

Parent-teacher relationship vital to home schooling

December 2 2021



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A research survey of primary school teachers in England has emphasized the importance of the relationship between parents and primary schools during lockdown school closures, with teachers providing a range of

practical and emotional support alongside academic assistance to parents to try and negate perceived disadvantages in home circumstances.

With schools closed from March 2020 until the end of the academic year and again from January 2021, pupils were taught online. This put an expectation on parents to shoulder some of the responsibility in ensuring pupils were engaged in their learning and to try and minimize some of the disadvantages faced by pupils from lower income families who may not have had access to the same learning equipment or facilities as others.

Academics from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) led a team of researchers who surveyed 271 primary school teachers from across the country during June and July 2000, and also carried out follow-up interviews with a smaller cohort in April this year to compare the second round of school closures from January 2021.

Participants worked in schools with differing levels of pupil premiums, which is additional funding provided by the Government to schools based on the number of pupils in a school deemed to be at an economic or social disadvantage. Lower pupil premium schools had fewer children considered to be at a disadvantage, while higher pupil premium schools had more.

The vast majority (84%) of teachers felt some pupils had been disadvantaged by school closures due to their home circumstances.

The researchers found that all teachers provided resources for parents to use at home, either created by themselves or using other sources. However, while pupils from schools with a lower pupil premium number were significantly better able to access all resources than those from schools with higher pupil premium numbers, middle income families struggled to find the time to engage with home schooling, with many

working from home in white collar professions during the pandemic.

The study highlights the broad range of support that primary teachers gave to children and their parents during the pandemic, not only academically, but also practically and emotionally. Teachers kept in touch with parents more regularly, either through online calls or home visits, and as a result felt they gained a greater understanding of children's home lives, which helped build trust.

Many gave examples of ways they supported families through other means, such as organizing collaborations with charities to provide breakfasts for children whose families were struggling to afford food, making up food hampers, and even providing loans. Some teachers provided specific sessions for parents to guide them through some of the teaching materials, or to boost their confidence.

Lead author Dr Sara Spear, Head of the School of Management at ARU, says that "the COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult and stressful time for many people, and for some families it caused, or exacerbated, socio-economic difficulties."

"Our results showed that parental participation in schooling in middle income families was predominantly impeded by parents' work responsibilities, with one or both parents likely to be working, and long hours and high-pressured jobs leaving little time for supporting children's home learning. "

"This was exacerbated in the second closure period, with more parents working, and increased expectations for children's learning. Only the richest families had access to resources, such as private tuition and intensive private schooling, that alleviated these pressures."

"It was clear from our research that a closer relationship between

teachers and parents meant a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by some parents, and as a result teachers went above and beyond to try and make sure no child was left behind. Teachers are hopeful that this stronger relationship will lead to better engagement in future, with things like parents' evenings being held online to encourage better attendance."

"In the event of future school closures, schools should consult with parents when determining any requirements for learning at home, to ensure that this is inclusive for the families in their community. Schools should pay particular attention to access to technology, and consider parents' ability and capacity to participate in schooling."

The research was published in the journal *Educational Review*.

More information: Sara Spear et al, Fostering "parental participation in schooling": primary school teachers' insights from the COVID-19 school closures, *Educational Review* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2021.2007054](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.2007054)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

Citation: Parent-teacher relationship vital to home schooling (2021, December 2) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-12-parent-teacher-relationship-vital-home-schooling.html>

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