

*DRAFT report*

## **Parental Engagement review March 2010 Children's' services and education sub committee**

### **Introduction**

The Children's' services and education sub committee decided to conduct a review on parental engagement after receiving a briefing on : Building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools System, Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future at a committee meeting in September 2010 . A key emphasis in the White Paper is the theme of parental responsibility. Research indicated that a common feature of the lowest performing primary schools is a lack of parental involvement with the education process. There are some outstanding Southwark schools in very challenging neighbourhoods that have worked very hard to engage parents more, and parental engagement may be the biggest lever not yet used in the borough to effect further improvements. The review therefore decided to focus on parental engagement in primary school children.

The review took place from September 2009 to March 2010. It became apparent that parental engagement is a huge topic that the committee had limited capacity to review. The review is therefore restricted to noting good practice in Southwark and in recent research.

The primary aim of this report is to suggest further areas for investigation and investment. It is hoped this will compliment the investment Southwark already has in parental engagement and the action research project currently being led by external consultant, Dr Jan McKenley. This project will use action research to discover how Southwark can best build parental engagement processes with parents in homes where an effective learning culture may not be evident.

### **Methodology**

Review of research and scrutiny reports from other Councils.

Officer presentation on the theme of 'Parental Engagement'.

Committee members sharing good practice.

Visit to parent governor event 'Promoting good parenting; Wednesday, 24th February; led by Commissioner for Parenting and CAMHS and review of 'Incredible Years: Parenting Pathfinder DVD'.

### **Findings and recommendations**

The sub committee noted the importance of family learning and the key role that parent's play as informal educators. It was noted that reports and research conducted by Professor Alma Harris and Dr Janet Goodall indicated that:

*'Parents have the greatest influence on the achievement of young people through supporting their learning in the home (parental engagement) rather than supporting activities in the school (parental involvement). It is their support of learning in the home environment that makes the maximum difference to achievement.'*<sup>1</sup>

### Recommendation 1 Support and encouraging parents in their role as informal educators

Research indicates that children are more disadvantaged by a lack of parental engagement in their learning than by social class (2). The Committee consider it important that all parents and families are encouraged to engage with their children's education; particularly the most disadvantaged, and favoured initiatives that communicate to all parents to avoid stigmatising or alienating parents and carers.

### Recommendation 2: Provide universal services

Evidence was heard that the father's role in their child's education was particularly important and there is considerable research demonstrating that a father's involvement is significantly related to positive child outcomes (3). However it was also noted that some children do not have an active father but that other significant males in children's lives can still be engaged. The importance of grandfathers, uncles, stepfathers and others was noted. Kintore Way Nursery School has successfully engaged male carers in their children's education by setting up regular play themed events. Children are encouraged to send personalised invitations to a significant male in their lives. Around a hundred fathers and carers have got involved and benefited. Members welcomed this approach and considered that it is vital that initiatives does not undermine fathers but rather promote the importance of their roles and empower both fathers and male carers.

### Recommendation 3: Fathers and male carers of children have a vital role in children's education and this should be promoted and encouraged.

A number of scrutiny reports from London Boroughs and research evidence has demonstrated that transition from Early Year's or home into primary school and later from primary school into secondary school are crucial times. Support at these times is particularly important and can make a significant difference to subsequent attainment. Children from families experiencing multiple stress factors are particularly vulnerable at these times (4,5,6).

### Recommendation 4: Family support is particularly targeted at transition times

Members heard from the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Leadership & Learning Services) that the latest DEMOS report on parenting as character building (7). This drew attention to growing evidence that what matters most is character capabilities – application, self-regulation and empathy and that these makes a vital contribution to life chances, mobility and opportunity. Confident, skilful parents adopting a 'tough love' approach to parenting, balancing warmth with discipline, seem to be the most effective in terms of generating these key character capabilities.

Southwark has a 'Commissioner for Parenting and CAMHS' and Southwark runs a valuable scheme: 'Incredible Years – parenting pathfinder' which teaches and enhances these skills using peer support in a supportive and non judgmental way.

### Recommendation 5 Parenting courses that increase and develop parent's skills should be promoted.

## References

1 Engaging parents in raising achieving; do parents know they matter. A Research project commissioned by the specialist schools and academies trust. Professor Alma Harris and Dr Janet Goodall.

2 & 3 The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education. Department for Education and Skills

4 Helping Families Support Children's Success at School. Published by Save the Children: Professor Alma Harris of the Institute of Education, University of London and Dr Janet Goodall of the Institute of Education, University of Warwick Review of Research Evidence.

5 Tower Hamlets scrutiny report on Parental Engagement in Secondary Education

6 Haringey council scrutiny review of parental involvement in education

7 Building Character , parents are the principle architects of a fairer society . Jen Lexmond & Richard Reeves