Reading Connects
family involvement toolkit

www.readingconnects.org.uk
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Key
This toolkit caters for both the primary and secondary
sectors. Material only suited to the primary or the
secondary sector is indicated by the appropriate icons.

Primary
Suitable for primary schools

Secondary
Suitable for secondary schools

Throughout, the term parents includes carers.
There is strong research evidence showing the positive difference it makes when parents and family members get involved in a child’s education. Parental involvement in encouraging reading is key. Children whose families read for pleasure are more likely to take it for granted that reading is a worthwhile activity. For more information visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/parentalinvolvement.doc.

Reading Connects has developed this toolkit to support schools in reaching out to all family members to help them encourage children to enjoy reading in all its forms. On 12 July 2006, Reading Connects brought together a wide range of experts in engaging parents and other family members with their children’s reading for a café-style discussion conference to provide ideas for this toolkit. These experts, from primary and secondary schools, local authorities and voluntary organisations, all share a belief in the power of reading to transform lives and the power of schools to support families in encouraging reading in the home. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of that day and to this toolkit. In particular, we would like to thank Anita Wright, headteacher at Woodmansterne Primary School in Lambeth, for her support and advice.

A wide range of tried and tested practical ideas emerged from the discussion alongside some key underpinning principles, which are listed on the opposite page. It is hoped that schools will find this toolkit useful in helping them to reach out effectively to all their families, ensuring that fathers are involved as well as mothers. The positive effect that a father’s involvement can have on a child’s learning is well documented. So it is most worrying that the participation rate of fathers and other male carers in family literacy initiatives is estimated to be only five per cent. This is not because organisers did not want fathers to attend but because they did not attract fathers. In writing this toolkit, we have kept this in mind and there is a specific section on reaching out to dads.

It is hoped that all schools will not only develop the ideas in this toolkit but will also join the Reading Connects network (www.readingconnects.org.uk). This enables schools to share what works with each other, as well as the barriers they have encountered and how they have overcome them.

This toolkit was first published in December 2006 as part of the Family Reading Campaign (www.familyreading.org.uk). Following the work of Parents as Partners in Early Learning this latest edition is called the family involvement toolkit and not the family engagement toolkit. This reflects our focus to support schools in effectively engaging, and also involving their families in reading activity.

Together we can help every home become a reading home and every child a reader.
Family involvement

Key underpinning principles

1. Work in partnership with families
   Parents and wider family members are empowered by being given responsibility to develop a project. Involve them in the planning so that they see themselves as partners in the approach. Use enthusiastic parents and wider family members to ensure that family-friendly language is used and to involve other families.

2. Integrate involving families with reading into the School Improvement Plan
   Engage with parents and the wider family to support reading as part of the whole-school ethos, involving all staff, with strong support from senior management. Promoting reading needs to be integrated into as many family projects as possible, not just those with a reading focus.

3. Target your approaches to suit a range of family members and different types of families
   Planning needs to be flexible, recognising that a variety of approaches will be needed. It is important to acknowledge that there are many different types of families and that it is harder to attract fathers to school-related events than mothers. The children can be used to hook the mums while the mums can be used to hook the dads. The approach should include targeting grandparents and siblings to help support children’s reading.

4. Link enjoyment of reading with achievement
   Simple slogans like “Reading opens the door to achievement” can be used to help families see the importance of becoming involved. The importance of parents reading themselves needs to be stressed.

5. Be inclusive in your approach
   The school needs to value the reading and literacy that is a part of different families’ cultures and involve the local community in its approach.

6. Be aware of parental self-perception
   If parents do not believe that they can have an influence over their child’s education and how well they perform, they are unlikely to get involved. This is particularly acute where parents’ basic skills are weak. Work with families to show how easy it is to offer support to children and how much of a difference they can make.
Recognising family involvement with reading as a priority

Parents are a child’s first educator and have the greatest influence on a child’s educational development. This important fact is borne out by a wide range of research that can be summed up by the following conclusion: “Parental involvement in their child’s reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy.” (Bus, van Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini, 1995).

Evidence shows that when family members talk and sing to children, share books and take them to the library, they help children to develop important early literacy skills. These activities have more effect on a child’s educational outcomes than parents’ social class and education. The power of reading to overcome social disadvantage is well documented: “Being more enthusiastic about reading and a frequent reader was more of an advantage, on its own, than having well-educated parents in good jobs.” (Reading for Change, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2002).

Moreover, neuroscience shows that learning to read and write substantially changes the architecture of the brain, making children brighter and more constructive.

The significance of such research evidence underpins the Government’s Children’s Plan (2008) and is reflected in Government policy, which recognises the centrality of the family and the importance of good home-school links if children are to maximise their potential. At heart, this is a standards issue: “Parents and carers are a crucial influence on what their children experience and achieve. The evidence of the importance of parental impact is building and the shape and structure of families and the social context in which they live is evolving rapidly. Government needs to consider carefully its role in enabling all parents to play a full and positive part in their children’s learning and development.” (Every Parent Matters, DfES, 2007)

The current climate of Every Child Matters – incorporating extended schools and children’s centres – is a powerful strategic driver that will help gain headteacher support. Engaging families with reading clearly sits within the ‘Parenting Support’ core offer of the Extended Schools agenda. All schools will be expected to provide access to extended services by 2010 and this includes support for parents to help with their child’s learning. For more information, visit www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools.

Moreover, the Government is working in partnership with local areas to ensure that: “All schools actively seek to engage parents in children’s and young people’s education, helping parents to understand what they can do at home to work with the school.” For more information, visit www.everychildmatters.gov.uk.

This agenda is also related to the ‘Views of parents and carers’ section of the Ofsted framework. The approaches proposed in this toolkit fit well with the Ofsted requirement to explain how you collect parental views and how you can show that they have influenced your practice and contributed to overall effectiveness.

How to engage families

Therefore, supporting families in encouraging their children to read should be high on school agendas. But what school managers need is not reminders about engaging families, but advice and support on how to achieve this. Later sections of this toolkit focus on providing that advice, while the opposite page covers the need for supportive local structures.
Providing a supportive structure
National agencies, as well as local authorities and organisations concerned with family literacy, need to work in effective partnerships to support schools. It is hoped that local planning will include strategic support for family involvement, with a focus on reading, from school improvement officers, the Primary and Secondary National Strategies, their consultants, and Ofsted.

You may wish to encourage your local authority to:

- Use the National Year of Reading local coordinator to help schools involve families and the local community and retain a local coordinator to sustain the impact of the year. Suggest they identify good practice across the authority and share expertise when engaging and involving families.
- Raise awareness of your home-school partnership projects with local information services, so that they can signpost families who are not already engaged via normal school communication channels.
- Provide a directory of local organisations and resources to support family involvement with reading and encourage clusters of schools to share resources and ideas. This could include conferences and family literacy celebration days, involving the voluntary sector as well as schools, to showcase good practice and successes and debate the best way forward. This could be a great way of promoting enthusiasm for this approach and raising awareness at a strategic level.
- Encourage all schools in the authority to feed good practice into the Reading Connects website so that valuable experiences can be shared. All case studies can be sent to readingconnects@literacytrust.org.uk.
- Encourage the library service to work with local schools to facilitate families visiting libraries. This will help to raise the families’ awareness of the support that is available.
- Encourage schools, where family involvement with reading is a priority, to provide opportunities for other local schools to visit.
- Focus on the families whose children have behaviour problems to provide them with targeted family learning support in partnership with other agencies. Such support may be flexible – it could be parents only (perhaps mum’s only or dad’s only) as well as parents and children working together.

Integrating family involvement with reading into school planning
If family involvement with a focus on reading is to be a whole-school priority, it needs to be in the school’s improvement planning, included within the self-evaluation form and supported by training (see page 12). The approach can be developed via the school’s programme of staff development, discussions and monitoring. This all requires governor support and input.

“For children of primary school age, parental involvement – particularly in the form of good parenting in the home – has the biggest impact on their achievement and adjustment. The effect is more significant than the school itself. Parents continue to have a significant impact through secondary school, shown in staying on rates and educational aspirations… It therefore makes sense to embed your parenting support offer within your School Improvement Plan, in recognition of the contribution it can make to raising achievement.”

(Know How booklet: Parenting Support, DfES, 2006).

DCSF resources


A little reading goes a long way: www.dfes.gov.uk/read.

A home-school reading partnership at Chineham Park

Case study

Gwen Clifford, headteacher at Chineham Park Primary School in Basingstoke, explains how focusing on family engagement and reading is impacting on pupil achievement and behaviour.

We believe that helping parents to become more confident in how to support their child’s learning, particularly with relation to reading skills and language development, should be a whole-school priority, from senior management level through to the support staff. It is vital to clearly identify for parents the role that they can play to support their children at home.

One key activity which forms part of this approach at Chineham Park, and which helps us to meet the Extended Schools agenda criteria, is the breakfast club we run. We offer early morning group reading sessions for our children and parents, as well as breakfast itself. This ensures that the children start their school day in the right frame of mind and engage more naturally in reading and other activities.

Another important element is the role of the school library. This essential resource is an integral part of our vision and is embedded into the school’s family learning programme. It is located in the school’s entrance, therefore raising its profile among the children, parents and other visitors. Parent helpers are also trained to manage the library system and they offer library sessions to all of our classes in school. By actively engaging parents in this process, they have contributed to its overall effectiveness and reinforced the messages that we are sending out to parents and children to promote reading for pleasure.

Whether it is through the school library, during breakfast club sessions, book fairs or our children’s book week, the benefits of this approach are evident. Results have shown that by placing the home-school reading partnership high on the school’s agenda, we have raised levels of pupil achievement. Real rays of hope have emerged, especially at key stage 1. The future of reading looks bright for all of our children here at Chineham Park.
Where are we now and what’s the best way forward?

Bring together a group of enthusiasts
If you are interested in involving parents and family members with reading, possibly the most important first step is to create a small working party, full of can-do people who really want to take the idea forward. Avoid rounding up all the people whose job titles suggest they should be there. If they are not genuinely enthusiastic about the idea, everyone’s energy will soon be sapped and meeting time will be spent trying to convince the unconverted that the purpose of the meeting is a good idea in the first place. Work with enthusiasts to begin with and, once you have a good momentum going, you can try to convert the unenthused. Remember to select a meeting time and place that suits the staff and parents in the group, which doesn’t necessarily have to be on school premises.

Useful participants (small schools will probably want a much smaller group)
• A member of senior management who has the ear of the headteacher.
• Two parents – preferably a mum and a dad (one of whom may be a parent governor).
• At least one member of support staff (hopefully including the school librarian).
• At least one member of teaching staff (hopefully including the literacy coordinator/head of English).

The results could form the basis of a focus group discussion. If you want to find out what the children think about reading and their perception of their parents as readers, download the National Literacy Trust reading survey from www.readingconnects.org.uk/questionnaire.doc, or you may wish to put encouraging reading on the agenda of the school council.

You might also want to use the ‘Where are we now?’ grid on page 10 to help brainstorm how advanced you think your school is at involving families with reading. Remember to listen to the views of others, especially the families, and encourage dissenting viewpoints. It’s no good declaring your school to have a highly supportive culture for engaging families when the families themselves are quietly sitting there thinking that they don’t agree. To fill in the grid, list your key evidence to show how you know that you are at the stage of development you have selected.

Gather information
It is always useful to have good information on which to base your planning. Many schools have found that an effective way of establishing what families think about an issue like supporting reading is to set up a focus group of representative family members and to use a questionnaire to find out their views. You can download the families and reading questionnaire from www.readingconnects.org.uk/familyquestions.doc.

Download a copy of this toolkit
To enable every member of the group to support your discussions, visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/readingconnects/familytoolkit.html for a downloadable version of this toolkit.

www.readingconnects.org.uk
## Where are we now?

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<td>Staff training in place to support engaging with families</td>
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<td>School involves families in developing a reading culture</td>
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<td>School targets approaches to suit a range of family members, including fathers</td>
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<td>School has space where families feel welcome</td>
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<td>School makes special provision to meet needs of families for whom English is an additional language (EAL)</td>
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<td>Maintaining family involvement with reading is part of the primary-secondary transfer process</td>
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Barriers to progress

Once you have gathered information about where you are now, it is worth considering what barriers are holding you back. You might want to work in pairs initially and see if different pairs come to the same conclusions.

See if you can agree on the key barriers and then consider what the key levers for progress are. You may want to consider if there are any existing successful events that you could piggy-back on to make this initiative successful.

Once you’ve had this discussion, hopefully some possible solutions to the barriers will emerge to provide ways forward. Page 33 contains suggested solutions to some common barriers faced by families.

Key barriers to progress

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Key levers for progress

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You are now in a good position to decide on your first action points. Look back at the key principles on page 5 when creating your plan. Remember, don’t be too ambitious to begin with. It’s better to start small and build on your successes using top-down and bottom-up approaches, rather than create a grand plan that is over-ambitious and leads to demoralisation. And don’t give up on the families who are not engaged straight away – persevering will persuade them to participate eventually.

Action points

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The key to successful family involvement is working in partnership with the families themselves. It is important that they do not feel as if they are being taught a lesson in a classroom. For schools to work effectively in partnership with families, they should consider providing open-ended situations that are more likely to empower participants. Don’t go in with a ‘set-lesson-plan’ approach or you will be in danger of losing both spontaneity and the capacity to listen to and consider the families’ perspectives.

Some adults find schools threatening; perhaps they had negative experiences of school themselves or they only seem to hear from the school when their child is in trouble. Each side can perceive the other to be critical and hence unapproachable. Schools should consider finding ways to help their staff and pupils’ families see that they share common goals. One way of moving forward is to have a system in place that means that the families get contacted with good news and not just bad. This helps break the negative associations with school. It is also important to remember that this is a two-way learning process: schools are attempting to support families and in the process can learn a lot about how to build effective partnerships with families.

Training for staff
Training for teachers and support staff in how to present materials to families and learning to understand families’ perspectives is key. Schools may want to consider integrating families’ needs into their school training programme. They may also want to consider providing basic skills awareness training for key staff working with family involvement.

The following organisations provide training for teachers and teaching assistants in involving families:

- ContinYou: www.continyou.org.uk
- Centre for Literacy in Primary Education: www.clpe.co.uk
- Language and Literacy Unit+: www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus
- National Family Learning Network: www.familylearningnetwork.com
- Fatherhood Institute: www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

Selecting appropriate space and creating the right atmosphere
New building programmes provide opportunities and funding to create a community space. Whatever your school’s circumstances, it is important to make the most of what you have. When deciding where to hold a family involvement event, it is important to think about creating a special space and atmosphere. Involve families in the planning and listen to their advice. Aim for a friendly and informal workshop space – avoid the hall if at all possible. Think about how staff might dress to help to put parents at ease, use music to make the space welcoming and, most importantly, provide refreshments. Consider using learning mentors, teaching assistants, parents or the children to host or present at events.

There are many other ways to make your school more family friendly
- Encourage parents and wider family members to use the school library or, if you are lucky enough, the ‘Parents’ Room’. Ensure these areas are clearly signposted and welcoming environments in which parents will feel comfortable spending time. If you are developing a dedicated family learning area, try to position it as near to the school foyer as possible, so that families don’t have to go too far before reaching their space.
In each of these areas, display a range of materials detailing reading resources for families, links with the local community and what the school is doing to promote a whole-school reading culture. See page 18 for ideas on how to encourage parents to use the school library.

Make the foyer as welcoming as possible for families and visitors. To raise the profile of reading, display newspapers and magazines in the waiting area as well as the Reading Connects certificate.

Download the Family Reading Campaign posters featuring top tips and ideas to get families reading. The 14 designs have editable text areas so you can adapt them to suit your parents’ needs. Visit www.familyreading.org.uk.

Display posters of popular role models reading around school. These can have an impact on adults as well as children. You can download free posters at www.literacytrust.org.uk/campaign/posters.html.

Enlist the help of enthusiastic family members to produce family pages for the school website or newsletter.

Involving all staff
Schools often employ as many non-teaching staff as they do teachers. Moreover, many non-teaching staff and governors are local parents. If schools are to achieve an effective whole-school reading ethos that supports family involvement, it is essential to get non-teaching staff and governors on board.

Training for parents and other family members
Many schools involve parents or other family members as reading buddies or to help out in the library. This requires training to maximise the success of the approach. Linking up with organisations like Volunteer Reading Help (www.vrh.org.uk) or Reading Matters (www.readingmatters.org.uk) is a great way of providing this training. These organisations also follow DCSF guidelines on police checking for adults who are likely to be working for significant amounts of time on their own with a child.

Using the internet
Many schools use ICT as a hook to get family members into school. In addition, some schools use their websites to create a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to support families. VLEs are learning platforms where teachers can upload activities, lessons and resources which families can access from home. These websites can be adapted to help support reading in the home, with the opportunity to swap top tips about good reads, as well as tips on reading with children and young people.

Parent Support Advisers (PSAs)
Led by the DCSF, the two year PSA pilot is providing 717 PSAs to support 1,167 schools across 20 local authorities. The pilot runs until August 2008. PSAs provide important support to parents in a school setting and have developed a wide range of practice and initiatives. The pilot is informing thinking about how schools might deliver this aspect of the extended schools offer, and develop models of good practice. A particular focus will be to increase the number of parents involved in their child’s education, both at school and home.

Schools that are not part of the pilot might wish to create a senior management post with community responsibility. Schools are in an excellent position to signpost families to additional support, whether it be for helping parents cope with disruptive children or to improve their own literacy skills. The development of extended schools offers considerable scope for multi-agency work that could help engage families with reading.

For secondary schools, heads of year are in a key position to help develop reading in the home because of their close links with parents.
Case study

Managing a family learning project

Jan Lefley, community education manager at Romsey Community School in Hampshire, explains how the school managed its resources to run a successful ‘build your own computer’ course.

The aim of the course was to provide children and their families with the opportunity to build a computer together during sessions run by the school. The long-term aim was not only to construct a physical object, but to encourage the families to read and research on the internet together in a relaxed environment at home.

The success of the project can be attributed to the management of the school’s resources, including staff training, the use of space and the partnerships formed with the wider community.

I manage the school’s community department and also sit on the Senior Leadership Team at the school. Senior management support has made it easier to initiate new projects and build relationships with the school staff. The ‘build your own computer’ course was developed using these partnerships within school and involved a number of steps to set up the project.

Initially, it was important to undertake a skills audit of the staff team and identify a member of staff to deliver the course. This person was given training in how to teach adults, as well as assistance with session plans, the outcomes of which were cross-referenced with the Adult Core Curriculum.

After funding was raised from Adult Education at Hampshire County Council, the school could then source a supplier of materials using the internet, as this kept costs down.

The involvement of the IT department and their ‘access to IT audit’ allowed the school to target particular pupils and their parents. Letters were written to families asking them to participate, as well as for a minimal contribution to build the computer.

It was essential to find an appropriate space to run the course. The learning resource area was chosen as it had large tables for families to work on and a connecting room with computers for internet research.

Once these vital elements were in place, the course could run and families attended an initial induction session, which included health and safety training.

Feedback from the course was very positive as it gave families the opportunity to spend time together and learn a new skill. They found the communication and listening activities useful and they could see how to transfer this into other aspects of their lives. Some of the parents also moved onto Skills for Life courses to improve their skills, so that they could continue to help their children.
Reaching out to families

Nearly all parents will support a school promotion if they think that it will have a direct impact on their child’s learning or academic achievement. It is important not to underestimate the power of hard-hitting facts. Embed these messages at all levels when promoting reading. A phrase such as “encouraging your child to read at home will help them achieve more at school” is a concrete piece of information with a clear message that families will respond to.

However, there is no one model that can be adopted when it comes to planning your communication strategy. A range of factors will influence how schools reach out to families, such as the time of year or the social and economic circumstances of the community. These should determine the format, terminology, style and tone of the communication materials used to engage families and will ultimately influence whether families are convinced enough to go away and ‘do’.

Communication matters
To reinforce the reading message, information must be disseminated regularly. Brainstorm all the possible opportunities on the school calendar that would gain maximum exposure and impact.

- Year 7 induction sessions, Year 9 options interviews and parents’ evenings are key opportunities during which parents are likely to be receptive to hearing ways in which they can improve their child’s academic achievement.
- Talking to families during school trips is a good opportunity to catch the enthusiasts who may be interested in taking on the role of family reading ambassador. It is important to talk about reading to families in informal circumstances, so that they associate its importance with a child’s overall well-being, not just with how it will help them in the classroom. Sports days and summer fairs are other opportunities to consider.
- Make sure that the language needs of EAL families are also considered on these occasions. Refer to pages 38 to 40 for further information.

As well as considering when to transmit your messages, it is important to reflect upon how you communicate. Bear in mind that some families may be more responsive to modern communication methods, while others, where for example a grandparent is the main carer, may prefer a more personal approach.

The age of the children will also have a considerable influence on the methods employed when reaching out to families. Traditionally, secondary schools use more formal means to communicate to parents who do not visit the school as they might have done when their child was younger. The following methods are for the most part informal and can be adopted by primary and secondary schools.

- In primary schools, the start and end of the school day are prime opportunities to approach parents, probably mums, in a non-threatening social situation. These are also periods when parents often gather in clusters with like-minded parent friends. Approaching these groups, and talking to them about reading in the home may be a way of encouraging further conversations at other times.
- Telephone calls or visits to targeted pupils’ homes are very effective ways of communicating with families. This personal touch will allow schools to build relationships and help families to overcome the barriers that are preventing them from getting more involved in school.
Getting the terminology, style and tone right in correspondence to families is essential. As mentioned earlier, some parents will be used to the school making contact for negative reasons related to their child. Therefore, communication related to your reading promotion should be as positive, motivating and friendly as possible.

- Avoid using formal educational jargon. If families are confused by the language being used, they may presume that they are incapable of helping their child.
- Communicate hard-hitting facts about the benefits of reading and friendly advice on how they can help. Families may respond negatively if they feel they are being told what to do. To obtain facts about parents and reading, schools may like to use the findings of the Reading Connects research, which looked at children’s and young people’s reading habits and preferences. You can read the results at www.literacytrust.org.uk/readingconnects/researchRCsurvey.html.
- Schools stand a greater chance of gaining support from families if they take the focus away from what parents may not be doing and concentrate more on what parents can do. This will avoid parents feeling as if their parenting skills are being challenged. For example, try the unthreatening message, “Are you looking for good bedtime storybooks? Try Jacqueline Wilson’s Great Books to Read Aloud for inspiration.”
- Making sure it is the right people communicating with families is as important as the manner in which they do so. Members of your working party can coordinate this.

Finally, when reaching out to families, give them the opportunity to respond to advice and share their opinions and experiences. By creating a two-way communication flow, schools can learn which approaches have worked best, and build closer relationships with families.

- Make sure that teachers’ email addresses are accessible where this mode of communication is used in school.
- Ensure that the school’s family reading working party is accessible and that families know how to contact the group.
- Allow family members to email a specific email address for reading-related enquiries.
- Discussion forums (accessible via the school website) are an opportunity for families to share their views and ask questions anonymously. Encourage a staff and senior management presence on the forums.

- A letter accompanied by a reading booklet is a very practical way of keeping families abreast of your family reading promotion. Make it as colourful as possible so that it stands out when pinned up on the kitchen noticeboard. If letters have a habit of not reaching parents, post hand-addressed letters home by mail or send out a text alert message to parents that day, letting them know that their child will be bringing a letter home. Alternatively, sending postcards instead of letters is a less formal and more friendly way of reaching out to families.
- Many parents work in offices and read and respond to emails as part of their daily routine. Many parents use computers in the evening. This is an inexpensive, interactive method of reaching out to families. The school website is also a good way to keep in touch with school news. Make the website as visual and entertaining as possible to encourage families to use it regularly. Set up an email or text alert system to notify families when there are new reading items. However, be aware that although 61 per cent of homes have internet access, the parents you most want to contact are probably the ones least likely to have access.
- Using family role models is a very effective way of transmitting your reading messages. This might be via the PTA, the school’s family ambassadors or members of staff who families have contact with.
- Using the power that children have over their parents is an important tool when reaching out to families. If a child continuously requests a bedtime story or asks a parent to take them to the library to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge, parents are likely to respond positively. A successful reading promotion in school will be influential at home.
- Remember to ask families how they would prefer to be contacted. Offer them all or some of these choices to make sure that no one can slip through the net.

www.readingconnects.org.uk
‘Internet rangers’ at Teyfant Community School

Tania Case, parent engagement worker at Teyfant Community School in Bristol, explains how an ‘internet rangers’ session provided a meaningful way to involve families in their child’s education, as well as an opportunity to encourage families to search and read internet sites together.

It was agreed that a taster session, during which the children taught their family members to use the internet, would be an effective way to engage families. During the planning of this event, key factors such as the age and ability of the children, as well as identifying families who would most benefit from the activity, were all paramount to the success of the project. It was also essential to consider the welcome that the families received and how to sustain support and enthusiasm for the project in school.

It was felt that the most effective way to reach out to families was to ask the Year 4 pupils to invite a family member themselves. The children put a lot of effort into personalising the invitation that went home. This method of communication proved hugely successful as the response was staggering, with requests for places far outnumbering the spaces available.

The session was a real achievement for everybody involved. The children’s confidence increased throughout the session and it was clear that they felt a real sense of pride, knowing that they were sharing an important skill with their family. The feedback from the adults was also very positive. One grandparent said:

“It was the first time that I had switched on a computer – I had real fun!”

At the end of the session, the children presented the adults with a copy of a photo that had been taken during the session and a certificate.

In light of its success, the framework from this session was later used in a second workshop. This time we involved Year 5 pupils and their families. We hope there will be many more opportunities for the school to engage its families throughout the year.
Practical ideas

Reaching out to families to help support reading can be a sizeable barrier, but once this has been overcome and home-school relationships established, maintaining family involvement is the next challenge. The case studies in this section demonstrate that if schools motivate and inspire families with resources to use at home, as well as organising events and activities in school, they will feel more enthused and confident to read themselves and encourage their children to do so too. An essential ingredient of any activity must be to emphasise the validity of a range of reading materials, including non-fiction books, magazines and newspapers, as well as fiction books.

This section features a range of simple tried and tested practical ideas that can be adapted to suit the needs of your school and families.

Getting involved in school life

Making families aware of the school’s reading promotion and involving them, increases their understanding of the important role that reading can play in a child’s life, as well as making them feel more comfortable in the school environment.

Parents in the library

Reserve an area in the library for parents and wider family members and have appropriate display materials and a diverse range of reading materials, including newspapers, fiction and non-fiction titles. Include the Quick Reads books in your parent section. These are a series of short, fast-paced books by popular authors designed to attract the emergent or infrequent reader. Visit www.quickreads.org.uk. Also visit www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk for information on books suitable for reluctant adult readers.

Enlist the help of a group of enthusiastic parents to run an adult section and encourage other parents to borrow books from the school library. Getting parents involved will give them a sense of ownership, and volunteering to work in the library is a lot less threatening than working in the classroom. Encourage parent volunteers to spread the word and their parent friends will be enthused to borrow books from the school library as well.

Parents in lessons

Invite parents and wider family members to come into school to take part in reading activities in class, although be aware that this will probably suit mums more than dads. For braver parents, this might involve talking to pupils about how reading has helped them progress in their lives. Alternatively, parents could buddy up with pupils during group reading sessions (see page 13). Bear in mind that some secondary school pupils may be averse to the idea of their parents taking part in their life at school.
‘Dads and Lads, Mums and Sons’ reading club

Beverley Taylor, learning resource centre manager at Reading School in Berkshire, recounts how a ‘Dads and Lads, Mums and Sons’ reading club has motivated pupils at this all-boys school to read more.

‘Dads and Lads, Mums and Sons’ was set up to encourage our boys to widen their choice of reading materials. Getting the parents on board was an essential element of the project, as encouraging reading at home is the key to sustaining pupils’ interest in the books and the scheme.

The club is open to students in any year and the idea is that the pupil and their parent agree to read six books a year together. They decide on a title, read the book and then email a joint book review to the school. Taking the time to write the review together gives families the opportunity to discuss their opinions on the chosen title, even though they may be reading the book at different times.

Initial family recruitment was made via a letter home, which emphasised the importance of role models, particularly male role models, to encourage boys to read for pleasure. It was also very important to stress in this letter that families had the freedom to choose titles and materials that they felt comfortable with.

The club has been a great success, with 68 families taking part last year, many of whom are keen to take part again. To raise the profile of the great work that we received, we made a display of every book review, together with illustrations of the book cover. We also created a new section of the library with recommended reads and a booklet of the reviews. The next step is to hold an event for all those who took part to discuss their chosen books.

The families’ feedback is testament to the achievements of the project:

“I was pleasantly surprised by the range of titles and the quality of writing available to young teenage boys.”

The scheme’s success is also demonstrated by the 100 per cent increase in requests for new titles, compared to the previous year, a number which will certainly continue to rise.

“...This is a really good way for my son and his father, who doesn’t live with him, to take part in a joint project and to share something.”
School events

Use organised school events, where families have already been invited to come in, as opportunities to integrate messages promoting reading for pleasure.

Celebratory events

Promote reading achievement at celebratory events, especially those to which families are invited. Present children who have completed a reading challenge or become Reading Champions with a certificate (visit www.readingchampions.org.uk).

Sports day and summer fairs

Set up a stall with relevant reading materials at events to which families are invited. If your school holds a sports day, display sporting magazines and memorabilia for families to borrow or buy. During a summer fair, display reading for pleasure top tips on a washing line around your stall and hold a raffle for families to win book tokens.

Parents’ evenings

At parents’ evenings, encourage teachers to direct parents towards a reading for pleasure stall. Make a feature of everything the school is doing to encourage pupils to read, with suggestions for how families can promote the same messages at home.

Ambassador sessions

Ask a parent who can inspire and relate to other parents to take on the role of family reading ambassador. Ask your ambassador to come in during a school event and to talk to families about the importance of reading in the home.

National Year of Reading (NYR) events

If you are running activities for the NYR, try to include pupils’ families. Visit www.yearofreading.org.uk.

Reading events

Incorporate a family element to national reading events and other reading events that are held at school.

National Children’s Book Week

During National Children’s Book Week, organise a tea party themed around a popular children’s book about food - for example, *Mrs Wobble the Waitress*. Encourage children and adults to read the book before the event and invite families to attend the party. Visit www.booktrust.org.uk.

National Storytelling Week

Invite professional storytellers to school during National Storytelling Week and hold a workshop for families to encourage them to tell stories to their children or a workshop for pupils to encourage them to tell stories to their younger siblings (see page 25 for more on storytelling). Visit www.sfs.org.uk.

World Book Day

On World Book Day, organise a trip for families to go to their local bookshop to redeem their WBD vouchers. Visit www.worldbookday.com.

Themed evenings

During parents’ evenings, survey families about what they do in their free time. Use this information to hold a series of themed evenings that tap into families’ interests. These evenings are opportunities to build relationships with families and a foundation for future events that encourage reading in the home specifically.

‘Bring your parents to school’ day

As a way of breaking down the barriers, hold a ‘bring your parents to school’ day. During the day, hold a ‘show and tell’ session and invite parents to bring in a personal object and describe what it is. Tap into parents’ cultural knowledge and encourage them to share this with others. Children could take pictures of the objects and make a book of all the ‘show and tells’ following the day.

Visits from authors/poets

Use comedy as a vehicle to make families feel more relaxed in school. Invite authors/poets who are renowned for their humour to do a performance. Use their visits to change the image of reading in school and how families might perceive reading at home.
With the support of Birmingham Family Learning Service, Four Dwellings High School was the first secondary school in Birmingham to offer family literacy and numeracy programmes. By encouraging families to read through drama and social opportunities, the school is endeavouring to break the cycle of underachievement. Christine Smith, family learning coordinator, describes a basic skills project that encourages pupils and their families to engage with books.

Year 9 pupils were referred to me by teachers and I invited their parents in for an informal coffee morning, during which the benefits of the 10-week programme were explained. Once recruited, the families spent two hours in a joint session each week, as well as students spending four hours with a teacher and adults spending four hours with an adult tutor.

To engage the families with reading, the initial choice of book was of utmost importance. Refugee Boy by Benjamin Zephaniah was a popular choice, as this author was born in Birmingham and still has strong links with the West Midlands. We read the book aloud together during the sessions. Initially some parents were reluctant to read in front of other families, so they started off just by listening or by reading one sentence/paragraph to increase their confidence. The students were great in encouraging their own parents to take a turn in reading.

To keep families motivated, we needed to make sure the reading message we were promoting was delivered and reinforced in a variety of ways. Refugee Boy raised an awareness of the lives of refugees and a visit to the theatre to see a play about similar issues left the families keen to work together to explore this area in more depth. We researched the topic using a variety of materials, including local and national newspapers, the internet, poetry and magazine articles. In addition, links were made with another secondary school from a different part of the country as a way of encouraging the families to share experiences with a variety of families and to foster a caring atmosphere in the classroom and beyond. The work the group produced was of a very high standard, and families were encouraged to read each other’s work and offer suggestions for improvement.

As a result of the sessions, students and adults developed the confidence to read aloud, to use ICT skills for research purposes and to start a journey on which they learned to appreciate literature and other reading materials. However, the impact of the project can really be measured when considering the families’ enthusiasm during and after the sessions. We were delighted that many of those involved were keen to repeat the experience, borrow other books and to continue to share what they had learnt with their children.

“With continued collaboration between Four Dwellings and the wider community, Family Learning intends to further expand the learning and social opportunities for all in the next few years.”

Find out more at www.fourdwellings.bham.sch.uk
Demystify the jargon
Hold sessions for families to help clarify the role they can play in encouraging children to read. Talk to them about the books that pupils will be reading at school that year. Give them top tips for starting discussions about these books at home. For families of primary school children, explain phonics and the school’s reading programmes in simple terms to prevent them from being intimidated by all the technical jargon surrounding this area.

Trips for families
Organise a trip for families to visit their local museum or the public library. Use the coach journey as a time for staff to get to know the families. Give them workbooks/quizzes to fill out during the visit. Alternatively, plan the trip exclusively for parents and visit the public library. During the visit, encourage parents to join the library and inform them about all the services and different activities that take place there.

CASE STUDY

Book Café success in encouraging reluctant readers
At Ellis Guilford School and Sports College in Nottingham, a Book Café has successfully enthused students to read more in their own time. Katherine Davison, learning resource centre manager, explains how involving parents has helped the project to succeed.

The Book Café was set up to encourage reluctant readers in Year 7 to engage in reading, using the motivational power of fun reading-related activities. A relaxed, welcoming environment was important to raise the profile of the club, using refreshments to encourage participation.

The pilot of this initiative was a success, with students’ reading ages increasing by up to three years. Students have developed an interest in reading for pleasure through sharing their experiences with others and therefore engaging in books that they would not normally have accessed.

“The lunchtime Book Café has successfully resulted in raising students’ motivation and enthusiasm for reading. It is also helping to raise standards in literacy and improving students’ confidence.” (HMI, May 2006).

Involving parents in the scheme was essential to ensure that the messages we promote were reinforced at home and we enlisted their support from the outset. To increase awareness, letters were sent home to parents, explaining the important role of the Book Café, and asking them to encourage their children at home by talking about the books they were reading. Parents’ evening was also a key opportunity to keep parents up-to-date with their child’s participation in the club, including a report on their attendance.

A questionnaire was sent out to parents at the launch of this year’s project to help us evaluate the success of our Book Café. This was designed to help us to gauge the children’s reading habits before they started coming to the Book Café. By carrying out the same survey at the end of the year, we hope to find out what difference parents think the Book Café has made to their child’s reading habits. One parent has already commented:

“Melissa enjoyed the books read for Book Café more because it was reading for a purpose. She talked about them with me. I think the Book Café has encouraged me to read with her more. I have taken more interest in her reading as a result.”
Activities

For an activity to be successful and engaging, it needs to reflect the interests and motivations of each family as much as possible. The following activities can all be adapted to suit the needs of your school’s families.

**Breakfast clubs**
Encourage families to attend breakfast clubs during which they can read or discuss books in an informal setting. Ask the adults for a small contribution so that breakfast can be provided during the session. If families come from a diverse range of community backgrounds, encourage them to bring in their traditional breakfasts during the session so that they can sample each other’s cuisine.

**Microsoft® Windows® Movie Maker projects**
Encourage parents and children to select a poem, song lyrics, newspaper article or a short story together using the internet or resources in the school library. In a follow-up session, show families how to use Movie Maker, a simple programme that allows users to transform their chosen text into a slide show with sound and visual effects. Short movies could be showcased at an Oscar-style event in school.

**Speed dating**
As a warm up for a reading activity with parents and wider family members, hold a speed dating-style session where people can get to know each other in a relaxed situation. If appropriate, hold different themes for the sessions, such as ‘my most embarrassing reading story’ or ‘my best reading recommendation’. Ask participants to vote for the most convincing story or recommendation following the event.

**Practical workshops around families’ interests**
Find out what interests the families have by surveying them at parents’ evenings or at parent induction days. Set up clubs or workshops which allow families to ‘do’ and also to read around their interests – for example, making kites by following instructions from the internet or reference books.

**Carnegie/Greenaway shadowing**
If your school is shadowing the Carnegie or Kate Greenaway book awards, encourage families to share the short-listed books at home and post reviews together on the official shadowing site: www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/shadowingsite. Hold a celebration event when the winners are announced. This activity has proven successful because it is a short-term commitment and there is a specific focus for families.

**Learning through play**
Learning through play can be an effective way to engage families. Hold a drama workshop at school, during which families can act out scenes from their favourite nursery rhyme, book or poem.

**‘What’s in the news?’**
Invite parents and wider family members to come into school over a set period to read newspapers with the children. Follow this up with further research on the internet and in the library. This activity allows schools to link reading with a history or geography project.

**How to read a picture**
As a precursor activity to any reading activity, engage parents and wider family members by introducing the ‘How to read a picture’ activity. Give them a picture and ask them to imagine what the relationship is between the people in it, what happened before the picture was taken, what will happen afterwards and what is being discussed. This is a good icebreaker activity and will help participants to understand the value of a picture book for children and how it helps develop their imagination and powers of prediction.

**Richard and Judy book club**
Hold your own Richard and Judy book club in school for parents, wider family members and staff. Discuss the book appearing on the television programme that evening and, if possible, show the live programme after your discussions to give your reading club national relevance. Allow a big enough gap between sessions to ensure that everybody has enough time to read the books.

**Get caught reading – families on film**
Invest in a digital mini-video camera and lend it to pupils on a rota system. Pupils have to catch their family reading at home on camera and bring the footage back into school, where the teacher can make a montage video to show at parents’ evening or an induction day. Encourage pupils to film their family reading anything, including newspapers, recipe books and labels.

**Primary**

**Secondary**
Kennall Vale Primary School in Cornwall set up a Reading Miles scheme to motivate children to read more at home. Stewart Auty, headteacher, describes the impact of this successful project.

This unique scheme was originally launched to improve pupils’ reading levels and to engage our parents to support their children’s learning more effectively. Reading Miles is a simple concept: award a certificate to pupils who regularly read with their families. We could not have anticipated the impact this idea would have. In the last school year, 97 per cent of pupils gained the first level ‘25 times’ certificate.

We have a range of certificates to celebrate families having read together at home, starting from 25 times to an incredible 200 times in one academic year. We also published a ‘Helpful hints for reading at home’ leaflet to help parents during their home reading sessions. This was well received, as the expectations of what parents could do, and how they could do it, were made very explicit.

The children like having the certificates presented during assembly and parents like the acknowledgement for their support at home. Teachers like the scheme because there has been a massive increase in reading at home, with beneficial effects on reading levels throughout the school. For the last two years, 100 per cent of Year 6 pupils gained Level 4+ in reading, and we attribute this achievement to a high profile for reading, both at school and at home.

I believe that becoming a successful reader opens doors to future learning. Teaching children to read is the most important aspect of our primary curriculum, and learning to read is the single most important skill for children to develop. Our recognition for reading at home not only rewards the child, but also acknowledges the tremendous support from parents and other adults at home. We believe that learning can be supported in partnership with parents; we believe that learning is a lifelong process and not confined to school days, and that reading success is a vital life skill. We need to explore every avenue to make the important things happen and nothing is more important than learning to read.
Storytelling

Most people love listening to stories. Storytelling may be the activity that helps families overcome the barriers that they face when it comes to reading. No matter what their reading level is, everybody can tell their own stories. This is a great way to entice families who would otherwise avoid attending reading clubs for fear of getting it wrong. The following ideas are all ways to use storytelling to your advantage.

**Storytelling workshops**

Set up a bedtime story workshop/club in school and encourage families to exchange children’s bedtime stories with each other. For follow-up sessions, introduce the idea of compiling all the stories for the school website or a book.

**Storyteller visits**

Consider inviting a professional storyteller to your sessions to give top tips and help with technique. A list of storytellers is available from Reading Is Fundamental, UK (www.rif.org.uk).

**Memory boxes**

Ask families to create memory boxes at home, including family photos, books or pieces of music. Use these boxes as a starting point for sharing personal stories.

**Family history project**

Families are often interested in finding out about their own past. Visit local libraries and museums and set up a history detective project so that families can research their own family or local history. Set up storytelling sessions in school after the trip to give families the opportunity to recount what they have learnt to each other. There is a wealth of information on starting family history projects at www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory.

**Dictaphones**

If your school has access to a Dictaphone, lend it to pupils in turn to take home and record family members telling their own stories. Back in class, write up the stories and make a book or website showcasing all of the stories. Lend the story book out to families so that they can be shared together in the home.
DIY resources

‘Our staff love to read’ booklist
Ask members of staff to nominate their all-time favourite read with a reason why and compile an ‘Our staff love to read’ list for a school newsletter, website or goodie bag (see page 28). In addition, take pictures of staff reading and turn the images into posters with some text about their favourite read. Display the posters in areas where parents congregate to increase their awareness of the profile that reading for pleasure has in school.

Bookmarks
Make bookmarks for popular books in the school library, with questions and discussion points related to the book. Ask children to show the book and bookmark to their families. Encourage family members to discuss the book at home.

Top tips family leaflets and websites
Produce a very visual leaflet for families explaining the benefits of encouraging reading at home. The following resources will help you to do this:

• The Family Reading Campaign’s advice for parents and family web pages: www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/parents.
• Talk To Your Baby (a National Literacy Trust initiative) and Bookstart – ‘Share books and talk together’ resource: www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby/sharingbooks.html.
• Parentscentre information on what children learn: www.parentscentre.gov.uk/educationandlearning/whatchildrenlearn.

Reading lists for families
Get pupils in each year to put together a list of their favourite books as a guide for their families. For each subject area staff could also make a list to encourage parents to read about what their children are learning at school.
Instructions

The Question Game

Schools often suggest that parents ask their children questions and talk with them about the books they read. However, this is often quite difficult to do. Clio Whittaker, a freelance family learning tutor who works with schools and families in the London area, has developed a game to encourage parents and children to talk about books.

The Question Game is part of ‘Easy to Read’, a session I have developed to help parents understand the importance of reading for pleasure. Showing parents simple and enjoyable ways to share books encourages them to feel comfortable about reading with their children, even if their own literacy skills are limited.

After explaining the difference between open and closed questions, I show parents a game that can get their children talking about books. We spread the Question Game cards out on the table, with the questions face down. They then pick the cards up at random and try to answer the questions. It is interesting for parents to see how what appears to be a simple closed question can often generate a long discussion.

Parents are then each given an A4 sheet of card divided on one side into eight. They choose a book that they think will appeal to their child, from a suitable selection on display. They then each make up and write four open and four closed questions about this book on the blank cards. They are encouraged to think of questions tailored to their child’s interests. For example, if their child has a passion for the colour pink, they will want to spot things in the book of that colour.

For parents who are not confident writing in English, it is an opportunity to go over the construction of a question. However, the Question Game works well for people with all levels of literacy, as the advantage of making the game is that it can be perfectly designed for an individual family’s interests and capabilities.

If there are sufficient funds to give parents a book to take home, an envelope can be taped to the back cover of the book to keep the cards in. I also give parents a sheet of blank question cards and an envelope so they can make a game for another book at home. Children will often want to make up their own questions for their parents to answer!

There are two reasons for the success of this simple game. Asking questions in a fun format somehow instantly transforms what is taking place from a task to a pleasurable activity. And, creating something that is personal to the family, rather than using a manufactured game, means it is more meaningful for all involved.
Resource boxes
Build resource boxes for families that can be loaned out for use at home. In the box include objects for fun games and then follow-up activities that allow families to read together – for example, a skittles game and the nursery rhyme Ten Green Bottles. To increase the number of boxes available, request the help of community organisations, such as the Women’s Institute or local businesses, to make additional boxes.

Story sacks
Story sacks are a very creative way of encouraging families to tell stories together. Sacks should be filled with inspiring objects and a set of cards with instructions for families, so that they can be loaned out. Enlist the help of staff and organisations in your local community (Women’s Institute, local rotary group) to make as many sacks as possible. If you are able to create enough story sacks, make a folder of the different sacks available for loan, with a waiting list at the front of the folder. Back at school, encourage children to tell their story sack stories and create a book of all the stories for children to take home.

To encourage families to create and personalise their own story sacks, include a set of DIY story sack guidelines with each sack. If any of the parents find the prospect of making up their own stories intimidating, make starter story sacks that include props based on popular nursery rhymes or fairy tales. Visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion/earlyyears/storysackspractice.html.

Babysitting boxes
Create babysitting boxes that can be lent out to pupils to encourage them to read with their younger siblings. Fill the box with any unwanted children’s books that families may have at home. Also include advice from the ‘Quick Tips’ series produced by Talk To Your Baby. For more information visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktobaby/quicktips.html.

Goodie bags
At a school event for families, give out reading goodie bags. In the goodie bag you could include a membership form for the local library, top tips for reading with children, a suggested reading list and Jacqueline Wilson’s ‘Great Books to Read Aloud’.

Bear’s adventures
Allow children to take home the classroom bear for the weekend. During bear’s weekend, families take the toy around with them, take photographs of him and write a simple diary together recounting the adventures that the bear has embarked upon. When the children return to school, give them the opportunity to read bear’s adventures aloud.
The story sack club at Boston Nursery School in Lincolnshire has been a success story of its own since the school opened 12 years ago. Heather Steed, headteacher, explains how the project has been an important part of their home-school liaison programme.

Initially, Jane Dyer, our literacy coordinator, sent out a letter to all families to explain the principles of story sacks and to request their help to get the project off the ground. A number of parents with many and varied skills offered their support and the story sack club was born.

Informal sessions were organised and parent volunteers were invited to join us for coffee, a chat and to make plans for the club. Following these sessions, parents set about creating the story sacks. They sewed, knitted and designed the bags and made props out of papier-mâché, wood and other materials. As well as the parents’ involvement, it was also important to have the support of two other members of staff, who are still active members of the group.

The story sacks are a valuable teaching aid, but the children also borrow them to take home and share with their families. Parents are given a small pack of top tips to ensure they get as much out of the resource as possible.

One parent commented:

“Emma enjoyed the story sack – reading along with the tape and acting out the story with the props. We are going to make one at home!”

To highlight the need for continual parental support, it has been very important to promote this resource through presentations to parents during open evenings and by displaying story sacks in the reception area. However, one of the most effective promotional tools has been the children themselves. Their enthusiastic participation in story sack sessions has been amazing and they are keen to relay what they have been doing to their parents. We have found that the children are always very keen to select their own sack.

We will continue to ensure the story sacks are regularly incorporated into curriculum planning and all children have access to them in school. They have proved particularly valuable when working with our high percentage of EAL children and their families.
Family Fun is a home activities programme that was developed by Knowsley Children’s Service to help children learn through exploration and discovery. It was successfully introduced into nursery classes in Knowsley foundation stage school settings in 2005/6 and will be extended into Reception classes in 2006/7. Keith McDowall, family learning manager, reports.

The programme is based on Family Fun packs which provide sets of learning resources for children and families to share together. Most of the packs are based around a book and all contain a nursery rhyme, as well as games and practical resources for parents to share with their child. As well as a short initial workshop to introduce Family Fun, parents are given clear guidance about how best to use the materials and ‘top tips’ on how to extend the activity.

Family Fun programmes run over six consecutive weeks, during which children take home a different pack each week, covering each of the six foundation stage areas of learning. To help evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, parents are asked to complete a simple diary sheet, which says whether their child enjoyed the activity and gives parents an opportunity to record any comments. One parent said:

“The pack contained a gorgeous book with lots of opportunities for discussion. Ella was very concerned about the little girl in the wheelchair. We spoke about it at some length but she still keeps asking questions. I’m looking forward to our next activity. Thanks.”

Family Fun has the potential to help parents of foundation stage children become more engaged in their children’s education and development. It also helps to foster partnerships between parents and foundation stage settings and to support young children’s learning and development, particularly with regard to early language and literacy.

Family Fun has been very popular with parents, children and with foundation stage staff. The number of parents who have taken part in 2005/6 has been unprecedented and every Knowsley school will be offering Family Fun in 2006/7, including a number of special schools and private sector nursery settings. We believe that Family Fun has the potential to significantly enhance foundation stage education in Knowsley.
**Resources**

**Family Reading Campaign**
This website includes case studies, links to resources and practical ideas related to reading in the home. Visit [www.familyreading.org.uk](http://www.familyreading.org.uk).

**Family Reading Campaign activity cards and posters**
The Family Reading Campaign has produced a series of free downloadable posters featuring top tips to get families reading. The 14 designs have editable text areas so you can add your own ideas or adapt the existing ones. The posters are based on the Family Reading Campaign activity card. Visit [www.familyreading.org.uk](http://www.familyreading.org.uk).

**Running Family Reading Groups**
This guide is aimed mainly at teachers but is also of interest to librarians and parents. It provides guidance on running family reading groups that encourage both adults and children to enjoy reading and develop the reading habit. Contact United Kingdom Literacy Association, 4th floor, Attenborough Building, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH. Call 0116 229 7450 or visit [www.ukla.org](http://www.ukla.org).

**BBC RaW families pack**
The central resource for the parent strand of the BBC RaW (Reading and Writing) campaign is a free storytelling pack. It has practical tools and fun activities for parents. Schools can get a free copy of the pack, along with a guide on using it to reach parents. RaW also offers a range of other free materials and support. Visit [www.bbc.co.uk/raw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw) or call 020 8752 6777.

**Read Together, Parentzone, Scotland**
A useful website highlighting what parents can do to help children become readers. Visit [www.readtogether.co.uk](http://www.readtogether.co.uk).

**Help your children to learn series** – “A guide to supporting reading for parents of primary/secondary children” and the “Every Parent Matters” guide
These DCSF publications can be downloaded from [www.parentscentre.gov.uk/publications](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/publications).

**Learning with Grandparents, The Basic Skills Agency**
The BSA has produced a range of materials to support schools in developing their work with grandparents. Visit [www.basic-skills.co.uk/resources/family](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk/resources/family).

**Bookstart, Booktime and Booked Up**
These government-funded national bookgifting programs are run by the charity Booktrust and give books to millions of babies, children and teenagers. They provide lots of opportunities for family reading activity (particularly Bookstart and Booktime) as parental involvement is a key focus for the programmes. Visit [www.booktrust.org.uk/national-programmes](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/national-programmes).
Claire Hogan, curriculum leader for family learning at the Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service, explains how a familiar bedtime routine was turned into a school reading event for young children and their families.

As part of the family reading club that was set up in one of the primary schools in our area, we organised a storytelling session for the children and their families to attend. The visiting storyteller, Sally Tonge, told a mixture of traditional and lesser-known stories by candlelight and used music and puppetry to enhance the tales. To build on the bedtime theme, families came to the evening dressed in their pyjamas, with their teddies. They also enjoyed mugs of hot chocolate. The event was a great success, one pupil commented:

“All my mates want to come. They think it sounds cool!”

The session was an event for all the family, with younger children observing how their older siblings were engaging with the stories and then following suit. To really involve the parents and older children, they also had the opportunity to play with the words and tell the stories themselves.

The bedtime stories event was a really effective way to encourage stories to be told at home. With some simple framing from Anne Marie Morrison, the development worker, it became an entirely fun and appropriate experience for the families. By modelling good practice, it raised their awareness of the importance of bedtime stories in a fun and accessible way. One parent said:

“I think it is a good idea. It gives the children more confidence to read.”

The success of the session can be attributed to its format but also to the commitment of the staff to work with the families. Due to popular demand, there is another twilight session planned for the near future.
The barriers and possible solutions

When getting families on board, it is likely that there will be a number of barriers. Families will sit somewhere on a continuum, with the hard-to-reach at one end of the scale, followed by the families who will go away and act upon the advice given to them, to a lesser or greater degree. And, at the other end of the scale, schools will be enthused to find some families who not only want to go away and ‘do’, but who want to actively get involved with the school’s reading promotion. Each category of family will be faced with a number of barriers, some similar and some very different.

This section deals with some of these problems and proposes a range of possible solutions. If the barriers below sound familiar, consider using the suggested solutions in your action plan (see page 11).

“I agree with everything the school is telling me, but I just haven’t got the time to put it into practice.”

• Organise short informal ‘taster’ or ‘one-off sessions’ for families who may not be in a position to make a long-term commitment. For example, hold a session entitled ‘Quick and easy ways to help your child achieve more’.
• Pair up families and ask them to take it in turns to attend each session. Parents fill each other in on the session they miss.

“It’s the school’s job to teach them to read, not mine.”

• Present them with the hard-hitting facts that show the impact that encouraging their child to read at home will have on their achievement.
• Talk to families and find out what they are interested in. Base reading activities on these interests to encourage them to get involved in the school’s reading promotion.

“All the reading activities at school are held before I get home from work.”

• Early mornings, Saturday mornings or 6 to 7pm may be better times to attract a wider audience.

“I’m not a very good reader myself, so how am I meant to help my child do it?”

• Encourage parents to let their children read to them at home, stressing the benefits for the child.
• Link up with adult learning services in the area and talk to families about the basic skills classes that are available.

“I can’t get to the sessions and workshops. I’ve got responsibilities at home.”

• Get parents to buddy up and share journeys.
• Hold the sessions in a wide variety of accessible venues in the community – for example, in a café, public library or a local community centre.
• Set up a crèche scheme, with older pupils babysitting families’ younger children.

“I want to get involved but don’t know what I could do.”

• Offer parents roles that they feel comfortable with. Celebrate what they can do and once they feel comfortable being involved in school and their child’s learning, encourage them to start reading with their own children.

“My children read really well. I don’t need to help them any more.”

• Encourage parents to explore new genres of reading materials with their children, based on the child’s or family’s interests – for example, a recent holiday.
Case study

Encouraging looked-after children in Peterborough to engage in reading

Peterborough’s city-wide literacy campaign READ.WRITELinspire targets both businesses and the wider community in supporting children and young people through literacy initiatives. Janet MacPhee, project director, describes how work with foster carers has motivated looked-after children to read.

It was decided that a project with foster carers would be of great benefit to these families in particular, as they are already an established group and look after children who would benefit immediately from support with their reading.

The foster carers were approached to be part of the project and, during an initial meeting, it was explained that they would be required to read/share a book on a regular basis with the children they looked after, preferably daily. To support them, they would be given appropriate training, including ideas and activities for reading books with children and motivating them to want to read independently. In addition to the training, each foster carer received a bespoke reading pack. This was made up of books, and included the Basic Skills Agency’s ‘200 ways to say well done’, reading stickers, badges and bookmarks and the READ.WRITELinspire ‘Good Practice Guide for Organisations and Schools’.

Each foster carer was also asked which library they borrowed from. These libraries were contacted to build partnerships in the local community. Each library was given READ.WRITELinspire stickers to be stuck into a looked-after child’s record book each time that child borrowed a book.

Book suppliers were also approached and discounts on children’s books were negotiated for the families who were given the opportunity to visit the suppliers and choose books for themselves.

The impact of the project is closely monitored through regular visits to homes and schools. The feedback has been extremely positive, with foster carers commenting on how much they enjoy the training. Most importantly, they report that the children have benefited immensely from the project. The children ask to be read to, they want to go and choose books from the library, they read to other children in the household and are a lot more curious about words. Schools have also noticed an improvement in the children’s attitudes towards reading. One teacher reported:

“He wasn’t interested in books before the family took part in the project. I am delighted to say that he is now an enthusiastic reader.”

For more information visit www.readwriteinspire.co.uk
Engaging dads and male family members

 Schools often find it difficult to involve fathers and male family members. Dads often won’t go near school unless absolutely necessary, insisting ‘the missus does that’. School letters sent to parents end up in mum’s hands and the Reading Connects survey (2005) suggested that 25 per cent of children had never seen their dad reading. Furthermore, there are the challenges of absent fathers and the lack of other male role models in the school environment, particularly at primary level. However, according to a report published by NFPI in 2005, when fathers do engage with their children’s education, they significantly boost their educational performance.

 Positive father involvement in children’s learning is associated with better exam results, better school attendance, less criminality, better quality interpersonal relationships and good mental health, says guidance from the DCSF. So how do we engage not just dads, but other family members such as grandads, older brothers and uncles? Many successful projects have found a number of effective strategies can help to ensure success:

- **Children are often the biggest motivator** – give dads the opportunity to do something with or for their children.
- **Use the mums** – many mums act as gatekeepers for the child’s education. Involve the mums in encouraging the dads to get on board.
- **Plan for long-term commitment** – and don’t get hung up on numbers. Word of mouth will help if you are successful.
- **Know your background** – be persistent, creative, patient and sensitive in the recruitment of fathers, as it can be challenging and time-consuming.
- **Not all dads are the same** – their cultures, life histories, experiences, situations and expectations will be varied so try not to lump them all under the same label.
- **Look at the whole-school attitude** – there may be mistrust on both sides of the fence and any good work you do can be undone in a moment if you do not have everybody on board or at least aware of what you are doing.
- **Timing** – as dads may be more likely to be at work during school time, think about when they might be available – early mornings, evenings or weekends.
- **Speak to dads directly** – events labelled for ‘parents’ tend to predominantly attract mothers.
- **Consult them** – ask fathers for their advice on factors such as content, design, publicity, recruitment, themes, timing and venue.
- **Use a dad-friendly hook** – sport is a great place to start, particularly football, even more so if there is a reward like a ground tour. Your local club may be able to help. ICT is also very popular.
- **They like to do something not talk about it** – use activities as part of the sessions: quizzes, interactive games, workshops, internet, puzzles, and visits from celebrity authors, poets, dramatists and storytellers – anything that mixes reading with doing something.
- **It’s not just books** – consider what reading materials fathers will enjoy, including subjects such as sport, travel and sci-fi, as well as other non-fiction topics, websites and newspapers.
Events and activities

Events
Holding a one-off event to grab the dads’ attention can work well but you need to have a retention strategy in place or numbers will fall off dramatically. Use the event to give dads the opportunity to spend some time with their children, have some fun, feel useful and show them that they can get more involved. Have an informal chat as part of the session to find out what they would like to do in the future. All of the suggestions below will enable dads to get more involved in their child’s education and will provide opportunities for schools to reinforce the reading message.

- **Dads into school day** – ask dads to come in and find out about what their children are doing in school.

- **Beer and books** – organise a reading group in the local pub for dads.

- **Business breakfasts** – provide a resident speaker and networking opportunities.

- **Weekend clubs** – organise clubs and trips so dads can play the nurturing role that empowers them and offers support beyond mum.

- **Football match evenings** – have a quick session of quizzes before settling down to watch a game.

- **A man who can** – ask dads for help during reading events – for example, to run BBQs at a book fair.

Activities
Turn one of your events into a longer course, giving dads a clear purpose and offering them the chance to walk away with something.

- **Practical courses** – organise a healthy food campaign where dads prepare food and sell it to parents and staff or learn to cook a special dinner with the help of sons for Mother’s Day.

- **Storytelling workshops** – offer advice on how to read with children at home.

- **Ambassador dads** – nurture one or two enthusiastic dads and build up their confidence so they can help develop a larger group. Have a dad monitor: someone alert to regional or national opportunities for reaching out to male parents, such as Father’s Day or sporting tournaments.

- **Radiowaves** – involve dads through making radio programmes that can be podcasted in and between schools. Visit [www.radiowaves.co.uk](http://www.radiowaves.co.uk).

- **Dads on film** – invest in and lend out a digital mini-video camera to pupils and get them to make reading-related videos with their dads. Have an award evening for the videos.

- **Building something** – provide practical sessions – be it a robot, a computer, a remote-controlled car or a go-kart.
The Dads Matter project was born out of a concern in the school about the lack of positive role models in the lives of many children, especially boys. Steve Davies, headteacher, explains how the project developed, integrating the motivational framework designed by Reading Champions, a National Literacy Trust initiative that uses the power of male reading role models to encourage boys and men to become lifelong readers (www.readingchampions.org.uk).

We targeted a cross-section of 50 dads who had been seen in the playground, attended outings, or were dads of boys or Reception pupils and invited them to attend a meeting in school to discuss starting a group just for dads. Seventeen dads turned up and I spoke to them about the proposed project, Dads Matter, and its aim to make dads more visible, audible and active in their children’s learning, and in the life of the school. It was obvious from the very first moment that the dads would prefer not to meet at the school and so we decided to meet each half term in either a private room at the local pub or an Indian restaurant.

At the first meeting, dads were asked to complete a questionnaire about learning styles and were given a homework task to share with their children. The appointment of an IT specialist within the group as administrator meant he was able to produce an email newsletter to keep in touch with the whole group. Dads were asked to bring another dad with them to the next meeting, so the group would double in size.

Other initial strategies included sending a letter home to all dads, holding an introductory meeting, having a Dads Matter table at parents’ evening and choosing an appropriate venue away from the school. We hoped that this would make potential members feel comfortable and not intimidated.

The impact of Dads Matter can be seen around the school. More dads are in the playground dropping off or picking up their children; more are aware of the importance of spending time with their children; two dads run a regular weekly football coaching session for Gifted and Talented children in Year 4; and one dad runs the Reception class PE session.

We have begun to use the Reading Champions framework, and the dads are playing a key role in implementing and running this project across the school. We have appointed six dads to work with a selection of boys in Years 5 and 6. Their main role is to raise the profile of reading across the school from Year 1 to Year 6. This has been initially targeted at some of our boys who find reading uncool, boring or simply not for them. We have already been successful in:

• encouraging more dads and other males to come to school in order to model reading and to talk positively to boys about the benefits and value of reading.
• encouraging some ‘tough’ boys to actually choose books that they would enjoy.
• encouraging teachers to set up paired reading with older boys working with boys in key stage 1, listening to them read and advising them on good choice of texts.
• encouraging children to go home and ask their dad to sit and read with them.
Supporting families for whom English is an additional language

More than 200 different languages are spoken in the homes of pupils attending school in England. Such diversity means that a flexible approach, relevant to the ethnic communities being targeted, is essential when considering how to support EAL families in developing a reading culture at home. Communication barriers may be the most obvious obstacles to tackle, but it is important to remember that some EAL families actually speak English very well. Beyond these potential language difficulties lies a complex range of social and cultural issues which will require careful consideration. Only once provision for these issues has been embedded into the school’s policies and ethos can staff consider reaching out to EAL families to support them in reading with their children at home.

Schools need to understand how EAL parents perceive their child’s school. These parents may find the school environment and curriculum threatening and alien if they are not used to, or do not understand, the education system in this country. Schools need to be aware of how families’ cultural values relate to education. Who are the most influential role models in the home and the community? Who traditionally teaches the child in the home? Are educational expectations the same for boys as they are for girls?

It is important that schools recognise that they can learn as much from the families as the families can learn from them. To facilitate such an exchange of information, schools can either invite families into school or go out into the community to meet key figures. A number of strategies can be employed to achieve this:

- Encourage the enthusiastic families to bring a friend – offer incentives to maximise the potential of this scheme.
- Promote staff training to raise awareness of key issues related to EAL families. All support staff should be included in this training as they are often the first point of contact for families. Simply encouraging teaching staff to pronounce names correctly is a step in the right direction.
- Ask for a volunteer in school to become the EAL monitor, a member of staff who has the responsibility of looking out for opportunities to talk to EAL parents.
- Provide opportunities at school for EAL pupils to promote reading in their own language. This could include raising the profile of the pupils’ home reading materials.

During this foundation stage, it is also important to evaluate how the school communicates with families and if all families’ language needs are being taken into account. Depending on school contacts, it may be possible to make sure there are bilingual speakers to translate at parents’ evenings, presentation nights and Year 7 induction days. School newsletters, letters sent home and publications could also be made available in community languages.

However, if the school intake includes a large number of different ethnic groups speaking a wide range of languages, providing bilingual speakers and translating all written materials may be an unrealistic task. In this case, communicate in English but make sure that the vocabulary and syntax used is appropriate for the target audience.

By investing time and resources during this initial stage, partnerships stand a much better chance of survival in the long-term. Schools will be in a better position to provide the reading support that EAL families really need.
want, as opposed to what we think they need. Once this phase has proved successful, schools can embark upon their family reading promotion, using the strategies described on the opposite page with a more focused approach.

At this stage, if families are ready, hold a session to survey them about their reading habits and attitudes. Which types of reading material are most frequently read in the home? Who traditionally teaches the child to read? Use this data to plan practical events and activities such as those listed below. There are also many other practical activities featured on pages 18 to 34 that can be adapted and used with EAL families.

- Invite authors and storytellers from ethnic minority communities to talk to families about the importance of reading in the home. If this isn’t possible, local authorities often have links with translators who could also come and talk to families.
- Involve the children. Recruit a small group of EAL pupils to make a ‘Top reading tips’ leaflet for families in various community languages. Alternatively, involve English-speaking children as well and set the group the task of creating a visual leaflet or family reading pack, which promotes reading through pictures, cartoons and uses a minimum of words.
- During induction day, ask EAL pupils to show families (who speak the same language) around the school, including the school library.
- Enlist the help of the bilingual speakers in school to set up a reading club using books in other languages.
- Integrate food into as many of the reading activities as possible. Food is often strongly linked with cultural identity and hospitality and can be used strategically to motivate families to attend events – for example, make a recipe book of families’ national dishes.
- Hold a buddying evening once a week where English-speaking family members partner up with EAL family members. This will help build the confidence of those who struggle with reading in English and help to forge relationships between English and non-English speaking families.
- Link into key national events such as World Book Day and Refugee Week or organise a ‘Multilanguage Month’. Highlight a different language every day/week that is relevant to your school and celebrate reading in this language. Encourage families to help run the events and send a programme home to raise cultural awareness among all families.
- Work with local adult learning service providers to signpost the EAL families who want to improve their English skills to ESOL classes.
- Demonstrate that the school values reading materials in other languages by displaying extracts of popular books, posters, newspapers and magazines in other languages for visitors in the school foyer.
- Get the families to help translate reading slogans like ‘Reading is fun’ (as illustrated on this page) into as many languages as are spoken at the school and display them prominently. Download the Reading Connects multilingual ‘Reading is fun!’ poster from www.literacytrust.org.uk/readingconnects/langs.pdf.
Reading and writing at home for all

Case study

Susan Cupples, literacy coordinator at West Acton Primary School in west London, promotes the inclusion of all parents in the school’s family reading programme. Here she describes their reading and writing at home sessions and how they have provided for EAL parents.

The sessions are designed for parents of Reception to Year 2 children and have been a great success in raising the profile of family reading among the school community. Themes each week are based on reading and writing, as well as play, phonics and emergent reader activities.

We talk to parents about the wide variety of books that they can share with their children. Many of the titles we suggest include dual-language books such as Little Red Hen and Billy Goats Gruff. By identifying resources that EAL parents can understand, it increases their confidence in being able to play a positive role and support their children with reading at home. Other strategies that we implement allow parents to develop their skills on how and what to read with children.

As part of the programme we provide lists of high frequency words translated into Japanese and Arabic, our two biggest additional languages spoken. To support the lists, parents are shown how to use the word walls and how to make sentences in English and their mother tongue.

In the classroom at West Acton Primary School

We also provide information about local libraries to encourage families to integrate into their local community. In addition to this, parents are encouraged to use the school website, which itself has a family learning area. Parents can read the DfES ‘Help your children to learn’ strategies in several languages for literacy.

Finally, we make sure that the school is welcoming as possible for EAL parents who might find it quite a daunting prospect to come in and attend these sessions. To make them feel more at ease, many of our school signs and letters sent home are translated into different languages.

The programme has made a real difference in our school. As a result of the workshops, parents have a better understanding of the school’s reading progression and are actually engaging with their children about books. The programme’s wider impact can be seen when looking at our key stage 1 SAT results in reading for 2005/6. They have improved significantly and will hopefully continue to do so in the years to come.

Resources

The DCSF publication ‘Help your children to learn – a guide to supporting reading for parents of primary/secondary children’ among many others is available in 11 different languages. For more information visit www.parentscentre.gov.uk/publications.


Mantra Lingua publishes a wide range of bilingual books and CDs. Materials are available in 48 different languages. Visit www.mantralingua.com.

For a wide range of other organisations specialising in multicultural and dual language texts visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/database/ealres.html.
Maintaining family links during primary-secondary transfer

If secondary schools are not careful, excellent family involvement links built over many years in the primary sector are lost when the child transfers to the secondary sector. Many measures are now being put into place to bridge the transfer gap for the child but thought needs to be given to how to bridge the gap for families.

Where good family involvement with supporting reading has been achieved at primary school, this information needs to be passed on to the appropriate secondary school as part of the transfer process.

The new intake parents’ meeting in the summer term, often linked to induction days, provides the best opportunity for communicating the school’s reading values to new families. Capitalise on the high level of parental and pupil interest to say “We are a reading school”. A prominent Get Caught Reading display involving a wide range of staff, pupils and their families is an excellent way of making the message visual. Include a handout that explains your school’s approach to involving families in building a school community that reads and link this, where possible, to what families have become accustomed to at key feeder primary schools. This could cover a range of the suggestions below, like the Summer Reading Challenge, a good reads list and a reading log.

Suggestions to strengthen other transfer events

• Put encouraging reading on the agenda for primary-secondary transfer meetings and build on best practice from primary schools on involving families with reading.
• Offer primary school pupils and their families the chance to visit the secondary school library.
• Include PTA support to strengthen the reading in the home message by having a range of PTA members, who reflect the school’s intake, present at induction day. Encourage them to communicate and promote the approach to families and underline the importance of parents being role models for reading.
• Promote the Summer Reading Challenge at the summer term induction day. Follow this up in the autumn term with a Year 7 parents’ event that celebrates the children’s successes in the challenge. Linking up with the local public library service would be very useful for this. The Summer Reading Challenge takes place in 97 per cent of local libraries and is run by The Reading Agency. For more information visit www.readingagency.org.uk.
• Use the Postcards from the Gap approach to help bridge the reading transfer gap for children. Ask each Year 6 child in primary school to write a recommended read on a postcard, which is then forwarded to the secondary school the child is transferring to. On induction day, these postcards could be displayed.
• Supply families with recommended reading lists for their children based on the pupils’ recommendations and added to by the school librarian. Include a ‘Recommended reads for families’ section on the school website, including ‘Great reads for your child’.
• Have a ‘Help get the whole school reading’ stall at the induction day to attract parent volunteers.

Building on these foundations

• Mail out a reading challenge to the new secondary intake during the summer holidays – most children rarely receive post addressed to them so this can be very motivating. This could include a reference to the Summer Reading Challenge.
• Set up a reading log/journal, based on the approach favoured by key feeder primary schools and include a space for families to add their comments.
• Include praise for reading in your family information system. Send letters home praising children for their reading achievements and asking families to congratulate the child as well.
• Invite parents to a follow-up meeting on supporting their child’s learning and include a reading strand.

www.readingconnects.org.uk
• If your school creates a contract for families of new Year 7 pupils, include a section on encouraging reading for pleasure in the home.
• At any forthcoming Year 7 parents’ events, hold events in the school library. This can be a very good way to extend the reading link and to enable extra staff or parents on the PTA to be present to offer support to parents who may not be confident readers themselves. Include an introduction to the library with an opportunity for parents to borrow books. Of particular use for parents who do not see themselves as readers are the Quick Reads books, developed as part of World Book Day to help engage reluctant adult readers (www.quickreads.org.uk). You may wish to link up with the local public library to make books available. For more books suitable for this audience, visit www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk.
• Arrange tutor group meetings for Year 7 parents, rather than whole-year meetings, to build on the home-school links at the transfer stage. Use the opportunity to show families the DfES’s short film ‘Getting Involved’ (see page 32 for more information).
• Set up Friday afternoon open sessions for the families of low-attaining pupils, with refreshments served by the children. This is a chance for families to see what their children have been doing. Include supporting reading in these sessions. This approach has proved popular with parents who are unemployed, who work night shifts or who are at home during the day.
• Bear in mind that as children get older within secondary school they may prefer some distance from family interest in their life at school, so plan your strategy accordingly.

DCSF transition information sessions
• The Government is funding a project to enable all schools to offer transition information sessions to parents of children starting primary and secondary school by 2010. As part of the extended schools services that schools offer, the sessions will be a good opportunity to increase parents’ understanding of the stage of education their child is beginning and to explain the vital role that parents have in encouraging learning. This will include offering advice about how parents can support their child’s reading. For more information visit www.teachernet.gov.uk/transition.

www.readingconnects.org.uk
Louise Kanolik, extended schools coordinator at Loxford School of Science and Technology, and Chris Lamb, assistant head at Uphall Primary School, explain how a partnership transition project involving Year 5 and 8 pupils is encouraging more children to read, and how engaging parents in this process is also helping to raise awareness amongst families.

The Breakfast Readers peer mentoring scheme has had a real impact on attitudes and parents are involved at each stage of this process. The Year 5 pupils were thrilled at the prospect of reading with some older ‘cool’ buddies, whilst enjoying breakfast. Following communication with parents to explain the aims of the project and to seek their permission and support, the scheme was set up.

The format is simple - 30 minutes every week with a reading buddy. The result? The attitudes of Year 5 pupils to reading, as well as their reading levels, have significantly improved, far more than predicted.

“I like books now, before I didn’t like reading, but I do now. The books are funny and my partner is cool!” Year 5 Breakfast Reader

We use incentives such as the reading passport, stickers, certificates and book tokens, all of which are really popular. When the Year 5 pupils complete their passport, and in recognition of the commitment from Year 8 pupils, letters of congratulations are sent home, asking the pupils’ parents to praise their child for their achievements.

Due to the success of Breakfast Readers, we are now working with a second primary school and hope to roll out a third next term. And when the original Breakfast Reader primary pupils, and their parents, join Loxford next year, we hope they will come with enthusiasm and an expectation to enjoy reading.

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Dear Mrs Abrahams

As you know your son, Daniel, attends the Breakfast Readers project at Uphall Junior School. I am writing to you to let you know how proud we are of Daniel for the maturity he has shown and the responsibility he has taken as he supports and encourages his Uphall ‘buddy’.

We know that his help on a Tuesday morning makes a big difference, not only to his ‘buddy’ but to Daniel, as he is developing his confidence and leadership skills.

We want to send a big ‘well done’ to Daniel. I am sure that you must be very proud of the contribution he is making.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs L Kanolik
(extended schools coordinator)

Ms Rawat
(achievement team leader Year 8)
‘It takes the whole village to educate the child’. This African proverb eloquently sums up the importance of the whole community in contributing to each child’s development. Each school has its own very distinct community which can be used to help the school build a community that reads. The Extended Schools agenda encourages schools to reach out to the wider community and create these opportunities.

Exploiting your community links

One task for your reading working group, once the basics are in place, is to brainstorm what opportunities the local community offers to strengthen your approach. You may want to throw the question out to other bodies like the PTA or governors to maximise the input from people with a wide variety of community links. Your local council will have a list of all the organisations in the area, including details of the local Parent Partnership organisation. Visit www.parentpartnership.org.uk for details of your local service.

Possible activities

Link up with your local library

The most obvious community link is with the local public library. You may want to invite the children’s librarian to come to a meeting, or meet at the library so that you can consider potential joint approaches. If possible, involve the school library service so they can help broker opportunities. A few ideas are listed below:

- Arrange special induction trips for families who have never been to the local library.
- Encourage families to get involved with the Summer Reading Challenge (see page 41).
- Find out about the range of events for families at your local library. This may include Got kids? Get reading! sessions, or other family literacy programmes. You may want to set up a joint family reading group with the library, focusing on families from your school.
- Arrange for box loans for the school from the SLS/public library aimed at families as well as children.
- If your area has a mobile library, arrange for it to visit the school at a time that suits families as well as children.
- Provide games for families related to the books.
Join up with other schools
Encourage other local schools to engage their families in creating a reading culture and work with them to create a reading community. Joint school events could be set up to promote reading. Request the help of your local authority literacy consultants in this, as well as seeking the help of the school library service.

Establish community reading ambassadors
Link up with local businesses, colleges and services to invite a range of speakers into school to support families in understanding the power of reading. Many university students as well as businesses are involved in buddy ing.

Approach local shops
The high street can have a very powerful visual impact and local shops often welcome the opportunity to build links within the community. Approach shopping centres and supermarkets to see if they will promote family reading.

Invol ve the health service
Families frequently visit the local doctor’s or dentist’s surgery or health centre. Try and engage them in promoting the family reading message, including family reading opportunities at the local library.

In vol ve religious communities
Reading religious texts is central to many faiths. Link with local religious communities to see how they can work with the school in supporting family reading. This is also an excellent opportunity to support EAL families.

Invol ve othe r loc al comm unity groups
There is a wide variety of non-religious community groups. Many will have a natural affinity to reading because they are interested in a particular activity or part of the world. Retirement homes can provide an excellent source for storytelling and reading opportunities.

Link up with a local bookstore
It’s in bookshops’ interest to promote reading, so check if your local store is willing to work with you for a reading promotion event that gets families into the bookshop.

Invol ve the local media
Local papers and other media, especially radio, like to cover debates about good reads and will feature school reading celebrations. Work with the local media to promote reading.

Contact your NYR coordinator
Your local NYR coordinator will have a good idea of what activity is going on in the local authority for 2008 and may be able to suggest some useful links. Visit www.yearofreading.org.uk to identify your coordinator.
We need to find something that gets both the children and the adults involved,” said the residents of 13-15 Priory Avenue. “How about we make a picture book written and illustrated by both children and adults? This will give everyone the chance to be creative, get to know each other and support a love of reading.”

13-15 Priory Avenue is a temporary home (run by Ashley Homes) for families and others who find themselves homeless, while they find permanent accommodation.

“It should have a wizard, a dragon, and a ghost. And it should all happen at 123 Invisible Street,” decided Cheyenne, Paige and Alex, children living at the home. That is how The Wizard and the Ghost began.

After two months of hard work, the story of Larry the Wizard boy and Amber the Ghost was complete. During that time a writer, David Kendall, and an artist, Louise Bristow, worked alongside the families to help bring their ideas to the page.

“It’s been great watching the kids enjoying themselves,” said Heather, who drew Invisible Street. “It’s all been brilliant,” said Kim, who drew the ghost family. “I loved drawing and inventing the characters,” said Paige.

The launch of The Wizard and the Ghost was held at Hastings Library as part of East Sussex Libraries’ support for projects that promote reading in creative ways to both adults and children. The project was funded by a Global Grant from East Sussex County Council. Children’s writer and illustrator Nick Sharratt awarded certificates to all participants and a copy of the book is now on display in the library.

Written by David Kendall
The project is aimed at those hard-to-reach families who do not normally access either mainstream adult education courses or family learning courses running in school. This includes single parents with young children who find it difficult to get childcare, parents who may have had negative experiences of education or are poor readers themselves, and other parents who are simply unaware that the enjoyment of reading opens doors into new and exciting worlds for adults and children alike.

Parents often comment positively about the project, moving from tentative acceptance to enthusiasm as the project progresses. One parent said:

“I found this course absolutely brilliant. It has shown us how to enjoy learning and playing and how to enjoy doing things together as a family. It has given me a lot of confidence and lots of ideas to help my children. We have all now joined the library and are looking forward to spending time round there together. I shall miss it but carry on with what I’ve learned.”

Finally the benefits to the schools are also significant. Heads and class teachers report improved relationships between families and school, with parents making a real effort to become more involved in their children’s education. A project worker commented:

“One pupil’s school attendance was very poor before he started the course and now has improved greatly. Mum is more confident about coming into school and talking to the teachers.”
"Involving families in their children’s reading is a powerful strategy for raising literacy standards in schools. This toolkit will support schools in the challenging but crucial task of stimulating reading for pleasure within the home. Compiled with schools, it contains a rich variety of tried and tested strategies that will inspire and support the creation of new readers."

Jonathan Douglas, director, National Literacy Trust

"In our experience, adding the family dimension to any reading initiative in school only served to strengthen the success of the project and build the sense of community. It is true that it is always the simplest ideas that are the most effective and the most sustainable. The family involvement toolkit provides lots of practical suggestions that are just that. Enough to keep us going for years!"

Di Pumphrey, deputy head, West Thornton Primary School (Reading Connects primary school of the year 2006/2007)

"Supporting families to read at home is vital to improving children’s reading skills. The Reading Connects family involvement toolkit is an inspiring resource, full of practical ideas that will help schools strengthen home-school links, an essential component of the Extended Schools initiative."

Jim Knight, Minister of State for Schools and Learners

"School librarians recognise the importance of family involvement in promoting reader development, but are not always sure how to go about connecting with parents and carers. In the Reading Connects family involvement toolkit, both librarians and teachers will find all the inspiration, motivation and practical ideas they need to encourage family-school partnerships to create a true reading community. This is a must-read for every school librarian, literacy coordinator and senior manager in school."

Anne-Marie Tarter, Ripon Grammar School (winner of SLA School Librarian of the Year Award, 2006)

"Intergenerational learning is particularly important in communities that have high levels of socio-economic deprivation and a history of educational underachievement. This toolkit will help to reinforce key messages supporting family reading, within the current policy context. Most importantly, it will help to disseminate a wide range of good practice and expertise which has been developed by practitioners working in this area."

Keith McDowall, family learning manager, Knowsley Directorate of Children’s Services

Reading Connects and the Family Reading Campaign are delivered by the National Literacy Trust on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.