

Growing Up in Scotland - 2012

Growing Up in Scotland: Early experiences of Primary School – parental involvement in school activities

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The Growing Up in Scotland study

The Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS) is an important longitudinal research project aimed at tracking the lives of several cohorts of Scottish children through the early years and beyond. The study is funded by the Scottish Government and carried out by ScotCen Social Research. GUS provides crucial evidence for the long-term monitoring and evaluation of policies for children, with a specific focus on the early years. While the principal aim of the study is to provide information to support policy-making, it is also intended to be a broader resource that can be drawn on by academics, voluntary sector organisations and other interested parties. GUS collects a wide range of information about children and their families; the main areas covered include childcare, education, parenting, health and social inclusion.

Background to the report

This document is one of a series that summarises key findings from the sixth sweep of the study, which was collected in 2010/11 when children in the birth cohort were aged almost 6 years old. It is one of two summaries which presents key findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study report *Early experiences of Primary School*.

The full report presents the results of largely descriptive analysis of the considerable data which GUS has collected around this topic from both the birth and child cohorts between 2007 (sweep 3) and 2011 (sweep 6). This analysis seeks to provide a better understanding of the factors which lead to a positive early experience of school for children, the early engagement of parents with the school and the child's teacher, and the many practical issues associated with starting school such as school choice, transport, and wrap-around care.

The aim of the report is to provide an overview of these issues and experiences exploring how they vary according to characteristics of the child, family, area (e.g. area deprivation), and the school (e.g. size).

Both interview data and administrative data drawn from school records has been analysed.

This document presents a summary of the data on parental involvement in school activities. Parental involvement incorporates a broad range of activities including helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, and taking part in school governance. Here we specifically look at parental involvement in a range of activities or events at the child's school as well as less formal parental involvement which occurs in the home.

Prevalence of parental involvement in school activities

Parents were asked whether they or their partner had participated in any of nine activities since their child had started Primary 1. The activities did not necessarily have to relate specifically to the cohort child. The most common activity that parents had participated in was visiting their child's classroom (86% of parents said that they had done this), followed by attending a school event in which their child had participated (81%). 24% of parents had attended a Parent Council, PTA, or other such



meeting while 19% of parents had volunteered in the classroom, school office, or library. 5% had not participated in any activities or events at the child's school since their child started Primary 1.

Almost all parents (88%) reported attending more than one event, and half (49%) had attended two or three.

Differences in involvement by socio-demographic characteristics

The number of events attended was banded into four groups: 0-1, 2-3, 4-5 and 6 or more and the proportion of parents in each of the four groups was compared according to key socio-demographic characteristics.

- Parents with one child were just as likely as those with more children in the household to attend four or more events.
- Family type was associated with higher parental involvement. Lone parents (23%) were less likely to attend four or more activities or events than couple families (30%).
- Younger mothers were also less likely to attend four or more events at the child's school. 30% of mothers aged 20 to 29 reported attending four or more events, compared with 39% of mothers aged 30 to 39 and 46% of mothers aged 40 or older.
- Parents living in less deprived areas, in higher socio-economic occupation groups and in higher income brackets were more likely to attend more events than those in more deprived areas, in lower socio-economic groups and in lower income brackets.
- Half (50%) of all degree educated parents reported attending four or more events, more than twice the proportion of those with lower Standard Grades (23%) or no qualifications (17%).
- Respondents (in most cases the mother) in part-time employment (less than 35 hours per week) were more likely to have attended four or more events or activities at the child's school (42%) than those working full-time (38%) or not working at all (35%).

As there is some overlap between those families belonging to the various social background categories considered and the characteristics of children in those families – for example, families where parents are more highly educated are more likely to have

higher incomes and parents in each of those groups are more likely to have attended more events – multivariate analysis was used to determine which characteristics are independently related to a lower level of school involvement when holding the other, potentially confounding, characteristics constant.

A lower socio-economic occupation, lower educational qualifications and not being in owner occupied accommodation were the factors which remained statistically significantly associated with lower involvement once other variables were controlled for. Employment status and family type became non-significant in the presence of these variables, suggesting that it is social disadvantage that drives parental involvement rather than the time available to parents to become involved in school activities.

Homework

Questions were included to collect information about the frequency with which the child received and completed homework and the extent to which someone at home helped the child with his or her homework. Data from both the birth and child cohorts was analysed.

The majority (71%) of children in the child cohort received homework every day or most days. Virtually all (93%) of those who received homework said that they always completed it, 6% said they usually completed it and just 1% said it was only sometimes or never completed. Children from families living in more deprived areas were less likely to always complete their homework than were children living in less deprived areas (90% compared with 96%). There were no statistically significant differences for completion by the child's gender.

Almost all (95%) parents were involved in helping their children with their homework but many others were involved too, particularly grandparents and older siblings who were reported as helping the child by 29% and 21% of parents respectively.

The vast majority (85%) of respondents said it was very or fairly easy to get their child to do his or her homework, 7% said that it was neither easy nor difficult and 8% said it was fairly or very difficult. The main reason parents found it difficult (reported by 47% of those who had difficulties) was because the child was not interested in their homework. Tiredness (23%) and the child's preference for other activities (15%) also featured as common reasons.

Most parents in the birth cohort (89%) said they were confident helping their child with all homework tasks, 10% were confident with some and just 1% were not

confident at all. Whilst confidence was generally high across all parents, some small variations did exist including:

- Parents of girls (91%) were more confident in all tasks than parents of boys (87%).
- Parents living in the least deprived areas (94%) were more confident in all tasks than those living in the most deprived areas (83%).
- Those with higher levels of education, in higher income brackets and from higher socio-economic occupation groups were more likely to be confident in all tasks than those with lower qualifications, in lower income brackets and lower socio-economic occupation groups.
- Respondents who had no difficulties with reading or writing were more likely to be confident in all tasks (91%) than those who did have such difficulties (74%).

Parental confidence levels were also associated with how easy they found it to get the child to do his or her homework. Nine out of ten parents (91%) who found it very or fairly easy to get homework completed were confident in all tasks compared with 8 out of 10 (80%) of those who found it very or fairly difficult. The direction of this relationship is unclear. For example, it is possible that parents who are more confident find it easier to encourage the child to do his or her homework. On the other hand, it may be that when parents find it easy to get their child to do their homework this provides a boost to their confidence.

Conclusion

Research has shown that parental involvement in children's education from an early age is associated with educational achievement. In addition, it has been found that the more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects. Yet research has also demonstrated large differences between parents in their level of involvement in school activities.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the involvement of parents in their children's education and in the work of schools themselves. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 aims to help parents, carers and schools work together as partners in children's learning. It also places duties on schools, local authorities and the Scottish Government to make it easier for parents to become involved.

For parents with children in P1, involvement in school activities and events is generally high. Most parents reported having participated in at least one school activity or event, although participation in more formal activities such as attending a Parent Council or PTA meeting, or volunteering at the school, were much lower. In addition, there remain differences in the level of participation by various subgroups of the population. For example lone parents, younger mothers, parents with lower educational qualifications, and parents from more deprived socio-economic circumstances had lower levels of participation. Once other factors were controlled for, measures of socio-economic disadvantage remained significant predictors of lower parental involvement. Thus, although it had been four years since the implementation of the Parental Involvement Act, it would appear that there is still a need to encourage and facilitate participation of those from more deprived backgrounds.

For the large majority of children in GUS, homework is a daily event and is consistently completed, very often with the involvement of a main carer. However, there is some small variation amongst different parents in both commitment to getting homework completed, the ease of getting homework done and parental confidence levels in assisting with homework. In similarity to the variation in involvement in school activities and events, those parents with more difficulties related to homework tend to be from more disadvantaged groups whether defined by area deprivation, household income or parental education. Thus involvement in their child's education is lower for parents in these groups whether at school or at home. Any steps to increase parental involvement therefore will need to tackle involvement simultaneously in each of these domains.

Further information on the Growing Up in Scotland study can be found at: www.growingupinscotland.org.uk

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