

**LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**REVIEW OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

**HARINGEY COUNCIL**

**APRIL 2004**

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## **APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANTS IN THE REVIEW**

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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- 1.1 In this review the Panel found plenty of evidence both from the research data and from our meetings and visits that working with parents as partners in the education of their children is important and will help to raise achievement levels in our schools.
- 1.2 Our LEA has recognised the need for further work to increase parental involvement: it is a theme in the LEA's Education Development Plan. The LEA has set up a Steering Group, comprising those staff with the closest involvement with parents, to draw up an action plan by September 2004. The report of this review will be referred to the Steering Group to help them in their work.
- 1.3 We found much good work with parents going on in our schools with valuable support provided by the LEA. The borough appears to compare well with others in terms of the range, number and quality of initiatives and projects in place. The weaknesses we have identified concern the processes – in particular co-ordination, the lack of an over-arching plan, limited data, the need for a clear message from the LEA to all schools and procedures to ensure close working with community groups.
- 1.4 Our report provides information that we have gathered about best practice elsewhere and endeavours to offer some insight into the barriers that inhibit some parents from closer involvement. Our recommendations are specific and are about how to take our involvement with parents a step further. They include the need for a vision and for structures within the LEA that will facilitate close working, the data that should be readily available, the processes that need to be in place to support schools and teachers, the issues to be addressed with the supplementary schools and suggestions on training and development.
- 1.5 We are confident that the LEA will take account of our recommendations and we look forward to reading the Steering Group's action plan in September.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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- 1. That the Steering Group developing the LEA's action for addressing parental involvement include parent representatives amongst its membership.**
- 2. That a shared vision of parental involvement and what it entails that is based on the principle of empowering parents be developed and agreed jointly by the LEA, schools and parents.**
- 3. That the LEA decide on the most appropriate structure to facilitate the development of parental involvement taking account of resources available.**
- 4. That the expertise and effective links with the different communities developed by the Parental Outreach Team be used to best effect.**
- 5. That the key roles for the LEA in whatever structural arrangement is chosen be as follows:**
  - (i). Assisting schools in developing their work with parents**
  - (ii). Providing strategic direction**
  - (iii). Building links with organisations working actively with parents from both within and outside of the Council**
  - (iv). Disseminating information**
  - (v). Spreading good practice**
- 6. That specific consideration be given to the use of the Networked Learning Communities for the spreading of good practice in work with parents.**
- 7. That costings that are realistic and sustainable be developed for funding the development of parental involvement by the LEA.**
- 8. That regular contact be maintained by the LEA with all parents awaiting a school place within the Borough.**
- 9. That the Steering Group look into the merits of setting up a Parents Consortium in Haringey.**
- 10. That a system be set up to collect basic information from schools about any initiatives involving parents, and from supplementary and language schools, the information to be evaluated and disseminated as appropriate.**
- 11. The LEA should establish a system for collecting information from schools on the level of attendance at parents evenings and the steps taken to communicate with those parents who do not attend.**
- 12. That a specific strategy to persuade Headteachers and school governing bodies of the value of prioritising action to develop parental involvement in schools be developed.**

13. That the LEA allocate appropriate resources to improving performance in schools where it has been identified that parental involvement requires development and that these schools be targeted for action within a specified timescale.
14. That full use be made of information produced by the DfES on involving parents supplemented, as necessary, by Haringey specific material.
15. That further consideration be given to introducing "Welcome to Haringey" induction sessions for parents new to the Borough.
16. That a feasibility study be undertaken on the merits of setting up of a specific centre for parents within the Borough.
17. That the LEA work with schools to ensure that they develop strategies for making parents welcome.
18. That regular training sessions be introduced for teachers on effective working and communication with parents.
19. That an evaluation of current family learning initiatives be undertaken that includes a sustainability strategy.
20. That current initiatives by the LEA to build links with supplementary schools be strongly supported and that the following issues be specifically addressed:
  - Reviewing assistance with the cost of hiring premises
  - The possibility of developing SHARE projects with them
  - The provision of guidance on the requirements of the national curriculum
  - Guidance and assistance on applying for available grant funding
21. That any increase in the level of assistance provided for supplementary schools be subject to the establishment of satisfactory monitoring arrangements.
22. The LEA support initiatives by the community groups to secure recognised examination accreditation for their languages.
23. That the LEA undertakes further developmental work to strengthen links with community groups and ethnic minority organisations.
24. That efforts to ensure that the ethnic breakdown of senior management positions within the LEA are reflective of the local community be maintained and additional strategies be considered to remedy the current imbalance.
25. That the LEA undertake a targeted recruitment drive for school governors from the different communities and devise a support programme to encourage and build the capacity of these governors.

26. That further consideration be given by the LEA about how it consults with parents on educational issues and, in particular, ensuring the views obtained are truly representative. This should include the merits of setting up a parents panel on the lines of the Tower Hamlets panel.
27. That training be available to governors on how best to encourage greater parental involvement.
28. That a survey of PTAs/HSAs within the Borough be undertaken and that consideration be given by the LEA to developing guidance to schools on starting PTAs/HSAs and on developing the role of existing associations.
29. That the differing needs and challenges presented by developing parental involvement in secondary schools be identified and addressed strategically by the Steering Group.
30. That the Steering Group develop a framework for effective monitoring and evaluation.

### **3. INTRODUCTION**

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#### ***Terms of Reference***

- 3.1 The terms of reference for the review were:

“To review current policy and practice by the LEA in supporting and encouraging parental and community involvement with a particular, but not exclusive, focus on secondary schools and, with reference to key messages from research and best practice, make recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on appropriate steps to further improve it “

#### ***Background***

- 3.2 In the course of last year’s review of inclusive education the Panel had looked at some successful initiatives in the Borough involving parents. The report of that review included a recommendation to develop parental involvement work further, particularly in secondary schools.
- 3.3 The LEA told us that it regards development of parental involvement as vitally important in the context of raising educational achievement. It had planned originally to set up a new central unit to lead on parental involvement work. After further consideration, however they have decided that the better course of action is to bring together the different teams within the LEA currently working with parents in a Steering Group tasked with drawing up an action plan. This is described in more detail at paragraph 5.16. The LEA intends to use this Scrutiny Panel report to provide the Steering Group with a base and an agenda to inform their discussions.
- 3.4 The Panel considered it important to produce this report in a reasonable timescale so that the conclusions and recommendations could be used by the Steering Group and there was no delay in the preparation of the action plan. The recommendations apply equally to primary and secondary schools. However, we recognise that there are some specific issues facing secondary schools. We have highlighted these on the basis of the evidence that we received but realise that further work is required and recommend that the Steering Group consider this further.
- 3.5 For the purposes of this review, the word “parents” has been used to mean parents, carers and guardians reflecting the diversity of arrangements for looking after and bringing up children and young people.

#### ***Adviser to the Panel***

- 3.6 The Panel was very fortunate to have the services of Dr. Carol Vincent from the Institute of Education at the University of London. Dr Vincent has undertaken specific research in this area as well as being a Haringey parent.

#### ***Membership of the Review Panel***

- 3.7 The membership of the Panel was as follows:

Councillors Santry (Chair), Fabian, Griffith, Haley, Bob Harris, Laird and Robertson

Church Representatives: Mrs. S. Berkery-Smith

Parent Governor Representatives: Ms. L. Pine and Mr. R. Sharp

REJCC Co-opted Member: Mr. G. Martin

### ***Review Process***

3.8 The work of the Panel included the following:

- Receiving a response from the LEA to the terms of reference of the review and, through this, establishing current LEA practice and plans
- Receiving a briefing on current issues, research findings and best practice from the Adviser to the Panel
- Meeting with local parents, governors, and organisations representing ethnic community groups
- Visiting several local schools to see current initiatives in practice and speaking to Headteachers and teachers
- Looking at best practice elsewhere, including a visit to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- Analysing relevant data and information.

## **4. FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH**

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### ***What is parental involvement?***

#### **4.1 The DfES says:**

“Children have two main educators in their lives – their parents and their teachers. Parents are the prime educators until the child attends nursery or starts school and remain a major influence on their children’s learning through school and beyond. There is no clear line to show where the parents’ input stops and the teachers’ input begins. The school and parents all have crucial roles to play and the impact is greater if parents and schools work in partnership.

There is no universal agreement on what parental involvement is, however there are two broad strands.

- Parents’ involvement in the life of the school.
- Their involvement in support of the individual child at home and at school.”

### ***Key research findings***

#### **4.2 Key research findings have highlighted the huge impact that parental involvement has on performance:**

- For primary school children, the impact of parents taking an interest is greater than the quality of the school that they attend.
- A 1999 study found that parental involvement had significant effects on achievement into adolescence. It found that parental involvement in a child’s schooling was a more powerful force than other family background indicators such as social class, family size and level of parental education and contributes to no less than 10% of variation in achievement. For example children with very interested parents progressed 15-17% more in mathematics and reading between ages 11-16.
- The involvement of parents in secondary education has an effect on continued development.
- In schools with matched intakes, those who do best have, among other things, strong links with parents and families
- When similar schools are compared, those with strong home-school links have consistently fewer problems related to pupil work and behaviour

#### **4.3 We noted that there have been a number of significant research projects in recent years which have highlighted particular aspects of parental involvement in a child’s education.**

- The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project monitors 2,800 children’s progress across the range of pre-school provision. This has found that aspects of the home learning environment have a significant impact on children’s cognitive development both at age three years plus and again at school entry.

- Our adviser brought to our attention some qualitative research on parental involvement which shows that the overwhelming majority of parents have clear and strong views on educational issues including views on school organisation. Parents, however, were often reluctant to enter into a dialogue with schools and to schools therefore it might not be apparent that the parents had such views. A MORI poll in 1999 found that 48% of parents had not spoken once to teachers during the previous school term.
- There was an uneven balance of power between schools and parents with parents feeling at a disadvantage. The majority of parents found it hard to engage effectively, despite their class background . (*Hallgarten.J* 2000).
- Research into the level of engagement of parents puts them in three groups – high, intermediate and low - with the groups strongly influenced by class. Those within the high category, often from professional occupations, saw involvement as their duty. They were concerned to monitor and supervise closely. There was less information available to the intermediate group, who did not monitor so closely and were more likely to take up welfare issues than achievement issues. The low group had the highest percentage of parent from the lowest socio-economic group and they tended to see schools as operating within a separate sphere. (*Vincent.C. & Martin.J, 2002, Class, culture and agency, Discourse, 23, 1: 109-138*)
- Research has identified two general types of parental engagement:
  - (i). Spontaneous. This type of engagement was prompted by an interest in the work of children and the school and was informal in nature. These interventions were generally effective. Middle class parents tended to take the most advantage of such opportunities.
  - (ii). Planned. The effectiveness of these was harder to evaluate as it was difficult to measure their impact precisely. They included initiatives such as family learning programmes. Nevertheless, there was some evidence from evaluations that they could improve relationships between schools and parents, building confidence and self-esteem on the part of parents as well as being enjoyable.

### **DfES Material**

- 4.4 The Government's 1997 White Paper "Excellence in Schools" sets out a three strand strategy which guides the majority of DfES initiatives:
- Providing information to parents
  - Giving parents a more effective voice
  - Encouraging families to learn together
- 4.5 We noted the wealth of useful material available from the DFES. The publication 'The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education' details the research conclusions and 'Materials for Schools: Involving Parents, Raising Achievement' has plenty of guidance on developing home-school links, taking action to involve parents

and training and professional development for teachers around parental involvement. In addition the websites [www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk) and [www.parentcentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk) provide further information.

### ***Barriers to parental involvement***

4.6 From the research and from the oral evidence gathered by the Panel we identified the following as key barriers:

- There may be unease about involvement amongst parents from some social groups whose own experience of school has been less than positive.
- Some parents from ethnic community groups will be hampered by language difficulties or come from a culture where notions of parental involvement in schools do not exist. Research on the influence of ethnicity is limited but one study revealed a lack of meaningful communication between these parents and schools.
- Some parents will be worried about being branded as “trouble makers”.
- Some schools and teachers do not see parents as partners in a child’s education. They see parents as providing support to the school but may lack the time for closer involvement and keep them at a slight distance. Parental involvement is not an integral part of the professional teaching culture.
- Parents’ resources (material, cultural and social) differ greatly. Parental involvement can be costly in terms of the time and commitment required from all those involved. For example some parents are familiar with the culture of meetings. Social resources include social networks. On the whole it is the mothers that become involved in their children’s schools.

## **5. CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS AND INITIATIVES**

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5.1 We learnt that there is a great deal work already taking place with parents in Haringey both on an individual basis and with groups. Many schools have undertaken their own initiatives.

5.2 The LEA also has a team of staff with a specific role to work with parents:

### ***The Parental Outreach Team***

5.3 The Parental Outreach Team works with parents on an individual and collective basis. The team was set up in 1995 following a survey that showed 60% of parents had poor communications with their children's schools. The aim was to improve links with the community and promote parental involvement as a key way of raising levels of achievement. Many parents were also intimidated by what they perceived to be the bureaucracy of the education system. It was felt that there was a need to provide them with an understanding of how the system worked. Specific communities were targeted and these were the main ethnic minority communities within the Borough.

5.4 The team now has 7 staff with each member providing information and advice, training and advocacy to a specific ethnic minority community. They:

- Help parents to understand the British education system
- Guide parents through the LEA's procedures, especially at the admission stage
- Offer facilitation in crisis situations
- Provide support for special educational needs (SEN) reviews, post exclusion meetings, parent consultations and at the transfer to secondary school stage
- Work to set up and support family learning
- Work with community organisations to build capacity
- Run advice surgeries for parents.

5.5 Parents often need support in registering their children for schools and an explanation of the documentation requirements. There may be delays in identifying a school place. We were told that it is not currently LEA practice to contact parents until a place comes up and, if the wait for a place is significant, parents can become disaffected. The transfer to secondary school can be another cause of difficulty for parents and the team provides support to parents who may not get the school of their choice.

5.6 The team is involved with the family learning and the "SHARE" projects and has helped set up these projects. The SHARE programme is a DFES initiative managed by the Community Education Development Centre (CEDC) where parents, teachers and children work on activities together both at home and in the classroom. It has not taken off quite so well in secondary schools as in primaries, where there are over 12 projects, but there are schemes at White Hart Lane School and Northumberland Park Community School.

5.7 The team has close links with Haringey Adult Learning Service (HALS) and helps to recruit parents for their family learning classes. It runs a number of special projects including the African & African Caribbean Academic Excellence Awards.

- 5.8 As each member of the team has a direct link with a specific community organisation they work closely with them to improve their capacity to support their members in addressing educational issues. Some communities have set up specific forums to consider education issues e.g. the Somali Parents Association now has a part-time dedicated education officer to assist the community. Consultation is taking place with a number of representatives from faith groups to discuss the development of an education forum and a programme.
- 5.9 Referrals come from a range of sources including schools, parents and faith and community groups. There has been a tendency for the team to be called in where there is a crisis rather than beforehand but this is diminishing as schools become more confident in their ability to handle such situations.

### ***Family Learning***

- 5.10 The Haringey Adult Learning Service (HALS) is in the lead on family learning. There is a wide range of over 30 family learning schemes, ESOL, SHARE and volunteer reading help projects running in Haringey schools and these reached approximately 600 families last year. They are run by a number of providers including HALS, the Workers Education Association and the College of North East London. Such activities cover the whole of the Borough although most in practice are concentrated in the east of the Borough. The imbalance is due to the funding structure – the funding is only available to support initiatives in the areas of deprivation.
- 5.11 We visited some of these projects and were impressed by the benefits they brought to the parents who participated as well as their children and by parents' enthusiasm. We attended the annual Parental Involvement Celebration Day organised by the Parental Involvement Co-ordinator in HALS which was very popular and where demonstrations take place of the work and activities undertaken. A recent inspection of HALS by the Adult Learning Inspectorate rated family learning as good and a strength in the Borough.
- 5.12 Of particular note is the father's group based at South Harringay Infant School. Research has shown that a father's interest in a child's schooling is strongly linked to educational outcomes for their child and therefore initiatives such as this have clear potential to yield results.

#### **SOUTH HARRINGAY DADS GROUP:**

This group is a SHARE project and focuses on literacy and art. The principles that underpin the group are the sharing of experience, the unimportance of language barriers and the warmth of the relationships that have been generated. The children are pleased with the interest that their fathers show in their school since school is a very important element of their lives. The group has undertaken a range of activities together such as cooking Makote (a Zambian stew), photo portraits, mosaics poetry and talking to the children about their work in class.

### ***LEA's General Approach***

- 5.13 The LEA sees greater parental involvement as an essential part of the raising achievement agenda. The LEA recognises that current arrangements for parental

involvement within the Borough are under-developed and has planned to address the issue. Developing parental involvement is a theme within the Education Development Plan.

5.14 The intention is to raise the profile of parental participation and strengthen the support given to schools and parents. The LEA recognises that work with parents has grown in an incremental fashion, as and when funding and partnership opportunities have arisen. In some cases the authority has been able to mainstream funding for particular projects but the majority of the work is dependent on short term funding from external sources.

5.15 The LEA recognises that there is room to improve the co-ordination and management of the different staff groups working with parents. It has recently set up a Parent and Community Involvement Steering Group to be led by a co-ordinator, managed by the newly appointed manager for Community Services and Regeneration.

5.16 There are several groups of staff across the LEA who work with parents as well as staff in other services and they will all be represented on the Steering Group. These include the parental outreach team (the head will act as the co-ordinator), supplementary schools support, the Excellence in Cities teams, Sure Start, the SEN Parent Partnership, SHARE Training and HALS Family Learning and the African Schools Association. As the plan is concerned with enabling parents to play a more active role, it would also seem appropriate for parents to be represented on the Group.

5.17 A major conference is planned to coincide with parental involvement week in June this year and the intention is to publish an action plan by September 2004. This will outline how current services can be maintained and their future secured, as well as detailing how work with parents can further assist in raising educational achievement in Haringey. £95,000 of funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), plus £80,000 from the LEA budget, has been agreed for 2004/5 to support a range of activities which will include the planned conference, capacity building workshops, 2 new community based SHARE projects, improved marketing of parental support services and other initiatives.

5.18 The LEA is hoping that the developments taking place will lead to:

- A better co-ordinated service for parents
- A higher profile for parental participation
- Improved support for schools and parents.

5.19 The ultimate aim is to help empower parents to become effective advocates for their children and to help schools achieve high levels of attainment by ensuring that they have parents with high expectations who are prepared to challenge.

5.20 A part of the LEA's strategy will be to help parents access support where needed from other parts of the Council, such as housing and social services. Some families find it difficult to engage with authority and are unable to access the support intended for them. Schools are particularly well placed to signpost parents to the help they need. In some cases resolving issues around benefits and social services will allow

a child to fulfil their potential and may free up parents to involve themselves more closely in their child's education. It is intended that the LEA will develop the support provided for families in need through multi agency work with, for instance, housing and social services. Strong links will be built with other services and the development of Childrens Centres should be of real assistance here.

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**Recommendation:**

- **That the Steering Group, developing the LEA's action for addressing parental involvement, include parent representatives amongst its membership.**
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**Schools Good Practice**

5.21 There is evidence of much good practice already taking place in schools within the Borough. All the recent school Ofsted reports have commented positively about school efforts to involve parents. In the evidence we received we learnt that small things like personalised invitations, making events attractive and friendly, and having clear objectives can make a big difference.

**EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN HARINGEY:**

- *Welbourne Primary School invites parents to state the time they want to see the teacher (tick box form) and sends the invitation in the language of the parents.*
- *White Hart Lane School works closely with community groups and telephones every parent in advance of parents' evenings to ensure attendance. Their attendance figures have improved dramatically from 30-40% to almost 100%. This has also coincided with a substantial improvement in test results.*
- *Risley Avenue Primary School has a Turkish speaking learning mentor whose responsibility it is to engage with Turkish parents.*
- *Some schools undertake home visits before children start school. This means that when parents and children go to the school for the first time, there will be at least one familiar face to greet them.*

5.22 Whilst we heard some anecdotal evidence of poor practice, none of this was specific. The difference between the schools that perform well and others appears to be that the successful ones are proactive. We understand there is an audit being undertaken of all work undertaken by schools with parents. This will help to identify schools where there are specific weaknesses and should allow the LEA to target these for assistance.

5.23 There is currently no central source of knowledge on what schools are doing and no process for spreading best practice around. There are six Networked Learning Communities within the Borough and they, in particular, could have a role here. They bring together clusters of schools, the LEA and the wider community to work collaboratively to raise standards and improve opportunities for their pupils. They are a means by which schools can learn from and with each other and find solutions to common problems.

## ***Supplementary and Language Schools***

- 5.24 We heard from the Haringey Standing Committee on Community Languages (HSCCL) about the important role played by the supplementary and language schools in Haringey. There are approximately 2,000 pupils who attend supplementary schools regularly in the Borough and they can therefore have a major influence on achievement levels. In addition to language, they also teach a range of other subjects including those from the national curriculum. They also claim a level of success in teaching pupils that may be disaffected with mainstream schools.
- 5.25 Some, but in practice very few, supplementary schools receive financial support from the Council. The LEA has appointed a part-time supplementary schools co-ordinator whose appointment is very welcome to the schools. The LEA is re-examining its relationship with supplementary schools and is being assisted in this by the DfES. An audit of local supplementary schools and the work that the LEA undertakes with them is currently in progress. There is currently only limited funding available to support supplementary schools and it has been directed to just one school. Through the audit, they hope to be able to identify which schools require additional support. Contact has been established with virtually all such schools but some groups are easier to engage with than others.
- 5.26 The LEA wishes to establish closer links with all supplementary schools. It aims to link the work being undertaken in supplementary schools work with the mainstream curriculum. A large conference is in the process of being arranged that will bring together supplementary schools and mainstream schools using parents as the link. A bid for Neighbourhood Renewable Funding had been made to fund the work and the African Schools Association will be taking a leading role in the project and working with all supplementary schools.
- 5.27 We identified several key issues that the LEA should consider in relation to supplementary schools:
- Assistance with the cost of premises. A particular concern for supplementary schools is the rents that they were charged now by Jarvis for the hire of school premises. Since the PFI contract, there had been a large increase in the fees charged and schools are struggling to pay the current amounts.
  - We think that there must be a number of funding streams that supplementary schools could access and guidance and assistance could be given to them in bidding.
  - The possibility of developing SHARE projects with them
  - Providing guidance on the requirements of the national curriculum
- 5.28 The LEAs Steering Group should look closely at all of these issues. In particular, there needs to be consistency in approach and an investigation of pricing polices in relation to premises. Any increase in the level of assistance provided should be tied to the establishment of satisfactory monitoring arrangements.

## **6. WEAKNESSES**

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- 6.1 The Panel has identified the following areas of weaknesses, some the LEA has already identified and is addressing and some will need to be considered further by the Steering Group. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.
- i. At the moment there is no shared vision of what parental involvement means and entails. It is important that whatever is agreed is shared and owned not only by the LEA and schools but also by the wider education community and especially parents.
  - ii. As the LEA acknowledges, there needs to be more co-ordination between the different teams working with parents. Although we were told that the teams do work closely we were not completely convinced. For example Family Learning could be more closely involved in policy development. Areas like admissions - often the first LEA contact for parents - need to be more closely involved.
  - iii. There is a lack of central information available about what efforts the schools are making to strengthen parental involvement. This means in turn that there is little or no process for exchanging good practice.
  - iv. At present the direct support provided through the Parental Outreach team and the Family Learning schemes is concentrated in the east of the borough where the short term funding is available to support initiatives. There will, however, be parents who it is difficult to involve in all parts of the borough and there needs to be a process for ensuring that schools support and encourage these parents.
  - v. The structure for supporting parental involvement within the LEA has still to be decided. A suitable structure needs to be in place that will foster close co-operation and utilise resources effectively. We identify in para 7.4 three possible models for the LEA to consider.
  - vi. The supplementary and language schools are a valuable but underused resource in the development of parental involvement. The current audit of these schools needs to be completed as soon as possible and there needs to be meaningful engagement to address the issues of concern to the schools and to develop plans to involve them in the development of new initiatives.
  - vii. Neither Headteachers nor governing bodies are currently given any steer or guidance from the LEA about how they can involve parents more. The evidence we received, confirmed by the research findings, is that effective parental involvement in a school starts at the top. It needs to be led by the headteacher: there needs to be an ethos created and embedded in school practice.
  - viii. Information about which schools are less good at involving parents appears thin – the school improvement officers are no doubt aware but we were not told of any systems for gathering this information or strategies for addressing the weakness.
  - ix. The DfES guidance recommends that schools undertake an audit and self-assessment of their home-school links and advocates development of a home-school policy. We were not told of any schools, even the ones who were very effective at involving their parents, which had undertaken such an audit or had a policy in place. It seems as though most schools lack a systematic approach to involving parents.

- x. Governing bodies are not encouraged to address the issue of how the school might strengthen its links with parents nor is any specific training provided.

## **7. THE WAY AHEAD**

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7.1 It may be useful at this point to refer to some comments made by Professor John Bastiani, probably the leading academic in the field of parental involvement. His comments provide a helpful checklist. He was commenting on Tower Hamlets LEA, considered exemplary in regard to parental involvement:

- It had a strategy for parental involvement
- It had a senior officer responsible for co-ordinating parental involvement
- It has a parents' centre
- There had been a lot of work at Headteacher level in terms of sharing good practice and ideas
- They had done work on the role of governors and how to encourage and support them
- Networks had been set up: one for early years and a consortium involving 49 groups interested in educational matters
- There was an infrastructure to service the needs of parents and support parental involvement.

### ***Shared Vision***

7.2 A shared vision needs to be developed of what parental and community involvement means and it needs to be owned by the LEA, schools and parents. There should be recognition by all parties of the contribution that all parents make to their children's learning. We were told about the very close relations the Early Excellence Centres build up with parents when children are at the pre-school stage but the tendency for these to weaken as children progress through the education system. Our meeting with the African Caribbean Leadership Council representatives emphasised the importance of schools developing a clear ethos that parents are partners, of encouraging open and honest discussions between parents and schools, of empowering parents to work with schools and teachers and convincing them that their opinions are valued and their culture appreciated.

7.3 We would expect the Steering Group's action plan to form the strategy for achieving the vision.

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### **Recommendation:**

- **That a shared vision of parental involvement and what it entails that is based on the principle of empowering parents be developed and agreed jointly by the LEA schools and parents.**

### ***Co-ordination***

7.4 The LEA will need to decide the most appropriate structure for delivering the improvements in parental involvement. The Panel identified the following possible models:

- Identifying a specific senior officer within the LEA to act as a facilitator and champion for parental involvement. This is the structure adopted by Tower Hamlets: the officer is located in the school improvement team and works part-

time on parental involvement with some administrative support.

- The Parental Outreach Team could take the lead role. The team now works to the newly appointed head of Community Services and Regeneration and the head of the Parental Outreach Team will co-ordinate the Parental and Community Involvement Steering Group. We think it would be necessary to redefine the team's current role to place more emphasis on setting up systems rather than casework. It would leave the issue of how to manage the valuable casework done at present. Almost certainly it will need schools to take more responsibility but the support and guidance will need to be in place first.
- Creating a separate central unit that brings together all the teams with a central involvement with parents: this could involve linking Family Learning Support more closely with the Parental Outreach Team. There may however be problems with different funding streams.

- 7.5 The new structure will need to provide for easy and regular contacts between the main teams working on parental involvement and those staff within the LEA who have important links with parents, such as schools admissions and education welfare.
- 7.6 There is also the work with parents undertaken by other Council services, such as Social Services, and the voluntary sector. The proposals in the Government's Green Paper on Childrens Services should help ensure more "joined up" working in the future.
- 7.7 Tower Hamlets has established a Working with Parents Consortium as a means of facilitating better co-ordination and the Panel suggests looking at the merits of establishing such a consortium in Haringey.

#### TOWER HAMLETS WORKING WITH PARENTS CONSORTIUM:

This was set up with the aim of improving links between organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors (Health, Education and Social Services) in order to ensure that parents were better supported in their role. It also:

- Promotes parent education and support
- Provides a professional network for those working in and concerned with parent education and support so that members can share information and expertise
- Acts in an advisory capacity to schools, community organisations and the LEA
- Works to raise levels of achievement in schools and contribute to school effectiveness.

#### Recommendations:

- **That the LEA decide on the most appropriate structure to facilitate the development of parental involvement taking account of resources available.**
- **That the expertise and effective links with the different communities developed by the Parental Outreach team be used to best effect.**

- That the key roles for the LEA in whatever structural arrangement is chosen be as follows:
    - (i). Assisting schools in developing their work with parents
    - (ii). Providing strategic direction
    - (iii). Building links with organisations working actively with parents from both within and outside of the Council
    - (iv). Disseminating information
    - (v). Spreading good practice
  - That specific consideration be given to the use of the Networked Learning Communities for the spreading of good practice in work with parents.
  - That costings that are realistic and sustainable be developed for funding the development of parental involvement by the LEA.
  - That regular contact be maintained by the LEA with all parents awaiting a school place within the Borough.
  - That the Steering Group look into the merits of setting up a Parents Consortium in Haringey.
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### **Data**

- 7.8 The Panel received a breakdown of the Family Learning programmes currently running in each school and some factual information about the location and number of pupils attending supplementary schools. The Parental Outreach Team will also have information on their school and community group contacts. The Panel thought it was hard to get a clear picture of what was happening in each school and difficult for the LEA to identify where schools were weaker or where there was good practice that could be shared.
- 7.9 It appeared to the Panel that the schools with well developed relations with parents were regularly analysing attendance at parents' evenings and had strategies for maximising attendance and communicating with parents who did not attend. We were told that the link between the class teacher and parents is the one that is valued most by parents. The Panel thinks that this is such a crucial interaction the LEA should require schools to provide information about the level of attendance at individual parents evenings and the efforts being made to communicate with parents who do not attend.
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### **Recommendations:**

- That a system be set up to collect basic information from schools about any initiatives involving parents, and from supplementary and language schools. The information to be evaluated and disseminated as appropriate.

- The LEA should establish a system for collecting information from schools on the level of attendance at parents evenings and the steps taken to communicate with those parents who do not attend.
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### ***Headteacher's role***

- 7.10 Research evidence, confirmed by the evidence we received, confirms the importance of the Headteacher's role in establishing an ethos of working with parents as partners in their children's education. We heard evidence that whilst many schools engaged effectively, undertook home visits and provided opportunities for parents to work with them as friends and allies, some were not so good. Some schools may say that their parents present particular difficulties but several schools within the Borough, who operate under challenging circumstances, work extremely well with parents.
- 7.11 We are firmly of the view that parental involvement needs to be embedded in the ethos of all schools and for this to happen it must be led by the Headteacher and the school's governing body. There needs to be:
- a programme developed that will raise the profile of parental involvement with headteachers and governing bodies. The LEA's proposed parental involvement conference in June should provide an excellent start.
  - practical guidance provided to schools on how they can involve parents more. The DfES material and Melian Mansfield's paper on 'How schools can encourage parents' are good sources and should mean that a pack can be put together easily.
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### **Recommendations:**

- That a specific strategy to persuade Headteachers and school governing bodies of the value of prioritising action to develop parental involvement in schools be developed.
  - That the LEA allocate appropriate resources to improving performance in schools where it has been identified that parental involvement requires development and that these schools be targeted for action within a specified timescale.
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### ***Developing Home/School Dialogue***

- 7.12 Whilst family learning schemes and other planned initiatives are excellent, they have their limitations. For instance, they cannot hope to cover more than a small proportion of parents. Developing strong relationships between all teachers and individual parents is vital to increasing involvement.
- 7.13 We learnt that there were several ways in which a dialogue with parents can be developed:
- Information. Many parents feel ill-informed about wider education issues and the curriculum. We heard how some authorities produce a range of information booklets for parents, with translated versions available. These can cover basic issues such as the curriculum, for particular year groups or Key Stages and ways

in which parents can support their children. We heard that the LEA is producing a booklet on the British education system for distribution to parents (in different languages). We have noted earlier in this report the excellent information that is freely available from the DfES. The extent to which Haringey needs to produce its own literature may therefore be limited but there may be a need for some Haringey specific material. Information needs to be communicated imaginatively. We heard that the LEA has in mind a "Welcome to Haringey" induction session for parents new to the Borough.

- Parent teacher consultation meetings, often including the pupil, where parents and teachers have a decent span of time to review the pupil's past progress and look forward. These are increasingly popular at secondary school level.
- More direct communication over pupil progress. Parents can feel that they are only approached by schools if there is a problem. This particular point was made by the African Caribbean Leadership Council in their presentation to us. They felt that whilst schools and the LEA did communicate with parents, they were often late in doing so and it was in relation to a particular problem. An ongoing dialogue on pupil progress, focusing as strengths and weaknesses, would help improve communication and possibly avert problems later. Letters, phone calls and certificates conveying good news all help to avoid the situation where parents feel they are only approached by the school if there is a problem.
- Year group meetings. These can be twice a year, focusing on what the children are learning but also including some wider issues for discussion. Some parents may feel less constrained talking about welfare issues, such as behaviour policy, homework, the playground, in such a setting. Another option is meetings targeted at a specific ethnic community group.
- A space for parents. Some LEAs have Parents' Centres and examples are Tower Hamlets and Newham. These centres give parents a space of their own away from schools and can be used as a base for a variety of activities such as meetings of parents groups, casework, mediation and possibly advocacy, although there can be difficulties with the latter if the centre is funded by the LEA. It is important that staff working with parents have the resources to undertake development work as well as resolving crises. A space for parents independent of schools and with access to a mediator/advocate could help to remedy power imbalances between some groups of parents and schools. Centres are generally funded by LEAs but at "arms length". The centre in Tower Hamlets includes some SEN support services. But wherever such a centre is located is likely to be a considerable distance away for some parents. A feasibility study might be useful to determine whether the benefits would justify the costs involved. An alternative might be to develop one or more parents' centres as part of the Children Centre concept.

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#### **Recommendations:**

- **That full use be made of information produced by the DfES on involving parents supplemented, as necessary, by Haringey specific material.**
- **That further consideration be given to introducing "Welcome to Haringey" induction sessions for parents new to the Borough.**

- **That a feasibility study be undertaken on the merits of setting up of a specific centre for parents within the Borough.**
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### **Accessibility**

7.14 Schools need to be welcoming places for parents. According to research, a large percentage (94%) of parents find schools welcoming. Paradoxically, the majority of parents also find schools intimidating places. This is especially true of secondary schools and from evidence we received it cuts across all social classes. The uneven balance of power makes most parents feel at a disadvantage.

7.15 We were told again that small things can make a difference. Providing crèches or allowing parents to bring their children with them assists attendance levels at parents' evenings, ensuring that reception staff welcome parents and that there is clear signposting in schools. Schools will be working towards compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and therefore will be aware of the importance of providing for parents with disabilities.

7.16 In a recent DFES publication there is a welcome audit checklist:

#### **Making Parents Welcome:**

The recent DfES booklet "Involving Parents, Raising Achievement" includes the following suggestions for ensuring that schools are making parents feel welcome:

- Parent friendly reception areas
- Making special help and support available to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of families during the admission of new pupils
- Setting up a befriending scheme for new parents
- Having arrangements and procedures to respond quickly to parental anxieties and concerns
- Recognising the special needs of parents such as those who lack confidence or knowledge of the system or work long and difficult hours

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### **Recommendation:**

- **That the LEA work with schools to ensure that they develop strategies for making parents welcome.**
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### ***Training and developing***

7.17 We referred earlier to the research suggesting that a "deficit" attitude to parents still persists amongst some teachers. We think that this is changing. Parental involvement however is not an integral part of their professional culture. Teachers may be excellent with pupils but may be less comfortable in dealing with parents and can find it difficult to communicate effectively. Some teachers may feel intimidated by parents. Whilst it is part of teacher training, involving parents is seen as a "bolt on"

rather than an integral part. There is virtually no whole school or other training within Haringey or more widely available on how to work with parents more effectively. More training for teachers is required to ensure that they are both comfortable and effective in working with parents and INSET days should be used for this purpose. A training module could also be developed for school governors by the PDC. Communication skills training for teachers is something that should also be considered.

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### **Recommendation:**

- **That regular training sessions be introduced for teachers on effective working and communication with parents**
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### ***Harder to reach parents***

7.18 From our meeting with the Haringey Standing Committee on Community Languages we learnt more about the obstacles that some parents from ethnic minority groups face and which may limit their ability to engage with schools:

- They may not have English as a first language
- They may not understand the way that the English education system works.
- In some countries, parents are not involved in schools and would only go to the school when there was a problem.
- Some parents are from countries where there was little access to education and some were illiterate.

7.19 The community groups emphasised the importance of making clear to parents what was expected of them and the purpose of the involvement. As previously mentioned, family learning initiatives can help to address these issues and provide parents with the tools they need to play an active part.

7.20 However, there are issues in respect of the family learning initiatives:

- Sustainability. The vast majority of such work is funded by grants from various different sources. Although the initiatives are excellent, their sustainability needs to be considered.
- Coverage. Due in part to the means by which they are funded, provision for working parents whose first language is English will be limited.

7.21 As referred to in paragraph 5.29, we learnt about the role of the supplementary and language schools and the very large number of pupils who regularly attend these schools in the Borough. Their potential influence is very considerable and the LEA needs to be working closely with them. There is much work to be done in developing and extending the links with these schools. They can provide the link that the LEA and the schools need to reach some of the parents who are harder to reach. The current problems experienced by the supplementary schools and the lack of a consistent approach needs to be addressed by the LEA.

- 7.22 The Committee told us how parents very much want their children to learn their community language. We know that children proficient in their own language are likely to learn to a higher level in English. Turkish is available as a GCSE option and the Somali education committee wants a GCSE in their language to be available and is pursuing this with the examination accreditation authorities. We think the LEA should support such initiatives as a means of helping to raise achievement levels.
- 7.23 The African Caribbean Leadership Council told us that although parents were happy on the whole with schools some were not always comfortable dealing with schools. Factors that could discourage parents included racism and perceived racism, parents' own educational experience, work commitments, poor communications and social conditions. There was support for more courses for parents at schools, newsletters and information evenings delivered in an accessible way.
- 7.24 The African Caribbean Leadership Council referred to frustration in their community that issues raised repeatedly had not been successfully addressed. A weakness that undermined confidence in the willingness and determination to address issues, was the failure of the workforce at LEA, school and governing body level, and particularly at senior levels, to reflect the diverse composition of the Borough. We noted that the LEA has tried to address this imbalance at senior levels but without much success. However, we heard that several senior posts have recently been filled by people from ethnic minorities so these initiatives may starting to bear fruit. Efforts should nevertheless be maintained.
- 7.25 At governing body level a targeted recruitment drive for more governors from the different communities plus a support programme designed both to encourage and build the capacity of these governors would help to address the problem.

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#### **Recommendations:**

- **That an evaluation of current family learning initiatives be undertaken that includes a sustainability strategy**
- **That current initiatives by the LEA to build links with supplementary schools be strongly supported and that the following issues be specifically addressed:**
  - **Assistance with the cost of hiring premises**
  - **The possibility of developing SHARE projects with them**
  - **The provision of guidance on the requirements of the national curriculum**
  - **Guidance and assistance on applying for available grant funding**
- **That any increase in the level of assistance provided for supplementary schools be subject to the establishment of satisfactory monitoring arrangements.**
- **The LEA support initiatives by the community groups to secure recognised examination accreditation for their languages.**
- **That the LEA undertakes further developmental work to strengthen links with community groups and ethnic minority organisations.**

- That efforts to ensure that the ethnic breakdown of senior management positions within the LEA are reflective of the local community be maintained and additional strategies be considered to remedy the current imbalance.
  - That the LEA undertake a targeted recruitment drive for school governors from the different communities and devise a support programme to encourage and build the capacity of these governors
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### ***LEA Consultation with Parents***

- 7.26 Parents have a collective voice as part of school governing bodies. However, parent governors often find it hard to make their voice heard within meetings. Parents may feel intimidated and loath to express their opinions. They can feel uncomfortable at challenging professionals. It is also difficult to get parents to stand as governors in some areas. Ethnic minority communities tend to be under represented.
- 7.27 There is currently a lack of Borough wide organisations representing parents. We were unable to find any specific group that could provide us with a collective view of parents on parental involvement within the Borough for the purposes of this review. There is a Parent Governor Forum but, despite considerable efforts, its meetings are not well attended. We have learnt of groups e.g. Haringey Parents in the west of the borough. We understand that the Council has a corporate consultation database but there are few groups on it whose prime function is to represent parents of school age children. The LEA needs to identify all existing groups and develop systems for encouraging their involvement in the development of policy at LEA level.
- 7.28 The LEA's consultation methods were outside the remit of this review but the effectiveness of consultation does impinge on parental involvement. We understand that LEA guidelines on general principles relating to consultation are currently being drafted. At present there is no set way in which consultations are undertaken. If parents need to be reached, the LEA normally accesses them via schools.
- 7.29 We heard how Tower Hamlets had set up a Parents Panel as part of its commitment to involving parents in decision making at all levels. This allows parents to be consulted on a range of education issues. Not all parents are comfortable with meetings and consideration needs to be given to setting up mechanisms that provide feedback that is representative of all parents.

#### **TOWER HAMLETS PARENTS' PANEL:**

320 parents agreed to be part of a Panel to be contacted and interviewed by telephone on a range of education-related issues. The first survey was completed in November 2001 and asked parents for their views on their priorities for education. Their views were fed into the new Education Development Plan. Since then, parents have been consulted on admission and exclusion policies, school transport, lifelong learning opportunities, summer holiday activities and pupil behaviour. When questioned recently, 84% of Panel members said that they were happy to remain on the Panel.

7.30 The role of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or Home/School Associations has potential for development beyond fund raising. Some have developed their role and act as discussion forums for a range of educational issues including school organisation and management.

7.31 There is a lack of current information about the number of PTAs/ HSAs in the Borough. The last survey, undertaken some time ago by Haringey Council of Parent-Teacher Association, showed that about 60% of schools had PTAs. The roles and the level of activity varied but included regular meetings, fundraising and social events and some discussion of educational issues. A number employ a system of class representatives who liaise with other parents in the class and thereby seek to involve all. If only a few parents are involved in the organisation it can place a heavy burden on them. In some situations the PTA/HSA may offer schools a means by which they can build parental involvement.

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### **Recommendations:**

- That further consideration be given by the LEA about how it consults with parents on educational issues and, in particular, ensuring the views obtained are truly representative. This should include the merits of setting up a parents panel on the lines of the Tower Hamlets panel.
  - That training be available to governors on how best to encourage greater parental involvement.
  - That a survey of PTAs/HSAs within the Borough be undertaken and that consideration be given by the LEA to developing guidance to schools on starting PTAs/HSAs and on developing the role of existing associations.
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### ***Secondary Schools***

7.32 Whilst all of the matters that have been referred to so far apply equally to secondary and primary schools, it is recognised that there are particular difficulties in involving parents with secondary schools;

- Parents often live further afield from the school than with primary schools.
- There is not the same casual daily contact with parents that takes place in primary schools.
- Pupils often feel less comfortable with having their parents involved.
- Pupils are taught by a far greater number of teachers.
- Parents feel particularly intimidated by secondary schools

7.33 We know that a number of the secondary schools in the borough have made huge efforts to involve parents more. Gladesmore has secured significant community funding to support a major parental involvement programme and the work at White Hart Lane is described below. We know that there are few family learning schemes

operating in secondary schools in the Borough. The Parental Outreach Team does not have the resources currently to work with secondary schools.

#### WHITE HART LANE SCHOOL:

- Various family learning initiatives are in operation at the school. The classes had originally just been in ESOL. They have now expanded to cover other subjects such as computing and attracted various people from across the communities. The school used feeder primary schools to promote the courses. The classes created a good impression of the school and made it more likely that parents would get involved in other school activities such as parents evenings and governors meetings. The courses have helped break down barriers and have helped to change the attitude of some children with disciplinary problems.
- Parents are closely involved in discipline issues and are contacted in the event of there being a particular issue. Overseas parents often had very high expectations and were very supportive of actions to enforce discipline.
- The school had merged the teaching of English as a second language, special educational needs and pastoral care provision into one unit called "Gateway" and this has been very successful. They involve parents, who sometimes attend classes.

7.34 The Panel would have liked to investigate secondary practices in more depth. We think there is a need to develop particular strategies with the schools to encourage parental involvement at this level and to learn how good practice can best be shared.

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#### **Recommendation:**

- **That the differing needs and challenges presented by developing parental involvement in secondary schools be identified and addressed strategically by the Steering Group.**
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#### ***Evaluation and Monitoring***

7.35 Parental involvement is costly in terms of the time and commitment levels required from all those involved. The work with parents within the LEA and in schools must be planned with objectives and success indicators developed that will enable the outcomes to be measured.

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#### **Recommendation:**

- **That the Steering Group develop a framework for effective monitoring and evaluation .**
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## **APPENDIX 1**

The following individuals/organisations assisted with the review:

Councillor Judy Bax – Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning  
Sharon Bolton – Haringey LEA  
Rob Graham – Haringey LEA  
Veena Sharma – HALS  
Mrs. Etta Kwaja – Chair, African Caribbean Leadership Council's (ACLC) Education Committee  
Dr. Elizabeth Jordan - ACLC education sub-team and Strikers Consultancy Ltd.  
Haringey Racial Equality Council  
Haringey Standing Committee on Community Languages  
Melian Mansfield - Chair – Haringey Early Years Partnership  
Kath Howell - Haringey Association of School Governing Bodies  
Metteu Wallace, Gaial Quest and Robert Singh - Risley Avenue Primary School  
White Hart Lane School  
South Harringay Infant School  
Sarah Gale – London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
London Borough of Tower Hamlets Education Service