



# Research Update

## The Impact of Parental Involvement in the School Experience of 10 and 11-Year Olds



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### Introduction

Parental involvement is consistently associated with pupils' success at school. Indeed, it is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement and sustained school performance (Harris and Goodall 2007). Parents are the primary educators until a child starts school and they continue to be a major influence on their children's learning throughout their schooling.

Save the Children understands that encouraging parents to get more involved in their child's education is vital in order to enable them to support their child's learning and development at home and in school. To enable us to better understand the impact of parental involvement with schools, and to demonstrate its positive benefits, Save the Children is working in partnership with Middlesex University to deliver **Families and Schools Together (FAST)**, an award-winning parental support and empowerment programme, across the UK. To date, the FAST programme has been delivered in 26 primary schools across Northern Ireland, and has been successful in encouraging parents to support their children's education and working to break down perceived barriers between schools, parents and the wider community.

To find out what the experience of children are in Northern Ireland in general, in 2013, Save the Children took the opportunity to commission ARK to ask P7 children via the Kids Life and

Times (KLT) survey questions concerning their parents' attitudes towards and involvement in their school. Additional questions commissioned addressed nutrition and children's experience of school care.

KLT is an annual online survey carried out by ARK in schools. All P7 children in Northern Ireland are invited to take part and in 2013, 3,773 children logged on to complete the survey. The fieldwork for 2013 Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey was undertaken in May and June 2013.

### Encouragement to like school

Children were asked to what extent their parents or guardians encouraged them to like school. **Figure 1** shows that four out of ten children (39%) said that they

were encouraged to like school all of the time, with nearly another quarter (23%) saying that they were encouraged to like school most of the time. The level of encouragement to like school was related significantly to a number of factors. For example, there was a strong relationship between how happy children were at school and the level of encouragement they had from their parents or carers. Eighty-eight per cent of children who said that they were encouraged to like school all the time, also said that they were mostly happy at school. This compares with just 69% of children who said their parents or carers never encouraged them to be happy at school, as **Table 1** shows.

Save the Children is particularly interested in the correlation between parental attitudes towards, and engagement with, their child's education and that child's

Figure 1: Do your parent(s) or guardian(s) encourage you to like school?

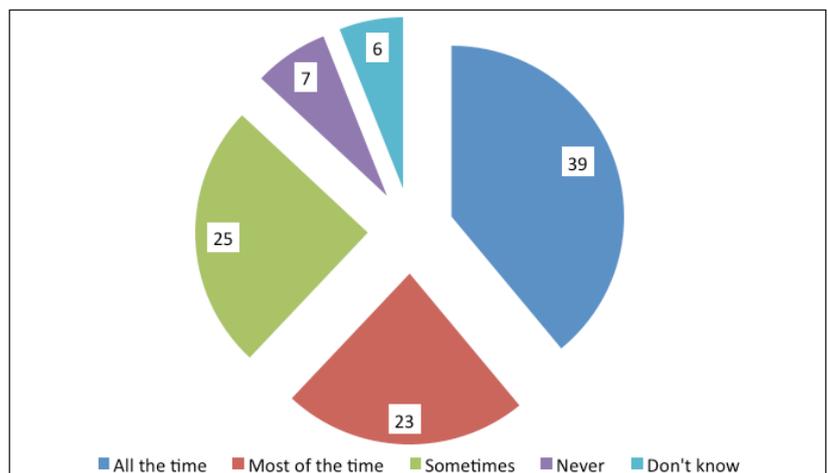


Table 1: Happiness in school by parents'/guardians' encouragement to like school

			%		
	All the time	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never	Don't know
Mostly happy	88	83	75	70	70
Mostly unhappy	3	3	5	9	3
I can't decide	9	14	20	21	27

educational outcomes. KLT results demonstrate that there is a clear link between the two. First of all, whether or not children were encouraged to like school is directly related to whether or not children sat the transfer test. Less than half (46%) of children who said their parents or guardians never encouraged them to like school sat a transfer test compared with more than two thirds of children who were encouraged all the time or most of the time (68 and 69% respectively).

Moreover, amongst those who did sit the test, there was a remarkable difference in achievement between those who were encouraged to like school and those who were not. Among children who sat the Common Entrance Assessment (AQE), 27% of children who were encouraged to like school all the time achieved a score of 113 or higher, whilst a further 26% achieved a score of 106-112. Amongst children who said they were never encouraged to like school, these respective proportions were 12% and a further 22%. This was similar among those children who sat the GL test. Here 58% of children who were encouraged to like school achieved an A grade compared to 34% of children who did not have that parental encouragement.

## Parents' involvement in school

In order to gain a better picture of the way that parents are currently engaging with schools, KLT respondents were asked to indicate ways in which their parents had interacted with their school environment, with various examples of parental involvement supplied. They were also asked why parents may not have attended meetings or events in school when they were invited. Whilst it is important to remember that not all children may always be completely

aware of their parents' involvement - nor the reasons for missing appointments or events in school, the information collected still gives a good sense of the levels of involvement and the reasons parents abstain. **Table 2** shows that the vast majority of children (81%) said that their parents attend meetings with their teachers when invited whilst nearly one third of children (32%) thought that their parents went to see a teacher when something was bothering them.

Table 2: Which of the following things have your parent(s) or guardian(s) done during your time in primary school? (multiple responses possible)

	%
Parents/guardians went to meeting with teachers when invited	81
Parents/guardians went to teachers when something bothering me	32
Parents/guardians came on school trips	15
Parents/guardians helped organise events in school	14
Parents/guardians joined Parent Teacher Association	10
Parents/guardians joined Board of Governors or Parents Council	5
Parents/guardians did something else	3
Parents/guardians did none of these things	4
I don't know if parents/guardians did any of these things	7

Figure 2: What do you think is the most helpful thing that your parents or guardians do to help you with your education?



The three main reasons given by children why parents or guardians did not attend events or meetings in school when invited were that parents were too busy (33%), could not get time off work (28%) or could not find childcare for the time the events or meetings took place (10%). All other possible reasons suggested in the questionnaire (such as parents being afraid to go into their children's school) were selected by negligible proportion of respondents. As can be expected, parents who did not encourage their children to enjoy school were also much less likely to attend school for events or interviews or get involved in school in any other way. Clearly, parental attitudes towards their child's school and subsequent interaction with that school environment are linked. For example, 68% of parents who did not encourage their children to enjoy school attended meetings with teachers when

invited compared with 84% of parents who encouraged their children all the time. The proportion of KLT respondents who said their parents never attended anything in school was twice as high among children whose parents were never encouraging (10%) than among children who said their parents were always encouraging (2%).

Children were asked what they thought the most helpful thing was that their parents or guardians did to help with their education. **Figure 2** shows that children rated support with their homework the highest, with 58% choosing this option. The second option chosen was ‘*Taking me to places like museums or libraries to learn new things*’ (14%). This was much more popular than KLT respondents’ third choice – ‘*Speaking to my teachers about what is going on at school*’ which was identified by only eight per cent of respondents. ‘*Help with reading*’ was only seen as most helpful by four per cent of children. Boys (60%) were slightly more likely than girls (56%) to choose help with homework, whilst the reverse was true in relation to taking them to places such as libraries or museums (16% and 13% respectively). Children who said their parents always encouraged them to like school were most likely to say that taking them places would help their education most (16%). On the other hand, only one in ten KLT respondents who said their parents never encouraged them to like school, felt that trips to the museum or library were most helpful. These children were most likely to say that homework help was most important to them (60%). This may suggest that children who live in families who are not encouraging in relation to their children’s education do not appreciate the added value that educational trips can provide, or indeed do not undertake trips to the museum or library. We can speculate as to the reasons for this.

For many parents, the financial implications of funding children’s out-of-school activities are stark. A previous survey undertaken by *Save the Children* found that one third (32.9%) of parents on the lowest incomes say they have less money than they did 5 years ago and that this means they can’t afford to pay for school trips and other activities (*Save the Children*, 2013).

Children who said that the most useful thing their parents did was getting involved in school were the most likely to be happy in school (89%). KLT respondents who said that speaking to teachers was the most helpful thing their parents did were the least likely to be happy (77%). Unhappiness in school was also strongly related to the experience of cyber bullying with 66% of children who had been bullied via text messages or the internet saying they were happy in school, compared to 84% of those who had not been.

## After-school care

KLT respondents were asked additional questions concerning experiences of after-school childcare. The cost and availability of childcare currently acts as a major barrier to parents looking to move into employment, as parents in the UK face some of the highest childcare costs in the world. Parents who are working often rely considerably on relatives to provide childcare for their children. A recent *Save the Children* survey found that around one in six of all parents surveyed are now working longer hours, and are more likely to be at work when the children are at home, than they were five years ago (*Save the Children*, 2013).

KLT respondents were asked who looked after them most days when school finishes. The vast majority of children were looked after by someone in their family, and this was most likely a parent (82%), but in some cases it was another relative (10%). Four per cent of children were looked after by a childminder, whilst three per cent of children went to an afterschool club. By far the most likely reason why children were not looked after by their parents when school finishes was that they were at work (87%). However, around eight per cent of children said that it was because they wanted to be with their friends or preferred to go elsewhere. Personal choice and the desire to be with friends was almost exclusively the reason given by children who attended either an after school club or were looked after by another relative, for example their grandparents.

For ethical reasons, children who were looked after by their parents or carers were not asked how happy they were

with the way they were looked after when school finishes. However, amongst those who were looked after by someone else, happiness with after school care was by far the highest among those who were looked after by another relative (75% saying they were completely happy). Fifty-eight per cent of those looked after by a childminder or a neighbour said they were completely happy with this, but only 35% of children who went to an after school club were completely happy with this.

KLT respondents were also asked about what they do between leaving school and 6 o’clock in the evening. Playing outside was the most frequently mentioned activity, and **Table 3** demonstrates that nearly two thirds of children (65%) play outside after school. As play is an intrinsic aspect of children’s lives, and children’s

Table 3: Thinking of the time between leaving school and 6 o’clock, do you do any of these things most days? (multiple responses possible)

	%
Play outside	65
Watch TV	58
Sport	55
Play with electronic games/ computer	54
Homework by myself	52
Play with other children	45
Homework with help from someone	25
Music	24
Play by myself	15
Dance	12
Drama	7
Play with board games	5
Something else	4

right to rest and leisure is protected under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, the strong numbers of children playing outside, and/or playing sport is a positive result. Although over one half of KLT respondents also said that they watched TV (58%) or played with electronic games (54%), 71% of those who said they watched TV and 64% of those who said they played with electronic

games also said they played outside. So, the picture that emerges suggests that children are engaged in a variety of different activities when school finishes.

An analysis of the KLT data shows that those who were looked after by their parent or carer after school were less likely to say that this was the time they did their homework – either individually or with help than those who were looked after by a neighbour or non-relative and those who went to an out-of school club. It is interesting to see, therefore, that children who were looked after by a neighbour or in an after-school club when school finished were the least likely to say that helping with homework was the most useful thing that parents could do to help them with their education.

## Conclusion

Every child has a right to an effective education which enables them, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001). As the KLT results demonstrate, children's happiness and success at school is affected by their parent's attitudes towards, and involvement in, their child's educational experience. Parents must be encouraged and supported in order to engage in a meaningful way with their children's experience of education. The Department for Education should establish a clear strategy for parental engagement to ensure that all schools

have clear procedures for communicating and engaging with parents. The evidence suggests that such a move would benefit our children greatly.

## References

- Harris, A. and Goodall, J. (2007). *Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement – Do Parents Know They Matter?* Research Report RW 004, London: Department for Children Schools and Families
- Save the Children (2013). *'Too Young to Fail'*, London: Save the Children.
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001) General Comment No.1 (2001) Article 29(1): The Aims of Education, CRC/GC/2001/1.

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## Key points

- 39% of children said that their parents or carers encourage them to like school all the time and a further 23% said that this was the case most of the time.
- Children who were more likely to be encouraged to like school by their parents or carers reported higher levels of happiness in school.
- Children who were more likely to be encouraged to like school achieved much better results in the selective AQE and GL exams which determine access to Grammar schools.
- Helping them with their homework was what children thought was the most useful thing parents or carers could do in helping them in their education (58% of children saying this). The second most useful thing was taking them to places like museums or libraries to learn new things (14% of children saying this).
- By far the most likely involvement parents had with their children's school was to attend meetings with teachers.
- Most P7 children were looked after by parents (82%) or relatives (10%) when they finished school. Children were involved in a variety of after-school activities, with playing outside being the most common one (65% saying this).

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