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Disabled parents' involvement in their children's education: looking at good practice

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About the project

This research project looked at how disabled parents, including people with learning disabilities, are involved in their children's education. This could be helping children with homework, going to parents' evenings at school, helping out in the classroom or on school trips, or being part of a parents' group. Children do better at school when their parents are involved in lots of different ways.

For this project, we looked at UK policy and research about parents helping their children to learn. We talked to people across Britain who are working on this, like policy makers,

teachers and parents' groups. We spoke to 23 disabled parents and one grandparent. They told us how schools had supported them to be involved in their child's learning or to help out in the school. We also talked to six people working in schools or local authorities who could tell us more about these good practice stories.

At the end of the project, we wrote a book for schools with suggestions for how they could help disabled parents get involved in their children's learning.

“ Children do better at school when their parents are involved in lots of different ways. ”

What we found out

Over recent years, the Government has said it wants to give more support to parents so they can help their children to learn.



There are policies to make this happen across the UK and a law about it in Scotland. These apply to all parents, including those with learning disabilities. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 says that disabled people must be treated fairly. For this to happen, schools need to know which parents are disabled so they can get the right support.

Disabled parents said that helping their children to learn is very important. Some thought it was especially important for disabled parents to be involved in their children's schools because they may not have many chances to take part in the community.

Disabled parents were supported by schools in three ways. First, by changes which would make the school easy to reach for disabled people generally, like putting in ramps and lifts. Secondly, by changes for individual parents; for example, for a parent who couldn't read, ringing them up about parents' evenings rather than sending a letter. Thirdly, by support aimed at all parents, like homework clubs.



It is easier for disabled parents to get involved in schools which want to include all parents equally and have a friendly Head Teacher. Being flexible and informal also help. An example would be the way meetings are held.

If parents want their child's school to know they have a disability, it is up to them to tell the school. Many parents find this very difficult. It would be easier if schools made it clear that they welcome and support all parents, including disabled parents.



Conclusions

Schools need to find helpful ways to ask parents about their support needs. Parents are more likely to tell schools about their disability if they believe it will lead to support that will help their child's education.

All home-school communications to parents should be in the right format for them. Every staff member involved with a disabled parent should know the best way to communicate with him/her.

It's easier for disabled parents to get involved in schools that are friendly and welcoming. Parents with learning disabilities generally prefer people talking to them rather than sending written information. It helps to have one teacher act as a key contact for each parent.

Disabled parents have different support needs which can change over time. Schools should ask each parent how they can plan ahead together to overcome any barriers.

Disability awareness training for everyone in schools, including pupils, is very important. Disability organisations should give the training.

Other publications

There are four publications about this research. Apart from this leaflet, there is a guidance document for schools, a research report and a summary for parents. You can find them at www.cfbt.com. They are available in other formats on request. Contact research@cfbt.com.





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