

Achieving **EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS**



**A Strategy and Toolkit
for developing effective
partnerships between
schools, parents/carers
and communities**

Effective Partnerships with Parents (EPPa) provides a structure to help schools to meet the new challenges of:

Every Child Matters

Extended Schools

School Self-evaluation

Five Year Strategy

EPPa has been supported by:

department for
education and skills



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'The Government recognises the crucial role of parents, carers and families in improving outcomes for children and young people and the need to provide support for parents, carers and their families in order for them to do so.'

Strategy for delivery of Every Child Matters Change for Children, DfES 2005

'The use of the word 'parent' is intended to refer to all parents and any significant adults in the lives of children and includes for example, carers and grandparents.'

BACKGROUND

The EPPa strategy and toolkit evolved as the result of an action research project over five years that involved a variety of schools, including primary and secondary; large and small; inner city and rural. The aim of the project was to help define what effective and productive partnerships between schools, families and communities would look like in practice. The EPPa strategy was first evaluated independently by the Centre for Social and Educational Research using schools in the South West of England and a further evaluation was undertaken using additional schools in the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham. EPPa has been supported by DfES, the Learning and Skills Council, Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Local Education Authorities, Poplar Partnership, School-Home Support and the Campaign for Learning.

What is EPPa?

EPPa offers schools a structured approach within which to create effective and sustainable partnerships with families and communities that support learning in its widest sense. It is based upon the belief that an informed and supportive parent' body will do a great deal to raise standards in schools and help children to achieve their potential. EPPa is first and foremost a school development tool and comes with an optional EPPa Award element. The supporting toolkit is user-friendly for use by schools, parents, children's centres and communities.

Many schools already believe that they do all they can to inform and involve parents but the Every Child Matters and Extended Schools agendas require schools to face new challenges with regard to parents and the community. The EPPa strategy offers a flexible tool for schools with which to tackle these new areas in a structured way, to meet locally identified needs.



A new approach

EPPa offers a different approach in that it is the parents and community that drive projects forward by providing the leadership and coordination, working closely with school staff and governors. The advantages of this parent-led approach are:

- Support and involvement of parents is greater
- Parents tend to live locally and make natural links with communities
- Parents have wide ranging skills and expertise to add value to the learning experience
- Parents have windows of time to commit
- A parent-to-parent approach is less daunting for some people

- Much of the administration is undertaken by parents
- Parents are in a key position to identify and implement projects to meet the needs of local people to help them support children's learning.

How Does the EPPa Strategy Work?

An 'Action Team' is formed, chaired by a parent, parent governor or parent community member. Initially the parents are likely to be 'the usual suspects' but as the Team evolves, 'harder to reach' parents become engaged and often take key roles.

- Action Teams members will include representatives from parents, school staff (including a senior teacher), governors and the local community.
- The EPPa Action Teams is a management group established to identify, develop and implement projects that promote more effective home-school-community partnerships. It is not a complaints tribunals or merely a discussion forum. The projects are identified following consultation with the school's stakeholders.

Because Action Teams are independently constituted community groups, they are able to apply for funding to grants and trusts for substantial sums of money to help with their projects. The role of the Action Team is to:

- Talk to as many people as possible and, through surveys and questionnaires, find out what is working and what are the challenges
- Decide priorities and make a plan
- Share out the tasks with other volunteers
- Carry out the projects
- Evaluate projects and decide the next steps.

Engaging parents and the community using EPPa

Action Teams are at the heart of parent and community involvement in EPPa schools. This means that schools become more aware of how to meet the needs and challenges that many parents face. Action Teams identify these and then offer appropriate support. EPPa is not prescriptive. It develops and improves on existing good practice in line with the school management plan. Schools face significant challenges if they are to integrate parents and communities in the way envisioned by government initiatives. Developing new partnerships to produce interagency working for the benefit of all children and families should include parents as key 'network actors' from planning to implementation. They are in a position to support schools that face a difficult juggling job as they keep focused on raising standards whilst simultaneously engaging parents and community for longer-term gains.

EPPa Action Teams have demonstrated that they can contribute significantly by:

- **Using links** that education, health and social services personnel have with children to avoid duplication and maximise resources.
- **Disseminating** leaflets and information about learning opportunities for parents and families, using libraries, health centres, grocery stores etc.
- Hosting one-off **community events** such as fun-days (e.g. multi-cultural activity days, music events and environmental awareness/recycling projects).
- Organising community **support programmes** (e.g. lunch club for elderly residents, nursery provision and family learning workshops).
- Ensuring (through close working with families) that **interpreters** are available, the school site is open, warm and welcoming for parents. Language and format of publications is respectful of the needs of all.
- Actively **recruiting** parents, carers and advisors from the local community with first-hand knowledge to support others and promote inclusion.
- Offering a **variety of involvement** so that parents and carers can be involved in their local school EPPa Team and influence what it undertakes.
- Empowering parents through projects that offer **basic skills** and similar training that help them to assist their child and provide good role models.
- Accessing **training for volunteers** and providing schools and communities with a strong volunteer base.
- Giving schools a truer picture of how they are perceived by parents and the community and aiming to promote a **positive image of the school** in the community.



'We live in an area with enormous cultural diversity and the EPPa Action Team promotes projects that help parents see that we can all really contribute and make a difference.'

Parent Action Team member

The Award

The Award element is an optional part of the EPPa scheme. It is designed to be challenging but achievable by any school wanting to show commitment to partnership with parents and the community. To achieve the Award schools will have to show that they have set up a constituted, parent-led Action Team, and provide details about two projects, chosen in consultation with parents, the school and community. These two projects will need to demonstrate successful work with volunteers and show that they have engaged more parents and children in learning. There is comprehensive guidance in the Toolkit about the Award and how to achieve it.

Case Studies

Bygrove Primary School, Tower Hamlets

"At first I did not know what I could do. This quickly changed, and with other parents, I found that I was suggesting and doing things that not only helped our children but gave me a new confidence that enabled me to do even more."

Parent Action Team member

Langdon Park Community College

"Having parents in school as role models has seen a major improvement in attitude and behaviour of our students."

Deputy Headteacher

"We know that improving financial literacy is really important for lots of families in this community so we are setting up a credit union so parents and their children will all benefit."

Action Team coordinator

Lansbury Lawrence Primary School

"We started a shop project to provide basic writing stuff for the children to use at home. It's been very, very popular! In running the shop we have learnt new skills – handling money, team working and helping other parents who have even less confidence than we had!"

Parent Action Team member

Bygrove School is a one-form entry primary school with a nursery, situated in the heart of London's East End. The school's population is racially mixed but the largest ethnic group is Bangladeshi. Parental involvement has become a priority at the school and staff at Bygrove sought to empower parents further through the EPPa strategy. Nine parents and four staff members, representing the broad ethnic mix of families at the school became the core members of the EPPa Action Team. Its first project was a hugely successful multi-cultural day where they engaged the majority of families. Families brought food to share and watched the children performing dances and music ranging from traditional Indian dances to line dancing. The aim of this event was to give all parents the opportunity to contribute to a school event and to give the children a chance to show off their school.

Flushed with success, the EPPa team went on to organise a summer fete (there is no PTA at the school), recruited new members and raised money for their next project, which was to provide a library of maths resource packs for family activities. The packs were so successful that the library has been overwhelmed at times with the number of parents. As well as engaging parents with learning throughout the school, this scheme has also given Action Team parents, organising the project, new skills. They have been involved in working closely with the school staff, ordering packs, keeping the finances straight and acting as librarians. In just twelve months, the EPPa strategy has given the school a new way of involving parents in a positive and sustainable way. The team now literally wants to build on its success and is looking into potential funding for building a room for parents at the school.

Langdon Park secondary school, in Tower Hamlets, established its EPPa Action Team in 2005 at a time when the school was undergoing major refurbishment. By prioritising parental involvement, the school aimed to gain greater support from families who traditionally step back when children reach secondary school age. Their first project extended the recycling work already in progress at the school and in the summer term, they organised a very successful 'Give and Take' day. This project engaged parents on the Action Team with organising and implementing a complex plan that enabled local people to exchange unwanted household and other goods. The Action Team succeeded in reaching the target audience of families who do not normally come to the school and the project directly involved students at several levels (e.g. in designing posters and in citizenship exercises such as volunteering on the day).

Many parents were keen to repeat this particular event and others are enthusiastic to take part in new projects. The Give and Take day contributed to the positive image of the school in the local community. The next project, already underway, is to instigate a credit union for families with children at the school. This will have real benefits for students. In just twelve months, the EPPa strategy at Langdon Park has demonstrated that it is possible to engage those parents who have previously been regarded as 'hard to reach' by the school.

Through helping other parents and meeting local need, parent team members have tapped into local training resources and have developed new skills and confidence that will allow the Action Team to go from strength to strength.

Lansbury Lawrence Primary School in Tower Hamlets is a recently amalgamated junior, infant and nursery school where over half the pupils have free school meals. The two-form entry school has an ethnically diverse population. The school is eager to further develop partnerships since its amalgamation, and the EPPa strategy offered a structure to do this.

Initial consultations revealed that parents (Somali parents in particular) wanted to know how they could help their children and all parents wanted to enjoy a better relationship with school and staff.

A range of diverse projects followed ranging from a garden renovation/environmental project that aims to engage more fathers, family learning workshops, transition projects and the establishment of a school shop that provides basic writing tools and learning resources for pupils to use at home at cost price.

Case Studies

The shop has been a real success and has raised funds from local businesses in order to keep prices low and increase the range of stock. The shop is now well-established and brings in the majority of parents who can also get help and advice from other parents about purchases while they are there.

The shop has generated a lot of goodwill and more interest in supporting children's learning at home. The team is consequently considering organising workshops for parents who want to support children with homework and the school is hoping to start a homework club for children. New Action Team consultations with parents have revealed that computer training for parents would be valued and the team has identified professional trainers to deliver parent and child ICT sessions. Building on the success of Family Learning Week, the Team has discovered that the school can have free football coaching sessions for families and these will start in the Spring Term. The family learning workshops have seen an increase in participation of up to 20%

The parents' room at Lansbury Lawrence is now too small to accommodate the regular meetings of the parents and the Team is preparing a bid for refurbishing the space that will include crèche provision.

The EPPa Team has engaged parents in a variety of new ways with the school. Whilst some projects directly support children's learning, others have crucially helped to break down the barriers presented by school for some parents. Parents on the Team have learned new skills associated with managing the shop, organising family learning projects and raising funds through businesses and trusts. Parents at the school in general have had opportunities to access a wider support network in the school and in the community.

Lister is a full-service school in Newham. Two of its local feeder primary schools have joined forces with Lister to form a cluster EPPa Action Team that comprises parents and professionals from the three schools and represents the highly diverse ethnic community in the area.

The Action Team organised an incredibly successful multi-cultural evening where families shared food together and pupils from all three schools presented a music and dance event. This evening was the springboard to launch interest in the Action Team and its projects. About 200 people turned out to hear about the initiative and share in the festivities.

The twenty-strong team of parents and staff are considering a range of projects suggested by parents and families in the community such as Arabic language classes, developing more summer activities for teenagers, a women's drumming group and an ambitious community celebration in summer 2006. In the few months since it was established, the combined schools' Action Team has seen improvements in the way the three schools network with one another, and parents are now at the forefront of shaping community development.

The Queen Elizabeth Action Team was established in 1999. The school is on a split site in a market town. It has thirteen feeder primary schools in the local town and surrounding villages. The Action Team has undertaken many and diverse projects ranging from communications improvement to parenting workshops. Revisions of the home/school contact book, the school calendar and transition information for parents were early projects. The split school site caused difficulties in the town for people visiting, including the emergency services, parents and new pupils. Within six months of establishing the Action Team, new signs were introduced as a result of community liaison between the school, the Action Team and the district council.

Transition in this rural setting is an issue for young Year 6 pupils and their families who are nervous about moving up to 'big school' which involves a bus journey and immersion in a new and bustling environment. The Action Team undertook several projects to ease transition. One was the so-called 'Bud-Wiser' internet buddying project. This was started to improve transition into Year 7 at QECC and involved pupils in Year 6 at a local primary school.

Lister Community School (Performing Arts College) Plaistow and Southern Road Primary Schools

"Our EPPa Action Team has helped us to join up the three schools to make the most of all our talents and skills. EPPa has helped us to build links between the primary schools and the secondary school so that parents now have a real sense of community across the cultures and across the three schools. Primary school parents and children are not so intimidated by the secondary school any more."

Parent

Queen Elizabeth Community Technology College (QECC)

"I was an active parent in my children's primary school but didn't know what to expect when they moved to secondary. The EPPa Action Team provided the opportunity to invite parents in and it helped me and other parents get involved with our school and our children's learning which is so important!"

Parent

Case Studies

Queen Elizabeth Community Technology College (QECC)

"As a new member of the school's leadership team I quickly learnt that simple yet essential improvements have been instigated and implemented as a result of the Action Team's work! Communication projects, behaviour management workshops and special events to support parents of children with special education needs were all done by the EPPa Action Team. So much of the good practice around parental involvement have had its origins with the EPPa Team."
Senior Management Team member

Crediton Learning Community Action

"Because we are about developing learning communities and not just about schools, we've been able to get hold of funding and other support from the local community to help with environmental projects that benefit not just the school but the whole area."

Action Team member

Parkside Community Technology College,

"After my accident I became registered disabled. I lacked so much confidence. I went to one of the EPPa team events and gradually got involved with the group. I found that I had so much to give and so much that was needed that I became chair when they asked me and I've gone from strength to strength. I've now just been elected as a school governor and my son is so proud of me!"

Parent

Over £6,000 was raised by the Team from grants and trusts which made it possible to organise three parenting workshops, run by professionals. These workshops attracted hundreds of people over three days and were repeated for the benefit of staff later. In addition to these workshops the local family centre contacted the EPPa team and asked if they could help with behaviour management courses for parents of very young children. Workshops were run in health and community centres in the area and feedback revealed more confident parents and better behaved children.

Staff at the college expressed an interest in having better trained volunteers to work alongside them in the school in a number of departments and the Action Team created a register of volunteers. Volunteers have been deployed in expressive arts, special needs, careers departments and the library.

The work of the Action Team at QECC illustrates how parents can lead and drive projects forward with just a little support from school staff. Many of the projects have been absorbed into the school's development plan.

The fourteen schools that make up the **Crediton Learning Community** have formed an Executive Action Team (CLCA – Crediton Learning Community Action), with representatives from head teachers, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, governors and community organisations. CLCA has adopted a community-based constitution and has initiated two major projects in the twelve months since it was established.

Healthy Eating and Lifestyles (HEAL) has involved people from schools, the Primary Care Trust, the local council, sports organisations and others. Seminars have been arranged to help schools to advance their plans, and events have been organised involving the families and communities throughout the region covered by the schools. These have included: walking bus; Healthy Schools Award; addressing issues relating to school dinners and packed lunches; daily exercise; fitness fun day; village sports day.

Living for Tomorrow, an environmental awareness project, is now under way, focusing to begin with on energy saving but longer term including water conservation and reducing and recycling waste. The aim will be to influence not only what goes on in schools (with plenty of opportunity to save money!), but also within families and the local community, including businesses. Students and pupils are also represented on the action group. Other projects planned for the future include volunteer training and arts projects. At present use is made of an Extended Schools Co-ordinator, who acts as a link between all the schools. The intention is to find funding for a co-ordinator who will provide admin support for CLCA and the project teams.

Parkside has had an EPPa Action Team since 1999 when the school had just become part of a new Education Action Zone. The continuing emphasis of the Action Team in 2006 is on making the college more community and parent/carer focused. The college was keen to engage parents with the community regeneration process to ensure that parents and carers had their say in its future development. Prior to the creation of the Action Team in 1999 there was little engagement of parents in the life of the college. Research undertaken by the Action Team showed the college that fathers and BME parents were a particular challenge.

Community organisations, parents and staff have all been actively engaged in a range of projects over the years, including newsletters, adult learning initiatives (e.g. ICT), creative arts taster sessions, days celebrating cultural diversity in the community and behaviour support workshops for parents of children who are at risk of being excluded. Projects were identified using consultations with the local community, families and the school and consequently designed to meet local need.

The Action Team sought to address a problem of racial tensions in the area by organising a World-Wide-Wednesday celebration of cultural diversity where pupils, staff and families in the area could share and participate in workshop activities centred on the performing arts.

Case Studies

Projects undertaken by the team have not required substantial amounts of funding because the Team tapped into local resources and providers who gave services free at the point of delivery to parents and carers. These services included courses on ICT and 'Teen Tactics' which enabled parents and carers to develop strategies for coping with difficult or challenging behaviour at home. The behaviour management project reached more people than anticipated and more courses are planned.

As a result of the Action Team projects, better lines of communication have opened up between the college and parents. The college is now seen by parents as a more friendly place through projects like the 'Meet the Head' sessions. Parents who undertake learning for themselves are better able to support their own children and provide better role models. Some 'hard-to-reach' parents who joined family learning classes went on to become Action Team members and then school governors. There is now a parents' room at the college and the Team is well-placed to identify and meet the needs of parents for training, advice, etc.

New funding has been secured to begin a new phase of work to reach out to the BME community. This will include interpretation and translation costs as well as capacity-building training for the team members and funding for an EPPa coordinator for a second year.

Highfield is in an area of urban deprivation in Plymouth. The Action Team was established in 1999 and at that time had a singular focus: the aim was to renovate spare school space to create a learning facility for the community. Within four years, the Team had raised over £25,000 through local and national grants and trusts in order to convert three old classrooms and some cupboards into what has become a community resource with a fully functional nursery (with facilities for babies), a huge learning space with 10 computer terminals, a separate kitchen, a quiet area and a bathroom with shower and changing facilities for disabled people. The Team recruited support in kind as well as money and now the space is used by the school, the community and families for courses as diverse as ICT, food hygiene, basic car maintenance, first-aid and 'whiz-art'. It is also used as a meeting room while the local church is being refurbished. The pupils at the school, as part of their citizenship, serve lunches to elderly local residents at a lunch club held by the Action Team volunteers in the room.

Families who were timid about coming into the school have been encouraged to step over the threshold into the community rooms, which are, in effect, a 'halfway house' to the school proper. Events targeted at familiarising parents with the building have included 'Breakfast with Beckham' during the 2002 football world cup. These early morning events attracted over 60 families, including many fathers, which was most unusual. The nursery facility was much-needed in this area as is the breakfast club that runs every day for pupils at no charge. The club has improved concentration and has socialised pupils according to staff.

Highfield's Action Team has attracted national interest and positive publicity for the school. It has been featured in the TES, the National College for School Leadership's publications, DfES Extended Schools document and the work of the Action Team has been cited as an example of good practice on a DfES video that promotes parental involvement. There is no doubt that without the efforts of the Action Team at Highfield, none of these projects would have been possible or even considered by school staff. The Action Team has brought together resources from the community and the school to help raise standards and increase social capital in the local community. On many fronts this is a huge success story. Support from the head teacher and school staff has been significant and illustrates what is possible when parents and staff work together to achieve joint goals.

Linking and networking EPPa Teams nationwide

EPPa Action Teams are part of a growing network that uses electronic and more traditional means of contact. There is a website that offers support and advice as well as a members area for sharing and disseminating good practice. To support schools at a local level, local authority children's service staff can undertake EPPa Mentor training. For more information about the two-day EPPa Mentor training programme visit the Mosaic Educational website (www.mosaic-ed.com).

Highfield Primary School

"As a new head teacher coming into a school, finding an established EPPa Action Team was an unbelievable gift! The EPPa approach has provided me with a structure to embrace important new government agendas, especially the five outcomes for Every Child Matters. We can't treat parental and community involvement as a 'bolt-on' any longer. Integrating new agendas into the school management plan has been so much easier using the EPPa strategy."

Head teacher

"Parents open up to us more than they might to teachers. I ran an ICT computer course for families and I soon discovered that lots of parents had writing and reading difficulties. Because I was a parent and they trusted me, I was able to tactfully and quietly ask if we could help them and they were so pleased to be able to get some help at last!"

Parent



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EPPa Toolkit

The toolkit consists of a sturdy box (in which to keep all documentation), a manual and a CD which contains a wealth of materials to ensure that EPPa can be adopted and put into practice as quickly and easily as possible.

£39.95 including postage



CD Contents include:

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