

1. INTRODUCTION

Between **September 2009** and **March 2010**, Her Majesty's Inspectors visited 47 schools to evaluate how effectively the partnership between parents and schools had developed.¹ The schools varied in size, geographical location and socio-economic circumstances.

Inspectors also gathered evidence from other sources, which included organisations working with parents and parents' groups, through focused discussions with groups of parents and professionals. These are listed in the Annex of the report. The survey drew on other evidence held by Ofsted, including recent data from its parents' panel and school inspections, and evidence from other Ofsted surveys.

2. KEY FINDINGS

- All the schools visited valued the key role of parents in their children's education but put this into effect in different ways, with very varied quality and outcomes.
- In the best cases seen, joint working between the home and the school led to much better outcomes for pupils; in particular, this helped pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those with low attendance or who were potentially vulnerable in other ways.
- All the schools visited were using, or experimenting with, new technology in their communications with parents. Such work complemented more traditional methods such as face-to-face meetings and paper-based communication.
- Seven of the 47 schools visited had parent councils or forums. These provided helpful routes for parents to raise issues or contribute to policy development on the initiative of the school but such councils did not represent all parents fully.
- In the best practice, complaints were used as an opportunity to improve services and understand better the wishes and views of parents. These schools had clear, straightforward complaints procedures that were well known to staff and parents.
- In the few cases seen where the schools said that parents had contributed or initiated ideas for strategic improvement, and these ideas had been taken forward, they had been successful.
- Although parents often worked helpfully alongside staff (especially in the primary schools visited), the various skills, qualifications, experience and insights of parents were underused to enhance the schools' provision and curriculum.
- The schools' evaluation of the impact of their work with parents was poor.
- Home-school agreements had a low profile and their impact on the day-to-day work between parents and the schools was very limited.²

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools should:

- consider auditing, and then using more widely, parents' skills and specific expertise as a resource to improve the school;
- tailor their communications with parents to suit individual circumstances;
- use parental complaints as a stimulus for improvement and record them to identify trends;
- evaluate better the impact of parental involvement and engagement on outcomes for pupils and use this information to focus further improvements;
- in the secondary sector particularly, enable parents to engage themselves more directly with their children's learning.

¹ The word 'parents' is used throughout the report to include those who may exercise parental responsibility, or aspects of this, formally or informally, for a child. This includes parents, grandparents, family members, foster carers, friends, social workers and other professionals.

² The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires that all maintained schools adopt a home-school agreement (sections 110 and 111). For further information, see: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/parents/involvement/hsa/a0014718/home-school-agreements>.

The full report can be viewed/downloaded at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100044>