Next steps

An updated version of the review is due to be published in autumn 2010. This will include validated practice examples and views from children, young people, parents, carers and service providers.

Two other Schools and Communities research reviews *Narrowing the gap in educational achievement and improving emotional resilience for children and young people with additional needs,* and *All children and young people make sustained progress and remain fully engaged through all transitions between key stages*, are also available on the C4EO website. Local decision-makers and commissioners working in local authorities and Children's Trusts may also find it helpful to read the Schools and Communities directors' summary, which presents the key messages from all three reviews. **www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/schools**

C4EO is using the main messages from the three Schools and Communities research reviews to underpin its knowledge sharing and capacity building work with Children's Trusts, and through them the full range of professions and agencies working to strengthen family wellbeing and community cohesion.

Research summaries

This summary is a concise and accessible overview of the key messages from the research review on this topic.

Please go to **www.c4eo.org.uk** to download full and in-depth versions.

How can C4EO support your vision?

C4EO offers wide-ranging support, including:

• validated local practice
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C4EO
for the sector
from the sector

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

Schools and communities

Strengthening family wellbeing and community cohesion through the role of schools and extended services

Key messages

• There needs to be a holistic approach to securing community cohesion and family wellbeing, involving all service providers working together.

• Children's Trusts have an important role in encouraging engagement and take-up in schools by sharing good practice, and providing support and training to motivate schools that have made less progress in providing extended services.

• The decision on what services should be provided by extended schools needs to involve community groups and parents so that services are appropriate and meet the real needs of the community.

• Sustainable long-term provision of services that integrate with existing provision is most successful. The benefits of short-term projects are quickly eroded.

• Clear communication is important to building trusting relationships between families, support agencies and the wider community. Professionals must have the skills to build positive relationships with diverse groups who may hold different values and expectations.

• Engaging parents in supporting learning in the home is the most successful way of raising student achievement and is where schools should focus their efforts in supporting parents.

• Targeted support during early years and at transition points in school can make significant differences to children's learning and aspirations. Key effects are improved behaviour, better learning outcomes and fewer exclusions.

The summary is taken from the research review, which tells us what works in strengthening family wellbeing and community cohesion through the role of schools and extended services. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature involving systematic searching. It summarises the best available evidence that will help service providers to improve services and, ultimately, outcomes for children, young people and their families

The Institute of Education carried out the review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) compiled the data.

Who are the key stakeholders?

- children and young people
- schools and extended services
- school leaders and teachers
- school governors
- parents and carers
- local authorities (LAs)
- Children's Trusts.

Their contributions are valuable in the process of improvement

- **Children and young people's** views are influenced by factors beyond school. Community cohesion strategies need to operate at multiple levels, not just at school, and children need to have time to explore and reflect on their experiences. Children with deeper prejudiced attitudes before an intervention are least likely to report a change in their views, and in some cases, their attitudes harden. It is, therefore, important that the local situation is taken into account when developing a cohesion strategy.

- **Local authorities** need to develop and maintain trusting relationships between different agencies and the communities they serve. Local authority community cohesion officers have an important role in advising schools and other children's services on how best to make an effective contribution.

- **Schools and extended services** can contribute to cohesion through linking projects with other schools, using the curriculum to promote shared values and offering extended services to parents and the wider local community so that parent and family engagement is at the centre of their developmental activity. Successful approaches for engagement with parents and families take into account the specific needs of the local community. Schools should offer themselves as a base for community activities out of school hours and during holidays to promote engagement with the wider community.

- **School leaders and teachers** must develop good two-way communication with parents. School staff need training so that they feel confident and communicate well with all groups in the school's local community. Teachers need to be convinced of the value of cohesion projects, such as linking projects with other schools, so that projects are integrated into wider classroom work and are successful. It is also important that schools listen to young people, for instance via feedback from school councils and from regular school questionnaires.

- **School governors** need to be representative of the local population, in terms of class and ethnicity. A range of strategies can increase participation, including a dedicated governor recruitment officer, advertising in the local press and allowances for childcare and other costs.

- **Parents and carers** need to be involved with the school, for instance as mentors and with the services on offer to feel that they have a valuable contribution to make. Resistance from parents may be misunderstood as a lack of interest rather than originating from a lack of time or of confidence. Families most at risk from lack of engagement should work with one person who can link them to the range of services on offer. A trusted point of contact helps those families that are reluctant to engage due to previous experiences of services, especially if they have found them fragmented. The use of parent support advisors by schools has proved to be very successful for these reasons.

- **Children's Trusts** need to provide schools with good data about their local communities so that decisions on which services to provide are not based only on schools' limited interactions with families.

Clear communication is important to building trusting relationships between families, support agencies and the wider community. Professionals must have the skills to build positive relationships with diverse groups who may hold different values and expectations.

What data is available to inform the way forward?

The main data sources are the DCSF (on educational attainment and attendance and progression outcomes) and a number of different national cohort studies and cross-sectional ad hoc surveys (on attitudes and perceptions). The data provides indications of the extent of community diversity (as represented by pupil backgrounds, disability and mental health). The cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys are sources of information on perceptions of community cohesion and engagement. There is no clear measure of the national, regional or local extent of parental involvement.

The evidence base

The evidence relating to family and parental support is wide ranging. However, there are some weaknesses and there is a need for:

- more research to formally evaluate action to promote community cohesion, particularly on aspects of class, gender, sexuality and age

- more research on how schools are involved at a strategic level in working with other agencies to promote community cohesion, the wider community impact of schools' actions, and the impact of school admission policies on community cohesion

- more empirical studies of family/parental engagement, particularly explicit examples of how to increase achievement and attainment of young people

- greater distinction between different groups of families and parents, as they tend to be regarded as a homogenous group.

Review methods

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites, recommendations from our Theme Advisory Group, and considering studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting'). The review team used a 'best evidence' approach to systematically select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review. This approach attempts to eliminate bias in the selection of literature, to ensure that the review's findings are as objective as possible. Most of the literature is from England.

Data contained within the data annexe was obtained by a combination of search methods but primarily by obtaining online access to known Government publications and access to data published by the Office for National Statistics.