

## Background

1. In 2004 NAGC was approached by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to undertake an in-depth analysis of parental engagement in the education of gifted and talented children in England. This followed on from a previous DfES commissioned development project conducted by NAGC in 2002 called 'Positive Home School Liaison'.
2. Parents are a key element in the education process both formally and informally. If schools are going to succeed in improving educational attainment, it is essential that they work in partnership with parents on a whole range of issues. This is true for every parent – including those who have a gifted and talented child.
3. Four key objectives were identified for the Engaging Parents study:
  - i) To examine the nature and degree of parental involvement in gifted children's education in a cross-section of primary and secondary schools
  - ii) To identify the systems and procedures that make for effective parental involvement
  - iii) To identify the gaps in current provision for parental involvement
  - iv) To produce templates of effective provision for schools to follow
4. The intention of the research was to compare perceptions of provision across all those groups involved in the parental engagement process. Four groups were identified by NAGC - Parents, Class Teachers, Gifted and Talented Co-ordinators and Head Teachers.
5. It was decided that these four groups would best be accessed by means of a postal questionnaire. Education Consultants at NAGC developed separate questionnaires to be completed by the four parties identified. It was felt that these questionnaires would address objectives i) – iii) of the research. Objective iv) would be produced once the research had been completed.
6. The questionnaire was designed based on considerable research into relevant literature and current practice in the US, following reviews of schemes running in San Francisco and Indiana, and with reference to the work of Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University.
7. In Joyce Epstein's work as Director of the Centre on School, Family and Community Partnerships at the University, she developed a model of parental involvement, defining six types: Communication; Parenting; Student Learning; Volunteering; School Decision-Making; Community Collaboration. For the questionnaire, a focus on the first five types of involvement was considered central to developing a structure in which to assess the nature and extent of parental engagement; the systems and procedures that enable effective engagement; and the possible areas in which current school provision does not support parental engagement.
8. To test the research framework, the postal questionnaire was piloted in October 2005 and sent out to 22 schools. From the results received, a further batch of 380 modified questionnaires was sent out in November 2005. Responses from 45 schools were received by NAGC – a total response rate of 11.9%. This is a disappointing response, but not surprising given the enormous sensitivities about the term 'gifted and talented' and the reticence of schools to publicise what they are doing to support their gifted and talented pupils.
9. In addition to the postal questionnaire, five in-depth case studies were conducted with schools already involved in engaging with parents of gifted and talented children. These case studies took the form of in-depth interviews with all representatives from the four groups identified as well as looking at a practical level at some of the good practices taking place within the schools.
10. To ensure that NAGC obtained as wide a spread of views as possible about parental engagement issues, the education consultants also conducted supplementary research, including desk research, an analysis of the needs of callers to the Helpline over the period of the research and discussions with key specialists about the issues they faced.

## Summary of Report

1. Communication between parents and schools is of prime importance, both about school issues and also about individual children and their progress. It is essential that a mix of traditional and new communication methods are used and that schools are aware of the growing demands placed on parent's time in their use.
2. Schools also need to minimise potential communication difficulties as a result either of language or cultural differences or lack of confidence in communicating with teachers.
3. Communication to parents about gifted and talented issues in general and their gifted and talented child in particular needs to be improved. Lack of information and awareness is a damaging factor in engaging effectively with parents on gifted and talented issues. The negative attitude toward the term 'gifted and talented', lack of teacher confidence in talking to parents about gifted and talented issues and lack of information and support to help parents of gifted and talented children all contribute towards reducing potential for parental engagement.
4. Wide discrepancies in the responses between the four groups participating in the survey also demonstrate the lack of efficient parental engagement strategies. There is a wide difference between what Headteachers think goes on within the school at a policy and strategic level and what happens within the classroom and then in the home. The new structures for the management of schools may help to reduce these differences. It is essential that there is a consistent approach both within the school and between the school and parents.
5. Parenting skills and a well-developed understanding between school and home in terms of what each expects from the other is a key element in engaging parents. The vast majority of parents that responded felt that they were unsupported by the school in how they might help their children best with homework and enrichment at home. Parents said that there was little information available about the other organisations they might turn to in order to provide a well-balanced education for their children.
6. In many cases, parents feel unsure of how to deal with the challenges presented by their more able children. Parents said that they had not had access to courses and workshops on giftedness through the school that might help them with such issues although a third of Heads said that their school had offered them. Even fewer parents said that they had been invited to attend courses on behaviour management and social and emotional needs to help them better understand their gifted children.
7. Just as the parents of children with special educational needs or a particular illness or difficulty need support from others who understand their situation, so do the parents of gifted and talented children. This must be facilitated by the school although they may not be the key provider of this information, advice or support.
8. Most parents said they did not have a clear understanding of what their school was doing to support their gifted and talented child. Likewise, a gap was identified in the research between the gifts and talents in the children and the provision to support those needs by the school. Either schools are not recognising the abilities of some children; they do not have the resources to support them; or they have provided for them but not informed parents about their provision.
9. The majority of parents felt that they were seldom or never involved in their child's school in any form. A number of reasons were put forward for this including work commitments, lack of childcare arrangements and lack of confidence in approaching the school. A small but noticeable percentage of parents felt that they had never been asked to become involved and many teachers agreed this to be the case. Whilst parents seem keen to be involved in their child's schooling it seems that on both parts there is a lack of understanding about how this might successfully happen in a way that leaves both sides feeling supported and protected.
10. Schools feel that they are working hard at communicating with and involving parents. It appears that this is not the perception of parents. This lack of understanding between parents and schools is a huge barrier to successfully engaging parents in the life of the school and is a strong motivation for developing alternative strategies for parental engagement .

## Key Findings

### Communication

- \* 1 in 9 parents did not feel they could talk to the school at any time
- \* 1 in 13 teachers felt they couldn't talk to parents at any time
- \* 50% of parents said they had verbal feedback about their child from the class teacher
- \* 25% of parents did not believe they had parent consultation evenings in school
- \* Only 5% of parents said that they volunteered either in their child's class or in another class or area within the school
- \* 5% said that they were in the Parent Teachers Association
- \* 2% said that they were a Parent Governor at their child's school
- \* 1 in 3 parents said that they were hardly ever involved and a further 1 in 9 said they were never involved
- \* 10% of parents agreed that they had been offered courses on giftedness at their school
- \* Over 6% of parents said that their child had social, emotional and behavioural needs but only 1% of parents said they had been offered courses and information to help address these needs
- \* 27% of Heads said they shared information about local groups with parents but only 6% of parents agreed that they had been given this information
- \* 0% of parents said school had given them information about national groups such as NAGC, NACE or CHI
- \* 79% of parents were unaware of the existence of a Local Authority Parent Support Service and only 1% of parents had made use of the Parent Support Service
- \* 72% of Heads said that they offered enrichment activities to their Gifted and Talented pupils

### Gifted and Talented issues

- \* Less than half (41%) of parents whose child was gifted and talented knew that their child was on the Gifted and Talented Register
- \* Only 1 in 13 parents agreed that they had meetings with the G&T Coordinator about their children either on an individual or a group basis
- \* 55% of G&T Coordinators said that they wrote Individual Education Plans for their gifted and talented pupils - but only 6% of parents agreed that they had received a copy
- \* 82% of Heads said that they surveyed the parents of gifted and talented children - but only 18% of G&T Coordinators and 10% of teachers in the same school agreed that to be the case
- \* 97% of parents had been offered no additional support with homework to help their gifted and talented child
- \* 12% of parents were offered information about what clubs and other resources were available locally, out of school hours
- \* 3% of parents were offered information about curriculum based support to be found locally (e.g. tutors)
- \* 49% of class teachers said that they suggested enrichment activities for parents to do at home with their children
- \* 75% of parents replied that they had received no such information.
- \* Less than 1 in 17 parents said they had been given enrichment activities to do at home with their children
- \* Parents felt that half (52%) of the children whose gift or talent had been recognised have received appropriate provision to meet their needs
- \* There is a massive difference between what Heads and G&T Coordinators believe on the one hand and what the teachers see happening with G&T provision in the classroom – by as much as 76% in some cases
- The areas where children appear to be losing out most are:
  - Sport
  - Art
  - The child who is the 'all rounder'

## Summary of Main Recommendations

1. More regular meetings with groups of parents should take place to share information about their children, School, Class, Year Group or G&T Programme and the wider education system.
  2. There should be a single point of contact for every parent with the school. This could be a role such as a family liaison officer, a learning mentor or a G&T Coordinator.
  3. The establishment of Parent Support Groups should be encouraged wherever possible to enable parents of gifted and talented children to support each other in communications with the school.
  4. Schools should provide more information about the curriculum and how it relates to gifted and talented issues.
  5. Children should be actively encouraged to invite their own parents personally to events in school and to work with them to increase their levels of engagement in education.
  6. There should be a shared understanding of educational vocabulary or jargon-free language to encourage parents to feel confident about getting involved in education and language support should be provided for families with English as an additional language or where disability issues would reduce the ease of parental engagement.
  7. All staff within the school should actively and positively encourage parents' involvement in the school and particularly in the class situation, whilst understanding and supporting parents who are not able to volunteer due to caring, work or other commitments. The school should actively publicise this as a benefit of involvement.
  8. Schools and their staff should develop proactive programmes to develop the skills and confidence of parents to help them improve the support they can provide to their gifted child.
  9. Schools should run or help to find funding for practical workshops for parents in both curricular and non-curricular subjects.
  10. Schools should offer the extended school model wherever possible, with wrap around care available to support parents who work.
  11. Schools should establish family driven learning opportunities for families with gifted and talented children.
  12. The school should publicly recognise and raise awareness of the children's achievements.
  13. Schools should make greater use of parent surveys and questionnaires to find out about how a child is performing at home and to obtain the views of parents on a range of issues relevant to their gifted and talented child.
  14. Schools should clarify the parent's role in the identification and assessment of their gifted child and should maximise this involvement wherever possible.
  15. Schools should make it easy for parents to understand how well their child and the school is performing and any difficulties parents have for example with language, disability or culture should be understood and supported.
  16. Schools should encourage volunteering in less 'daunting' areas such as sport and art to encourage less confident parents to get involved in other ways.
  17. Further work needs to take place at both a national and local level to promote the engagement of parents in the education of their gifted and talented children. The top 5 priority issues are:
    - i) drawing up and piloting a number of projects which showcase examples of good practice in schools
    - ii) publishing templates and toolkits which enable schools to develop their own models of parental engagement
    - iii) commissioning research into the community aspects of parental engagement on G&T issues
    - iv) funding the establishment of a network of Parent Support Groups to take forward the engagement programme at both a national and local level
    - v) rolling out the quality standards for G&T education and seeking to ensure that every school is at least at entry level within these standards
- If you have difficulties with any of these issues or would like more information then call: NAGC Helpline on 0845 450 0221



THE NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION FOR  
GIFTED CHILDREN

## About NAGC

NAGC is the national membership charity that specialises in supporting the families of gifted and talented children – to ensure that children and young people achieve their full potential, parents are given the skills and confidence to support their gifted child and the experience is positive for the whole family. Established in 1967, NAGC offers a range of services including:

- A national Helpline for children and young people, parents and organisations that work with them, such as schools
- A national Parent School Partnership network to work with parents and schools on issues of concern
- Training for children, parents and organisations such as schools and nurseries
- 26 Branches throughout the country providing a range of local services including regular Explorer Clubs for children and young people and support for parents and families
- A national YouthAgency for older children aged 11-18
- Regular publications on gifted and talented issues, including a newsletter for members

NAGC supports over 10,000 people a year and is based in Bletchley, Milton Keynes.

## Acknowledgements

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If you have difficulties with any of the issues referred to or would like more information please call: NAGC Helpline on 0845 450 0221  
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**NAGC**

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# Neglected Voices?

Engaging parents in the  
education of their gifted and  
talented children

Executive Summary



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