



**ITA**  
**International Teachers Association**

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## **Module 18: Family Involvement**

In this module, you will learn about family involvement with reference to SEN education. You will begin the module by learning about the importance of family involvement in educational provisions, and outcomes. The next section will introduce strategies and programs implemented to facilitate family involvement, including Every Child Matters, and a Review of Best Practice by the Department of Education. You will then learn about SEN education at home, in terms of the parents' rights, and the legal obligations of the local authority. The module will finish with suggestions for improving family involvement in SEN education.

### **18.1 Importance of Family Involvement**

### **18.2 Facilitating Family Involvement**

### **18.3 Special Education at Home**

### **18.4 Suggestions for Improving Family Involvement**

## **18.1 Importance of Family Involvement**

**The term family involvement, in this instance, refers to the extent that a child with SEN's parents or guardians are involved in the child's education.** Another term commonly used is parental engagement.

This involvement may include:

- **Involvement within the school** by taking on a position such as a break time supervisor or a governor.
- **Continuing the child's education in the home** by helping with homework, reading to the child or teaching nursery rhymes.
- **Maintaining a consistent dialogue with educators** regarding their child's education and progress.

This involvement has been identified in numerous studies as a **major factor in higher student achievement levels, and outcomes in children with and without SEN.** The importance of family involvement is recognized by governmental bodies to the extent that it is legislated. This will be discussed in further detail in section 8.2.

### 18.1.1 Bridging The Gap Between School And Home

Parental involvement bridges the gap between school and home by bringing parents and educators together. Some of the benefits of this involvement include:

- **Educators can draw on the expertise, and knowledge of the parents** or caregivers about the child and their SEN.
- **Parents feel comfortable in expressing their views, wishes, and concerns** about their child and their education in a warm, collaborative environment. Thus, feeling empowered in their child's education.
- **Parents are able to gain an understanding of the services and provision offered for their child** with SEN, leading to realistic expectations of improvement, and achievement.
- **Educators can learn about any factors that may be affecting the child's progress**, such as difficult family events, in order to ensure the services and provision are provided accurately.
- **Parents can learn in more depth about the goals set for their children** by educators, and the strategies used to meet those goals. They might choose to implement some of the same strategies at home to create continuity between the home and school environments.
- **Educators may choose to involve parents in setting goals** and objectives for their child's development.

### 18.1.2 Responsive Service Delivery

Parental involvement allows educators to create **flexible, personalized services** that are imng-fluid to the needs of children with SEN, and their families. Some of the benefits of this involvement include:

- **Educators can focus on reaching parents from groups which are traditionally excluded from services and involvement.** Giving them the opportunity to express their views, wishes, and concerns can empower parents. Parents from these groups are able to take an active role in the process of deciding which services will be delivered, and how they will be delivered.
- **Educators can gather feedback from parents and caregivers about the educational provision offered.** This allows them to tailor and amend the provision, where necessary, to better meet the needs of the child with SEN. This enables them to offer imng-fluid services that are more effective.
- Responsive services that allow educators to meet the child's needs are **more cost effective**.

### 18.1.3 Improved Educational Outcomes

A 2008 report by the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families titled '*The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education*' found that parental involvement, at an early age, has more of an impact on cognitive development outcomes in children than parental income, occupation or education.

**Parental involvement activities that were linked to positive outcomes at age three and seven include:**

- Reading with the child.
- Reciting the alphabet.
- Visiting the library.
- Teaching nursery rhymes and songs.
- Playing with letters and numbers.

It also found that parents were **more likely to engage in these activities with girls rather than boys**. This could be a factor in the lower cognitive and behavioral levels of boys compared with girls upon entering formal education.

The effects of parental involvement do not end at age seven. Results of achievement at age 16, in English and Math, illustrated that very high parental involvement is linked to better exam results. In addition, parental behavior has a greater impact on Key Stage 2 attainment than even school quality.

## **18.2 Facilitating Family Involvement**

**Facilitating family involvement involves the offering of Information, Influence and Empowerment to the families by educators and professionals.**

**Information - Educators should share information about the child, and the child's progress at school.** This may be achieved through a home-school diary, online reporting, email contact, or regular parent-teacher meetings. Educators should help parents access further information to deal with any specific issues that may arise. Educators should seek to gain information about the child from the parents.

**Influence - Educators should offer parents the opportunity to influence the way services are delivered.** The parents should be viewed as having a wealth of information about the child, and their progress that can be used to hone and pinpoint service delivery.

**Empowerment - Educators should empower parents to work in partnership with them as much as they can.** This means continuing school-based strategies at home to maximize the benefits of services offered.

### **18.2.1 Every Child Matters**

**The Every Child Matters: Change for Children program is part of a government-led initiative to ensure that family involvement is maximized in the education of children with and without SEN.** In partnership with Local Authorities, and educational providers including schools and nurseries, the government aims to make sure that support is consistently available for parents and families; so that outcomes for all children are improved.

This program is working to increase multi-agency services. **This term refers to a team of professionals representing agencies such as social services, schools, and hospitals,** to offer integrated support to children, and their families. These services might be offered in children's centers, schools, and on a referral basis.

**The Every Child Matters program requires that:**

- **Universal support is available to all parents** in the form of advice and information offered in nurseries, healthcare settings, schools, and information providers including helplines, and websites.
- **Specialized support is available to all families** with additional difficulties.
- **All schools involve parents in their children's education,** provide opportunities, and advice for school-home collaboration.

**The Supporting Parents Guidance (2006) is offered to local authorities as part of the Every Child Matters program.**

**This guidance asks that each local authority develop strategies to implement parenting support services, and that a single commissioner is appointed to oversee them.** It stresses that local authorities have a duty to provide information, advice, and assistance to parents and prospective parents. This includes a duty towards parents of children with SEN, meaning that they must recommend services, facilities, and publications that may help improve outcomes.

**The guidance also states that local authorities must aim to:**

- Ensure fair access.
- Reduce inequality.
- Engage families who are difficult to reach.
- Raise parents' aspirations for their children.
- Enable parents to influence how services are provided.
- Understand what parents need to improve outcomes for their children.

### **18.2.3 Review Of Best Practice In Parental Involvement**

**The Review of Best Practice in Parental Involvement, commissioned by the UK's Department for Education, presented the following findings about the facilitation of family involvement:**

'Attempts by schools to engage parents in their children's learning are unlikely to be successful if they represent an 'add-on' to mainstream activities. **A parental engagement strategy,** therefore, should be integrated into a whole school approach to parental engagement. School based family and parent support activities should have the improvement of children's learning as a clear and consistent goal.

To engage effectively with parents, staff needs training and coaching, particularly when working with parents whose backgrounds are very different from their own. School staff should receive parental engagement training through initial teacher training or continuing professional development.

**Schools that successfully engage parents make use of a broad understanding of parental engagement.** Their parental engagement strategies align with the interpretations, and values of the parents they are aimed at. Parental engagement in children's learning is effectively supported when parents receive clear, specific, and targeted information from schools.

**A parental engagement strategy should be outward facing.** It involves the views of parents, the evidence and expertise of other schools, and services in the community. Equally, the transfer of knowledge and understanding should be part of a two-way process: not only from school to home; but from home to school.

**ICT can contribute to improved parental engagement by providing a convenient means for parents to access up-to-date information about their child's learning.** ICT enables parents to be more engaged with their child's learning, and supports more flexible working arrangements for staff.

## 18.3 Special Education At Home

**Home Education or Homeschooling refers to a method of education in which a child is educated within a home environment.** This education may be delivered by parents, tutors, relatives, family friends, or a combination of these. It may take place in a group setting at another home educated child's home, at the child's own home, or a combination of these. It may involve trips to parks, libraries, museums, historical sights, and other places of learning.

### 18.3.1 The SEN Code Of Practice

**The SEN Code of Practice related to education was amended in 2014 when EHC Plans came into effect.** This lets parents of children with SEN know where they stand legally when it comes to educating their children at home. Some main points include:

- Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents have **the right to home educate their children** including those with SEN.
- The education provided at home **must be suitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude, and special educational needs.**
- **Local authorities may fund services required to meet the SEN needs** of home educated children from the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- **Local authorities should support parents to ensure that SEN needs are met.**
- **Home education should be included in the EHC Plan**, if a child has one, making it the legal obligation of the local authority to ensure special education provision is provided.

- If a school is included in the EHC Plan but **parents decide to home educate, the local authority has no duty to provide special education provision**. EHC Plans must be reviewed annually to keep them relevant, and ensure all SEN continue to be met.
- **The local authority is required to take the wishes, feelings, and views of the child and the parents into account** with regards to home education provision.
- **Parents must write to their child's school to let them know they plan to remove their child from the school in order to home educate**. The school then removes the child's name from their admissions register. If the child attends a special school, the local authority must approve this removal.
- Local authorities do not have a right of entry, and can only enter the home if the parents invite them in.
- **Local authorities should not try to undermine parents' rights to educate their child at home**, but to communicate their duty to provide appropriate support for all children including those with SEN.
- **Home education does not have to be conducted in a school-like manner**.
- If the local authority feels that provision is not sufficient to meet the child's SEN needs, they can advise parents on improvements to be made.
- **If the local authority is continuously dissatisfied, with educational provision made by homeschooling parents, they can intervene using the school attendance order framework**.
- **The local authority should let parents of children with SEN know that they can request an EHC assessment and how to do so**.

### 18.3.2 Homeschooling Requirements

As mentioned in section 8.3.1, it is Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 that allows home education:

*'The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive full time education suitable a) to his age ability and aptitude, and b) any special educational needs he may have, either by attendance at a school or otherwise.'*

**There are many misconceptions about homeschooling requirements, but these are the legal requirements:**

- **Parents are not required to have any qualifications of any kind**.
- **Full-time education must be provided** for children and young people aged 5 and 16 years, though the term 'full-time' has been debated. There is no requirement to follow school hours.
- **Parents are not legally required to provide provision laid out in an EHC Plan but should allow the local authority to do so**.
- **Homeschoolers are not obliged to follow the National Curriculum** or teach subjects that are taught at school.
- **Children are not required to take SATs, GCSEs, A-Levels**, or any other exam but can choose to do so at an external exam center.

## 18.4 Suggestions for Improving Family Involvement

### 8.4.1 Education and Skills Committee Report, the Lamb Inquiry, and the LGA Report

In 2007, the House of Commons produced the **Education and Skills Committee Report on the subject of special educational needs**. It identified parental confidence as a key factor in SEN educational provision, but highlighted areas in which this key factor was lacking. The Lamb Inquiry went on to investigate how parental confidence might be improved by better practice of local authorities, and schools in their interactions with parents.

The Local Government Association then commissioned a report to present key findings in this area:

#### Creating Positive Relationships

**The report found that creating positive interactions, and experiences from the first point of contact can improve parental confidence.** This can be done by taking a 'collaborative and consultative' approach to meeting the needs of the child with SEN, involving face-to-face meetings between parents and SEN professionals.

#### Understanding Roles

**Parents should be made aware of the roles of different SEN professionals** in terms of their child's educational provision. This will allow more effective communication, and understanding between parents and professionals. Parents should be clear about who they can approach with their concerns or queries.

#### Flexibility

**Parental confidence is increased in response to visible flexibility of provision.** This means they are able to see that the services offered to their child are subject to tailoring in order to best meet the child's SEN. Reviewing and monitoring procedures demonstrate this to parents.

### 18.4.2 Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) Evaluation

The Leicestershire County Council provides a Checklist of Parental Participation. This form is for SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) in schools, in order to help them review their schools current practice regarding parental involvement for SEN students. This tool can help SENCOs identify areas for future improvement of school practice in encouraging parental involvement.

It is encouraged that the form be completed with the help of parents of children with SEN who are enrolled in the school. SENCOs will provide the school SEN policy, the governor's annual report, the home-school diaries, and agreements of a selection of SEN students. The 'SEN – a parents' guide' and 'Support for your child' booklets, samples of letters sent to parents regarding SEN issues, and a school calendar will also be provided.

**SENCOs are asked to consider the current practice, and future action for the following 15 questions:**

1. How are parents informed that SEN provision is being made for their child?
2. How are parents' views of children's needs included in...
  - The IEP review process?
  - The annual review process?
3. How are parents informed about the nature of SEN provision in school?
4. How are parents informed about the school SEN policy? How parent friendly is it?
5. How are parents' views of the provision for their child gathered?
6. How are parents informed about support available from the LEA?
7. How is regular communication with parents managed?
8. What mechanisms are in place to ensure parents receive a copy of their child's IEP, and an explanation of its structure?
9. How are parents encouraged to support their child's IEP targets at home?
10. How are parents with literacy difficulties or disabilities encouraged to be fully involved in the SEN process?
11. How are reluctant parents encouraged to participate?
12. Are there opportunities for parents to learn more about SEN issues?
13. Are there opportunities for parents of pupils with SEN to meet?
14. How do parents know who is the school's SEN Governor, and does the SEN Governor monitor the views of parents?
15. How are parents of pupils with SEN who transfer during the phase informed, and involved?

[LINK to EXAM](#)