review of parental engagement initiatives

Focus group with parents (January 2009)

- Focus group with parents of children attending Oaklands Secondary, Lawdale and Elizabeth Selby Primary Schools – to hear views about quality of parental engagement

School Visit –Stepney Green School (January 2009)

- Review Ocean Maths Project and its work building relationships with local residents and improving parents' understanding of work children are doing in Schools

Visit to the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) (February 2009)

- Participating in the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Parenting Programme at PRU and talking to parents about the impact of the programme in building relationships between parents and children

Visit to the Annual Parents Matter Conference (March 2009)

- The Working Group was invited to attend the Annual Parents Matter Conference and spoke to parents about ways to improve parental engagement.

Final Meeting (March 2009)

- Consider draft recommendations

6. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the Working Group's report and its recommendations before submission to Cabinet.

Findings

Background

National Legislation

7. The government has highlighted the importance of parents and parenting in recent legislation. *The Childcare Act 2006* places a duty on local authorities to broaden the scope of information provided to ensure that parents of children and young people up to their twentieth birthday can obtain the full range of information they need to fulfil their parenting role. It also places a requirement on local authorities to deliver information services which are accessible to all parents, particularly those who might otherwise have difficulty in accessing the information they need.
8. Since the launch of the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme*¹, the significance of parenting in improving child outcomes has become increasingly central to policy formation on family issues. Government Guidance issued in October 2006 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) asks local authorities to develop a strategic and joined-up approach to the design and delivery of a continuation of parenting support services, ideally through a parenting support strategy that informs the Children and Young People's Plan and takes account of parents' views. The DCSF says that:

'Families are in most cases the key determinant of positive outcomes for their children, and good parenting is a major factor in improving children and young people's life chances.'

Local Overview

9. April 1999 saw the first scrutiny review in Tower Hamlets that examined parental involvement in schools. The review carried out by the Education and Youth Scrutiny Panel sought to review work to increase involvement of parents in their children's learning and review barriers to greater involvement.
10. The scrutiny process involved hearing presentations and receiving information from voluntary and statutory organisations. Furthermore visits were made to a number of family learning sessions and focus groups were held with parents at four open meetings.

¹ Every Child Matters: Change for Children reform aims to improve and integrate children's services, promote early intervention, provide strong leadership and bring together different professionals in multi-disciplinary teams in order to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people and their families.

11. Key findings from the 1999 review suggested that good practice already existed, with considerable work already happening locally. Moreover, it was clear that there is no one model approach to parental involvement and that different needs of different parents and communities have to be recognised. Furthermore, findings made apparent the enthusiasm of the Bangladeshi community to get involved. Nonetheless, there was still a lot of work needed to increase involvement.
12. The 2008/09 Working Group spent considerable time considering the findings of the report by the Education and Youth Scrutiny Panel. The 1999 report was used to help draft the scoping document, particularly the methods to obtain evidence. The current Members of the Working Group decided early to carry out visits to parenting programmes as was the case in the earlier review. It was argued that the best way to understand barriers to parental engagement was to talk with parents themselves.

Family Support and Parental Engagement Strategy 2007/08

13. During the development of the draft scope, the Equalities and Parental Engagement team introduced the *Family Support and Parental Engagement Strategy 2007/08*, which sets out the Council's vision on the way better engagement will be achieved. This strategy states that:

'The strategy for family support and parental engagement is designed to support the borough's vision by ensuring that parents and families have access to the support that they need, when they need it, so that children can benefit from confident, positive parenting from birth through to teenage years'.

14. A key component of the 2007/08 strategy is the *Tower Hamlets Parents' Charter* which sets out shared principles and beliefs for key providers. These include ensuring that parents receive high quality service, clear and comprehensive information about services and how to access them, making sure that parents are consulted about existing services and involved in the planning of new initiatives.

Literature Review

15. The belief that parental involvement has a positive effect on students' academic achievement is intuitively appealing to policy makers, teachers, parents and students alike. However this belief has a firm foundation both in the literature concerning parental involvement and in the school improvement research base. The empirical evidence shows that parental involvement is one of the key factors in securing higher

student achievement and sustained school performance (Harris and Chrispeels 2006²).

16. It would appear that involving parents in schooling leads to more engagement in teaching and learning processes. The importance of parents' educational attitudes and behaviours on children's educational attainment has also been well documented, especially in developmental psychology literature. This evidence shows that different elements of parents' 'educational attitudes and behaviours, such as the provision of a cognitively stimulating home environment, parental involvement in children's activities and parental beliefs and aspirations, have been identified as having a significant effect on children's levels of educational achievement' (Feinstein et al. 2006:1³).
17. Parental involvement in learning at home throughout the age range is much more significant than any factor open to educational influence. (Sacker et al. 2002⁴).
18. Parental aspiration/expectation of their children's achievements has a strong impact on results at school, while the effect of supervision of their work is only marginal (Fan et al. 2001⁵). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003⁶) list involvement initiatives as 'good' parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance' (Desforge & Abouchaar, 2003, p.2).
19. Evidence shows differences relating to economic status carry over into the area of parental engagement. While parents want the best for their children, working class parents may not automatically expect certain outcomes as do middle class parents (National Centre for Social Research 2004). As Lupton (2006⁷) points out 'most working class parents think education is important but they see it as something that happens in the school, not the home'. Their expectations of social mobility through education also remain small. It remains the case that their social class has a powerful impact on subsequent educational attainment.

² Harris, A. & Chrispeels, J. H. (Eds.). (2006). *Improving Schools and Educational Systems: International Perspectives*. London: Routledge

³ Feinstein, L. and Sabates, R. (2006). *Does Education have an impact on mothers' educational attitudes and behaviours*. Research Brief RCB01-06, DfES.

⁴ Sacker, A., Schoon, I. and Bartley, M. (2002). "Social inequality in educational achievement and psychological adjustment throughout childhood

⁵ Fan, X. and Chen, M. (2001). "Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement

⁶ Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A. (2003). The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment

⁷ Lupton, R. (2006). *How does place affect education?* London, Institute for Public Policy Research.

20. Finding from the literature review demonstrate clearly that parental involvement has a positive influence on students' academic achievement. Furthermore findings suggest parental involvement in children's activities and parental beliefs and aspirations, have effects on children's levels of educational achievement.
21. The literature review helped to further expand the scope of the review and to set the context for investigating current programmes and practices.

Current Programmes and Practices

22. The Working Group was presented with information about current initiatives to increase parental engagement at the meeting in November 2008. Including:
 - Extended Schools
 - Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Parenting Programme
 - Transition Information Sessions/ Parent Information Point (PIP)
 - Passport to Learning and targeted workshops for parents of year 7 students
 - Maths curriculum workshop – Ocean Maths Project

Extended Schools

23. The Working Group was informed by the Head of Extended Services that services offered as part of the programme are in response to demand and delivered through schools and clusters. Programmes are delivered by teams within Children's Services, other statutory providers and voluntary, community or private sector organisations.
24. Extended Schools provide a wide range of services and activities, to help meet the needs of children and their families. The core parenting support that families should be able to access through schools include: information sessions for parents at key transition points, parenting programmes and family learning sessions to allow children to learn with their parents.
25. The Working Group was informed that a varied menu of activities exists to deliver the Extended Schools programme. These include: academic activities to boost children's school performance, homework clubs, booster and catch up sessions as well as arts, sporting and creative activities. Programmes are shaped through consultation with children and young people and by individual school development priorities.

Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities

26. Information on the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (SFSC) parenting programmes was provided by the Parenting Early Intervention Project Manager. Members heard that the programme equips parents with more information on better parenting to help children to lead violence free, healthy lifestyles.
27. SFSC is a community based programme specifically designed to promote some of the protective factors associated with 'good parenting' (developing close and warm relationships between parents and children; using methods of discipline that support self-discipline in children; fostering self-esteem of children; developing strategies to deal with risky situations; managing anger). At the same time SFSC deals with the factors associated with increased risk (inconsistent parenting; harsh discipline in an overly critical environment; limited supervision; isolation and lack of knowledge of community resources). Importantly, the SFSC approach emphasises that the local environment impacts on parenting (for example the availability of good schools) and that parents should play an active role in helping to shape this environment by engaging with community resources.
28. SFSC achieves its aims through a range of methods which include:
 - Providing parents with information to empower them
 - Developing anger management and positive discipline techniques
 - Providing a cultural framework to validate the historical and family experiences of different ethnic groups
 - Decreasing isolation by helping parents to connect to community resources.
29. As noted in the Introduction, the Working Group visited parenting programmes. One of these was the SFSC programme at the Pupil Referral Unit where ten parents were present. All of them were female, two were Bangladeshi, two African Caribbean, five White British and one Polish. Members and parents talked in length about the benefits of this programme and its effect in building parents' confidence to influence their children's behaviour positively.
30. The majority of parents expressed strongly held views about the positive impact of this programme, and it quickly became clear that parents associated improvement in parenting with this programme. Almost all of the parents were supportive of an increase in the number of SFSC programmes in Tower Hamlets.
31. Many parents referred to the impact they felt the parenting programme was having in improving relationships with their children. The following excerpts are just a few examples:

“I feel more relaxed around my daughter and this allows me to talk to my child in a more positive way”;

“I am now more positive about parenting and look forward to spending some time with my children”.

32. One of the major aims of the course is to encourage positive discipline and communication approaches. One parent said:

“Before if my daughter was behaving badly I would scream and just shout, but now I just talk to her and try to explain to her that what she is doing is wrong”.

One of the Members asked how the programme has helped her to change the approach taken to disciplining her child. The parent said that sessions on confrontation helped to manage her anger more.

33. The discussion then progressed to the barriers parents faced when trying to interact with schools. The Working Group specifically asked parents’ views on how schools could improve parental engagement. Parents talked about the difficulty accessing information and support that informs them about parenting activities and programmes.

“I hardly ever receive information from schools other than details about parents’ evening or calls to say that my son is truanting”.

Another parent commented:

“Most of the information I receive is about my child misbehaving”.

However, some did say they receive information at times about school activities but found those activities difficult to attend because of childcare responsibilities.

34. The Working Group also talked about the way information is presented and was keen to know if information about parenting programmes is translated into other languages. To which, one parent replied.

“Most of the time the school does give me information in Bengali, I think they have to. But I can read English when it is simple and so would like information to be in plain English. I rather the school spoke to me then sent me letters as I feel more comfortable with that”.

35. During the final Scrutiny meeting, the Working Group presented its findings from the visit to Council Officers. Parents had specifically told the Working Group that information and support needs to encourage

parents to participate in their childrens' school. Information also needs to be in plain English to make it easy to read and understand.

36. Members were informed that one of the Council's long-term aims is to develop the role of parents as partners of schools by giving them more say in the way provisions is offered to pupils. Working with schools to improve information given to parents is a vital element of the Family Support and Parental Engagement Strategy 2007/08.

- R1 That Children's Services help to develop the Parent Support Partner (PSP) role within schools to ensure parents have access to the information and support they might need to access services, including parenting programmes.**
- R2 That Children's Services develops clear and accessible information and communication networks for parents through development of the PSP role, publications and newsletters, websites, parent forums and rep schemes as well as face to face meetings.**

Transition Information Sessions/ Parent Information Point (PIP)

37. Information about the Parent Information Point (PIP) was presented to the Working Group by the Senior Parent Support Co-ordinator. PIP sessions provide information and support for parents at key transition points. Parents of children new to a school or moving on to a new phase (e.g. from years 6 to 7) are invited to a meeting where they can find out more about the transition process and how they can support their child. An informal discussion and/or group activity is followed by a 'market place' session, where parents can pick up leaflets and information about facilities and activities across the borough.
38. Attention was drawn to the approach taken by Langdon Park School. When primary children visit the school at the end of the summer term parents are also invited. After a brief introduction by the Headteacher children go to class with their form tutor and parents are divided into the same tutor groups as their children. Each group of parents is facilitated by a member of staff and a year 11 student, who is able to translate. Parents then take part in a PIP session, where they have an opportunity to meet other parents and share information and concerns.
39. The second visit by the Working Group was to a Transition Information Session at Raines Foundation School. Many parents of year 7 pupils were present. The Working Group observed parents interact with teachers and talked to parents about the difficulty they and their children face when transferring from primary to secondary school.
40. The majority of parents talked about the benefits of this type of information session in helping their child to manage the transition

between primary and secondary schools. It became obvious that parents associated the programme with a more seamless and effective transition.

41. One parent said:

“This programme is really good. I get to see the school that my son will be attending and meet his teachers. This is a very stressful time for me as I know my son is really nervous about starting year 7, so coming here reassures me that he will be ok. It’s also good that my son is here. It will help to familiarise the place”.

42. The PIP session gives parents an opportunity to ask questions about the school that their children will be attending. As one of them said:

“It’s really good that there is a dedicated point to ask questions. I have so many things on my mind really nervous about my son starting secondary school”.

43. The Working Group asked parents how they thought schools could improve the transition process. In response parents were keen to continue to have transition programmes for the first few months.

“This session is great, but I would like to come back again to talk with teachers about how my child is doing. I don’t mean parents’ evenings, but regular meetings”.

One parent said:

“I really want to support my daughter and so need to know what she will be studying. If I can meet with her teachers regularly then that would help me immensely”.

44. Another parent talked about her daughter who has just started year 10 to study GCSE. The Group was told that transition from year 9 to year 10 has been difficult:

” My daughter is finding the adjustment hard to take. I only wish the school gave me more information about the transition from year 9 to GCSE so that I could have helped her cope”.

45. The Working Group presented its findings from the Raines Foundation School visit to Officers of the Council and other Members of the Working Group that could not attend. The Working Group felt that the PIP Session was successful and that parents found the opportunity to come into school to meet teachers useful. However, they did ask that more information is given to parents about secondary school work to enable them to support their child better. Moreover the group were

keen for a similar transition session to be available to parents of year 9 pupils about to start GCSE and parents of GCSE pupils about to start college or Post 16 courses.

- R3 That Children’s Services in partnership with primary and secondary schools develops a seamless and effective transition process from year 6 (primary school) by running transition information sessions (Parent Information Point) for all Year 7 parents. This should be followed by a structured induction into year 7 through workshops and short courses enabling parents to learn more about how secondary schools work and how they can support their child’s learning.**
- R4 That Children’s Services supports secondary schools to offer transition information sessions for parents of children in Y9 (making curriculum choices) and Y11 (making post 16 choices) and pilots a Choice Advice Service for parents who find it difficult to engage with the process.**

Passport to Learning and Targeted workshops for Year 7 parents

46. The Parental Engagement Co-ordinator informed the Working Group of the Passport to Learning programme. The programme provides parents with a means of reflecting and recording on educational, training, work and volunteering experiences. Parents are supported to build up a record of skills and knowledge they have developed to support their children’s learning and development. Parents can attend a variety of Passport to Learning courses including “Building Skills and Confidence” and “Volunteering in your Child’s school”
47. The programme includes workshops aimed to increase parents’ confidence and improve attendance rates of children. Also to increase parents’ confidence and knowledge of the school system and increase parental involvement at parent conferences and consultations, pupil review days and school initiatives.
48. The Working Group was invited to attend a parents’ meeting run in partnership by Oaklands Secondary School, Elizabeth Selby Primary School and Lawdale Junior School. The group meet regularly to discuss parenting issues with each other. Ten parents were present.
49. Members were keen to understand the level of information and support parents receive from schools and whether information is translated into different languages. In general, parents felt very positive about the information the school provided.

“My daughter’s school is very good in keeping me informed and up to date with her progress”.

Another parent said:

“The school provides clear information on how my child is getting on and gave information that helped me understand how I could support my child’s progress”.

However one Bangladeshi female parent did say that information received at times was full of jargon and difficult to understand.

“Sometimes I can’t understand the English.”

The Working Group specifically asked if this is because English is her second language. To which the parent replied “yes”.

50. Furthermore, Members spent time discussing with parents whether they find their child’s school welcoming. In the introductory review meeting, Officers from the Equalities and Parental Engagement team informed Members that one way to improve parental engagement is for schools to be more welcoming, especially for the hard to reach groups. When talking with parents some said they feel uncomfortable attending parents’ evenings and at times would “stay away”. When asked the reason, one parent said:

“I feel as if I am always in the wrong and that the teachers are always right”.

51. One of the key aims of this review was to evaluate the relationship between schools and parents to see if schools are involving parents in key decisions. The Working Group discussed this with parents to distinguish whether it is easy for them to contact the school to have a say about the way the school is being run. The majority of the parents said that the schools that their children go to, on the whole, are accessible. However, one parent said that:

“The setup is good within this cluster but really poor in my other child’s secondary school, where accessing the school is difficult. I just want the same for all my children”.

Furthermore another parent said:

“It’s the same faces that attend this programme, the school needs to find a way to encourage more parents to attend to get their views on how the school is run”.

52. Parents also said that this cluster is specifically good at notifying parents of services and parenting programmes that its schools are running. Members heard that information about events and programmes are regularly sent to parents. Despite the success of this programme the Working Group was interested to know how attendance

at this meeting could be improved. Parents said that *“information needs to be in different languages”*. The Parental Engagement Co-ordinator did say that a continual effort is always made to translate documents.

53. The parents at this meeting clearly demonstrated the good work found within this mini cluster, during the development of the recommendations, Officers said that space to hold meetings are important and that the Oaklands mini cluster is lucky in that it has a community centre that can be used.
54. The Headteacher of Oaklands School, who was also present on this visit, stressed the importance of having a dedicated space to give parents an opportunity to discuss how their children’s school is managed. Patrice Canavan said that parents are *“customers of the education service as well as key partners in their children’s education. As such they should expect involvement in the running of their children’s school and for those who lead and manage the school to be accountable to them. Schools need to have a detailed understanding of the needs, expectations and experiences of parents in order to assess whether they are meeting them. Therefore all schools needed to develop a welcoming atmosphere that is understanding of the needs of the parent”*.

- R5 That Children’s Services support schools to ensure that there is a dedicated area for parents to meet or attend programmes, either in the School or nearby (eg the Community House shared by schools in the LEO – Lawdale, Elizabeth Selby and Oaklands -mini-cluster).**
- R6 That secondary schools, with the support of Children’s Services, introduce regular consultation events to obtain parents’ views and build trust and confidence (Parent Voice), ensuring parents receive feedback and see results.**
- R7 That Children’s Services supports schools to develop a welcoming school with training for front-line staff, both in the office and the classroom, on how to make parents feel comfortable, particularly when discussing sensitive issues.**

Maths curriculum workshop

55. The Ocean Maths Project was originally set upon the Ocean Estate in Stepney and has expanded across the borough. The area has a high black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) population. The project aims to help raise the educational attainment and expectations of local young people and develop positive links between Schools and the local community.

56. The Director of Ocean Maths highlighted how the project uses specially designed homework, focussing on a game which children and parents or their carers can play together. This is designed to support and enhance what children learn in school. Each term, parents are invited to a workshop where they are shown how to play the games and offered additional ways to support their children's education.
57. The final visit of the Working Group was to see the Maths Project in action at Stepney Green Secondary School. Twenty parents were present, all of whom were of Bangladeshi background. The Group observed parents working with their children and afterwards talked to them about the project.
58. The majority of parents were positive about the impact of this programme, and it quickly became clear that parents associated improvement in understanding the work that their child does in school to this programme. Almost all of the parents were vociferously for an increase in this type of workshop across Tower Hamlets.
59. Many parents believed the parenting programme improved the relationship with their child's school. One parent said:
- "Before I would never attend the school, this workshop forces me to attend and meet my sons' teachers".*
- Furthermore one parent said:
- "It has helped me to understand the education that my son receives".*
60. Members thought the workshop was a great example of parents working with their children and teachers. The atmosphere was lively and it was clearly visible that parents really enjoyed themselves.
61. At the final scrutiny meeting the Working Group gave feedback to Officers and those Members that could not attend the Ocean Maths Project Workshop. From observing the workshop and speaking with parents and teachers, it is the Working Group's view that this project plays an important part in encouraging parents to play an active role in the development of their child's learning and improving the relationship between parents and schools.
62. Officers informed the Working Group that the Ocean Maths Project continues to be a success at Stepney Green School and that the excellent GCSE Maths results that the School has obtained in the last couple of years can be linked to the success of the project.

R8 That Children's Services support schools to develop an ongoing programme of interactive activities and workshops for parents to learn more about the curriculum, how children are taught and how they can support their child's learning, as well as approaches to parenting teenagers.

Conclusion

63. The Working Group welcomed the opportunity to examine in detail the various parental engagement initiatives operating locally. From visits made to different schools it was clear that whilst a lot of good work is already underway to get parents more involved in their childrens' schooling, more work is required to secure engagement from hard to reach parents.
64. Members wanted to find ways to help parents feel more confident when interacting with schools. The review found that programmes such as the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Parenting Programme did to some extent help to build confidence amongst parents. Although upon reflection, more work is needed to empower parents to feel totally comfortable and confident when engaging with schools.
65. The recommendations are based primarily on the visits and reflect what parents have to say about ways engagement can be improved. Discussions have also been held with Children's Services throughout to ensure that the recommendations are necessary to improve parental engagement.
66. Finally, the Working Group hopes that the implementation of the recommendations and the on going work of Children's Services will further increase parental engagement and consequently improve educational achievement to improve outcomes for young people.