



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

Family Homework

Final Report

An evaluation report prepared for *The Stepney Partnership* by
*the National Research and Development Centre for Adult
Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), Institute of Education, London*

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Glossary

EAL	English as an Additional Language
FH	Family Homework
FHLs	Family Homework Leads
FSM	Free School Meals
HSLO	Home-School Liaison Officers
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SP	Stepney Partnership
SPPM	Stepney Partnership Project Manager

Executive Summary

Background

This report is an independent evaluation of the Family Homework (FH) programme, which is run by five primary schools from the Stepney Partnership (SP) in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The schools involved are Ben Jonson Primary, Cayley Primary, Halley Primary, Redlands Primary and Smithy Street Primary. The evaluation was carried out by researchers at the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), at the Institute of Education, University of London.

FH has been running since 2010 and its overarching aim is to get families more involved in, and with, their children's learning. The programme is distributed five times during each school year, and the central premise is that children and their families will work collaboratively on a range of activities during the week-long half term holidays (October, February and May), and two longer holidays (Christmas and Easter). At the time of our evaluation, FH was compulsory for pupils in two schools, and non-compulsory in the other three.

Each school takes the lead in turn and is tasked with developing an idea, or topic (e.g. Volcanoes, Pirates). The main stakeholders involved in FH's production and roll-out are the deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, class teachers and the Home-School Liaison Officers (HSLOs).

Methods and sample

The main methods employed to gather data for the evaluation were questionnaires (paper copy and online), individual interviews, and focus groups. Questionnaires were administered to parents¹ in the five schools (via the children) who had children in Years 2, 4 and 6. Questionnaires were sent to 36 teachers in the five schools who taught these age groups, plus Reception teachers. 792 pupils across the five schools, in Years 2, 4 and 6, completed an online questionnaire. Pupil return rates were almost 100%, and all the teachers who received a questionnaire completed it. 57% of families who had children in the five schools responded to the parent questionnaire.

Qualitative focus groups were conducted with the group who acted as the Family Homework leads (FHLs), (which consists of three deputy headteachers, an assistant headteacher and a class teacher with responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage), a group of teachers from each school, and HSLOs from four of the schools. Focus groups were also held with 34 parents from all five schools and with 28 Year 4 pupils from four of the schools. Headteachers also provided written feedback on a range of questions about the programme.

¹ Throughout this report the term 'parent' also refers to carers.

Main finding

The main finding of this evaluation is that FH is a highly successful initiative. The programme has high rates of family participation and has already over-achieved in its main objective, which is to get families more involved in, and with, their children's learning. The great majority of the children and their parents look forward to FH and feel they benefit from it. Staff at all of the schools appear to work hard to ensure FH is a success, and they do this because they believe in the programme's purpose and integrity. The efforts of all the staff involved should be applauded. The schools collaborate and support each other, and there is great potential for this model to be replicated in other schools across the UK.

Participation and engagement in Family Homework

Participation rates were measured for the FH topic on Volcanoes (February 2014). Two thirds of the pupils participated in this FH, with pupils in Year 4 being slightly more likely to participate than those in Year 2, and pupils in Year 6 being the most likely to participate. Rates of pupil involvement varied by gender, with girls more likely than boys to participate, particularly in Year 6.

Around half of all pupils said they like FH 'a lot', and just under a third reported liking it 'somewhat'. There are large differences by age group: while around two-thirds of Year 2 pupils reported liking FH 'a lot', this drops to just under a half for Year 4 pupils and a quarter for Year 6 pupils. As with participation, most of this apparent age group effect is driven by gender: while older girls are somewhat less likely than younger girls to say they enjoy FH, older boys are much less likely than younger boys (and girls their own age) to say they like the programme. Generally speaking, pupils who like school work more also like FH more. However, Year 6 boys who like schoolwork a lot do not typically like FH.

FH does a good job of appealing to pupils who do not like schoolwork. Nearly half of pupils who say they do not like schoolwork say they do like FH, with one in five saying they like FH a lot.

While FH is regarded as a voluntary offer in three schools (Ben Jonson, Halley and Smithy Street²), it is viewed as part of the normal, or regular, homework policy at Cayley and Redlands, and therefore the presumption is that it will be completed during the holidays.

There were significant differences in participation rates across schools, which appear to be related to these varying expectations. Three schools, Cayley, Redlands (both where FH is seen as a requirement) and Smithy Street (where there is also a strong expectation that it will be completed), had rates of reported participation of over 90% from at least one year group; the two schools with the lowest rates were Ben Jonson and Halley.

² The current SPPM regards the offer in Smithy Street as being more of an expectation than in the other two schools.

Parents like FH, and at all the schools more than half of them reported a high level of enjoyment. The school where parents like it the most is Cayley.

In terms of the parental background characteristics that are typically associated with engagement in children's learning, parents who rarely read are just as likely as other parents to enjoy the programme. FH also appears to engage many parents who are not very involved in their child's (or children's) schoolwork.

Who works on Family Homework and for how long?

FH appears to be very much a family affair, and more than one member of the family is generally involved. Almost four fifths of pupils said that another member of the family helped them, although this means that around one-fifth of children do FH on their own. The majority of children say that they get 'a lot' of help, with the most frequently mentioned person being the child's sibling. It is unclear how much of the FH is done by children and how much by adults. The time that families set aside to work on FH is relatively short. Nine out of ten parents said that they devote fewer than five hours to each topic overall, with the majority spending between two to five hours. This figure was confirmed by the pupils.

Barriers to participation in Family Homework

The two most commonly cited barriers to participation in FH were lack of time and difficulties in finding or affording materials/resources.

Some families are persistent nonparticipation is when asked the likely reasons for persistent non-participation, FH stakeholders cited a variety of reasons. The most commonly mentioned were lack of time (a particularly difficult issue for large families) and language difficulties.

There was some evidence that some younger pupils sometimes find FH too challenging for, and that some older pupils find it uninteresting and even boring. This suggests that the range of activities might be broadened, or that families be made more aware that the suggested activities are just that: suggestions. Families are allowed to come up with their own activities and this needs to be re-emphasised. However, it may be the case that families who are the least likely to participate are also the least likely to generate their own ideas, and additional and/or a broader range of activities may sometimes need to be included.

The best things about Family Homework

Parents and pupils were much more likely to point to positive aspects of FH than to complain about negative aspects. The most popular activities for the Volcanoes FH were craft related. Fewer than one in five parents mentioned taking family trips or visits as a result of FH in general, and fewer than one in 10 pupils said they had gone on a family trip as part of participation in Volcanoes.

The best parts of FH in general for parents are spending time with their children and making things.

The worst thing about Family Homework

Parents were most likely to complain about two aspects of FH: finding the time and finding resources. For the pupils, the least enjoyable part of FH is that it takes up too much time in their holiday. Older pupils were more likely to say that FH is boring. Almost all of the pupils in the focus group said that they felt 'a bit' of pressure to complete FH, both from their families and occasionally from teachers.

The benefits and purpose of Family Homework

Eight out of ten Year 4 pupils and over six out of ten Year 6 pupils feel that FH helps them learn new knowledge and skills. As with participation and enjoyment, the apparent age effect is primarily explained by gender. For example, Year 6 girls are 2.5 times more likely than boys to feel that FH helps their learning. More than half of the parents think that, as a result of FH, they have become more involved in their child's learning. Pupils and parents regard FH as being very different from school homework. While the parents (along with the FH leads and HLSOs) see its main purpose as increasing family engagement and interaction, most pupils think that FH is designed to ensure that they keep on learning during the holidays.

Teachers' views

Almost every teacher thinks FH to be worthwhile and believe that it makes a positive contribution to their school's culture; around two thirds also feel that there are sufficient opportunities to provide feedback to pupils and to the school management team. Only just over half of the teachers think that parents enjoy FH, and four tenths had a neutral opinion to this question or were not sure.

Recommendations for consideration

FH is a successful programme. As such, our recommendations should be seen as minor modifications to the initiative, rather than wholesale changes. In this section, we suggest a number of issues or actions for the five schools to consider. Some of these have been advocated by some of the main stakeholders, and parents and pupils, during the data collection.

- Consider introducing more activities aimed at engaging older pupils – e.g. more digital or online activities; reviews of games, music, films. Perhaps older year groups can be asked to produce a short video, using a smart phone?
- Consider ways to encourage more trips and visits, as not many happen at the moment. One possibility is that HLSOs could organise more group trips for parents.
- Schools could display more FH work from the other schools in the SP.

- Have more FH topics that give opportunities for staff and pupils to dress up in order to promote the topic.
- Provide a stimulus in schools to promote Family Homework – for example, through promotions such as teachers dressing up as pirates.
- Publicise the ‘release’ date of FH a week earlier than currently happens, to give parents more time to prepare.
- Provide guidance on how much of the FH activities should be completed by the child and siblings and how much by the adults in the family.
- Give parents and pupils a chance to suggest future FH topics, perhaps as part of a competition.
- Re-emphasise to families that they are free to come up with their own ideas.
- Expand the shops currently in operation in two of the schools in order to make it easier for parents to access resources/materials.
- Ask HSLOs to run more workshops to give parents ideas and show them how to make things listed in the FH handout.
- Make teachers aware that some pupils feel pressurised into feeling they have to participate in FH and produce an end-product for every topic.*
- Consider making FH a requirement, as part of the schools’ regular homework policy across all five schools.

1. The Family Homework programme

Introduction and background

The Family Homework (FH) initiative was set up by the Stepney Partnership (SP) in 2010 with the aim of increasing families' involvement in their children's learning. The aim of the SP is to enhance family cohesion and thereby raise pupil achievement through shared family learning. The partnership involves five primary schools (Ben Jonson, Cayley, Halley, Redlands and Smithy Street) and one secondary school (Stepney Green Maths, Computing and Science College).

This report is an independent evaluation of the FH programme, carried out by researchers at the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), at the Institute of Education, University of London.

1.1 About the Family Homework Schools

The five primary schools taking part in the FH programme are all located within a short walking distance of each other in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. One of the defining features of the area over time has been the way in which it has been an entry point into the UK for generations of migrants. Tower Hamlets has one of the largest Bangladeshi communities in the country. Economic deprivation is widespread³ and the borough is also considered one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK. The borough fares worst on measures relating to housing and income deprivation, especially income deprivation affecting children and older people (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010: Local authority rankings)⁴. Tower Hamlets has the highest level of child poverty in England, very high rates of long-term illness and premature death, and the second highest unemployment rate in London.

In 1997 Tower Hamlets schools were rated the worst in the country. In 1998, Ofsted declared the council's education department, the best funded in the country, to be failing. In 2014, however, Tower Hamlets is seen as an educational success story. The borough has some of the fastest improving schools in the country. The latest primary school results show very high standards are common in schools across Tower Hamlets, and it is one of the few councils whose secondary maintained schools⁵ are all rated good or outstanding by Ofsted⁶.

³ The *average IMD score* measure shows that Tower Hamlets is the 7th most deprived local authority district in England out of 326 local authority districts.

⁴ The Indices of Deprivation 2010 (ID2010) provide a relative measure of deprivation for small areas across England. The indices were published by CLG in March 2011.

⁵ There are 18 council-run secondary schools in the borough.

⁶ See: http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/news_events/news/december_2013/boroughs_schools_praise_d.aspx; and <http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2013/dec/11/tower-hamlets-transforming-failing-schools-ofsted>

The five FH schools vary in size from one-form to three-form entry. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM), often used by governments and other policy makers as a proxy for social and economic disadvantage, is approaching double the English national average in three of the schools and over 3.5 times in one of the schools⁷. The proportion of children designated to have Special Educational Needs (SEN) is also around double the national average. Over 90% of the families that attend four of the FH schools are Bangladeshi; the next largest minority ethnic group is Somali. In four of the five FH schools, over 90% of pupils have English as an Additional Language (EAL)⁸. Three schools perform above the national average in terms of academic attainment, as measured by the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or higher in both English and mathematics in their SATs, taken at the age of 11.

The characteristics of the FH schools are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Characteristics of FH schools

School	Number of pupils on roll	% of pupils eligible for FSM	% of pupils with SEN	% of EAL pupils	% achieving L4 or above in both English & Maths at KS2
National Figures		19	8	18	79
Ben Jonson	531	50	14	98	88
Cayley	567	35	15	94	73
Halley	239	34	16	72	59
Redlands	467	38	18	98	87
Smithy Street	449	31	13	96	81

1.2 About the Family Homework Initiative

The FH initiative began in Redlands Primary School in March 2010 as part of *Excellence in Cities*, and soon spread to the other four schools in the Partnership^{9,10}. FH was originally devised to maximise the educational benefits that arise (both to children and the school) when parents have greater engagement in their children's

⁷ In the other school, Smithy Street, the number of pupils eligible for FSMs is also considerably higher than the national average.

⁸ The exception to these percentages is Halley, although it still has four times the percentage national average of EAL pupils.

⁹ FH was also trialed in the secondary school in the Stepney Partnership but was judged not to be working successfully and was soon abandoned.

¹⁰ The original funding was for three years and the schools gained an extension of two more years. The schools now fund the FH project between them.

learning; further, teachers wanted to encourage more first-hand shared learning experiences outside the classroom.

The FH programme is generally led by the five schools' FHLs. When they were interviewed together in the autumn of 2013, as part of this evaluation, they pointed to four distinct objectives for FH. FH was set up to encourage parents to:

- understand that learning is not just what happens at school, and that some of the most important learning occurs outside the classroom;
- understand that they have a key role in their children's learning;
- talk more to their children about their learning;
- venture out on more trips and visits, taking advantage of the rich resources that London has on offer.

All of these objectives come under the overarching aim of FH, which is to get families more involved in, and with, their children's learning.

The objectives of FH are not formally written down; however, they are commonly understood by the main school staff involved in its production and roll-out (i.e. the deputy headteachers, class teachers and the Home-School Liaison Officers¹¹ (HSLOs)).

In three of the schools (Ben Jonson, Halley and Smithy Street¹²) FH is seen as an offer; and participation is not compulsory. As one of the deputy headteachers affirmed:

[FH] is an offer, and if you want to take the offer on and run with it it's fantastic, if you don't maybe it's not for you; it's not about everybody should do this because this is the thing that fits every single person. Some families might just sort of think, oh, for very sound reasons we didn't have time to do this, we were off in Egypt that week, not that we didn't want to do the homework, we did something else equally as amazing.

However, at Cayley and Redlands, FH is regarded as being part of the regular homework policy, and is therefore expected to be completed within the timeframe of the school holiday.

1.3 How the Family Homework programme works

FH is distributed five times during each school year. The central premise is that children and their families will work collaboratively on a range of activities during the

¹¹ Home School Learning Officers is a generic title. They have a variety of names such as Home Liaison Officers, Inclusion Officers, Parental Support Officers and so on.

¹² The current SPPM regards the offer in Smithy Street as being more of an expectation than in the other two schools.

week-long half term holidays (October, February and May), and two of the longer holidays (Christmas and Easter). Each school takes the lead in turn and comes up with an idea, or topic, which they bring to the FHLs. The main topic is discussed, further developed and distributed to each school. The lead within each school may be one of the members of the schools' leadership teams; however, this responsibility is more likely to be delegated to one of the class teachers in the school. How much ownership and control he/she takes is up to them and varies between the five schools. Some lead teachers garner advice and ideas from other teachers, by email or face-to-face meetings, while others tend to work more alone. Although the whole school is involved with FH, most of the ideas for the main topic and its activities come from teachers and HSLOs, and the children and their parents rarely have much of an input at this stage of development.

Examples of past topics include Dinosaurs, Space, The Moon, the London Olympics, Food, Super Heroes and Pirates. When this evaluation was being conducted, the most recent topic (February 2014) was Volcanoes.

FH is presented as a folded A3 sheet and designed for children of all abilities across the whole age range between Reception (4-5-year-olds) and Year 6 (10-11-year-olds). Each sheet will typically include approximately a dozen activities or ideas. Children and their families can choose how many activities they wish to engage in. At least one activity will involve a suggested visit (e.g. perhaps to a museum or outdoor site), which is designed to encourage experiential learning, but the majority of the activities involve art and crafts skills; in other words, they are designed to encourage families to make and do things together. The activity sheet is designed to be very visual, but does not look professionally produced.

Each of the five FH schools uses different strategies in attempting to maximise parental engagement. These include preliminary coffee mornings and workshops (generally run by the HSLOs) to explain the activities to parents and suggest possible materials to use and objects to make. Two schools, Redlands and Smithy Street, have temporary shops, which provide free, or cheap, craft materials such as glue, glitter, straws, paper plates etc. These temporary shops have proved to be well used.

Following the half-term or term break, pupils hand in or report on their FH. There are a number of post-FH sharing events – for example, sharing assemblies – and each school keeps a record of FH activities completed. The whole-school sharing, or achievement assemblies are seen as a key way of increasing motivation and engagement. At these assemblies, children sometimes receive certificates. At Cayley certificates are given at the end of the year to children who completed all five FHs. The FHLs also reported that these assemblies motivate teachers, increasing their interest in ensuring that as many of their pupils as possible complete FH. There are also displays of the families' work at each school; these displays are also seen as key motivators for children and their parents.

Each FH is internally evaluated. Teachers record each child's participation or lack thereof, and in some schools teachers complete scrapbooks containing photographic evidence of the class's FH. Teachers also give their views on how successful a particular FH was and list the factors they feel contributed to success, or which hindered it. At Redlands, the school assesses the effectiveness of FH by sending out parent questionnaires every other year. In the intervening years, they invite parents to come into school to air and discuss their feelings about FH.

1.4 The structure of this report

Chapter 2 provides more details of the aims of the evaluation and the methodology. Chapter 3 examines participation rates and non-participation rates in FH and investigates some of the barriers that militate against families taking part. Chapter 4 looks at FH from the children's viewpoint, focusing on enjoyment and activities engaged in. Chapter 5 focuses on the same issues, but from the parents' perspective. Chapter 5 also includes insights from teachers. Chapter 6 provides a school-by-school overview of participation and engagement in FH. Chapter 7 summarises and discusses the key points that arose during the evaluation. Chapter eight offers recommendations for improving FH further.

This report includes four appendices. Appendix 1 provides an overview of information on pupils' home learning environments. Appendix 2 provides copies of print questionnaires used in the evaluation, and links to online questionnaires. Appendix 3 presents the activities sheet that the SP schools used for Volcanoes during the February half-term, 2014, and Appendix 4 shows two school displays about FH on the theme of Pirates.

2. Aims and methods

2.1 *Aims and objectives*

Although the first Stepney Partnership Project Manager (SPPM), Ben Yeo, carried out his own evaluation in 2012, he felt that the five schools would benefit from an evaluation conducted by professional researchers, as such an evaluation would be more rigorous and objective.

The research was also commissioned to capture a model that the great majority of its constituents see as being highly successful, and one that can be adapted for use in other schools, both in London and across the country.

The NRDC evaluation was designed to be both summative and formative. A primary aim was to assess the impact and effectiveness of the FH programme for the children, parents, teachers and the senior leadership teams, particularly in terms of increasing parental engagement in their children's learning. The evaluation also sought to describe and critically analyse the programme's processes and practices.

In order to increase understanding of the context in which the programme functions, the evaluation needed to gain insights into the school environments, particularly with regard to parental engagement activities. To provide valuable contextual information, and enable a more richly informed assessment of the programme's effectiveness, the evaluation also sought to gain insights into the Home Learning Environment (HLE) of the pupils – that is, families' learning-related practices, attitudes and resources. The evaluation also sought to gain insights regarding programme non-participation.

In addition to allowing the SP to analyse the programme's impacts and effectiveness, the evaluation has also tried to provide the Partnership with information that will support efforts to maintain and/or improve the programme's quality.

The evaluation project had seven objectives.

Objective 1: to comprehensively document and describe programme processes and practices.

Objective 2: to understand and describe the in-school programme context – that is, parental engagement strategies in the SP as a whole and at individual schools.

Objective 3: to develop an evidenced based understanding of the at-home context – families' learning-related practices, attitudes and environments.

Objective 4: to ascertain the impacts of FH on pupils and families, as reported by these two groups.

Objective 5 is to assess the impacts of FH on stakeholders within participating schools: HSLOs, teachers, deputy headteachers.

Objective 6: to describe and critically analyse stakeholders' views on FH's effectiveness – for example, the programme's strengths and weaknesses.

Objective 7: to improve understanding of programme non-participation, and possible routes into increased participation on the part of less- or non-engaged families.

2.2 Design and methodology

The research design combined impact evaluation and process evaluation. By *impact evaluation*, we refer to the assessment of the programme's impacts and effectiveness; *process evaluation* refers to descriptive analysis of the programme's contexts – both in schools and homes – as well as the programme's processes and practices. Impact and process evaluation activities have been combined in order to provide the highest possible value to the SP.

The research used a mixed methods design and the fieldwork was carried out between September 2013 and April 2014.

The main methods employed to gather data were questionnaires, individual interviews and focus groups. Parent questionnaires were administered as paper copy to parents in the five schools (via the children) who had children in Years 2, 4 and 6. Teacher questionnaires were provided in paper copy to the teachers in the five schools who taught these age groups, plus Reception teachers. Pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6 completed an online questionnaire. The Year 2 questionnaire was a simplified version of the questionnaire provided to older pupils.

The pupil and parent questionnaires asked a range of questions about attitudes and activities related to FH. This questionnaire also collected data about potentially related parent and pupil attitudes and practices regarding school, schoolwork and regular homework. Examples of all questionnaires are included in Appendix 2.

2.2.1 Sample

Questionnaires were completed by 792 pupils across the five schools: 304 Year 2 pupils, 237 Year 4 pupils and 251 Year 6 pupils. There are 298 pupils in Year 2 across the 5 partnership schools, 300 in Year 4 and 299 in Year 6.

There are a large number of families who have more than one child in the same school. Table 2 shows the percentage of parents responding to the questionnaire, and the percentage of families represented by those parents.

Table 2 Parent questionnaire response rate

School	Number of families at the school	Parents responding to survey	Percentage of families responding to survey
Ben Jonson	209	76	36
Cayley	162	121	75
Halley	75	41	56
Redlands	158	115	73
Smithy	151	74	49
Total	755	427	57

72% of those who filled in the parent survey were mothers/stepmothers, while 21% were fathers/stepfathers. In 3% of cases, a sister filled in the survey.

Questionnaires were completed by 36 teachers: nine Year 2 teachers, ten Year 4 teachers, eight teachers from Year 6, and nine teachers from Reception.

An in-depth qualitative interview was conducted with the first SPPM (who left the Partnership in October 2013). Focus groups were conducted with:

- The SP FHLs, which consisted of 3 deputy headteachers, 1 assistant head and 1 teacher.
- Six randomly chosen teachers (one from each school, except Halley, which was represented by two teachers)
- Home-School Liaison Officers (HSLOs) from four of the schools;
- Parents from all five schools;
- Year 4 pupils from four of the schools (Cayley, Halley, Redlands and Smithy Street);

The parent focus groups were led by the HSLO from each school. See Table 3 for further details.

In addition, Headteachers submitted written responses to the questions in the FHL topic guide.

Table 3 Summary of qualitative interviews

Participants	Method of interview	Number of participants in interviews	Date	Approximate time
The Stepney Partnership's Project Manager	Individual, face-to-face	1	September 2013	60 minutes
The FHLs	1 focus group	6	November	60 minutes
Teachers	1 focus group	6	November	60 minutes
Home-School Liaison Officers	1 focus group	5	December 2013	60 minutes
Parent interviews (conducted by HSLOs)	5 focus groups	34	January-February 2014	60 minutes for each focus group
Year 4 pupils	4 focus groups	28	April 2014	50 minutes for each focus group
Total	12 focus groups; 1 individual interview (Plus Headteachers' written response)	80		

3. Engagement in Family Homework

This chapter begins by looking at pupils' participation rates and family engagement in the most recent FH, on Volcanoes. It also provides data on the time families spend on each FH, in general, and considers the main barriers acting against more families taking part. The chapter also includes a discussion on hard-to-reach families.

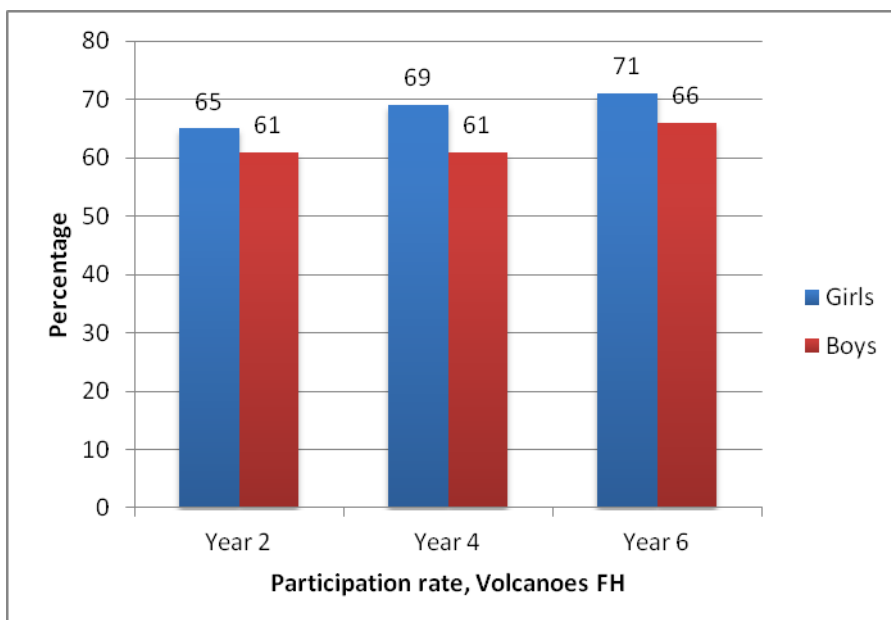
In this and the following sections, we sometimes draw on data regarding pupils' or parents' attitudes not just to FH, but to school, schoolwork and regular homework. These data are summarised in Appendix 1.

3.1 Doing Family Homework

3.1.1 Overall participation rates

Two thirds (66%) of pupils reported that they had participated in the most recent FH, Volcanoes. This percentage was relatively consistent across all three year groups (Y2, Y4 and Y6), as would be expected given the number of siblings within each school. However, as Figure 1 illustrates, there were some age- and gender-related differences in participation rates. The higher the year group, the more likely pupils were to have participated in Volcanoes. **In all year groups, girls were more likely than boys to do this FH.**

Figure 1 Percentage of pupils reporting participation in Volcanoes



Because attitudes to school in general may be related to participation in FH, we looked at the relationship between pupils' self-reported attitudes to schoolwork and their likeliness of having done the FH on Volcanoes. These relationships are as follows:

- In Year 2, girls who like school a lot were more likely than other girls to do Volcanoes. Year 2 boys' attitudes to schoolwork had no statistical relationship to their likelihood of completing Volcanoes.
- In Year 4, girls were equally likely to do Volcanoes, whatever their attitudes to schoolwork. Boys who do not like schoolwork were less likely than other boys to do this FH.
- In Year 6, girls were equally likely to do Volcanoes, whatever their attitudes to schoolwork. Boys who do not like schoolwork were much less likely than average to do this FH. However, boys who like schoolwork a lot were also less likely to do this FH.

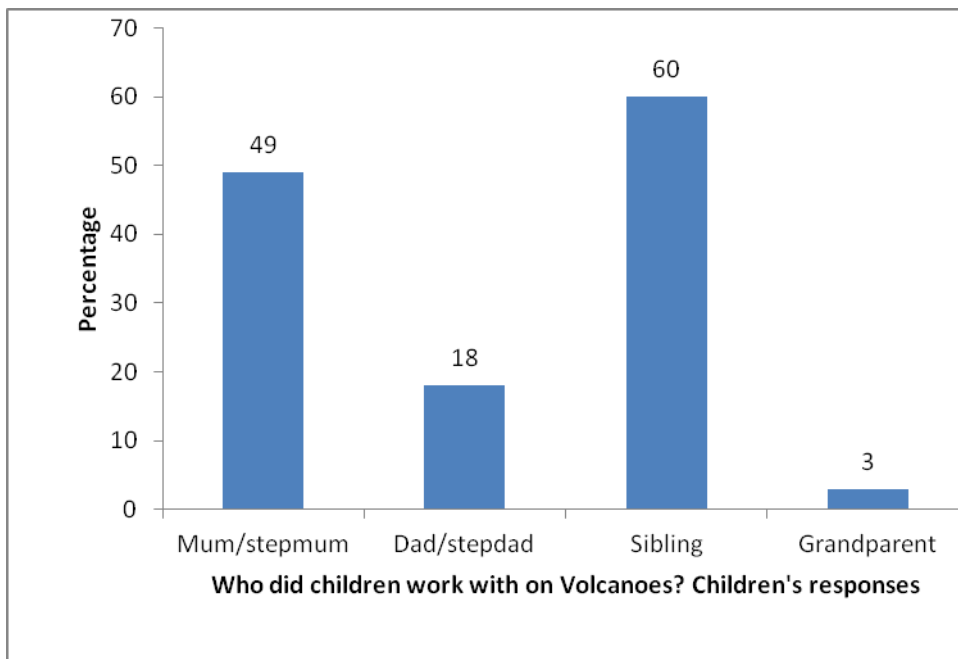
These findings suggest that gender, age and attitudes to schoolwork interact to affect engagement with FH. It is perhaps unsurprising that boys are somewhat less likely than girls to participate in FH. It may also be unsurprising that pupils who do not like schoolwork were less likely to do FH – however, this is true only for boys, and only in the higher year groups. It is more surprising that Year 6 boys who like schoolwork a lot were less likely to do FH than Year 6 boys who like schoolwork only a little. It is no surprise that FH may struggle to engage older pupils (boys in particular) who are somewhat disaffected from school. However, it also appears that **FH may be struggling at least somewhat to attract older boys who are the most engaged in school.** This issue is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

3.1.2 Family engagement

78% of pupils in the survey said that a family member helped them with FH; this means that **more than one in five children report doing FH on their own** rather than with family members. Perhaps surprisingly, Year 2 pupils were not the most likely to report receiving help (though it is possible that many of these pupils received more help than they recall). Whereas 86% of Year 4 pupils said they received help on the most recent FH they completed, only 77% of Year 2 pupils and 73% of Year 6 pupils said the same.

Children were encouraged to indicate all people who helped them with this particular FH. The most frequently mentioned family member was a sibling. This presumably reflects the fact that many families had more than one child in primary school, and these children tended to work together on FH. However, **70% of respondents named one family member only.**

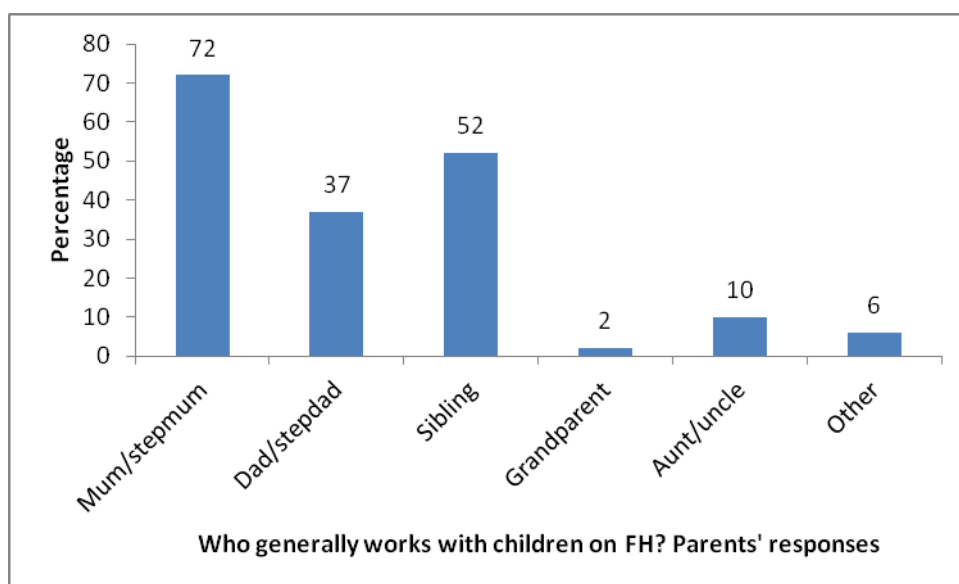
Figure 2 Who does FH with children? Pupil response



Looking more closely at pupil responses to the question of who helped them with the most recent FH, we find some surprising responses. For example, Year 2 pupils are much less likely than pupils in years 4 and 6 to report getting help from a sibling. Likewise, Year 6 pupils are just as likely as Year 2 pupils to report getting help from their mother or stepmother. It is possible that there is some level of misreporting occurring, with Year 2 pupils somewhat less likely to answer these questions accurately. However, it is also possible that a significant percentage of Year 2 pupils are doing FH on their own. Investigating these questions would require further study.

Parents were asked who *generally* works with their children on FH. This question was not specific to the FH on Volcanoes. Rather, it sought to determine who typically works with children on FH. Compared to children, parents were more likely to cite themselves as getting involved.

Figure 3 Who does FH with children? Parent response



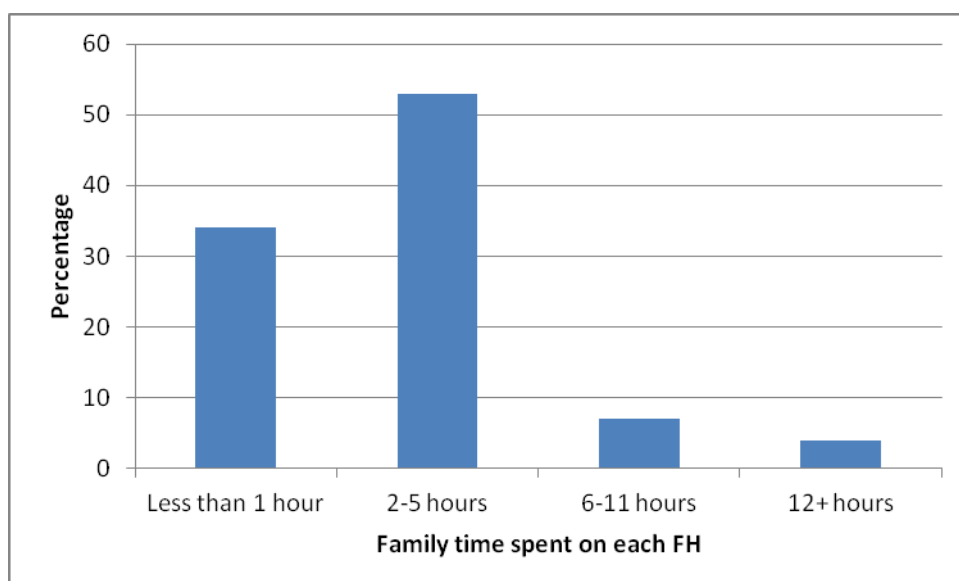
The pupil focus groups also explored the subject of family engagement. In general, qualitative data gathered from the children support the findings above. However, compared to their questionnaire responses, the children's focus groups suggest that FH is more of a family affair, with multiple numbers of people involved. Out of 28 children, nine mentioned three other family members taking part, nine quoted two, four said four other people and four said only one other person helped them. As with the questionnaire findings, the most frequently quoted collaborators are siblings, both older and younger. The next most frequently cited collaborators are mothers, followed by fathers. The first person mentioned, and therefore possibly the main or most important, was a sibling, then their mother, followed by their father. In the focus groups, children reported that sometimes the tasks were divided up according to particular parent skills: *Mum is the creative one and Dad is good at maps.*

The pupil focus groups also explored the subject of **how much help children received during the FH. Twenty-five children said they get 'a lot', and only two said 'a bit'.** Family members assist by giving ideas, helping to make things, including sticking and gluing, choosing and buying materials, and finding information on the internet. Family members also contribute particular skills, such as drawing and painting.

3.1.3 Time taken

In the questionnaires, parents were asked to estimate the amount of time their family typically spent on each FH. As Figure 4 illustrates, **90% of parents estimated that the family typically devotes five or fewer hours to each FH, with a majority devoting 2-5 hours.**

Figure 4 Estimated time spent per FH



The question about the number of hours each family spent on a ‘typical’ FH produced some ambiguous answers in the parent and pupil focus groups. For instance, some parents said that it depended on the topic and that the time varied greatly depending on the interest a particular FH generated. Some parents provided vague answers, such as: ‘it can be up to three days’ or ‘two mornings’. Given these caveats, the most frequently mentioned amount of time seems to be up to two hours (11 responses); up to three hours (7 responses) and over five hours (8 responses). These estimates are similar to the figures reported in the questionnaires.

Although it should be remembered that the children in the focus groups were only 8-9 years old (Year 4), researchers still decided to ask this question as they were interested to see if any general pattern emerged, rather than taking the numbers given as any kind of literal truth. The children were asked to think about FH as a whole - that is, not only their own contribution, but how long it took the whole family to complete it. However, it is possible that some children were thinking only of their own individual work on FH.

Similar patterns were found in the data from pupil and parent focus groups. The most common time mentioned by pupils was between 1-3 hours (10 responses). Six children said ‘less than an hour’ and seven thought it was over a day. Thus, it appears that children and their families spend a relatively short time on FH, with over half judging it to be less than three hours. The combined responses from the questionnaires and the focus groups suggest that the vast majority of families spend roughly half a day or less on FH. The shortest time quoted was 15 minutes.

3.1.4 Popular activities

The pupils (n=504) who reported doing the most recent FH were asked what activities they did. Pupils could select as many activities as they felt were relevant.

As Table 4 shows, painting and papier-mâché were popular across all year groups. Younger children were much more likely to make a volcano cake with their parents, while Year 6 pupils were more likely to make an information leaflet. Fewer than 10% of children reported taking a family trip. Across age groups, girls were more likely than boys to do the activity involving papier-mâché, but neither more nor less likely to engage in other activities.

Table 4 Activities engaged in for FH Volcanoes

	Year 2 (%)	Year 4 (%)	Year 6 (%)	Total (%)
Paint a picture	29	27	24	27
Papier-mâché	23	19	20	21
Volcano cake	25	11	5	14
Leaflet	5	12	20	12
Read stories	10	12	9	10
Poem	11	12	8	10
Write a report	6	14	8	9
Family trip	11	12	5	9
Collage	11	8	9	9
Volcano dance	5	1	2	3
Other	26	31	36	31

3.2 Barriers to participating in Family Homework

3.2.1 Non-participation rates

Across the three year groups, 273 pupils (34%) reported that they did not do the FH on Volcanoes. Non-participation rates for each year group are as follows:

- Year 2: 37% (193 pupils did Volcanoes, 111 did not)
- Year 4: 35% (153 did Volcanoes, 84 did not)
- Year 6: 31% (173 did Volcanoes, 78 did not).

It is not possible to ascertain how many of these pupils were siblings to each other, meaning the total number of families who did not participate in the FH would be lower than the total number of pupils.

3.2.2 Reasons for non-participation

As Table 5 shows, the **most commonly cited reason for not doing the FH on Volcanoes was a lack of time, followed by insufficient resources** at home. In all three year groups, one of these two reasons were included in that age group's top three reasons for not completing this particular FH. (Children were allowed to choose as many reasons as they wanted.)

Regarding differences between year groups, **younger pupils were much more likely to point to their parents not having enough time**, suggesting that for Year 2 pupils are more dependent on help from their mother and father, and perhaps find some of the activities too challenging to work on when they are on their own. Year 6 pupils were much more likely to say that FH was boring (or unexciting), or that they went away during the break.

Table 5 Reasons pupils did not do FH on Volcanoes

	Year 2 (%)	Year 4 (%)	Year 6 (%)	Total (%)
I did not have enough time	41	32	33	36
Insufficient resources at home	21	39	26	28
My parents did not have enough time	28	15	6	17
It was boring	10	7	31	16
Went away	12	13	24	16
Not enough room at home	7	3	1	4
Other reason	7	15	15	12

The teacher, parent and pupil focus groups each explored the barriers that make it difficult for some families to participate in FH. Questionnaires also explored this issue. The three most common reasons cited by the teachers in free text responses on the survey (they often wrote more than one reason per written response) were very similar to those cited by pupils (and recorded in Table 5): **lack of time, difficulties finding resources and materials**, and a general lack of interest.

In the parent focus groups, seven of 34 parents gave more than one reason for nonparticipation, but the two main constraints were again resources and time. Just under half of the focus group parents cited difficulties finding the materials or resources needed for certain activities, and several mentioned the **cost of resources** as putting them off.

There are not enough resources at home and sometime we are struggling financially.

Ten parents attributed time as being the main reason for non-participation, but only two alluded to lack of space.

In their focus group, the pupils also mentioned difficulties buying materials and resources, but there was a greater emphasis on the **lack of space and homes being full of “noisy relatives”**, something barely mentioned by the teachers or the parents.

There are always lots of relatives visiting our home and it's always busy and noisy.

3.2.3 Understanding the barriers to parental participation

HSLOs were asked for their own thoughts on the reasons why some families do not participate in FH. HSLOs work closely with parents, and should, in theory, be able to provide useful insights. **HSLOs estimated that 10-20% of parents never, or very rarely, participated in FH.** It was felt that older parents were less likely to engage with FH. HSLOs noted that **some families within the SP are very large; because of this parents in general and mothers in particular have less free time**, and are thus less likely to participate in FH. HSLOs also cited **language difficulties**, which are sometimes associated with a lack of confidence.

We have quite a few parents who don't speak English and they don't have the confidence, they are always like not afraid but just don't feel that they have enough knowledge to come and communicate or take part in things, because language is a barrier, so if you've got a teacher speaking English they won't understand things most of the time so therefore they just don't feel they can participate.

At one of the schools a Bengali translator is present at the introductory FH workshop. However, this school has a significant minority group of Somali speakers, who are not catered for in terms of translation.

The first SPPM also thought that a lack of confidence meant some parents did not feel that they had the education, knowledge or skills to support their children. Another view from the SPPM, and one that was discussed by the teachers in their focus group, was that there is a feeling amongst some members of the community that teachers are the experts in learning and it is not the place of parents to become involved.

Focus group parents were also asked about possible reasons for nonparticipation by other families. The two main reasons that these parents cited were:

1. **Language difficulties**, which meant that some parents did not understand the purpose of FH;
2. A **lack of time**, particularly if both parents were working.

Other, less frequently cited reasons provided by focus group parents were: some parents might not see FH as being 'proper' homework (which of course it is not, but these parents think FH should relate more to the curriculum); some parents are apathetic and lack motivation; some find FH a burden and feel pressurised; and some do not know what to do and lack the knowledge to help their children.

3.2.4 Removing the barriers for families

One HSLO speculated as to how nonparticipating families might be encouraged to take part:

I wish I knew the answer to that because there are some really hard to reach families who remain hard to reach, no matter how much we do for them they will always come up with excuses and reasons for not coming, my boiler's not working, I've got a workman coming around, or someone's coming, I've got an appointment, usually it's an appointment at the doctor's, hospital, dentist, anything they can think of... you just know they are excuses, but what can we do? We can't do much more than what we are doing, we are giving them phone calls, we are reminding them, giving them flyers, leaflets, asking them, literally asking them, showing them the way, and they still can't stay, oh no, not today, maybe tomorrow, next time, next week.

All schools were aware of the problem of some families not returning FH on a regular basis. All the schools have outreach staff that attempt to increase the engagement of these parents – for example through non-threatening, non-accusatory face-to-face discussion.

Children are a key motivator in getting more parents involved. Therefore, the SP parental engagement strategy also focuses on in-school motivators. For example, pre-FH build up is designed to get children excited about the forthcoming FH, at least partially in hope that this excitement will be carried over to the parents. In focus groups, teachers and deputy heads pointed to particular examples of successful FH build up –for example, when the theme as pirates, many school staff dressed up in pirate garb, to the delight of their pupils,

It may also be the case that the activities are not pitched at the right level. Although families are free to come up with their own suggestions, it may be that the very families who are the least likely to participate are also the least likely to generate their own ideas, and more activities, and/or a broader range may sometimes be needed.

3.3 Key points and implications from this chapter

- Two thirds of the pupils participated in the most recent FH, on Volcanoes. The higher the year group, the higher the self-reported rate of participation – though differences between year groups were small.
- Gender, age and attitudes to schoolwork interact to affect engagement with FH. In terms of gender, boys are somewhat less likely than girls to participate in FH (at least on Volcanoes).

- Overall, pupils who do not like schoolwork were less likely to do Volcanoes. However, this effect was driven by boys, and only in the higher year groups. That is, even when girls do not like schoolwork, they are no less likely to do FH. The same is true of younger boys. But Year 6 boys who do not like schoolwork have a particularly low FH participation rate.
- More surprisingly, Year 6 boys who like schoolwork a lot were less likely to do FH than Year 6 boys who like schoolwork only a little. It appears that FH may be struggling (at least somewhat) to be attractive to older boys who are the most engaged in school.
- Almost four fifths of pupils said that another member of the family helped them with FH, which means around one-fifth do FH on their own.
- The most frequently mentioned person who helps children with FH is a sibling.
- When pupils do FH with their family, it is often the case that more than one family member gets involved. According to parents, siblings and mothers are the most frequent collaborators, with fathers a fairly distant third.
- The majority of children say that they get 'a lot' of help with FH.
- The time that families set aside to work on FH is relatively short. Nine out of ten parents devotes fewer than five hours to a typical FH, with the majority spending between two to five hours.
- The most popular activities for the Volcanoes FH were craft related. Less than one tenth of pupils said they went on a family trip.
- The two most commonly cited barriers to participating in FH were lack of time and difficulties finding materials/resources. HSLOs also pointed to some parents' lack of time (particularly for large families), or lack of willingness to make time. HSLOs also cited language difficulties for some parents, which lead to a lack of confidence in school-related matters.

4. Children’s attitudes to, and perceptions of, Family Homework

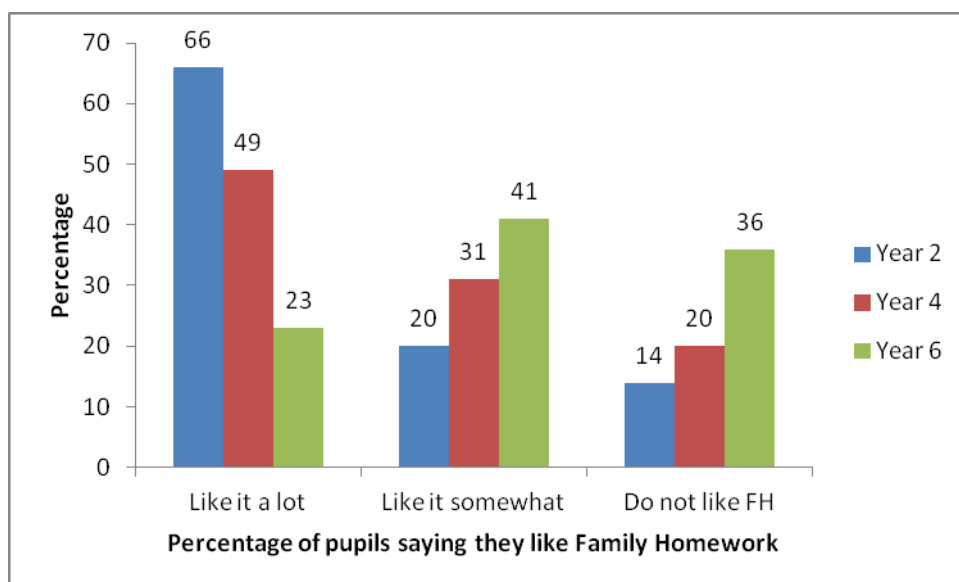
The chapter reports on pupils’ level of enjoyment of FH, and their favourite aspects of the programme. It also considers their least favourite parts and presents further pupil perceptions – for example, on whether FH helps their general learning, and what they consider the purpose of FH to be. The final section looks at the relationship between pupils’ attitudes towards schoolwork and FH.

4.1 Pupil enjoyment

Overall, 47% of surveyed pupils said they liked FH a lot, and another 30% said they liked it somewhat. However, these overall figures conceal a **large amount of year group variation**, as illustrated in Figure 5. Younger pupils are markedly more likely to say they like FH, and older pupils are much more likely to say they do not.

In Year 2, 86% of pupils said they liked FH, with 66% of pupils saying they liked it a lot. In Year 4, the percentage agreeing they liked FH dropped slightly to 80%, and the percentage of pupils saying they liked the programme a lot slipped to 49%. In Year 6, 64% of pupils agreed that they liked FH, with only 23% agreeing that they liked it a lot.

Figure 5 Enjoyment of FH by year group (pupil response)



The declining enjoyment of FH is particularly notable given the somewhat higher participation rate as pupils age (as reported in Chapter 3). Focus group teachers discussed possible reasons why Year 6 pupils in particular are less likely to enjoy FH. One proposed reason was ‘overload’ and ‘FH fatigue’ - on other words, it is no longer new to them and they have done it many times before. However,

another reason is that some Year 6 pupils, and particularly the boys, have started to look forward to secondary school, and have begun to construct and perform a self-image of insouciant sophistication. As one teacher told us:

As a year six teacher I think it comes down to a little bit of coolness.

While the pupil survey revealed that the Year 6 pupils who did Volcanoes were no less likely to work with their mothers or father than younger pupils were, it is likely that some Year 6 students no longer want to do FH with their parents.

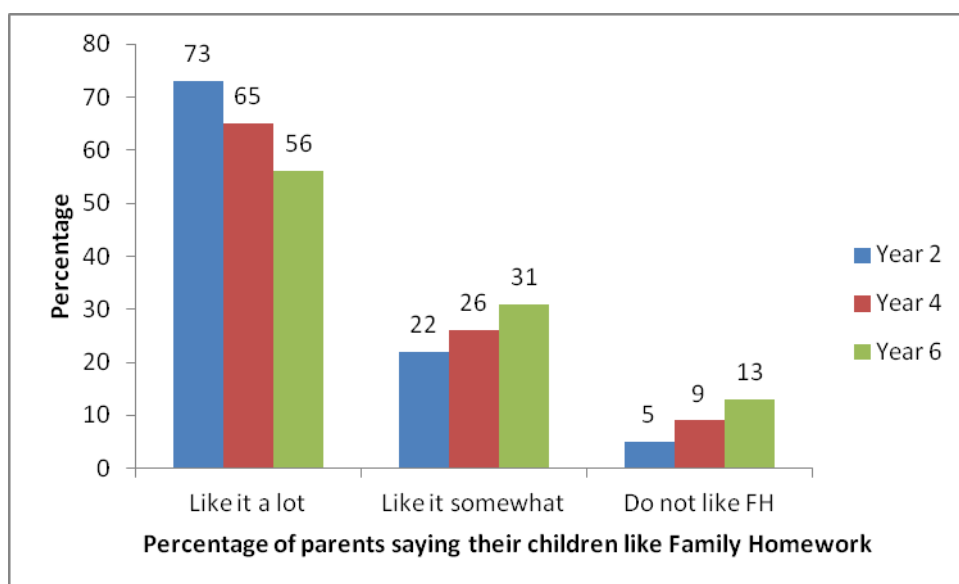
*I think the problem is with the Year 6s they get to that point where some of them don't want to do homework with their parents. And it is just opinion, I haven't got any research on it, other than the fact that from listening to especially some of the boys, and some of the cooler girls, you know, they don't really want to be making models with their mum, they see that as actually quite young. So I end up getting quite a lot of the text written on the back sheet and that's quite a low standard, **it's very much an after-thought to the cool lot.***

To a certain degree, this teacher's opinion matches the findings of our survey. Year 6 boys who say they do not like schoolwork were less likely to do Volcanoes, and, as discussed later in this chapter, are less likely to say they enjoy FH. However, there also appears to be a certain amount of disaffection with FH amongst Year 6 boys who do like schoolwork. This **suggests that FH is not doing enough to appeal to older, more engaged, boys.**

Parents rated their children's enjoyment higher than children did themselves.

95% of responding parents said that their Year 2 children like FH, with 73% saying they like it a lot. Amongst parents of Year 4 pupils, 91% said their children like the programme, with 65% saying they like it a lot. Figures dropped slightly for Year 6 pupils, 87% of whose parents reporting they like FH, with 56% saying their children liked it a lot.

Figure 6 Enjoyment of FH by pupils (parent response)



This year group effect was also seen in teachers' views. Of 27 teachers surveyed across these three year groups, 24 agreed that the pupils enjoyed FH, with eight of those agreeing strongly. Two teachers were neutral on this question, and one disagreed that their pupils enjoyed FH.

Teachers' views on pupils' level of FH enjoyment were primarily influenced by year group. All nine Year 2 teachers in the survey agreed that their pupils enjoyed FH, with the majority of those teachers (5) agreeing strongly. While all ten Year 4 teachers agreed that their pupils liked FH, only three strongly agreed. As Table 6 illustrates, the biggest gap was between Years 4 and 6. In Year 6, while five out of 8 teachers agreed that their pupils enjoyed FH, no teacher agreed strongly with this statement, and two teachers were neutral (neither agreeing or disagreeing), while one Year 6 teacher disagreed. (While reception classes were not otherwise included in our evaluation, reception teachers were invited by the SP to participate in the teacher survey. Two reception teachers agreed strongly that their pupils enjoyed FH, while five agreed and two were neutral on this question. These reception-level results suggest that, at least from the teachers' perspective, reception-age pupils are more receptive to FH than Year 6 pupils, but somewhat less receptive than pupils in Years 2 and 4.

Table 6 Teacher response to the statement 'My pupils enjoy FH'

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Reception	2	5	2	0
Year 2	5	4	0	0
Year 4	3	7	0	0
Year 6	0	5	2	1
Total	10 (28%)	21 (58%)	4 (11%)	1 (2%)

While pupils and parents disagreed somewhat about the degree to which children enjoyed FH, they did agree that there was something of an age-related effect, with older pupils enjoying the programme less. However, a **closer look at the pupil responses shows that a significant proportion of this apparent age effect is in fact related to gender**¹³. In Year 2, for example, boys and girls are equally likely to say that they like FH a lot. And while Year 4 girls appear slightly less likely than Year 2 pupils to agree that they like the programme a lot, they are even more likely than Year 2 pupils to agree that they do like it. The responses from Year 4 boys tell another story: while they are just as likely as girls to agree that they like FH a little, they are 20 percentage points less likely to say that they like it a lot. **In Year 4, therefore, the apparent age-related drop in reported satisfaction is driven almost entirely by boys.**

The story for **Year 6 is slightly more complicated, as there appear to be age- and gender-related effects.** 76% of Year 6 girls agree that they like FH, with 30% of the total saying they like it a lot. Year 6 girls are thus less likely than younger girls to report satisfaction with FH. However, they are still far more likely to do so than Year 6 boys, only 54% of whom agreed that they liked FH, with only 16% agreeing that they like it a lot. As in Year 4, the biggest difference between boys and girls in Year 6 is in the percentage of each gender who reported being highly satisfied by the programme: **in Year 6, girls are twice as likely as boys to say that they like FH a lot.** It is also worth noting that **Year 6 girls are somewhat more likely to like FH than Year 4 boys.**

Table 7 Pupil views on FH, by gender and year

		% liking FH lot	% liking FH somewhat	Total % liking FH
Year 2	Girls	66	21	87
	Boys	67	17	84
Year 4	Girls	60	32	92
	Boys	39	32	71
Year 6	Girls	30	46	76
	Boys	16	39	54

NB: Figures in this and all other tables are rounded to the nearest whole number.

4.1.1 Favourite aspects of Family Homework

Based on focus groups with parents, teachers and other school staff, the evaluation team developed a list of **aspects of FH that children might like.** Pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6 were then asked to select as many aspects as they wished. Table 8 shows the percentage of pupils in each year group choosing each item. For all three age groups, the most popular choices were “it is fun”, “I like being creative”, and “I like

¹³ We were not able to collect gender-related data from parents.

making things” – though the frequency with which these three items were mentioned differed for each year group.

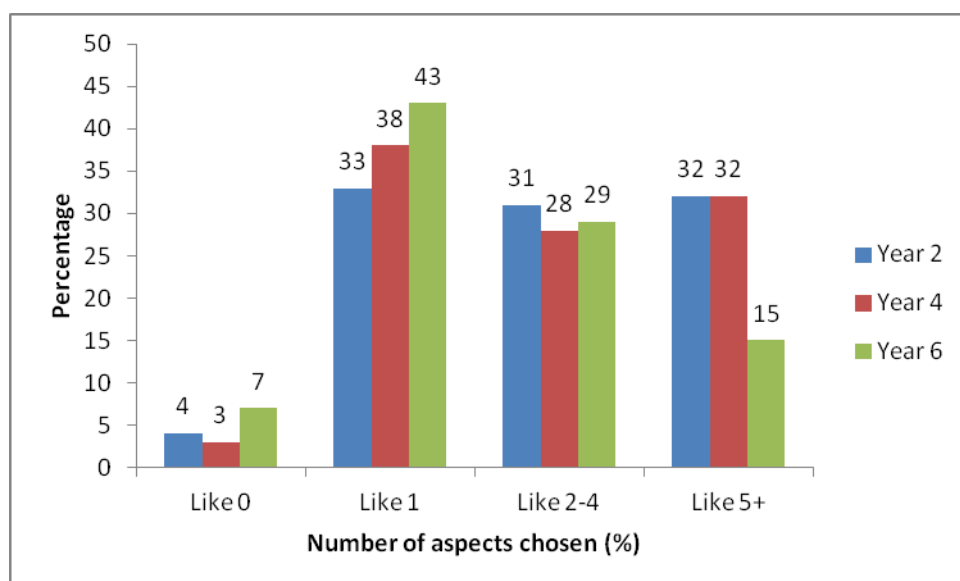
For all three year groups, the least frequently mentioned choice was ‘Because of FH, my family goes to fun places’. This suggests that, while FH does encourage families to visit interesting places in the local area and throughout London, relatively few families act on this encouragement.

Table 8 Aspects of FH which pupils enjoy

	Year 2 (%)	Year 4 (%)	Year 6 (%)
It is fun	65	53	33
I like being creative	51	57	48
I like making things	48	45	44
I am interested in the topics	29	31	21
It helps my learning	35	28	19
I like doing it with my family	35	33	21
My family goes to fun places	17	13	11
My family spends more time together	24	24	17
The sharing assembly	20	23	15
Seeing what other people made	21	27	27
Another reason	21	14	16

Pupils were asked to choose as many “likes” as they desired. As Figure 7 illustrates, Years 2 and 4 had similar selection patterns regarding the number of things they enjoyed about FH, and Year 6 differed substantially. The higher the year group, the more likely pupils were to say they only liked one aspect of FH.

Figure 7 What do pupils like about FH? Number of aspects chosen



In addition to being asked what they liked about FH, pupils in Years 4 and 6 were asked how much they agreed with the following two statements: 1) “Family

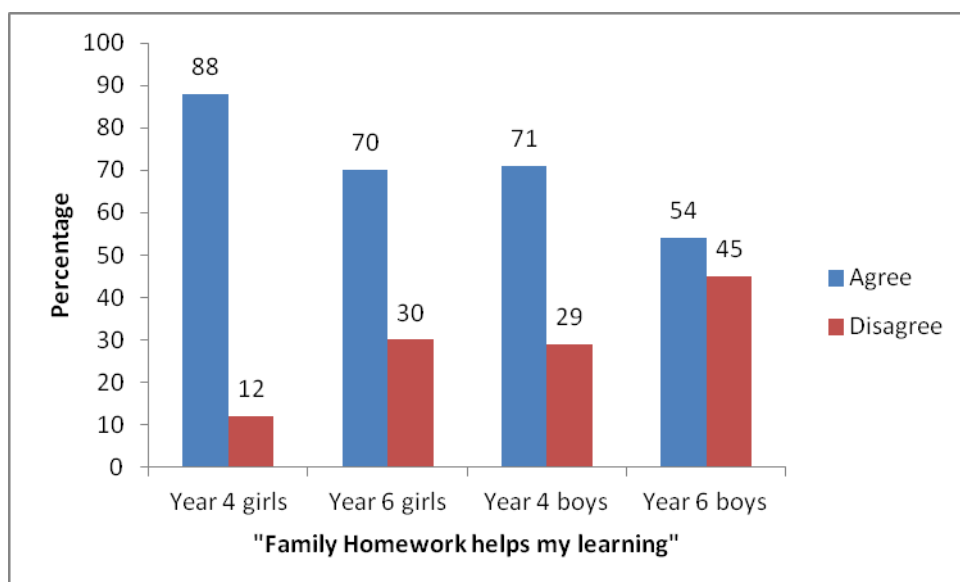
Homework help my learning” and 2) “Family Homework helps my family to spend more time together”¹⁴.

79% of Year 4 pupils agree that FH helps their learning, with 44% agreeing strongly. In Year 4, girls were more likely to agree than boys (88% versus 70%).

63% of Year 6 pupils agree that FH helps their learning, with 25% agreeing strongly. 69% of Year 6 girls think that FH helps their learning, compared to 54% of boys.

Whereas in Year 4 girls are only slightly more likely than boys to strongly agree that FH helps their learning, in Year 6 girls were 2.5 times more likely to do so. Again, this suggests that while there is an age effect with regard to FH, the gender effect is greater, at least amongst older pupils. For example, Figure 8 shows that Year 6 girls are just as likely to agree that FH helps their learning as are Year 4 boys. Year 6 boys are much less positive than other pupils about FH.

Figure 8 Percentage of pupils agreeing that 'FH helps my learning', by year and gender



The children in the focus group said they **gain a lot of knowledge and learn many new skills through doing FH**. Interesting new facts (whether they were about the main subject area such as pirates, Volcanoes, etc) came top of the list; art and craft skills also came high up. A few pupils mentioned learning research skills and learning how to use the computer better.

My brother and sister show me things on the computer.

I learn lots of new facts and I have also learned to do research which will help me in the future.

When focus group pupils were asked what they consider to be the best part of FH (as an open question, with no suggested answers), the two main types of response

¹⁴ This question was not asked of Year 2 pupils.

clustered around spending time with their families (11) and the chance to make things and be creative (9). This is again very similar to the responses from the questionnaires. Four children also mentioned the satisfaction they gained from completing an FH project.

It's great making stuff, creating stuff, making something that no-one has ever seen before.

There was no mention of the fact that FH helped them with their general learning, nor of it being fun, although many clearly regarded it as being so. 26 out of the 28 focus group pupils described FH by using adjectives such as '**brilliant**', '**exciting**', '**fun**' and 'really good'.

When asked whether or not **FH helps their family to spend more time together**, 77% of Year 4 pupils concur that it does, compared to 57% of Year 6 pupils. Pupils in Year 4 are nearly twice as likely to agree strongly that FH helps the family to spend more time together (57% compared to 32% in Year 6). This may suggest that Year 6 pupils are less likely to do FH with their parents.

4.1.2 Favourite FH topics

The Year 4 children mentioned nine different FHs in total but there was no overwhelming favourite. Volcanoes was the most popular but it needs to be remembered that this was the last FH that the children had completed and so the one most fresh in their memories. It was interesting that some topics were from when the children were in Year 2, showing that these had made a memorable impression.

4.1.3 Less enjoyable aspects of FH

In the survey, pupils were given a list of aspects of FH that they might not like, and asked to select any that they felt relevant. The list was based on criticisms voiced by parents in focus groups¹⁵. 21% of pupils cited no aspects, while 48% cited one aspect and 14% cited two. 18% of pupils said there were three or more aspects of FH which they did not like. The number of aspects cited was very consistent across year groups, with one exception: pupils in Year 6 were more likely than younger pupils to say that there was at least one aspect of the programme that they did not like.

As Table 9 shows, the most frequent complaints were related to time. For all three year groups, the most frequently cited dislike was that FH takes too much time. Pupils also complained that they did not want to do FH during their holidays, but Year 6 pupils were much more likely to say this. **Year 6 pupils were also more likely to feel that FH is boring. Year 2 pupils, in contrast, were most likely to say that it is too difficult.** To varying degrees, **all age groups pointed to a lack of**

¹⁵ It was not possible to carry out the pupil focus groups until after the pupil questionnaires had been administered.

sufficient resources at home. Only a small percentage of pupils felt that their parents did not enjoy FH.

Table 9 What pupils say they do not like about FH

	Year 2 (%)	Year 4 (%)	Year 6 (%)
Takes too much time	40	27	36
Don't want to do it during holiday break	17	19	36
Lack of resources at home	15	23	27
Family Homework is boring	16	14	26
Family Homework is too difficult	25	18	9
There is no one to do it with	9	6	8
My parents do not like Family Homework	9	6	7
Another reason	7	17	16

The patterns detected in the survey were very similar to those from the pupil focus group: the two most commonly cited sources of difficulty were the challenges finding materials/resources and the fact that FH took up too much of their holiday time, which they saw as a time for personal relaxation. Pupils also spoke of an additional time-related factor: worries about not having enough time to complete FH. Three children from one school said they felt pressured by their teachers to complete it, and four in one school said that their teacher would threaten to take away their 'golden time' if they did not show evidence of participation.

Sometimes I like to rest but my teacher says I have to do it.

4.2 Further pupil perceptions

Focus group pupils were asked what they thought the purpose of FH was. While the overwhelming response to this question from parents was that FH was designed to increase family interaction, only three out of 34 children saw this as its main objective. The predominant view, from around half the sample was that **FH was designed to keep them busy during the holidays, and to make sure that they carried on learning new knowledge and skills**¹⁶.

It [FH] is to keep us learning and carry on working.

It is to stop us getting lazy in the holidays.

A few children also added that FH was something that made learning fun in the holidays or reiterated that it was creative and about getting them to make things.

¹⁶ This is not one of the objectives stated by the Family Homework leads.

Almost all the children (26 out of the 28) could identify some distinct differences between FH and the regular school homework that they received each week during term time. The main contrast identified by just under half of the children was that **FH was much more creative and more fun than 'ordinary' school homework**, and this was very similar to the response in the parents' focus group.

Family Homework is fun, and normal homework is boring.

Five other children made the point that school homework is more about learning, whereas FH is more about enjoyment and, again, being creative.

Other responses were that there is more choice in FH and that it gives children the opportunity to work with their family.

Although children were not asked if they felt pressurised into doing FH, **17 out of 28 children told the interviewer that they did feel a bit of pressure to complete the FH**. However, only two said that this pressure was 'a lot', seven children said they felt no pressure and two did not have an opinion. The main sources of pressure were from parents, teachers and themselves. Some parents want their child to get a certificate; and as we have seen earlier, four children at one school said that their teacher threatened to take away their 'golden' time if the FH was not completed. Sometimes the pressure was self-induced.

I can feel a bit of pressure. When I plan it and it doesn't always work out good.

I sometimes wonder if I have done the right thing? Is my piece of Family Homework going to be good enough?

4.3 Links between enjoyment of Family Homework and attitudes to school¹⁷

Not surprisingly, pupils' enjoyment of school is related to their enjoyment of FH. Across all three year groups, pupils who say that they enjoy schoolwork a great deal are more likely to say that they enjoy FH a lot. **However, whereas the relationship between enjoying schoolwork and enjoying FH is equally strong in Years 2 and 4, it breaks down somewhat in Year 6**. In Year 2, 82% of pupils who said that they like school a lot also said they like FH a lot. In Year 4, 79% of pupils who like school a lot agreed that they also like FH. However, **in Year 6, only 43% of pupils who say that they like school a lot agree that they like FH a lot**. While the numbers in this subsample of Year 6 pupils who say they like schoolwork a lot are relatively small (see Table 10), they may be indicative of FH's difficulties in appealing to some older pupils, particularly boys. Whereas 51% of Year 6 girls who say they like school

¹⁷ See Appendix 1 for detailed breakdowns of pupils and parent attitudes to school, schoolwork and homework.

a great deal agree that they also like FH a lot, this was true for only 28% of boys who like school a great deal.

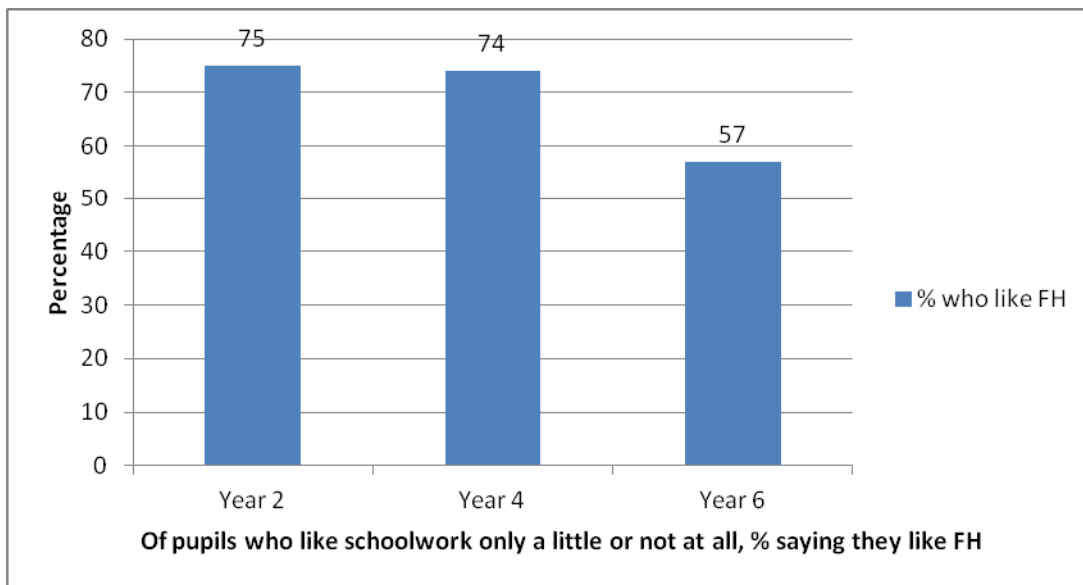
Table 10 Year 6 pupils who say they like schoolwork a lot: What is their attitude to FH?

	No.	Like FH a lot (%)	Like FH a little (%)	Dislike FH a little (%)	Dislike FH a lot (%)
Girls	45	51	38	9	2
Boys	29	28	35	3	35

Parents were asked how much their children enjoyed three different types of academic activity: 1) attending school in general; 2) doing classwork; and 3) doing normal homework. Not surprisingly, there were clear relationships between all these factors – for example, children who enjoy classwork are more likely to enjoy homework. Also unsurprisingly, children who enjoy any of these three activities – going to school, doing classwork or doing homework – are rated by their parents as more likely to enjoy FH.

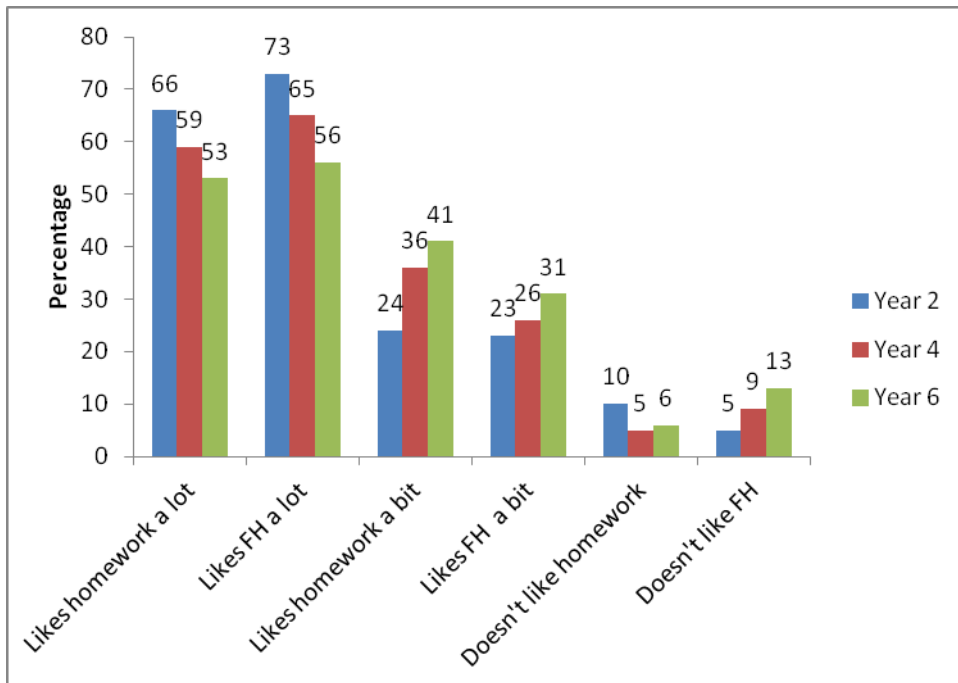
Interestingly, however, the relationships amongst these three factors and enjoying FH are not as strong as the relationships between the three factors themselves. For example, enjoying classwork is more predictive of enjoying normal homework than it is of enjoying FH. This suggests that while FH struggles to engage older boys who do like schoolwork, **the programme does a good job of appealing to many pupils who are not otherwise strongly engaged in school.** This suggestion is supported by looking at pupils' own ratings of the degree to which they enjoy schoolwork and/or FH. Across the three year groups, **45% of pupils who say they do not like schoolwork say they do like FH, with 20% saying they like FH a lot.** However, there are notable year group differences. Figure 9 compares pupils across the three year groups who say they like schoolwork only a little or not at all. Amongst pupils in years 2 and 4, **most of those who don't particularly like schoolwork do like FH.** This is still true in Year 6, but notably less so.

Figure 9 Of pupils who like schoolwork only a little or not at all, percentage who like FH



Comparing their children’s attitudes to normal homework and FH, a higher percentage of parents feel their children like FH a lot. As illustrated in Figure 5.5, this is true for all age groups. However, **parents of children in years 4 and 6 are roughly twice as likely to say that their children do not like FH, than to say that their children do not like normal homework.**

Figure 10 How much do pupils like Family Homework and normal homework? Parent response



4.4 Links between enjoyment of Family Homework and pupil ability

FH seeks to engage pupils of all abilities and ages. As we have seen, older pupils are less likely to enjoy FH, although gender plays a major role in this phenomenon. Furthermore, older pupils are actually more likely to participate in FH, despite their apparent boredom. In addition to worries about engaging older pupils, there are potential challenges associated engaging higher or lower ability pupils. The pupil surveys suggest that, in Year 2, FH does a better job of engaging higher ability pupils than engaging lower ability pupils. In Year 6, FH struggles to attract boys with the worst attitude to schoolwork, but also struggles to attract boys with the best attitude to schoolwork. Overall, the survey finding suggests that FH would benefit from expanding its range of available activities, both at the top and bottom ends. It also suggests that FH might benefit from greater efforts at attracting older boys, whatever their attitudes to schoolwork.

Generally speaking, the teacher survey confirms the findings of the pupil survey. Including Reception, 53% of teachers agree that FH engages lower ability pupils. 28% are neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 20% disagree. However, as Table 11 illustrates, there were significant year group differences. It is perhaps interesting to note that **while Year 2 pupils express the greatest degree of satisfaction with FH, Year 2 teachers are divided on the degree to which the programme successfully engages lower ability pupils.** Year 4 teachers are most likely to see FH as engaging lower ability pupils. This is consistent with the notion, expressed in focus groups, that Year 4 is the ‘sweet spot’ for FH – the year in which the programme appeals to the broadest range of pupils.

Table 11 Does FH engage lower ability pupils? Teacher response

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Reception	2	5	2
Year 2	4	3	2
Year 4	9	1	0
Year 6	4	1	3
Total	19 (53%)	10 (28%)	7 (20%)

Including reception, 78% of teachers feel that FH engages higher ability pupils. Three teachers take the opposite view, while three others are neutral on this question.

Table 12 Does FH engage higher ability pupils? Teacher response

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Reception	8	1	0
Year 2	7	2	0
Year 4	9	0	1
Year 6	4	2	2
Total	28 (78%)	5 (14%)	3 (8%)

4.5 Key points and implications from this chapter

- Around half of all pupils said that they like FH ‘a lot’, and just under a third reported liking it ‘somewhat’.
- There are large age-related differences in pupils’ attitudes to FH. While around two-thirds of Y2 pupils report liking the programme a lot, this drops to just under a half of Y4 pupils and a quarter for Y6 pupils.
- A large percentage of the apparent age effect is explained by gender. Older boys are much less likely than their female peers to enjoy FH, and much more likely to say they do not like it at all.
- In Year 2, 82% of pupils who say that they like school a lot also say they like FH a lot. In Year 4, 79% of pupils who like school a lot agree that they also like FH. However, in Year 6, only 43% of pupils who say that they like school a lot agree that they like FH a lot. Again, this is primarily a gender effect, driven by Year 6 boys’ lower enthusiasm for FH.
- While FH struggles to engage older boys who do like schoolwork, the programme does a good job of appealing to many pupils who do not like many other aspects of school. Across the three year groups, 45% of pupils who say they do not like schoolwork say they do like FH, with 20% of this group saying they like FH a lot. However, there are notable year group differences. Amongst pupils in years 2 and 4, most of those who don’t particularly like schoolwork do like FH. This is still true in Year 6, but notably less so.
- Pupil surveys suggest that, in Year 2, FH does a better job of engaging higher ability pupils than lower ability pupils. Year 2 teachers generally confirm this finding. Year 4 teachers are most likely to see FH as engaging lower ability and their higher ability peers. This is consistent with the notion, expressed in focus groups, that Year 4 is the ‘sweet spot’ for FH – the year in which the programme appeals to the broadest range of pupils.

- In Year 6, FH struggles to attract boys with the worst attitude to schoolwork, but also struggles to attract boys with the best attitude to schoolwork. Overall, the survey finding suggests that FH would benefit from expanding its range of available activities, both at the top and bottom ends.
- The most popular FH activities (at least with regard to Volcanoes) involve arts and craft. One of the least mentioned aspects of FH is the family trips or visits. This is likely because they do not take place very frequently.
- Eight out of ten Year 4 pupils and over six out of ten Year 6 pupils feel that FH helps with their general learning of new knowledge and skills. There is also a gender difference, particularly with the older pupils, and Year 6 girls are 2.5 times more likely to think FH assists their learning than boys.
- For the pupils, the least enjoyable part of FH is that it takes up too much time
- Pupils see the main purpose of FH as ensuring that they keep on learning during the holidays.
- More than three-quarters of Year 4 pupils agree that FH helps their family to spend more time together, as do nearly six in ten Year 6 pupils.
- Year 6 pupils were more likely to say that FH is boring. Year 2 pupils, in contrast, were most likely to say that it is too difficult. To varying degrees, all age groups pointed to a lack of sufficient resources at home.
- The pupils in the focus group said that they felt 'a bit' of pressure to complete FH, from their families but also from teachers.

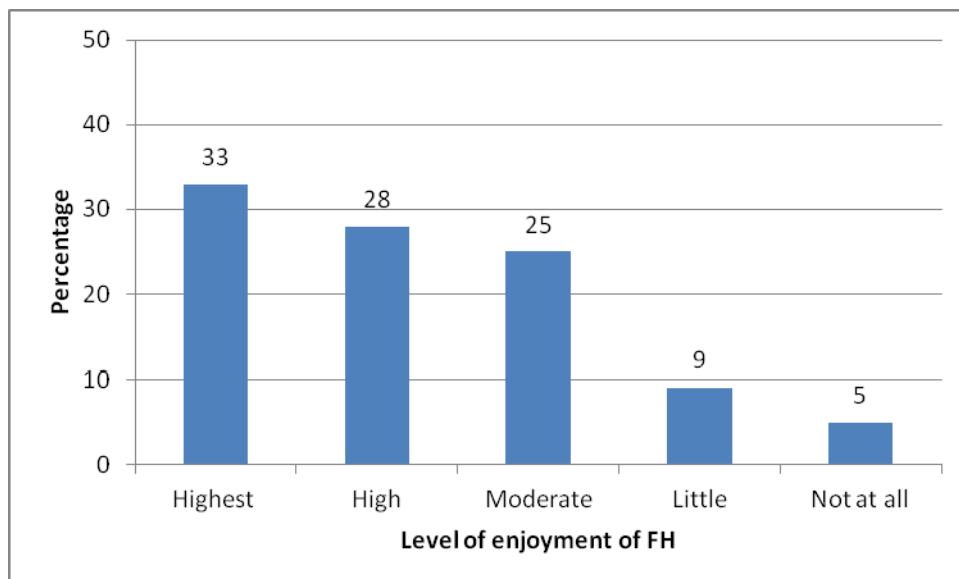
5. Parent and teacher perceptions of Family Homework

Chapter 5 presents data from parents and teachers' perspectives, but focuses primarily on parents. The first section of this chapter considers parents' enjoyment of FH, and the relationship between their levels of satisfaction and their own literacy habits and practices. The next section looks at parents' perceptions of the purposes and nature of FH. Next, parental views are presented on the benefits of FH, changes within family attitudes and practices, and the parts of FH that they experience difficulties with. Finally, this chapter looks at teachers' perceptions of FH. These perceptions include their views on parents' attitudes to the programme, the impacts of FH on teachers themselves, and opportunities to provide feedback to pupils and school management.

5.1 Parental enjoyment

Parents were asked to rate their enjoyment of FH on a 1 to 5 scale, with a rating of 1 indicating that they enjoy FH a lot and 5 indicating that they do not enjoy it at all. Responding **parents were almost seven times more likely to say they enjoy FH a lot than to say that they do not enjoy it at all.** 33% of parents selected the highest level of enjoyment, with a further 28% selecting the second highest level. 25% expressed a moderate level of enjoyment, 15% expressed little enjoyment, and 5% said they do not enjoy FH at all.

Figure 11 Parents' self-reported enjoyment of FH: % selecting each category

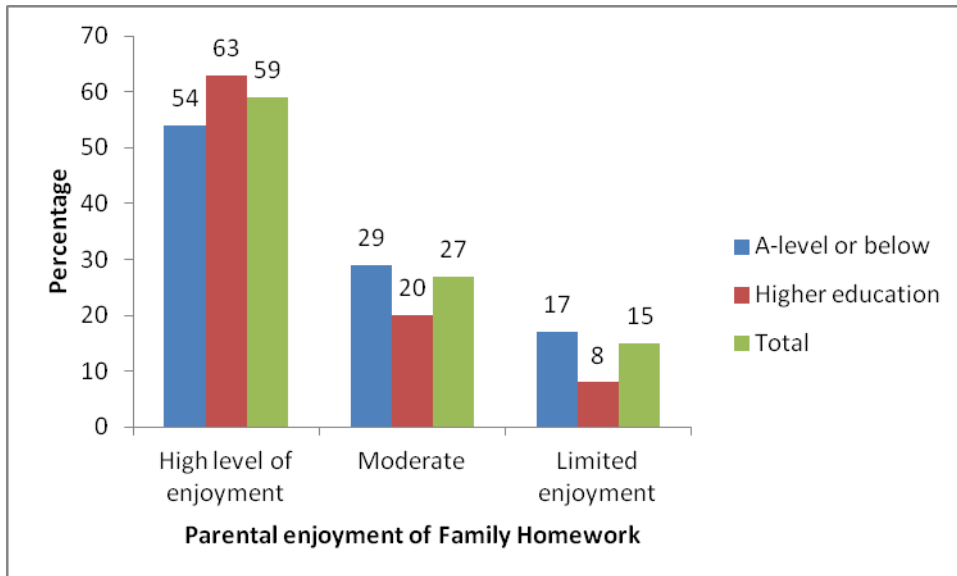


In their focus groups, parents mentioned 11 different FHs in total, but the four most commonly cited topics they said they enjoyed were *Pirates*, *The Moon*, *Space* and *Food*.

5.1.1 Relationship between enjoyment and parental education

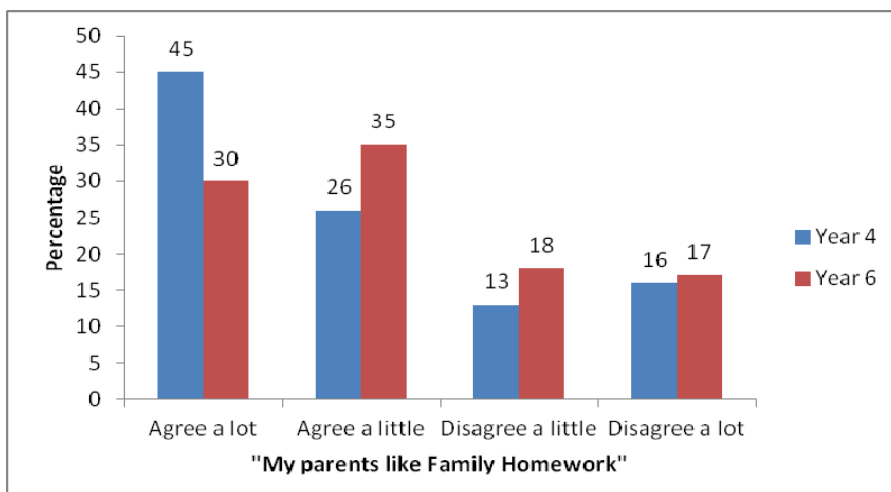
Appendix 1 includes a breakdown of parental education levels. As Figure 6.1 indicates, there is an association between parental qualifications and attitudes to FH: parents with degrees are more likely to say they enjoy FH a lot. However, this association is relatively small, and parents with degrees are no more likely than other parents to say that they enjoy FH at least a bit. This indicates that **FH appeals to a broad range of parents, whatever their education level.**

Figure 12 Parental enjoyment of FH, by highest qualification



Pupils were asked about their parents' enjoyment of FH. Amongst Year 2 pupils, 52% say their parents liked it a lot, while 27% say they like it a bit and 21% say they do not like it. Year 4 and 6 pupils were asked the degree to which they agreed with the statement 'My parents like FH. As Figure 13 illustrates, Year 4 pupils are more likely to agree strongly that their parents like FH. Overall, **more than two thirds of pupils agree that their parents like FH.**

Figure 13 Degree to which pupils agree with the statement 'My parents like FH'

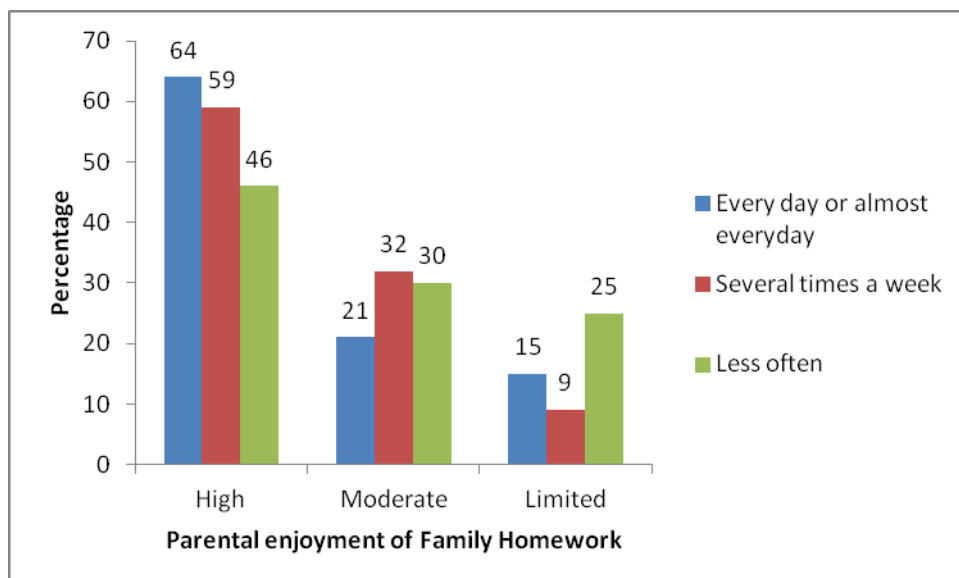


5.1.2 Relationship between enjoyment and literacy practices

Appendix 1 contains a summary of our findings regarding parents' reading practices – i.e. the frequency with which they read a variety of print and digital forms of text. In our analysis, we found no association between parents' reading practices and their enjoyment of FH. That is, **even if parents rarely read for pleasure, they are still very likely to report enjoying FH.**

Parents who reported being more involved with their child's schoolwork and homework say they enjoy FH more, as illustrated in Figure 6.3. However, **even parents who are the least involved in their children's schoolwork typically enjoy FH.** This suggests, as before, that FH is having success at engaging parents who are not typically engaged in schoolwork.

Figure 14 How much parents enjoy FH, by how often they talk to children about schoolwork



5.2 The perceived purposes of FH

When asked what they perceive the objective or purpose of FH to be, some focus group parents provided multiple answers, but the overwhelming majority (29 out of 34), said that it was designed **to engage the whole family and increase family interaction.**

It's to encourage families to spend time together in their children's education...Family homework means not watching TV but spending time in educational activity, and it's something to do in the holidays. Holidays disturb thinking and learning habits.

Other views included that FH aims to encourage creativity, to improve and increase parent-school relations, and to keep children thinking during the holiday periods.

30 out of 34 parents thought that FH is **very different from the regular, curriculum-based homework** that their children bring home during the week. Over a third of all parents said the main distinction between the two was that **FH is more enjoyable and there was less pressure.**

Although both regular homework and family homework are part of developing my children’s learning there is a distinct difference between the two. I find that my children are far more excited and show more interest in family homework than they do with regular homework. There is a lot more discussion around the homework activities on a family level and there is plenty of room for flexibility, individuality and creativity. Regular homework is curricula based and usually has more closed answers and outcomes.

Other reasons given by a few parents were that: FH is practical and creative; it is for the whole family; it is more practical; it is less academic; and there are no right or wrong answers.

5.3 The benefits of Family Homework

When asked about their perceptions of the most beneficial aspects of doing FH, most parents cited more than one benefit. Provided with a list of eight options, plus a separate option for ‘Other’, more than half of parents reported five or more benefits, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13 Number of FH benefits cited by parents, by percentage

Number of benefits	Percentage
1	16
2-4	40
5+	54

The most frequently cited benefits related to enjoyment, creativity and spending time with one’s children, suggesting that **parents feel FH is achieving its objectives.** Fewer than one in five responding parents cited going to interesting places as a benefit of FH.

Table 14 FH benefits cited by parents

Benefit	Percentage
Helps the family spend more time together	65
Makes learning fun	64
My child enjoys it	61
Encourages creativity	60
Helps me to support my child’s learning	57
Helps me for closer to my child	45
Increases contact with school	28
We go to interesting places	18
Other	3

Although parents in the focus groups were asked about what they considered the best, rather than the most beneficial, part of FH, their answers were very similar to the most common response to the question asked in questionnaire. Almost half of the parents in the focus groups said the best part of FH was that it was interactive; it brought the family unit together where they could share ideas and make group decisions.

It's a chance for the family to be together; the siblings bond as well as the parents and sometimes mum is more excited to do the family homework than the children.

Around a fifth of the focus group parents liked the fact that the activities were practical and gave opportunities to be creative. Some also mentioned that FH created a time where they could be with their child and witness their child's enjoyment in being engaged in an interesting activity. A few parents saw a competitive element to FH: family members could compete against each other and against other families at the school. **Only one parent spoke about the visits as being the best part.**

Parents in the focus groups came up with 10 benefits of participating in FH, although sometimes it was not clear if these accrued to the parent, the child or for the family unit as a whole. The three most frequently cited benefits, which can be applied to the whole family, or to the parents and child, were gains in knowledge and learning new things; building up the imagination and improving creative skills; and developing research skills, particularly on the internet. These were cited by around a quarter of parents

I've gained knowledge. When you are together you learn so many things. I learned lots: baking, cooking skills and all about famous athletes. The Olympics was all new to me; I learn from the children.

Around a fifth of parents also spoke about how FH helped them get to know their children better, in terms of their interests and their abilities. A few parents said that FH had boosted their children's confidence and self-esteem. Other more general benefits mentioned were the development and improvements in social/interpersonal and organisational skills.

5.4 The impact of Family Homework

5.4.1 Family changes

Parents in the survey were asked what if any changes they had noticed in their family as a result of FH. Parents were provided with a list of possible options, and asked to choose as many as were relevant. 32% of parents chose one item, 44% chose 2-3 items, and 22% chose four or more items. As Table 15 shows, **more than**

half of responding parents say they feel more involved in their children’s learning because of FH. All four of the top changes were related to parent-child interaction. Parents were much less likely to select options related to parent-school interaction and family trips.

Table 15 Changes attributed to FH

Impact	Percentage
Parent feels more involved in child's learning	52
Family does more creative activities together	50
Parent listens more to child's views	46
Family spends more time together	40
Parent has more contact with school	22
No changes	18
Family takes makes more educational trips or visits	15
Have not done any Family Homework	4
Other	2

When the focus group parents were asked what if any changes they had noticed in their family as a result of FH, almost three quarters said they been able to detect at least one change, while 10 said that there were none. As with the parents who completed the survey, the most frequently mentioned changes were related to parents and children spending more time together and using that time to work towards a common purpose. Only a few parents said the family had taken more trips and made more visits together. Other reported changes were: parents got to know their children better; they listened more closely to their children; and they gave them the chance and the space to explore and initiate ideas.

I have definitely gained an insight into my children’s certain interests and their abilities.

It’s about being patient, listening to the children more, not underestimating their potential, sharing ideas, thoughts and plans.

Other changes involved the whole family learning to enjoy learning together, and parents becoming more flexible and more creative. Amongst the focus group parents, there was no mention of increased parental contact with the school.

5.5 Some less enjoyable aspects of Family Homework

In the survey, parents were given a list of possible difficulties they might have with FH, and asked to choose as many as were relevant. The list was based on difficulties cited by parents in their focus groups. In the survey, 31% of parents cited one difficulty, while a further 29% cited two. 29% cited 3-4, and 11% cited five or

more. **Parents were thus much more likely to cite benefits of FH (Tables 13-14) than to cite difficulties.** 15% of parents said there was nothing difficult about FH.

The **most commonly cited difficulties related to time pressures.** Half of parents said that it was sometimes difficult to find enough time to do FH during the break. Nearly as many said that holiday plans sometimes clashed with FH. Parents also cited **resource challenges, both in terms of finding resources and affording them.**

Table 16 Parents' difficulties with FH

Difficulty	Percentage
Sometimes hard to find enough time	50
Sometimes holiday plans get in the way	45
It can be difficult to find the right resources	41
Resources are not always affordable	27
Don't understand some of the activities	17
Not enough notice beforehand	13
Child finds Family Homework boring	12
It is too competitive	11
Parent finds Family Homework boring	6
Other	4

When focus group parents were asked what they considered the worst part of FH, the dominant themes were again time and resources. Time was mentioned by around a quarter of these parents as being an issue. Time was particularly an issue for working parents, or when the family had plans for the holiday, making it difficult to fit FH into a busy schedule.

Sometimes it's difficult to fit in with other things. My children are usually busy during half terms and I'd like them to have a break.

A similar number of focus group parents spoke about difficulties of finding materials or resources and two mentioned the expense of paying for them as acting as a deterrent to participate. At one school, Cayley Primary, five of the seven parents were worried that FH could get in the way of regular homework.

5.6 Teacher responses

Teachers were quizzed about parents' attitudes to FH. When asked whether or not they agreed with the statement 'Parents enjoy FH, 55% of teachers did agree, 42% were neutral, and 3% (one teacher) disagreed. Year 2 teachers were most likely to strongly agree that parents enjoy FH.

Teachers were also asked how strongly they agreed with a range of statements about the impact of FH on parents. As Table 17 shows, **teachers agreed relatively strongly that the programme helps to get parents more involved in their children’s learning**. There is also general agreement that FH improves parent-school relations. Teachers are more ambivalent about the impact of FH on parents’ understanding of their children’s learning.

Table 17 Impacts of FH on parents, according to teachers

Impact	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Increases parents’ involvement in their children’s learning	10	24	3	0
Improves parent-school relations	6	21	9	1
Improves parents’ understanding of their children’s learning	5	16	13	3
Engages families who are not typically involved in their children’s learning	2	10	15	10

Most teachers felt that, despite concerted efforts, FH struggles to engage families who are not typically involved in their children’s schoolwork. With regard to parental engagement, the **teacher survey paints a somewhat less optimistic picture than the data from the parent survey**. As the latter survey indicates, even parents who are the least involved in their children’s schoolwork tend to say they enjoyed FH. However, it should be noted that the parent survey was voluntary, so it is possible, and indeed likely, that the least engaged parents did not respond.

The main reasons that teachers gave in the open-text responses in the questionnaires as to why some families struggled to participate in FH were similar to the responses given by parents: lack of time and difficulties in finding resources. Teachers often gave more than one reason in one answer, and some of these also hinted at a sense of impatience with non-participating parents.

Lack of understanding on the subject. Lack of resources. No time due to work commitments, looking after children, etc.

A lot of families are not bothered and do not put in the effort into their children's learning.

Despite the numerous pressures on their time, teachers do not appear to resent FH. When asked if the programme takes up more of their time than it is worth, only two teachers said that it did. 32 teachers think that FH is worth the time, with an

additional two teachers being neutral on this question.

In terms of FH processes, 22 teachers agree that they have sufficient opportunities to provide feedback to pupils. Eight teachers feel that they do not have enough time, and six were neutral on this question.

Teachers do feel that they have sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on the programme to school management. 26 teachers think that they do, with only two teachers saying they do not. Eight teachers were neutral on this question.

34 of 36 teachers agree that FH makes a positive contribution to their school's culture, with 12 agreeing strongly. No teachers disagreed with this statement; two teachers said they neither agree nor disagree.

According to the teachers, there is a **strong degree of communication within schools** about FH. All 36 teachers confirmed that they are aware of what other classes at their school produce. However, there **appears to be less communication across schools. Only six teachers agreed that they were aware of what other schools within the SP produce** for FH. 26 teachers said they were not aware of what other schools produced, with five teachers being neutral on this question. In the focus group, teachers confirmed these sentiments. The consensus in this group was that each school did a very good job of internal publicity, but that cross-Partnership sharing was minimal. Teachers felt that making greater efforts to share families' work across the Partnership would add to the sense of motivation and excitement that FH seeks to achieve. Focus group teachers also felt that this would be a natural next step for the programme, given the close proximity of the primary schools and the fact that a number of children had relatives at other SP schools.

5.7 Key points and implications from this chapter

- Responding parents were almost seven times more likely to say they enjoy FH a lot than to say that they do not enjoy it at all. 33% of parents selected the highest level of enjoyment, with a further 28% selecting the second highest level. 25% expressed a moderate level of enjoyment, 15% expressed little enjoyment, and 5% said they do not enjoy FH at all.
- Parental education has some impact on engagement with FH, but not much. Parents with degrees are more likely to say they enjoy FH a lot. However, this association is relatively small, and parents with degrees are no more likely than other parents to say that they enjoy FH at least a bit. This indicates that FH appeals to a broad range of parents, whatever their education level.

- We found no association between parents' reading practices and their enjoyment of FH. That is, even if parents rarely read for pleasure, they are still very likely to report enjoying FH.
- Parents who reported being more involved with their child's schoolwork and homework say they enjoy FH more. However, even parents who are the least involved in their children's schoolwork typically enjoy FH. This suggests that FH is having success at engaging parents who are not typically engaged in schoolwork.
- More than half of parents reported five or more benefits of FH. The most frequently cited benefits related to enjoyment, creativity and spending time with one's children, suggesting that parents feel FH is achieving most of its objectives. However, only about one in seven parents said the family had gone on interesting visits together as a result of FH.
- Parents cited for more benefits of FH than difficulties.
- Parents see the main purpose of FH as engaging the whole family and increase family interaction. Like the pupils, parents regard FH as being very different from school homework.
- Overall, more than two thirds of pupils agree that their parents like FH.
- For parents, the best parts of FH spending time with their children and making things. More than half of the parents feel that, as a result of FH, they have become more involved in their child's (or children's) learning.
- The most commonly cited difficulties related to time pressures. Half of parents said that it was sometimes difficult to find enough time to do FH during the break. Nearly as many said that holiday plans sometimes clashed with FH. Parents also cited resource challenges, both in terms of finding resources and affording them.
- Teachers agree relatively strongly that FH helps to get parents more involved in their children's learning. They generally agree that FH improves parent-school relations. Teachers are more ambivalent about the impact of FH on parents' understanding of their children's learning.
- Just over half of the teachers think that parents enjoy FH, and four tenths have a neutral opinion to this question or are not sure.
- Almost every teacher thinks FH is a worthwhile programme, and feels that it makes a positive contribution to their school's culture. When asked if the programme takes up more of their time than it is worth, only two out of 34 teachers said that it did.

- Around two thirds of teachers feel that there are sufficient opportunities to provide feedback to pupils and to the school management team.
- Teachers feel that the SP schools do a very good job of internal publicity, but that cross-partnership sharing is minimal. Teachers felt that making greater efforts to share families' work across the Partnership would add to the sense of motivation and excitement that FH seeks to achieve.

6. Family Homework across the Stepney Partnership

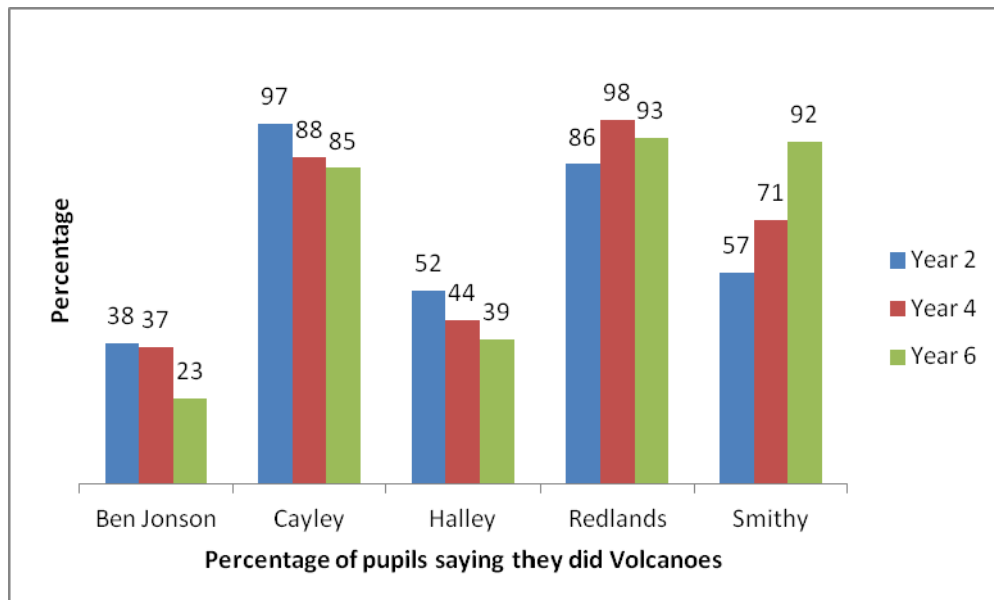
This chapter provides a school-by-school breakdown of some of the key themes addressed in this report. In particular, Chapter 6 looks at participation rates, pupil enjoyment, not only of FH, but also of general schoolwork and their normal school homework. The chapter concludes by looking at parents' enjoyment of FH across SP schools.

6.1 Participation rates

Within each school, pupils' self-reported participation figures differed by year group. However, this pattern was variable across schools. At Redlands, participation in the Volcanoes FH was very consistent across year groups. In three schools (Ben Jonson, Caley and Halley), participation declined by year group. At Smithy Street participation rose by year group.

The most meaningful differences were not across year groups, but across schools. At the two schools where FH is a compulsory requirement (Caley and Redlands), pupils in all three year groups reported participation rates above 85%. Ben Jonson and Halley showed much lower participation rates on this particular topic.

Figure 15 Percentage of pupils saying they did the FH on Volcanoes

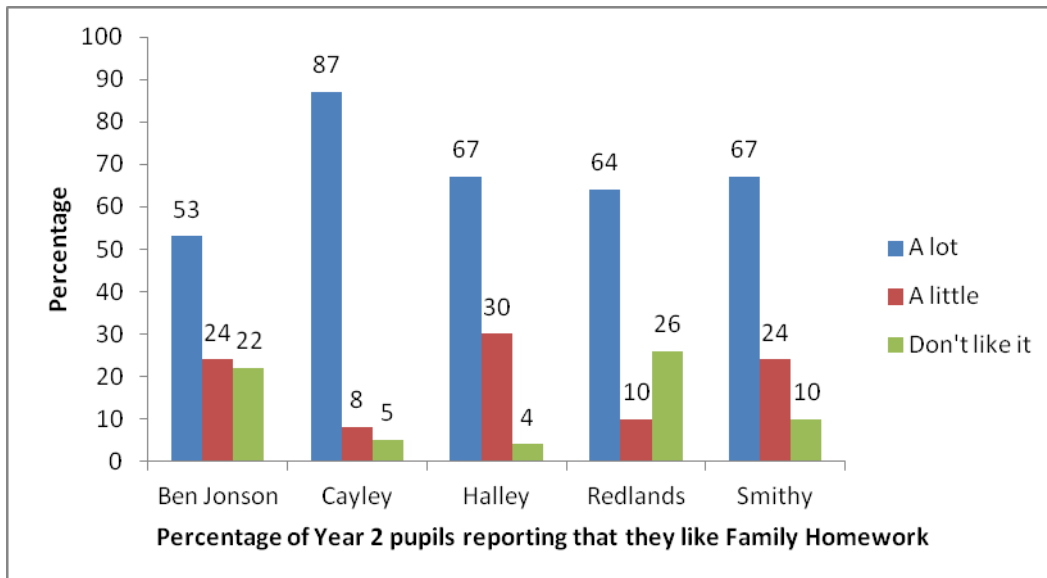


6.2 Pupil enjoyment of Family Homework

Pupils' self-reported enjoyment of FH also differed significantly across schools. Because different age groups reported strikingly different attitudes to FH, we report results by year group (Figures 16-18). In Year 2, the percentage of pupils

reporting that they liked FH a lot ranged from a low of 53% at Ben Jonson to a high of 87% at Cayley, with the other three schools somewhere between these extremes. Ben Jonson and Redlands stand out for the relatively high percentage of Year 2 pupils saying they do not like FH.

Figure 16 Percentage of Year 2 pupils who say they like FH



Pupils in Years 4 and 6 were asked a slightly more complex question than those in Year 2. Those in the higher two age groups were asked the degree to which they agreed with the following statement: "I like Family Homework". As would be expected from the results reported earlier in this report, the higher the year group, the lower the self-reported enjoyment of FH. One exception was Halley, where Year 4 pupils expressed a particularly high level of satisfaction with the programme.

Figure 17 Percentage of Year 4 pupils agreeing that they like FH

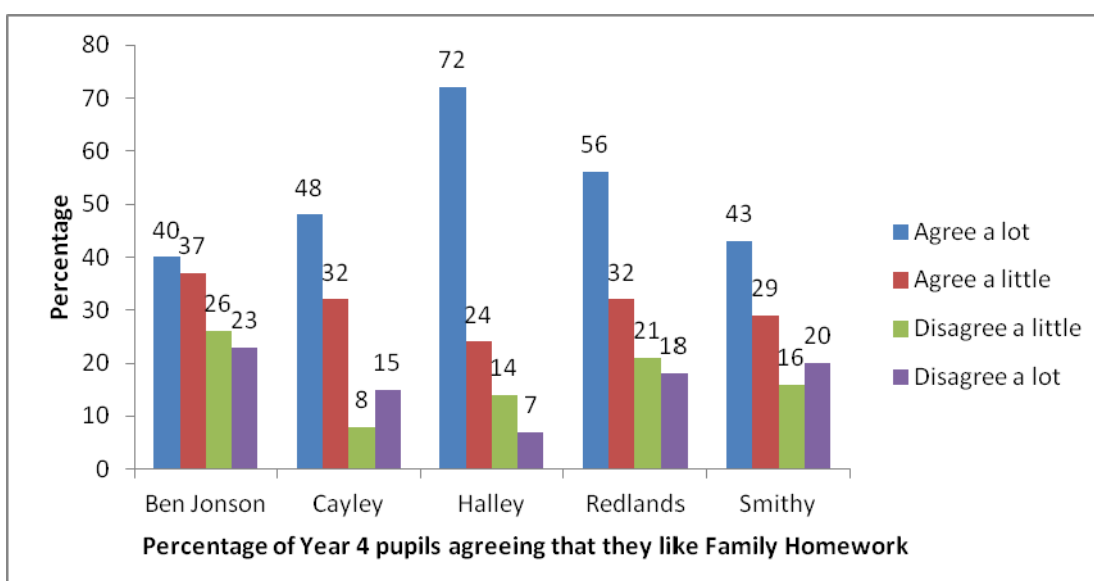
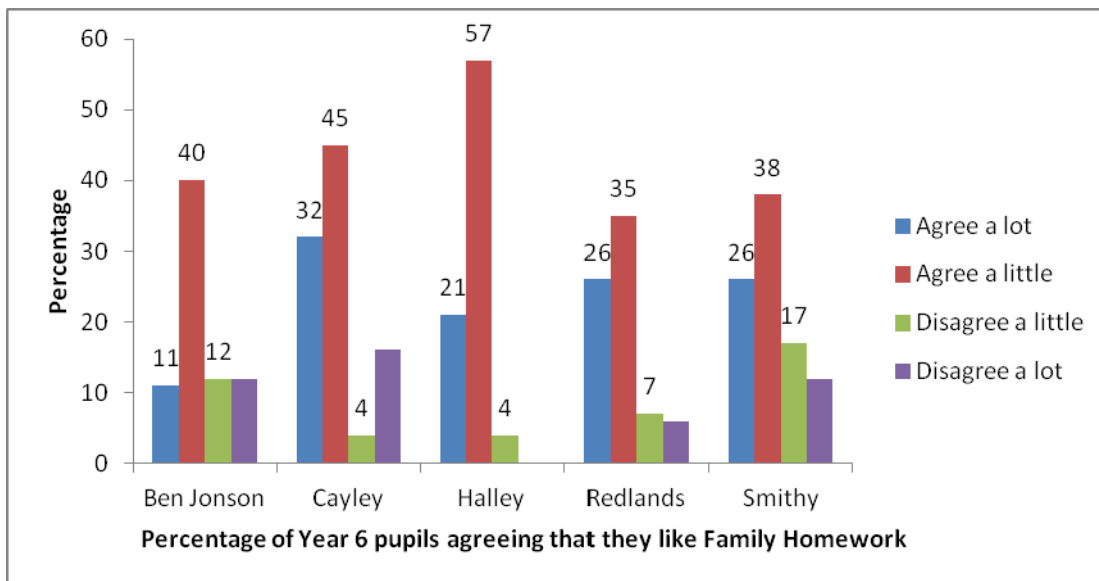
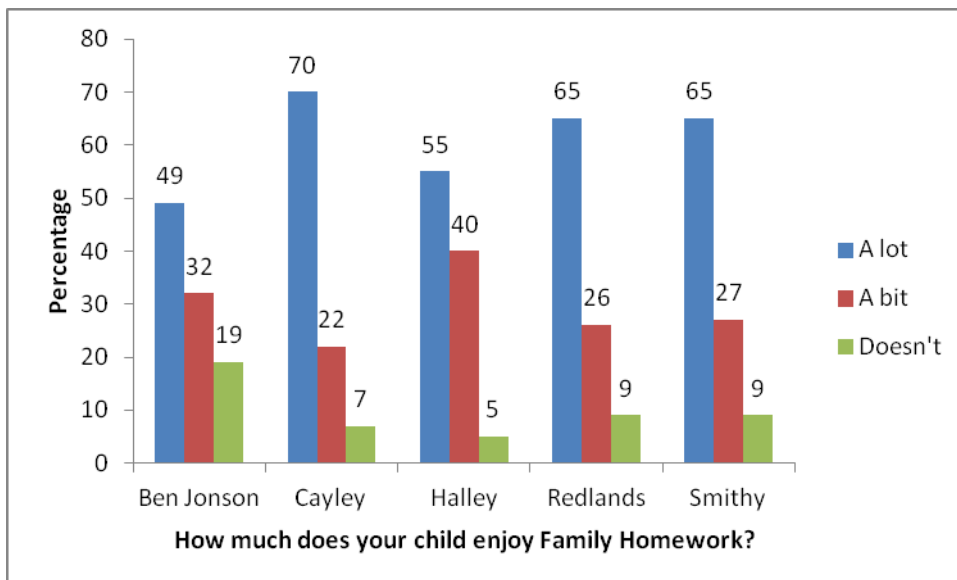


Figure 18 Percentage of Year 6 pupils agreeing that they like FH



Pupils’ self-reported differences in their enjoyment of FH were reflected, albeit to a lesser degree, in parents’ responses. Parents at Cayley were slightly more likely than those at Redlands and Smithy Street to say that their children enjoy participating a lot, but no more likely than parents at other schools to say that their children do enjoy it at least a bit. The exception to this was Ben Jonson, where parents were markedly less likely to say their children enjoy the programme.

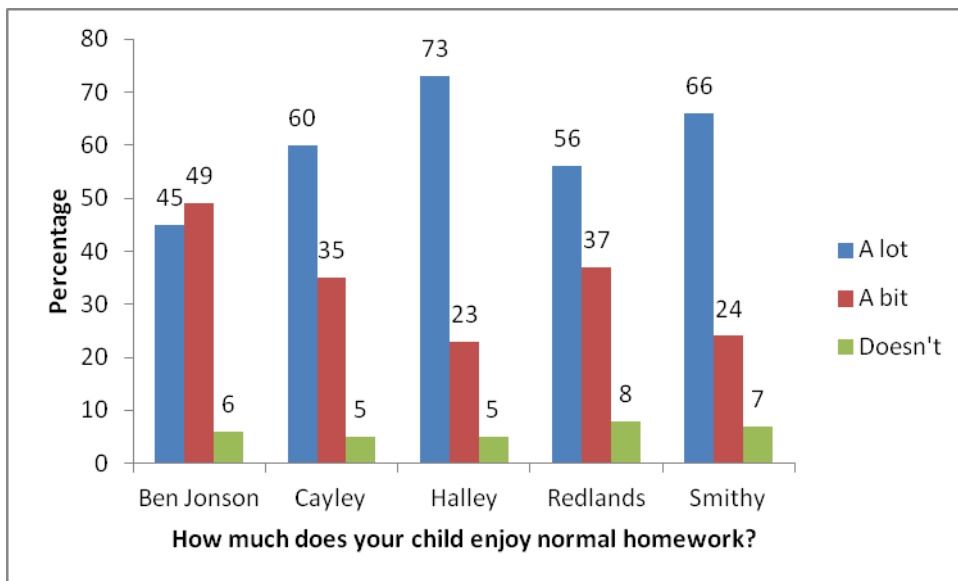
Figure 19 Parents' perceptions of the degree to which their children enjoy FH



6.3 Pupil enjoyment of schoolwork and normal homework

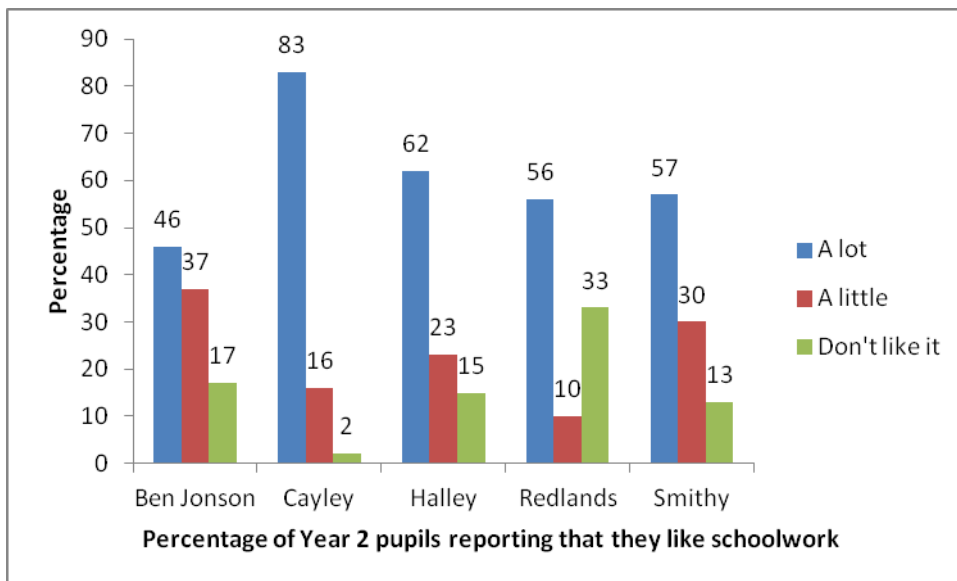
Because enjoyment of and participation in FH may be influenced by attitudes to other aspects of school, the surveys included questions about attitudes to schoolwork and normal homework. Cross-school differences in enjoyment of FH were largely mirrored by differences in enjoyment of normal homework. As indicated in Figure 20, few parents at any school felt that their children did not enjoy normal homework, but there were significant differences regarding children's perceived enjoyment of FH. At Halley, a higher percentage of parents felt that their children enjoyed normal homework than FH.

Figure 20 Parents' perception of the degree to which their children enjoy normal homework



Pupils in all three year groups were asked **how much they like schoolwork** (Figures 21-23). In addition to the predictable age-related differences, there were **significant differences across schools**. In Year 2, for example, pupils at Cayley were much more likely than pupils at other schools to say they enjoy schoolwork a lot. While Redlands had a relatively typical percentage of Year 2 pupils saying they enjoy schoolwork a lot, it had almost twice as many pupils saying they do not like it. Pupils at Ben Jonson were the least likely to say they enjoy schoolwork a lot.

Figure 21 Percentage of Year 2 pupils reporting that they like schoolwork



In Year 4, the largest differences were in the percentages of pupils saying they do not like schoolwork. Whereas very few pupils reported this at Halley, Redlands and Smithy, at least one in five did so at Ben Jonson and Cayley.

Figure 22 Percentage of Year 4 pupils reporting that they like schoolwork

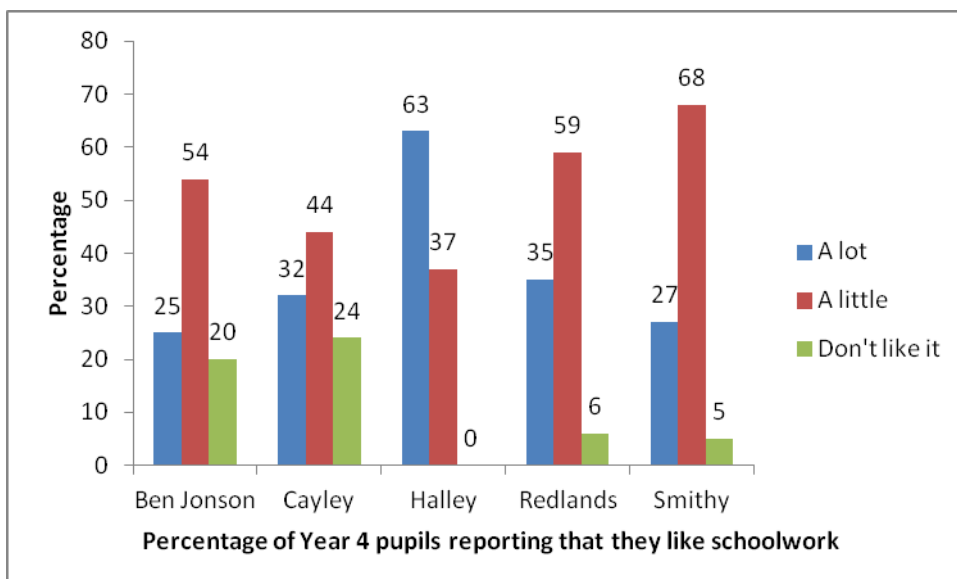
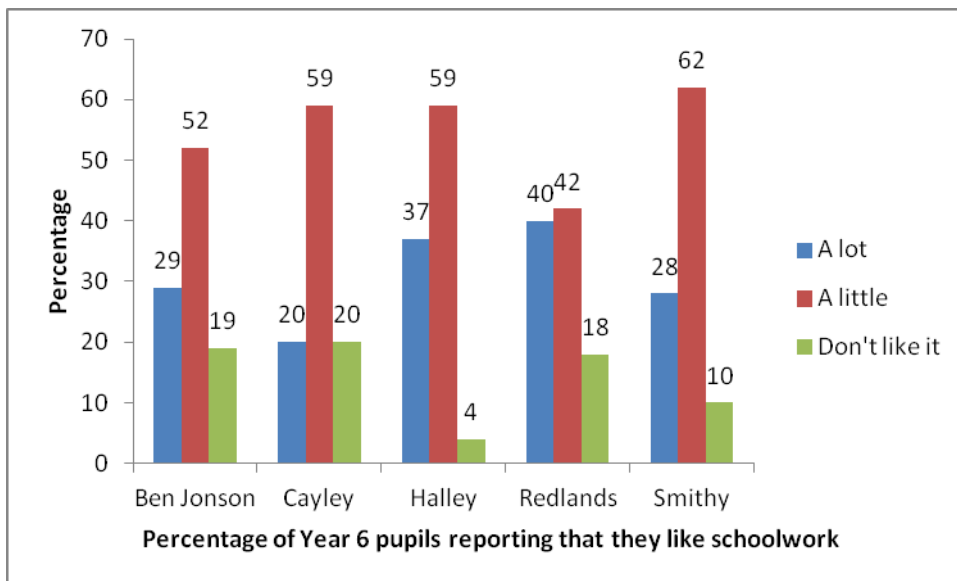


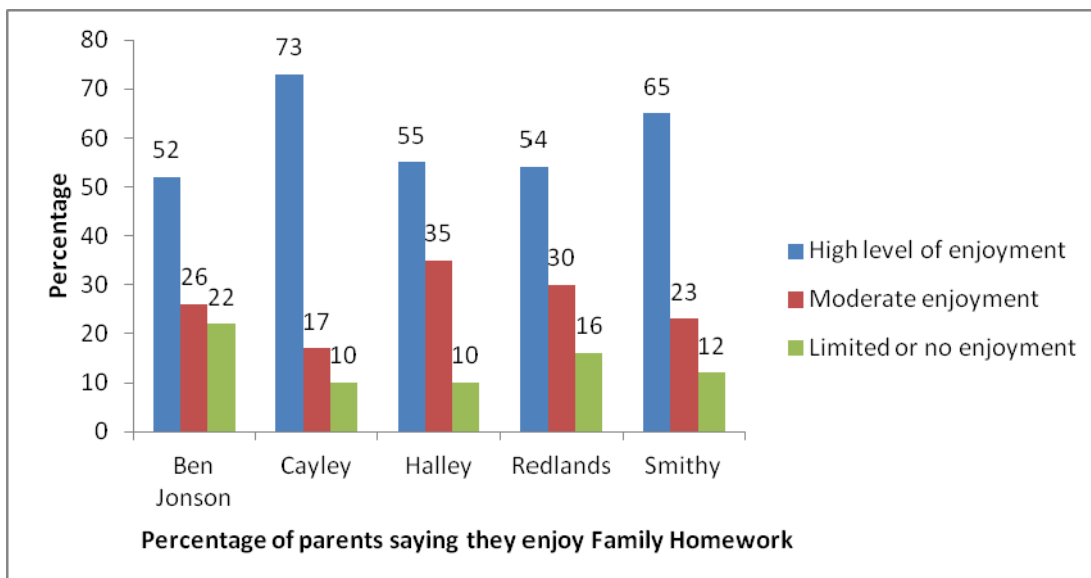
Figure 23 Percentage of Year 6 pupils reporting that they like schoolwork



6.4 Parental enjoyment of Family Homework

While there were cross-school differences in parents' self-reported enjoyment of FH, these differences were less than those found for pupils. **At all schools, more than half of parents reported a high level of enjoyment.**

Figure 24 Percentage of parents saying they enjoy FH



6.5 Key points and implications from this chapter

- Within each school, pupils' self-reported participation figures differ by year group. However, the most meaningful differences in participation rates are not across year groups, but across schools, which would appear to be related to where the presumption is that FH is compulsory (at Cayley and Redlands). Indeed, three schools – Cayley, Redlands and Smithy Street (where there is also a strong expectation that FH will be completed) had participation rates in the Volcanoes FH of over 90% from at least one year group. The two schools with the lowest reported rates were Ben Jonson and Halley.
- Pupils' enjoyment of FH also differs across age groups and between schools. The general trend is for younger pupils to enjoy FH much more than their older counterparts. One exception was found at Halley, where Year 4 pupils report liking FH more than pupils in either Year 2 or Year 6.
- Pupils' attitude towards their general schoolwork was is age related, with younger children liking schoolwork the most. However, there were large differences across schools.
- Parents like FH. At all the schools more than half of parents reported a high level of enjoyment. The school with the highest level of reported parent enjoyment is Cayley.

7. Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

This chapter provides an analytical summary of the findings detailed in chapters 3-6. In Section 1 of this chapter, these findings are analysed in light of the evaluation's seven objectives. Following this analysis, we highlight additional issues arising from the evidence collected in this evaluation. Section 2 lists a number of suggestions that came from some of the stakeholders, and from the parents and pupils, for improving or developing FH further. The chapter ends with a series of possible recommendations for the five schools to consider.

The programme evaluation had seven objectives. In our analysis, we will discuss the first two objectives together, then discuss Objectives 3-5, followed by Objective 7. In order to avoid repetition, Objective 6 will not be discussed individually. Objective 6's aim – to describe and critically analyse stakeholders' views on FH's effectiveness, including strengths and weaknesses – will be incorporated into discussion of each of the other objectives. First, however, we present the evaluations' primary finding.

7.1 Main finding of this evaluation

The main finding of this evaluation is that **FH is a highly successful initiative**. The programme has high rates of family participation and has already over-achieved in its main objective, which is to get families more involved in, and with, their children's learning. The great majority of the children and their parents look forward to FH and feel they benefit from it. Staff at all of the schools appear to work hard to ensure FH is a success, and they appear to do this because they believe in the programme. The efforts of all the staff involved should be applauded. The schools collaborate and support each other, and the model should be replicated in other schools across the UK.

7.2 Objectives 1 & 2: Describe programme processes and practices, within the broader context of the Stepney Partnership's overall parental engagement strategy

7.2.1 Programme processes

It is clear from the evaluation that the involvement of multiple schools brings a number of benefits. In particular, no one school is overloaded or overburdened with production requirements. Also, it is apparent that the multi-school nature of the FHLs helps provide essential motivation to this group – for example, by adding to the range and variety of project ideas. The structure of the FHLs also helps schools to share challenges with each other, as well as sharing ways to support and overcome these challenges. Furthermore, it appears to encourage a flexible approach to the programme: it is clear that each school has a slightly different approach to FH, and that this diversity is actively encouraged. **It is likely that such diversity strengthens the programme, and adds to the models' potential transferability to other contexts.**

However, it also appeared that **the SP could more fully capitalise on its multi-school partnership**. While there is significant and important cross-school communication ‘behind-the-scenes’, particularly through the FHLs, the multi-school nature of FH currently provides fewer benefits to teachers, pupils and parents than it might, particularly given the close proximity of the SP schools and the reported late high number of relatives children have in the various schools. Teachers said that they were not aware of the work produced by other schools, and reported little if any cross-school sharing of activities. Parents said that they would welcome seeing work from across the SP displayed in their own schools.

The **role of Project Manager appears to be an essential one** for a partnership such as this. The SPPM’s role ensures that a single individual bears ultimate responsibility for the programme’s continuation and quality. Given the numerous responsibilities of the individual members of the FHLs, to say nothing of the time pressures faced by all stakeholders within a modern primary school environment, vesting programme ownership with a single, funded individual would appear essential, at least in a multi-school partnership.

7.2.2 Programme quality

The higher the quality of FH, the more likely it is to motivate pupils and parents, and to have a positive impact on staff. The deputy headteachers highlighted the vital role that teachers play in making a particular FH work well, both prior to distribution and after pupils return it.

I think success also goes down to individual teachers as well, about how much you are promoting it within your class, and how much you promote it after, when a piece of work comes back, regardless of quality, how you really make the child and the parent feel what they’ve brought back is really amazing.

One of the most successful and popular FH topics was Pirates; this was cited by the deputy headteachers, the teachers, the HSLOs and the parents. One of the main factors in Pirates’ success appears to have been the fact that most schools made the FH a **whole-school event**, which began with a dress-up day for staff, parents and children. The children knew a lot about pirates already and in the words of one of the deputy headteachers, this ‘created a buzz’ around the school.

The reason why I’d say it has been successful is because we had the big pirate day beforehand, which got all the children into that buzz, all the parents, like in my class every single child dressed up, even if they didn’t bring a homework back they dressed up, the whole school, adults dressed up, everyone had that buzz going on, there was a massive buzz before the event. And then after the holiday then they got given their homework, and they came back, and the buzz was still continuing, and I think that was why it was successful.

The activities – such as treasure maps and treasure chests, different coins, flags with skull-and-crossbones – were achievable and easy to make, potentially adding to participation and engagement. It is also likely that this FH had greater subject matter appeal for boys.

Some of the least successful FHs have been on more abstract topics such as Nature, which perhaps lack a specific focus for many pupils and families to relate to. One of the teachers recounted how the topic of Food was also less successful, partly because of the difficulties of bringing in items (e.g. perishable goods) to share.

The stakeholders feel that the quality of the FH has improved over time. This was backed up by the quantitative data each school collected on completion, which looked at both the quality as well as the quantity of the returns.

7.3 Objective 3: Develop an evidenced based understanding of the at-home context: families' learning-related practices, attitudes and environments

Appendix 1 provides quantitative data on pupils' Home Learning Environments (HLEs). That appendix also provides data on pupil and parent attitudes to school, schoolwork and regular homework. By gathering such data, we are able to investigate the degree to which participation in and/or enjoyment of FH is related to home factors that are generally outside of school control. Our conclusion is that, **as expected, home factors have some impact on FH engagement and enjoyment.** For example, more highly educated parents are somewhat more likely to report enjoying FH. Likewise, parents who report being more involved with their child's schoolwork and homework are also more likely to say they enjoy FH. These findings are consistent with a large body of research on parental engagement programmes, and highlight the limits of what even the most successful parental engagement programmes can be expected to accomplish.

Given these obstacles, however, **FH appears to do a very good job of engaging a broad range of pupils and parents, whatever their background characteristics.** For example, even those parents who said they were the least involved in their children's schoolwork tended to say they enjoy FH, indicating that FH is successfully engaging many parents who are not highly involved in their children's education. Likewise, while less educated parents are less likely than their peers to say that they enjoy FH a lot, they are just as likely to say that they do enjoy it.

Analysing pupils' attitudes to school, schoolwork and normal homework, we found, unsurprisingly, that children who enjoyed these three things were more likely to enjoy FH. However, we also found that **FH is largely successful in engaging pupils who have less positive attitudes towards school, schoolwork and homework.** One notable exception is Year 6 boys.

FH seeks not just to respond to or 'overcome' the Home Learning Environment, but to affect change in that environment. Changing practice, whether it be for pupils, parents or teachers, is often difficult and can take a long time. Changes can also sometimes be ephemeral, e.g. lasting only as long as a particular initiative; it is always harder to create changes which endure over a number of years. It is clear from this evaluation that the teachers, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and HSLOs feel that **FH produces meaningful changes within pupils' homes**. Although this evidence is by nature subjective, all of these stakeholders believe that there has been a shift towards greater family engagement in, and with, their children's learning.

The objectives of FH are ambitious, and include **helping parents and children to redefine and expand their understanding of what constitutes learning**. This is unlikely to be a rapid process. As one deputy headteacher speculated:

I definitely feel, just through those ad hoc conversations you have with families, or what you hear from children, that there is a shift, but it's like turning around an oil tanker. It takes a long time. But there is definitely a shift where more things are being done.

Another deputy headteacher made an important point regarding the potential long-term impacts of FH on the HLEs of the future. **The greatest long-term benefits of FH might not be seen until the current children become parents themselves**, and begin to use the resources of their outside environment, engage in their own children's learning by using first-hand experience, and have greater involvement with their own children's schoolwork.

I think this probably ties in quite well, it's not an objective as such, but I think one of the things that we have talked about, about turning around an oil tanker, some of this is about our children as parents of the future, that the experiences that we give them now, the ways in which we talk about learning, all the things that we've talked about previously, what you hope is that those children grow up and think yes, that's what education is, that's what learning is, this is the relationship I should have with my children, these are the things I should do with my children. And it's a much longer term, obviously very, very, very difficult to measure, but essentially I think it is about these are the possibilities, so the children, children as parents of the future.

7.4 Objective 4: to ascertain the impacts of FH on pupils and families, as reported by these two groups

Pupils enjoy FH: roughly half say they like it 'a lot', and just under a third report liking it at least a bit. While older pupils are somewhat more likely to do FH, younger pupils are much more likely to say they enjoy it. This gives rise to a dilemma: should FH seeks to increase its appeal to older pupils, become easier for younger pupils to do without support, or both? As teachers have suggested, **FH could potentially appeal**

to older pupils by offering digital participation options. Such options might also increase FH's appeal to boys. Gender differences are more important than year group differences: in all year groups, girls are more likely to complete FH and significantly more likely to say they enjoy doing it. Gender differences increase by pupils' age – for example, girls in Year 6 are twice as likely as boys to say they like homework a lot.

Year 2 teachers are particularly likely to feel that FH might be too challenging for lower ability pupils. Coupled with low satisfaction rates amongst older pupils, this suggests that **FH should seek to broaden its range of activities**, to include some easier activities that younger children could do without support, and some more interesting activities that would appeal to a broader range of older pupils.

FH does not appear to be achieving its goal of getting families to take advantage of London's many interesting sites and attractions – relatively few respondents report going to new or interesting places as a result of FH, despite the fact that family visits, within and outside the local area, are an integral part of the suggested activities in every FH topic.

Teachers, the FH leads, HSLOs and parents were in general agreement regarding the main purposes and objectives of FH, indicating that the programme is working as desired. Pupils feel that the main purpose of FH is to keep them learning and on task during the holidays. Eight out of ten Year 4 pupils and over six out of ten Year 6 pupils feel that FH helps with their general learning of new knowledge and skills.

Even though they offered a number of critiques of FH, the vast majority of responding parents say they enjoy FH. Parents cited a broad range of benefits, with most parents choosing at least five from a list of eight. More than half of responding parents see benefits for their children – e.g. 'making learning fun' – and for the family, particularly with regard to spending more time together. Most parents also feel that FH helps them to support their child's learning.

Parental critiques of FH focused primarily on time and resources. A significant percentage of parents complained that it could be difficult to find the time to fit FH in around other commitments. However, there was little indication that parents felt the need to spend vast amounts of time on FH. Roughly 9 in 10 parents who responded to the survey said their family spent five or fewer hours on a typical FH, while a third of the parents in the focus group cited a period of fewer than two hours

A significant minority of parents reported difficulties accessing or affording resources. This suggests that schools might improve participation by providing such resources to families, e.g. through more 'shops'.

Pupils' participation in and enjoyment of FH differed significantly across schools. This may be because schools have different objectives for FH, or different views of how the programme fits into its broader educational strategies.

7.5 Objective 5: to assess the impacts of FH on stakeholders within participating schools: HSLOs, teachers, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers

Despite the inherent complexities of being a multi-school partnership, FH appears to function smoothly. The programme has a routine, and every member of staff knows what their specific role entails in the cycle, from the initial idea, the offer, the production, roll-out, collection (or hand-in) and evaluation.

Teachers reported that they did not feel there were many challenges in delivering FH. **While it takes up valuable curriculum time, the benefits are perceived to be worth the time commitment.** In an age of 'initiative overload' within the education system, teachers' acceptance of the additional work required by FH suggests that the programme is successful in achieving its objectives, and successfully integrated into school processes and practices.

Yes, you have to move things around, and perhaps that's a challenge, but it's very worthwhile because you are valuing their work and that's quite important.

Within schools, FH appears to serve a valuable social function, particularly through sharing assemblies and displays of work. However, **there appear to be few efforts at cross-school sharing of work.** Whole-partnership assemblies, for example, could potentially prove motivating, both to pupils and staff.

FH appears to have a highly positive impact on the staff who are responsible for its ongoing development. In discussing the initiative, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, teachers and HSLOs were all clearly proud of the programme and its positive impact on parents' engagement with their children's learning.

7.6 Objective 6: to improve understanding of programme non-participation, and possible routes into increased participation on the part of less- or non-engaged families

Just over one third of pupils reported that they had not participated in the most recent FH, Volcanoes. Across year groups, the two most commonly cited barriers to participation are lack of time and difficulties in finding materials/resources. Though older pupils are more likely to say that they do not enjoy FH, they are more likely to do it (at least in the case of Volcanoes, the only FH the evaluation has reliable figures for).

As parents and some school staff observed, there are times when holiday trips or other commitments make it impossible to participate in a particular FH, even for families who typically usually do engage with the programme. While the FHLs indicated that participation rates are important, and are thus documented at

classroom and school level, the SP does not seek participation for participation's sake. **Engagement is seen as a means to a particular end:** whole-family involvement in learning, and the understanding that learning takes place in a variety of formats and in a broad range of settings, such as during a half-term visit. Nevertheless it needs to be remembered that FH forms part of the normal homework policy at Cayley and Redlands, which can create particular tensions. Some pupils did note that their teachers use both carrots and sticks as incentives for participation. In addition to positive motivators such as sharing assemblies and school displays, in one school some pupils reported teachers threatening to take away rewards such as 'golden time for non-completion.

The success of a programme such as FH cannot be assessed solely or even primarily on the basis of participation rates. As discussed in stakeholder focus groups, the primary causes of serial nonparticipation are largely outside schools' control. This was corroborated by our own quantitative evidence, which found that background factors such as parental education were associated with attitudes to FH¹⁸. However, our survey found that while background factors were somewhat predictive of attitudes to FH, they were very far from determinant. Even in households where parents are poorly educated and/or are only minimally involved in their children's learning, FH participation rates were high. This indicates that the programme is successful in appealing to a very broad cross-section of pupils and families.

One question arising from this evaluation is the degree to which the SP should increase its efforts to improve participation rates among the persistently non-engaged or hard-to-reach families. It is the opinion of the evaluators that, while this group should continue to be the focus of special efforts, **these efforts should not come at the sake of limiting the time or resources available to the majority of families who do regularly participate in FH.** In terms of increasing participation amongst the less engaged, one possibility may be to provide more free resources and materials, as the lack of these was cited by a number of families. However, it may be the case that many families citing material barriers are in fact held back primarily by dispositional barriers, which are more difficult to overcome. Those parental dispositional barriers, in turn, produce situational barriers for younger pupils in particular, who are more likely to be dependent on their parents for help.

Another issue to consider is the **high variability in cross-school participation rates, at least on Volcanoes.** At two schools – Cayley and Redlands – pupils in all three year groups reported participation rates above 85%, and it is probably not a coincidence that these were the two schools where FH is seen as a requirement. Two schools showed much lower participation rates on this particular topic.

¹⁸ It should be noted that, while the evaluation's parent survey managed an impressively high response rate, those parents who did not respond to the survey are likely to be those who are least likely to participate in FH from term to term.

Another issue related to participation is that of determining how much a child had participated in the production of the FH activities – i.e. how much has been done by them and how much by the family. A further question is whether it matters if the child has had very little input.

One teacher told the group that:

We get some homework in and it's like the parents have done it, and the children haven't done it at all, so it really is they've maybe stuck one lolly stick on or something, but it is an amazing, fantastic model, but it's quite clear, like I teach year one, that no year one child has done it. Obviously mum's made the whole thing, which is nice that they've had some time to be creative and do something, but it's not the aim.

Another teacher, though, pointed out that there are still benefits for everyone in the family.

In a sense maybe it's that feeling of ownership anyway, in that even if the parents have produced the majority of that homework and the child has just said stick that there, stick that there, they still bring it in and they have that ownership of that piece of work, regardless of how much input they've actually had on it, they feel like they are included and hopefully there has still been that communication between the children and the parents and there has still been the conversations about what's happening, in which case there are still some benefits from it.

Nevertheless, it does beg the question of whether there should be a statement that gives guidance on how much input each person should have? We believe that this is something the schools could consider.

7.7 Suggestions for improving FH further

The suggestions in this section arise from the written responses in the teachers' questionnaire and their focus group, and from the parent and pupil focus groups.

Teachers provided eight different suggestions for programme improvement. The most common were: involve parents more by providing more workshops and running more parent-pupil assemblies; give out prizes and awards; and provide more information. The latter could potentially be achieved by: showing more examples of previous work (in more displays around the school); listing resources that were needed; and appointing a parent representative in each school who could act as a parent champion.

In their focus group, the teachers discussed suggestions to improve the amount of engagement from the older pupils.

I think some more thought into what would make a cool Year 6 child tick, for example, would appeal to them, you know, it's how you dress it.

We have already seen suggestions from these teachers that many Year 6 pupils have begun to look forward to secondary school, have grown more aloof, and have begun to affect a 'cool' image. As they grow older, children may continue to be willing to work with their families, including younger siblings, but may enjoy doing so less. To improve engagement amongst older pupils, teachers suggested activities based more on technology, including reviewing films or games.

One idea I thought for the older children, I know that there are always websites and things like that on the sheets that are suggested, and I think for a lot of the older children maybe the technological side of things may be something that they would be interested in, because as you said it's that coolness, they don't want to make models, they don't necessarily want to go for a day out to the Docklands Museum with their parents. However the idea maybe of suggesting films they could watch, you know, because that's something that children don't necessarily do, the idea of sitting down with their parents, the videos and DVDs that tend to be put on for the children, and maybe if the parents actually engaged in those with the children, engaged in conversations about what they've watched with the children, and maybe it could be some form of review, like film reviews and things like that could be something that's suggested, or even game reviews, anything that could be linked into whatever the topic is, you know, I think something like that could be a way in.

Despite high participation rates and even higher satisfaction rates, only seven parents out of the 34 in the parent focus groups feel that FH is 'fine as it is'. The rest came up with at least 13 suggestions for how it the programme be improved. Parents suggested that schools provide some resources, either free or at subsidised prices, or at least have a list of suggested retailers where relevant materials could be purchased. A minority (three) of parents thought that it should be stressed that FH should be optional; there was a feeling amongst some parents that participation had become *de facto* compulsory, which made some parents feel pressurised to take part.

Three other parents suggested that all completed FH should have some kind of notional reward, such as a certificate. Other suggestions made by one or two parents were: make the purpose of FH clearer; give parents and children a say in the choice of topics; run workshops to demonstrate activities; translate activity sheets; have a separate section for fathers; show completed work across all schools in the SP; separate activities between KS1 and KS2; and give FH out earlier so that parents can be better prepared.

In their focus group, the pupils came up with six suggestions. The primary suggestion, cited by about a third of focus group pupils, was to give children a

greater say in the topics or themes. Less than a quarter of children thought there should be separate FH topics for boys and girls. A few said that the school should provide certain materials such as glitter and glue, and the same number said that the topics should be made more interesting. Only one child said that FH should be optional, on a voluntary basis.

As this evaluation has highlighted, older boys appear less likely to be engaged by FH in general. However, while one way of increasing engagement among this group may be to focus on 'boy-friendly' topics, doing so may be unfair to girls. We would instead recommend that additional consideration be given to the gender appeal of the activities in each FH.

8. Recommendations for consideration

FH is a successful programme. As such, our recommendations involve potential tweaks to the initiative, rather than wholesale changes. In this section, we suggest a number of issues or actions for the five schools to consider.

- Consider introducing more activities aimed at engaging older pupils – e.g. more digital or online activities; reviews of games, music, films. Perhaps older year groups can be asked to produce a short video, using a smart phone.
- Think about ways to encourage more trips and visits, as not many happen at the moment. Perhaps HLSOs could organise more group trips for parents.
- Schools could display more work from the other schools in the SP.
- Have more FH topics that give opportunities for staff and pupils to dress up in order to promote the topic.
- Publicise the ‘release’ date of FH a week earlier than currently happens, to give parents more time to prepare.
- Provide guidance on how much of the FH activities should be completed by the child and siblings and how much by the adults in the family.
- Give parents and pupils a chance to suggest future FH topics, perhaps as part of a competition.
- Re-emphasise families that they are free to come up with their own ideas.
- Expand the shops currently in operation in two of the schools in order to make it easier for parents to access resources/materials.
- Ask HSLOs to run more workshops to give parents ideas and show them how to make things.
- Make teachers aware that some pupils feel pressurised into feeling they have to participate in FH and produce an end-product for every topic.*
- Consider making FH a requirement, as part of the schools’ regular homework policy across all five schools.

Appendix 1: The Home Learning Environment and pupils' attitudes to schoolwork

Objective 3 of this evaluation was to develop an evidenced based understanding of families' learning-related practices, attitudes and environments. Increased understanding of these factors could potentially support the SP in its efforts to increase engagement in FH and other forms of learning.

The parental questionnaire collected data on parents' education levels and their personal reading practices. Both these factors have been shown to influence parental engagement in their children's learning. The questionnaire also collected data on dual parent-child learning practices, including parents reading with children, or discussing schoolwork and homework with their children. The pupil questionnaire collected data on children's attitudes to schoolwork. These parent and child data have been incorporated into earlier sections of this evaluation report. This appendix provides fuller details of these data.

Figure 25 provides a full breakdown of the qualification levels of reported by parents who completed the paper-based questionnaire.

Figure 25 Parents' highest level of qualification

Highest qualification completed	Percentage
No formal qualifications	16
GCSEs / O level / CSE or equivalent	24
A-level or equivalent	14
Higher education below degree level	6
Degree or degree or equivalent	10
Higher degree / postgraduate	6
Not sure	18
Other, e.g. vocational or professional	3
Overseas qualification	3

Because a number of studies have found that parental reading practices are linked to parental involvement in their children's learning, the survey asked parents how frequently they engage in a range of literacy practices: reading books; reading newspapers or magazines; reading digital text on tablets, kindles or computers; and reading text or other writing on mobile phones. Table 18 shows responding parents' reported frequency of engaging in these activities. Statistical analyses showed that parents' reading practices (in terms of frequency) were not related to their enjoyment of FH. For example, even parents who read books tended to say they enjoyed FH.

Table 18 Parents' reported frequency of reading various types of text

	Books (%)	Newspapers / magazines (%)	Digital text on tablets, kindles or computers (%)	Texts or other writing on mobile phones (%)
Every day	27	23	39	64
Several times/week	22	27	19	14
1-2 times/week	16	26	15	5
Less often	35	24	28	17

a. Parent-child learning practices

Most parents report high levels of involvement in their children's academic efforts. 61% of responding parents report that they or another adult in the family talk to their children about their schoolwork either every day or almost every day, while a further 26% say they do so several times a week. 10% talk with their children about schoolwork once or twice a week, with only 4% saying they do so less frequently.

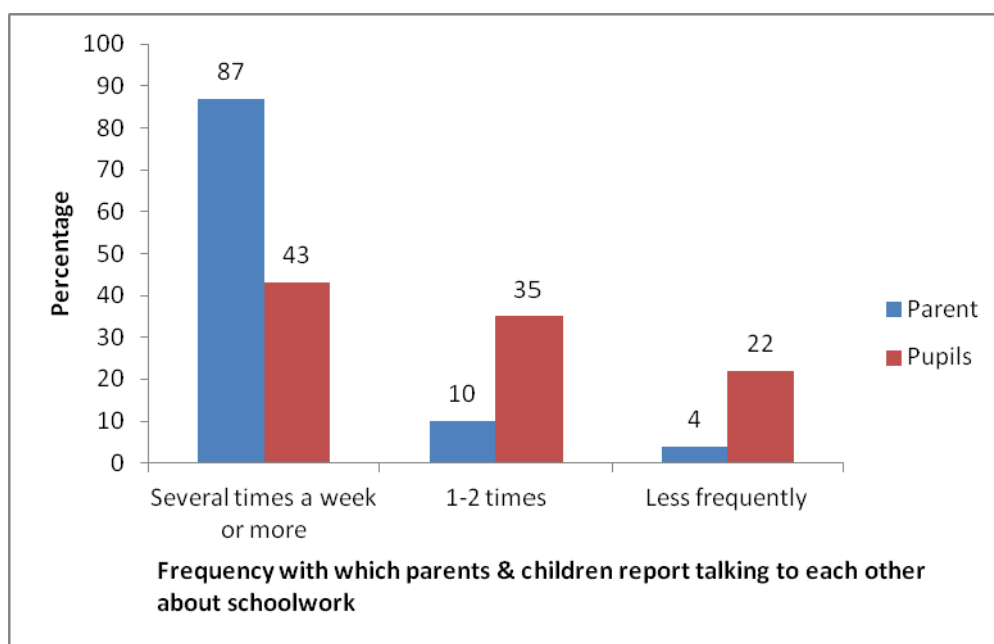
Parents also report being closely involved with their children's normal (school) homework¹⁹. Nearly half (47%) of parents report that they or another adult in the family help their children with homework every day or almost every day, and a further 26% say they did so several times a week. 19% say they do so once or twice a week, with 8% reporting they do so less frequently.

As children grow older, parents become slightly less involved in their schoolwork and homework, but only to a small degree. The overall picture for all year groups is of parents who report high level of involvement in their children's educational activities.

Responses from school pupils to the same questions produced a somewhat different picture. Figure 26 compares parents' responses to those of pupils. As the table illustrates, parents are much more likely to say that they and their children speak about schoolwork frequently.

¹⁹ We are calling the school homework that pupils are given by their class teachers on a regular basis, 'normal' homework to distinguish it from Family Homework.

Figure 26 Frequency parents & children report talking to each other about schoolwork

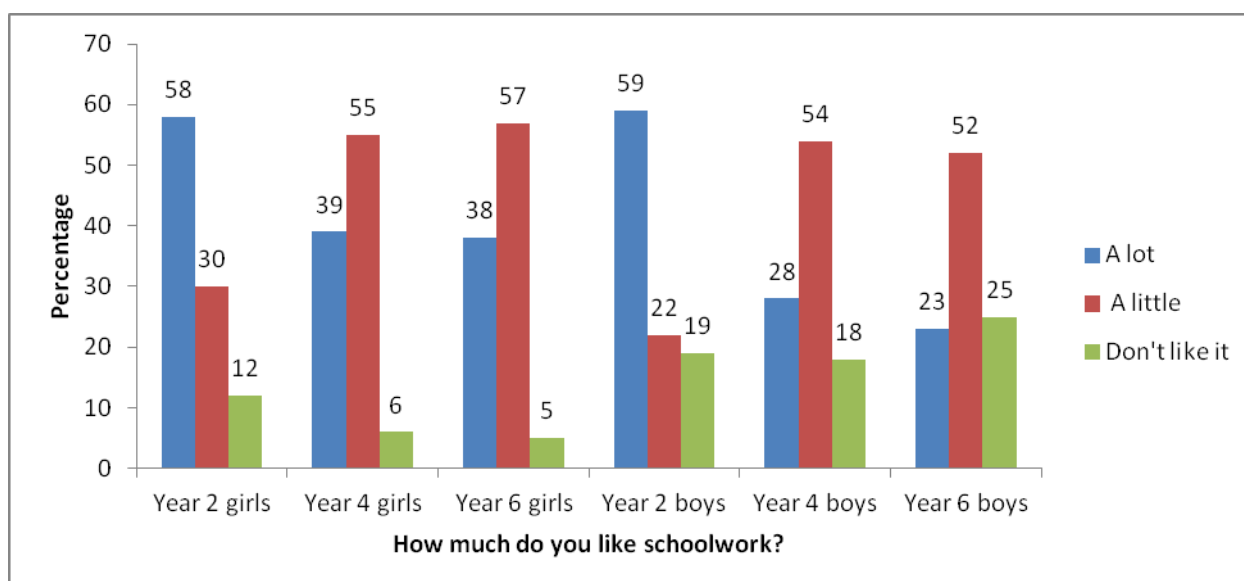


b. Pupil attitudes to schoolwork

Attitudes to schoolwork appear influenced by age and gender. Year 2 pupils are much more likely than the older year groups to say they like schoolwork a lot, but are no less likely to say they do not like schoolwork at all. Between Years 2 and 4, pupils' attitudes towards schoolwork shift, from liking it a lot to liking it a little. This is true for both boys and girls. However, girls in Years 4 and 6 are somewhat less likely than Year 2 girls to say they don't like schoolwork at all. And in Year 6, girls are just as likely to enjoy schoolwork as in Year 4.

Except in Year 2, boys and girls differ substantially within their attitudes to schoolwork. In particular, boys in years 4 and 6 are much less likely than girls to say they enjoy schoolwork a lot, and much more likely to say they don't like it at all. In Year 4, boys are three times as likely as girls to say they don't like schoolwork, and this ratio rises to 5:1 in Year 6.

Figure 27 Pupil self-reported enjoyment of schoolwork, by age and gender



c. Parental attitudes

Once again, the picture that emerges from the parent data is different. Roughly 2/3 of Year 2 and Year 4 parents said that their children enjoy schoolwork a lot, with almost all other parents saying their child enjoyed it at least a bit. Year 6 parents were just as likely to say that their children enjoyed school at least a bit (96%), though only two thirds feel their children enjoy it a lot. Across all three year groups, only 3% of parents think their child does not really enjoy schoolwork.

Parents were also asked about their children's attitudes to going to school and to normal homework. 83% of Year 2 parents feel that their child enjoys school a lot, as do 75% of Year 4 and 6 parents. Fewer than 2% of parents think that their children do not enjoy school at all. Parents do not feel that their children enjoy normal homework as much as they enjoy school more generally. However, only 7% of parents said that their children don't really enjoy homework at all, with Year 2 parents being the most likely to say this (10%).

Appendix 2: Questionnaires

a. Pupil questionnaires

Pupils in all three year groups completed online questionnaires. The Year 2 questionnaire can be accessed at

<https://www.surveymzmo.co.uk/s3/1527170/Family-Homework-Year-2>

The questionnaire completed by Years 4 & 6 can be found at

<https://www.surveymzmo.co.uk/s3/1527224/Family-Homework-Years-4-6>

b. Parent questionnaire

Dear Parent/Carer

Researchers from the Institute of Education have been asked by the Stepney Partnership to find out parents or carers' views on the Family Homework that your child brings home in the ***holidays***.

Could you please take a few minutes to fill in this short survey?

Please return the completed survey to your child's teacher in the envelope provided.

All answers are COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL.

Thank you!

Researchers: Jon Swain and JD Carpentieri

j.swain@ioe.ac.uk; Telephone: 020 7612 6739

j.carpentieri@ioe.ac.uk Telephone 020 7911 5490

THESE QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT YOU

- 1. If more than one child in your family brought this survey home, please complete it for one child only (the youngest). What school year is that child in? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY**

Year 2

Year 4

Year 6

2. What is your relationship to this child? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- Mother / Step Mother
- Father / Step Father
- Grandmother
- Grandfather
- Aunt
- Uncle
- Other (please write) _____

3. What is your HIGHEST educational qualification? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- No formal qualifications
 - GCSEs / O level / CSE or equivalent
 - A levels or equivalent
 - Higher education below degree level
 - Degree or degree equivalent
 - Higher degree & Postgraduate qualifications
 - Other, such as vocational or professional (please write)
- _____
- Overseas qualification (please write the type and level of qualification)
- _____

4. How often do YOU read each of the following? TICK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW

	Every day	Several times a week	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Less often
Books					
Newspapers or magazines					

Digital writing on tablets, kindles or computers					
Texts or other writing on mobile phones					

THESE QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT YOUR CHILD

5. How much does your child enjoy each of the following?

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW

	My child enjoys it a lot	My child enjoys it a bit	My child doesn't really enjoy it
Going to school in general			
Classwork			
Normal homework			
Family Homework			

6. How often do you or another adult in your family do the following with your child?

PLEASE TICK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW

	Every day or almost every day	Several times a week	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Hardly ever or never
Talk to your child about their schoolwork					
Help your child with their normal homework					

THESE QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT FAMILY HOMEWORK

7. How much do YOU enjoy doing Family Homework? TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- I enjoy doing it a lot
- I enjoy doing it a bit
- I don't mind either way
- I dislike it a bit
- I dislike it a lot

8. What are some of the best things about doing Family Homework?

PLEASE TICK AS MANY ANSWERS AS YOU WANT TO

- It helps the family spend more time together
- It helps me feel closer to my child
- It makes learning fun
- It helps me to support my child's learning
- My child enjoys it
- It encourages creativity
- We go to interesting places
- It means I have more contact with my child's school
- Other (please write)

- There are no good things about Family Homework

9. Are there some things that can make doing Family Homework difficult?

PLEASE TICK AS MANY ANSWERS AS YOU WANT TO

- It is sometimes hard to find enough time for Family Homework
- Sometimes holiday plans get in the way

- It can be difficult to find the materials or resources
- Some materials and resources cost too much money
- I don't understand some of the activities we are asked to do
- It is too competitive
- My child finds Family Homework boring
- I find Family Homework boring
- There is not always enough notice of when Family Homework is coming
- Other (please write) _____
- There is nothing difficult about doing Family Homework

10. Who generally works with your child on Family Homework? PLEASE TICK AS MANY ANSWERS AS YOU WANT TO

- Mother / Step Mother
- Father / Step Father
- Brother or sister
- Grandparent
- Aunt or uncle
- Other (please write) _____

11. Roughly how much time does your family spend on one Family Homework topic, such as the one on Volcanoes? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- Less than one hour
- Between 2-5 hours
- Between 6-11 hours
- 12 hours or more

12. What changes have you noticed in your family since doing Family Homework? PLEASE TICK AS MANY ANSWERS AS YOU WANT TO

- The family takes more educational trips or makes more visits
 - We do more creative activities together
 - Our family spends more time together
 - I feel more involved in my child's learning
 - I have more contact with my child's school
 - I listen more to my child's views
 - Other (please write)
-

- I have not noticed any change in the family
- We have not done Family Homework since my child started school

c. Teacher questionnaire

Dear Teacher

The Institute of Education, University of London, is conducting an evaluation of the Family Homework programme. As part of that evaluation, we would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this short survey.

Participation in this research is voluntary and all answers are **completely confidential**.

When you have completed the survey please return it to the school office.

Many thanks for your help; your time is much appreciated.

Researchers:

j.swain@ioe.ac.uk; Telephone: 020 7612 6739

j.carpentieri@ioe.ac.uk Telephone 020 7911 5490

SECTION A: ABOUT YOU

1. What year do you teach?

- Year 2
- Year 4
- Year 6

2. Where do you teach?

- Ben Jonson
- Cayley
- Halley
- Redlands
- Smithy

SECTION B: FAMILY HOMEWORK, PUPILS AND PARENTS

3. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Family Homework. TICK ONE ANSWER IN EACH ROW

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My pupils enjoy Family Homework					
Parents enjoy Family Homework					
Family Homework engages lower ability pupils					
For higher ability pupils, Family Homework is a bit boring					
Family Homework increase parents' involvement in their children's learning					
Family Homework improves parent-school					

relations					
Family Homework improves parents' understanding of their children's learning					
Families who are not typically engaged with their child's learning do participate in Family Homework					

4. In your understanding, what are the main objectives of Family Homework?

5. In your opinion, what are the main reasons that some families do not participate in Family Homework?

SECTION C: FAMILY HOMEWORK AND YOUR SCHOOL

6. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Family Homework. TICK ONE ANSWER IN EACH ROW

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Family Homework makes a positive contribution to my school's culture					
Family Homework takes up more of my time than it is worth					
I have sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on Family Homework to pupils					
I have sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on Family Homework to school management					
Family Homework achieves its objectives					
I am aware of what other classes at my school produce for Family Homework					
I am aware of what other schools in the Stepney Partnership produce for Family Homework					

7. Could the Family Homework programme be improved? If so, how? Please write any comments below.

Thank you! Your opinions are very valuable to us!

Appendix 3: The Volcanoes activity sheet

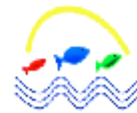


Family Homework Volcanoes!



Every school holiday, families across the Stepney Partnership primary schools (Ben Jonson, Cayley, Halley, Redlands, Smithy Street) enjoy 'family homework'. Children, siblings and parents/carers learn together and have fun!

The theme for this edition is **Volcanoes**



When we return to school, your teacher will give you a chance to share what you have done with your class



Try these **EXPLOSIVE** ideas with your family!



Make a smoking volcano cake!

www.bbcgoodfood.com
youtube.com

Find or create a song about volcanoes





Can you create some explosive music to accompany your song?

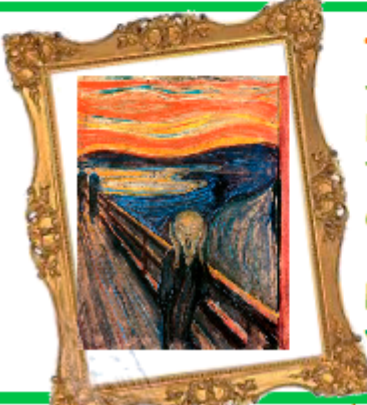

How many stories can you read with a volcanic scene?



Do these activities together as a family!



Show the different layers of the earth with paper mache



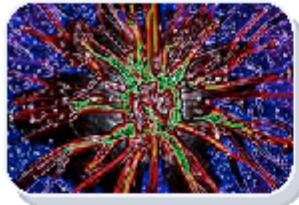
The **Scream** by Edvard Munch is said to be based on the artist's memory of how he felt when he saw the effects in the sky of the powerful volcanic eruption of **Krakatoa**

Paint a picture of how you might feel if you thought a volcano was erupting





Find some explosive words and create your very own poem!



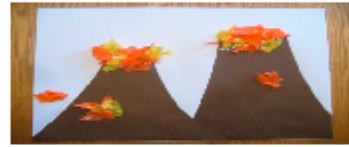
Make up your very own volcanic dance—how will you move?



Write a report about a famous volcano



Make a collage of a volcano



Make an information leaflet about Pompeii



What happened? What were the after effects?



Film a model volcano erupt!



www.how-things-work-science-projects.com

Ideas for family trips/activities over the holidays:

Science Museum

The Natural History Museum

Remember to bring something in to tell your class about your trip.

It could be a photo, drawing, poem, booklet, ticket,—anything!



Parent's comments:

Signed:

Hope your half term is full of explosive fun!

Use the box below to record any of the activities your family have enjoyed this holiday. Be ready to share your homework when you return...

Name:

Class:



Appendix 4: Photographs of Family Homework displays



