

HOME-SCHOOL AGREEMENTS: A TRUE PARTNERSHIP?

A research project for RISE by

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RISE

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Summary of the Main Findings

Schools were required to have home-school agreements in place by September 1999. These should have been drawn up in consultation with parents, who are then 'invited to sign'. Pupils may also be invited to sign where governors consider that they have sufficient understanding to do so. But there is no obligation to sign, and there are no penalties for refusing.

The DfEE intended that these agreements should provide a framework for improved partnership between parents and schools. While there is consensus about the educational value of good home-school relationships, the idea that signed agreements might help to achieve this has provoked considerable debate among politicians, educationalists, professional associations and parents' organisations. The research has examined the initiative by recording the experiences and views of teachers, parents, governors and students. It also aimed to investigate the extent to which home-school agreements were perceived to improve, or be likely to improve, partnerships between parents and schools and to provide suggestions for good practice.

The study was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and carried out by the Research and Information on State Education Trust (RISE) between December 1998 and March 2000.

Views and experience of headteachers

There were no significant differences in attitudes towards home-school agreements between primary, secondary and special schools. However, schools which had introduced a home-school agreement before they were required to were considerably more likely to report that teachers and governors were enthusiastic than schools which were currently working on, or yet to begin work on, their agreement. These 'early implementers' were also more likely to have given the initiative a higher priority and to have had a home-school policy in place.

Drawing up the agreement:

- Nearly all schools consulted the DFEE's published Guidance
- Of those working on their agreements in 1999, nearly all had consulted parents, but only two thirds had consulted parents *individually*, as required in the legislation. The remainder had held meetings with parents, or had consulted through the PTA
- Parental response rates were very low: the majority of schools had responses from less than 25% of parents. But these were mainly positive.

The most commonly cited advantages of home-school agreements were that they:

- Clarified roles, responsibilities and expectations
- Enhanced partnership, communication and involvement with parents
- Made the school's values and vision clear.

The most commonly cited disadvantages of home-school agreements were that:

- There is no compulsion to sign and they are not enforceable
- They will not be signed by those parents whom schools would particularly like to sign
- They add to the burden of schools' administrative work and may be costly to implement.