

COULD DO BETTER

SCHOOL REPORTS AND PARENTS' EVENINGS

A STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRACTICE

Alison Clark

Graduate School of Education
University of Bristol

Sally Power

Policy Studies
Institute of Education, University of London

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Summary of Main Findings

This report looks at the range of home-school reporting practices in English state-maintained secondary schools and examines parents' perceptions of their usefulness. The data are derived from a questionnaire survey and more detailed research within four case study schools involving interviews with senior staff and parents.

Reporting practices

- There was a wide variation in the frequency and number of written reports parents receive about their child's progress during their secondary school career. However, the majority of schools reported to parents more frequently than legally required.
- Some types of schools appeared to report more frequently than others. The grammar schools reported more frequently than comprehensive and secondary modern schools; schools in inner-city locations reported less frequently than those in rural and suburban locations.
- There has been a rapid growth in the use of computerised reporting systems. Over one third of schools used computer statement banks to construct some or all of their reports.
- There seems to be a move towards making reports more interactive. A relatively new feature of school reports is the concentration on target-setting. In addition, the incorporation of some form of pupil self-evaluation was the norm rather than the exception. Three quarters of schools also said that all or some of their reports contained space for parents to add written comments. However, the nature and quality of pupil and parent involvement in reports appeared to be quite limited.
- Only a small minority of schools offered special provisions to help parents with little or no English. As one might expect, nearly all of these schools had inner city catchment areas, but there were a number of schools in inner city areas with a significant population of students from backgrounds whose first language is not English where no such provision was available.
- Few schools appeared to have systems to monitor attendance at parent-teacher consultations.
- Estimated levels of attendance at parent-teacher consultations showed wide variations. Attendance declined as students progressed through the school. There were marked differences in the scale of the drop in attendance according to school type. Attendance at secondary modern schools was lower than at grammar schools and lower in inner-city schools than in others. The parents of children with behavioural problems were identified as the most under-represented group by the majority of schools.
- The large majority of schools reported difficulties in managing home-school reporting. Issues relating to administration and time were raised more frequently than anything else. Schools mentioned the difficulties of getting in contact with parents in general, and some groups of parents in particular.