

Improving Children's Behaviour and Attendance through the Use of Parenting Programmes: An Examination of Practice in Five Case Study Local Authorities

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Abstract

The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced new powers for Local Authorities (LAs) to apply for a parenting order to help address children's poor behaviour in schools. A recent survey suggested that most LAs in England were at a relatively early stage in their preparations for providing an appropriate range of parenting programmes to meet possible demand. On the basis of the survey five LAs were identified which had well developed provision based on contrasting approaches. Two utilised existing programmes available through alternative providers or early years provision, the others offered programmes in schools, one based on well established internationally available materials, the others on content developed in the LA. One of these actively encouraged schools to take over the programme after its initial introduction. The longer term needs relating to parenting programmes are considered in relation to these case studies.

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Introduction

Behaviour and attendance at school have been a major focus of legislation and policy in the UK since the mid 1990s. Government has sought to establish the relative responsibilities of schools, Local Authorities (LAs), parents and students, and develop systems and procedures to effect change. An important element of this has been the provision of support for families with particular reference to the role that parents can play in the prevention of offending and antisocial behaviour (Supporting Families, 1998; Every Child Matters, 2003; Every Child Matters: The next steps, 2004).

The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced new powers for Local Authorities (LAs) to apply for a parenting order to help address children's poor behaviour in school. A parenting order compels a parent to attend a parenting programme and to fulfil other requirements as determined necessary by the court for improving their child's behaviour, for example, ensuring that the child arrives for school on time. Parenting orders were already available following prosecution for non-attendance but under the Anti-social Behaviour Act they are available following a permanent exclusion or a second fixed term exclusion within 12 months. They are used when a pupil has been excluded for serious misbehaviour and where parenting is considered a factor in the child's behaviour and the parents are unwilling to engage with the LA or school in attempting to bring about change on a voluntary basis. These arrangements are not unproblematic and the legality of child curfew zones introduced

under the Act has already been challenged in the courts. The publication of the Respect Action Plan (2006) has intensified the focus on the role of parents and includes: the formation of a National Parenting Academy; additional investment in parenting programmes; new legislation to ensure that parents take responsibility for their child's behaviour within the classroom; and the empowerment of schools to apply for parenting orders.

The introduction of these measures reflects the importance attached to children's attendance and performance at school based on research that demonstrates that: high rates of attendance are closely related to success in public examinations (OFSTED, 1995); truants are more likely to leave school with few or no qualifications than non-truants (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998), and pupils who truant or are excluded from school are more likely to offend (Audit Commission, 1996). There are direct links between exclusion and long-term social exclusion (Blyth and Milner, 1994; Osler, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998) since, through being excluded from school, some children learn that their place is outside mainstream society (Blyth and Milner, 1994).

There is evidence that parenting programmes can contribute to improving children's behaviour (Barlow, 1997; Houghugh, 1998; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Barrett, 2003; Moran et al., 2004), although effective behaviour change at home does not always transfer to other environments including school (Firestone et al., 1980). After attending programmes some groups of parents still experience problems, typically those characterised by single parent status, maternal depression, low socio-economic status, or with a family history of alcoholism and drug abuse (Webster-Stratton and Hammond, 1990). Community factors can also be important (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In a review of the literature specifically focused

on education, Desforges and Abouchar (2003) concluded that parental involvement in the form of 'at home good parenting' had a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment had been taken out of the equation.

Most parenting programmes are based on one of two main approaches, behavioural or improving relationships. The former seem to be more effective in changing children's behaviour while the latter seem to have more positive effects on the cohesive functioning of families (Barlow, 1997). Practices in delivering parenting programmes in the UK in relation to the former are largely derived from the work in the USA of Webster-Stratton with conduct disordered young children and their families, the latter from Bavolek's approach with dysfunctional families (Lloyd, 1999). In the UK, Ghate and Ramella (2002) focusing on the effect of parenting programmes on reducing re-offending among children and young people found that a wide range of very different approaches were adopted, although programmes saw themselves broadly as 'preventative' or 'therapeutic', with some combining both approaches.

The growing consensus of the value of parenting programmes and the government's intention to expand provision has led to concerns about how they might be delivered to have the maximum impact while also encouraging the most needy parents to attend. A survey commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) of all LAs in England (Hallam et al., 2004) showed that, overall, the systems in place for co-ordinating and providing parenting programmes were fragile. Most LAs did not have adequate provision and in many places providers supported by charitable organisations operated independently of each other. Links between LAs and providers were, on the whole, not well established

and in many cases communication was limited. However, there were examples where the LA was taking an active role in promoting the development of parenting programmes or co-ordinating and monitoring their work. The aim of this paper is to provide an in depth exploration of five of the examples identified in this larger study and consider the implications for the development of practice in LAs.

Methodology

To identify LAs which were actively involved in the co-ordination or provision of parenting programmes, previously piloted telephone interviews/ e-mail conversations were conducted with LA officers responsible for attendance issues in all of the 150 LAs in England. The interviews established the nature of any parenting programmes operating in the LA for either voluntary or compulsory attendance, the nature of the relationship between the LA and the parenting programme provider, and how the programmes were quality assured and evaluated. 134 LAs (89%) made a response to the telephone/e-mail interview, although in some cases this was only to indicate that they did not provide parenting programmes. On the basis of the data derived from the interviews a panel of experts including academics, representatives from LAs, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) selected 23 parenting programmes for further study. The selection took account of different types of programme for parents of children with different types of problems and of different ages, geographical area (rural, urban), level of deprivation in the LA, and involvement in other DfES programmes, for instance, the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) or Excellence in Cities (EiC). Visits were undertaken by the researchers to each of these programmes, documentation examined, and interviews undertaken with LA representatives, programme providers, parents and children.

Informed consent was given by all interviewees for the use of their interview data. Interviews were transcribed, and data from documents collated. On the basis of the data derived from the visits it was possible to identify a small number of LAs which adopted coherent but contrasting approaches to the provision and management of parenting programmes. This paper describes five such examples in detail on a continuum from the LA adopting a largely co-ordinating role for programmes provided by other organisations, to provision developed by the LA and being delivered in schools. In the first case study the LA acted as a co-ordinator for programmes run by other providers. In the second, the LA drew on existing programmes offered by Sure Start and Parenting Plus, while in the third, the LA offered school based programmes for children and their parents based on a nationally run programme. In the fourth and fifth case studies the LAs had developed courses which were being run in schools. The fifth LA was actively engaged in persuading schools to take responsibility for running the courses themselves.

Findings

Case Study 1: LA acting as co-ordinator for programmes run by other providers

In this County LA, the Parenting and Family Learning Manager, who was part of the Early Years and Childcare Service, managed and supported projects which offered support to parents. A great many parenting programmes operated within the LA run a by a wide range of different providers some on a voluntary basis. The most common was the Family Caring Trust which provided materials and guidebooks, and informal training through workshops. Some of these programmes were implemented through Family Centres, some by churches. The LA periodically undertook a mapping exercise of the range of courses that were

available. Health Visitors also organised a number of their own programmes often using the Family Caring Trust as did the major hospital in the area. Overall, approximately 4000 parents a year attended a parenting programme.

The LA Parenting and Family Learning Manager acted as a co-ordinator for the programmes, managed the Parenting Forum Co-ordinator, oversaw training, and managed the Parent-Talk project and a team of home-school link workers. Supervision for Family Links programmes was offered and help in setting up projects in schools. The Family and Community Support Manager managed the Local Authority Family Centres, of which there were eight. There were service level agreements with nine others. Within the Community Learning Branch of the authority, which embraced adult education, youth work, and early years and childcare, there was a Parent Education Development Team (PEDT) which supported and advised on parenting programmes focusing on training and development, and promoting quality rather than actually running programmes. The exception was the Parent-Talk programme, which was managed by PEDT and subsidised by community learning. The LA had several levels of provision, Parent-Talk, Family Links, an early education partnership for pre-school children and the Family Nurturing Network. The latter emerged from the same organisation as Family Links but adopted a more clinical psychological approach and developed specific programmes for parents and children where there were difficulties with behaviour. The programmes were free-standing and based on the Webster-Stratton parenting programme model (Webster-Stratton and Hammond, 1997).

Referrals to the various aspects of provision were not routed through a central point. Parent-Talk had a specific pattern of referrals and these were referred to its director from a variety of sources including education. The Parenting Forum provided advice for those seeking

programmes and PEDT directed parents to relevant organisations focusing on different levels of need also taking account of the age of the children. Parents with compulsory orders tended to be directed to Parent-Talk which was deliberately set up to meet this need, although some were referred to the Family Nurturing Network which was co-ordinated by the Youth Offending Team. The Youth Offending Team had set targets to support 10% of the parents of the pupils that they were working with. Funding for this high level of provision came from a range of sources, including local businesses.

The parenting forum which brought together all those involved in parenting education within the LA was a voluntary body that had a remit to promote the development of parenting education, influencing county policy with regard to parents and children. It acted as a network for sharing information:

'The Parenting Forum was set up in order to co-ordinate, raise standards, promote quality and training and to encourage policies to change so that more funding could be secured for the future. What was really wanted was to get the main providers together and map out their areas of specialism in conjunction with the needs of parents to try to make sure that there was an entitlement in all areas of the county for this. As yet this has not been achieved – but there has been progress. It has taken the drive of social and health care, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to raise questions about the co-ordination of parenting programmes.' (LA representative)

While in comparison with many LAs provision was substantial, the LA considered that what they offered was inadequate. The aim was to make parenting programmes available in every school partnership so that they became an integral part of school life.

Case Study 2: Programmes provided by Sure Start and Parenting Plus

This unitary authority drew on a set of programmes provided by Sure Start and Parenting Plus, in conjunction with the Educational Psychologists, the Primary Integration Team, a teacher and the Co-ordinator of Adult Education. The programme had been running for four years and was in the process of being updated. The courses offered were:

- Coping with kids - A Fresh Start – for under 4’s
- Coping with kids - Getting it Right – for 4 – 8 years
- Coping with kids - We’re Good Enough Parents – for 8 – 16 years

Other courses offered included Confidence Building, The Importance of Play, and Healthy Eating. The programmes for the younger children were based on the Webster-Stratton model. The programmes were modified as necessary depending on the needs of the parents participating in each course. The facilitators of the courses assisted parents in identifying and contacting other agencies where necessary.

When parents joined a programme an education plan was completed with a tutor on a one-to-one basis. This was reviewed as the course progressed, exit and future plans being developed as completion was neared when parents were also rewarded with a certificate.

The ‘Coping with Kids’ course also led to a Level 1 (ONC) accreditation. The programmes were promoted through outreach workers in the community, general advertising in the local newspaper, at health centres, in childcare settings, and through national and local newsletters. Information was also sent out to parents already on the database.

Some courses were over subscribed and there were waiting lists, in part, because of the limited number of crèche places available at the centre where the courses were held. Each course catered for between 6 – 8 parents who were referred through Social Services, the Youth Offending Team, the Education Welfare Service, the Health Service, the Young Persons Centre (drugs), the Teenage Pregnancy unit, General Practitioners, and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. Self-referred parents were better motivated than those referred through agencies leading to more positive learning outcomes. Funding, which was perceived as inadequate to meet needs, was through Adult Education, the Learning and Skills Council, Health and Social Care, and the Education Welfare Service.

Case Study 3: School based programmes for children and parents based on a nationally run programme

This metropolitan borough adopted a school based approach following initial implementation by a team of 12 from the LA education team who were trained to deliver a school based pupil nurturing programme and a parenting programme twice each term. After 18 months the schools took over responsibility for the programme with additional facilitators being drawn from a range of agencies including school nurses and community workers. Funding initially came from the Education Action Zone but was transferred to the Behaviour and Education Support Team (BEST), the Behaviour Improvement Programme and Sure Start. Each BEST had staff trained to deliver the programmes and was responsible for encouraging parents to attend. The CAMHS worker also made use of the programme materials in individual work with parents. Training for schools lasted two days after which schools were primarily responsible for recruitment into the programme.

Both the pupil and parent programmes followed the Family Links Nurturing Programme derived from the book “The Parenting Puzzle” – written by Family Links (Hunt and Mountford, 2003). The programme was based on ten sessions and focused on giving praise, family rules, self-esteem, choices and consequences, using “I” statements, nurturing ourselves, children’s development, sexual issues, problem-solving and taking stock. The Nurturing Programme, drawing on the work of Bavolek (1996) in the US, was based on four ideas (the Four Constructs): self-awareness and self-esteem, appropriate expectations, empathy, and positive discipline. The facilitators were positive about the programme and their training. In this LA, the Family Links organisation co-ordinator was also the Area Co-ordinator for BEST. She oversaw the work of the facilitators and ensured that supervision was in place, although longer term it was hoped that current facilitators would train as supervisors. The LA monitored the number of parents attending courses, publicised courses and supported schools implementing the programme. While the LA did run the Nurturing Programme for pupils, it was not run alongside the Parenting Programme. This was perceived to be a weakness.

Two examples of the implementation of the parenting programme were explored in more detail. One, in an infant school, recruited well and had strong support from staff. Most parents self-recruited, but some were ‘encouraged’ to attend by school staff. Some of the parents attended the course twice, the first attendance addressed issues while the second enabled consolidation of ideas and deeper reflection on practice. These parents also acted as buddies/mentors for new parents to the group. Parents were offered incentives - a £5 token which could be spent at a nation-wide store for attendance for the first four weeks, bubble bath in the nurturing yourself session, and board games for parents to play with their families (Sure Start funded). On completing the course all parents were awarded a

certificate, which was presented during a school assembly. Pupils reported feeling a great sense of pride when their mothers received a certificate. A crèche was provided (funded by Sure Start) which was seen as crucial in facilitating attendance.

The second programme was based in a community centre and drew in a wide range of parents and carers, including grandparents, and some who worked with children professionally, for example, a teacher and a youth worker. Recruitment was through advertising within the community and the vicar, who facilitated the programme and encouraged her congregation to attend. The different experiences of attendees were reported to have engendered an interesting exchange of ideas based on experiences with children of different ages. The facilitators interviewed felt that the programmes were life-changing experiences for participants. Family life came to be viewed as fun, relationships with school improved, self-esteem was enhanced, and parents were empowered, and often went on to take other courses, for example, computer studies, or first aid.

Case study 4: LA developed courses run in schools by LA staff

In this County LA, two programmes had been developed for use with the parents of primary and secondary pupils. At primary level the workshops were run by the Home School Liaison workers based in Primary Behaviour Support. The secondary school programme offered, Stepping Stones, was run by Home School Liaison Workers who were based at the Secondary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and who were part of the Behaviour Support Team. They linked with Special Education Needs and Pupil Support (SENaPS). The provision of the parenting programme was contracted out to the Behaviour Support Team, and to Social Services who offered one-to-one support where parents were unable to attend programmes

or where it was inappropriate. Parents with compulsory orders were dealt with through the Behaviour Support Team, which already ran numerous programmes in school venues.

Resourcing was through Family Centres. A parent helpline ran within the LA, which any parent could use. Parents often telephoned about issues related to behaviour and were sent resources, offered support services, or referred to a more appropriate agency.

Each year, the Primary Behaviour Support Team undertook an annual audit of needs and an option that schools could select was the provision of the parenting programme, Family Workshops, in their school. Geographically the LA was divided into four areas with between six to twelve schools in each of the areas being offered Family Workshops. This was insufficient to meet demand. Schools made referrals relating to difficult children and a partnership plan was put into place. Behaviour Support staff worked individually with pupils in schools with an emphasis on modelling strategies. The Home School Liaison staff worked within a multidisciplinary team and provided the link between school and home, particularly in terms of consistency with regard to the strategies in place. All behaviour management was praise focused.

Family Workshops ran for six sessions, each lasting two hours, in school, during school hours. The programme was written within the LA drawing on material from the Webster-Stratton programme and Familywise. All the sessions involved practical exercises, problem solving and discussion and were open access, although schools were asked to encourage parents to attend if they had raised issues relating to difficulties with their child. Many parents were concerned with their child's attitudes, back chatting, shouting, slamming doors and fighting with siblings. Homework generated difficulties and some parents were concerned about attention seeking behaviour. Sharing difficulties with other parents

provided relief and support. Information was given about other options, courses, and holiday play schemes. Some parents went on to do the Stepping Stones programme for parents with teenage children.

The Stepping Stones Programme was an 8 week group-based parenting support programme for parents of teenage children. The venue was moved to different schools over time to facilitate access. The programme was built around several existing programmes including, Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (Dinkmeyer et al., 1997), and the Webster-Stratton course. It included consideration of relationship building; management of poor behaviour and the pressure points that caused it; and the use of praise, encouragement, and boundary setting as many parents wanted to be punitive and had little awareness of lower level interventions tending simply to hit their children. Sessions also addressed appropriate consequences for poor behaviour, and life after children.

An early years programme was being developed so that courses would be available for each stage of children's development (early years, primary and secondary). The LA encouraged school staff to undertake the training programme so that schools would be able to offer the programme themselves.

Case study 5: LA developed courses run in schools with schools continuing the support after the classes have been completed

This London borough had 3 to 4 courses, each lasting for six weeks, being delivered at any one time. The course was initially developed by the Behaviour Support Team and the Educational Psychologist team but was then implemented in schools run through the

Behaviour Support Team. The LA believed that the school should be the focus of all delivery. Schools sent letters out to all parents and also approached parents whom they felt would benefit. Parents could also get information through Community Education. Some schools had developed a directory of support agencies offering assistance to parents.

The LA used a six-week programme based on Canter's 'Assertive Discipline' which was already adopted in schools. Each session was an hour long and was designed for between 4 – 12 parents. Two sessions focused on teaching about parenting methods for improving behaviour, three on issues that parents reported would be helpful, while the final session was used to set up a support group. The model was adapted to meet the needs of particular groups of parents and those of each school. Issues which frequently arose included mealtimes; bedtimes; homework; getting children to obey requests; and relationships, between adults, children, and within the family, and how they impinged on the way that the children behaved.

Follow up sessions in this LA were a central focus of the final session:

'The sixth session is talking about forming a support group. We talk to them about when they might like to come, how often, if they would like to have one session that is just them as a social event, one where you can invite a member of the Behaviour Support Team, Special Needs Co-ordinator, the Educational Psychologist, the school nurse, so that they have got outside interventions to help keep that going.' (Parenting Programme Provider)

This LA perceived that the way forward was for schools to facilitate ongoing support for the parents:

'The difficulty now, particularly in this area, is that there are not enough agencies to support parents. Parents might need other agencies but those other agencies just aren't there, or if they are there, they are not very effective. That is the big problem. The biggest thing for us is for schools, once we have done the job, to take on a support group within the school. One or two schools have done this. One is particularly successful. They were one of our first schools 10 years ago and they have been running a support group ever since. We would like that to be the model which is recreated every time. That support group still runs and they meet regularly. They have on going training for parents - there are new parents coming in - and they invite guest speakers'. (LA Officer)

Summary of the contrasting approaches

Table 1 sets out the key features of each LA's approach. Case study 1 illustrates a scenario where the LA acts in a supportive and co-ordinating role for programmes provided by others with the LA itself providing only one programme set up to ensure that compulsory parenting orders can be met. In case study 2 the LA through Sure Start and Parenting Plus provides classes centrally, but the extent of provision is limited by available crèche facilities. In case study 3 the programmes are school based but part of a national programme with the LA co-ordinator also acting as the area co-ordinator for the national programme. In case study 4 the programme was developed by LA staff and firmly embedded within an educational context although there were links with Social Services. The educational nature of the programme was reinforced by school staff being encouraged to train as facilitators. Case study 5 was similar to this but parents were encouraged to continue meeting after the formal programme was ended with schools actively participating in the setting up of these ongoing support

groups. The programme itself was further embedded within the educational context through the focus on assertive discipline which was also adopted in schools.

Table 1: Key features of each LAs approach

	Key features
Case Study 1: LA acting as co-ordinator for programmes run by other providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of providers including those from the voluntary sector; • Programmes offered in a variety of venues; • Programmes based on a range of different approaches; • LA provides support and training; • LA provides financial support to voluntary sector co-ordinator; • LA provides one programme to ensure availability of places for statutory referrals; • Referrals not dealt with centrally.

<p>Case Study 2: Programmes provided by Sure Start and Parenting Plus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused group of programmes catering for parents of children of different ages; • Programmes provided by Sure Start and Parenting Plus; • Promotion of programmes through outreach in the community, local advertising, mail shots and other means; • Programmes held at central venue. • Limited number of places available
<p>Case Study 3: School based programmes for children and parents based on a nationally run programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School based programmes for parents and children to run concurrently (this was not properly implemented in this example); • Programmes run within a nationally co-ordinated framework; • Programmes based in schools and the community.
<p>Case study 4: LA developed courses run in schools by LA staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes developed by LA staff; • Programmes embedded within an educational context; • Links built in between education and social services; • Parent helpline for all parents; • Open access to all parents; • Programmes provided for parents of children of different ages; • School staff encouraged to train as facilitators.

<p>Case study 5: LA developed courses run in schools with schools continuing the support after the classes have been completed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course developed by LA staff; • Open access for parents; • Programme linked to the behavioural procedures adopted in schools; • Parents encouraged to continue meeting in a support group after the programme was completed; • Provision to be supported by the school in the long term.
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Discussion

If LAs are to implement the terms of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 which empowers them to apply for a parenting order to help address children’s behaviour in school they will need to ensure that there are appropriate programmes available in their locality. Hallam et al. (2004) revealed that over the country as a whole at the time of the research there had been relatively few compulsory parenting orders made relating to education, however, this may change. Most LAs did not have the capacity in available programmes to cater for an increase of parents on compulsory orders. The responsibility for overseeing the provision of parenting programmes in relation to education lay with a wide range of personnel within LAs most of whom had considerable responsibilities elsewhere. Some LAs were in the process of appointing parenting co-ordinators and it seemed likely that such appointments would become the norm rather than the exception. Overall, there were few parenting programmes which were specifically designed to address issues relating to education, most parenting programme provision was of a more general nature.

As the case studies described above illustrate, a few LAs had developed their own provision with a focus on educational outcomes rather than more generalised outcomes for family functioning. This provision was generally school based and in some cases parallel programmes were provided for pupils. Where provision was school based head teachers were supportive of it and it was useful in providing a bridge between home and school which previously did not exist for some families. The attendance of the parents in school facilitated improved communication and where difficulties arose with the child's behaviour, after attending a parenting programme, parents were able to respond in a more measured way to the issues and it was possible to make greater progress in addressing the problems. Parents valued the opportunity to share the difficulties that they were experiencing in relation to managing the behaviour of their child and school based programmes reduced problems relating to transport, although there were still some difficulties in the provision of crèche facilities and suitable accommodation for the classes to take place.

School based programmes also offered the opportunity to co-ordinate the work with parents with initiatives focused on the child, and to assess the impact of the parenting programme on the child in an educational context. While most parenting providers undertook systematic evaluation of their programme through parent questionnaires in the final session, most did not assess the perceived impact on the behaviour of the children at home or school. Unless programmes were directly linked with schools, programme providers had no knowledge of the impact on educational outcomes of the children and schools had no knowledge that the parent was attending a programme. In addition, where programmes were run by private providers, the LA had no control over their quality and information derived from evaluations was rarely fed back to LAs.

Where programmes were held in local schools and made available for all parents, not only those experiencing difficulties, the stigma attached to attendance reduced and parents were more likely to attend. As some of the case studies illustrate, once a programme was set up it could be continued by the school providing that training was made available to facilitators. These were parents who had previously attended the course or a range of school staff, for instance, teachers, Learning Support Assistants, Learning Mentors, Home-School Liaison Officers, and school nurses. Such an approach enabled the provision of locally available programmes, catering for the parents of children of different ages, available to all parents contributing towards improving parenting skills across the nation.

In each of the five example LAs considerable progress had been made towards ensuring the availability of parenting programmes for parents attending a programme voluntarily or compulsorily under a parenting order. Their approaches varied, in part because of the local context, for instance whether they were rural or urban, affluent, or in areas of high social deprivation, or already had successful programmes being provided by the voluntary sector. Local factors are crucial in determining the way that each LA offers parenting programmes. Decisions need to take account of what will be of most benefit to the children and parents in that LA. However, there are some key elements which are necessary to ensure the viability and effectiveness of parenting programmes regardless of context. All LAs need to have a named person with responsibility for co-ordinating the provision of parenting programmes within the authority, monitoring programme effectiveness, and ensuring that provision is of a high quality. Systems need to be put in place to monitor children's attendance and behaviour in school when parents attend programmes which are intended to impact on educational outcomes. Without this the effectiveness of programmes cannot be assessed.

Where parenting programmes have an educational focus, to enhance communication between home and school and enable closer monitoring of the impact on children, it is beneficial to hold them in schools. This is particularly the case where the programmes are aimed at primary school children. School based provision enhances access for all, can begin to make attendance at a programme the norm for all parents, and offers the possibility of developing local ongoing support within the community.

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