

**Share**

**An evaluation of the first two years**

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An evaluation of the  
first two years

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## Section 1

# The early experience of Share schools

### 1.1 An outline of positive features

- Share is now running in 244 schools in 23 LEAs (19 in England, 2 in Wales and 2 in Scotland). The table on page 8 shows the progression from the pilot phase. Only 2 schools from the original 20 chose not to participate in year 2 for specific reasons.
- Teachers (headteachers and their key staff) receive two days' training, with a follow-up day which focuses on reviewing practice and evaluating outcomes.
- Share materials include a teacher's handbook and the parents' pack already described.
- The costs of Share have been met through a variety of funding sources, including the DfEE, LEAs, charitable trusts and CEDC. LEAs have also drawn down funds from the Standards Fund, the FEFC and local TECs.
- In most cases, a Key Stage 1/Year 1 teacher has been the Share co-ordinator. In a small number of schools, the headteacher has been directly involved, either through running the scheme personally, or through working with the parents' group some of the time, or through helping out as and when needed. Other links have been provided by Deputy Heads, HSL (Home-School Liaison) Section XI Services, by ABE (Adult Basic Education) and by CEDOs (Community Education Development Officers).
- Initially, schools have been advised to limit the initiative to fifteen parents in order to maximise the chances of success and enable everyone to examine what has been learnt.
- Schools adopt a variety of ways of recruiting parents, as discussed in the training course. Individual contacts, word of mouth, informal approaches and the efforts of existing Share parents and children work especially well.
- Share parents come in all shapes and sizes! Most are mothers; a significant minority are fathers and step-parents. Others include a child's regular carer and an adoptive grandmother.
- Parents come from a very wide range of social, cultural and geographical backgrounds, and have a wide variety of educational experiences. A significant minority speak English as an additional language; some cannot read or write in any language. A traveller community has participated in the second year of the scheme.
- All parents are encouraged to register for the accreditation of their Share-related work. This is, however, voluntary. About 50 per cent of Share parents submit work for moderation.
- Nearly all Share schools organise activities through a parents' group, which meets regularly; many supplement these with individual tutorials and 'surgeries'. A few schools work exclusively on a one-to-one tutorial basis.
- In the pilot scheme, no school had a crèche facility; in the second year nearly 50 per cent did. Others wanted to provide this, but judged it to be impractical.
- Nearly all groups meet either weekly or fortnightly. There is some evidence that less frequent or irregular meetings result in the loss of both purpose and momentum.
- Most groups are strictly 'adults only'! A number, however, use the occasional session to work jointly with their children at school.
- Most groups lose about 22 per cent of their original members, mostly through unavoidable factors such as family and work circumstances. Most groups have a core of regular attenders and a further 20 per cent who attend as and when they can.
- Several groups (in totally contrasting schools and areas) have experienced virtually 100 per cent attendance and successful accreditation. Less than a dozen have collapsed, and three of these restarted the following year in different circumstances.



\_\_\_\_\_ is a Share school

'Parents, teachers  
& children committed  
to learning together'

\_\_\_\_\_ Director, CEDC

\_\_\_\_\_ Director of Education

\_\_\_\_\_ Headteacher



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Share parents and teachers recognise that all children need to:

- have plenty of opportunities to learn at home and at school
- feel secure in the relationship between home and school
- have their parents or carers involved in their learning
- know that learning is important for life.

The school will offer parents:

- the opportunity to support their child's learning at home
- an equal chance to take part in Share
- a range of Share early reading, writing and maths activities to use with their child at home
- encouragement, help and support in working with their child at home and/or at school
- the opportunity to improve their own skills and to gain accreditation for their learning
- information about other support and services available to them
- a Share parents' group meeting on a regular basis in a suitable space and/or access to the Share teacher on a designated day by negotiation.

Parents will:

- make a commitment to finding time and a suitable space in which they can work with their child at home
- give their child regular encouragement, support and praise
- take an active part in the Share parents' group meeting and/or have regular contact with the Share teacher
- take responsibility for their own learning about their child's learning and education.

## Section 2

# Key issues and concerns

### 2.1 The contribution of Share to pupils' achievement and progress<sup>3</sup>

#### The nature of the task

The evaluation of the Share pilot programme gave broadly similar treatment to the learning of pupils, parents and teachers. This second report, by contrast, gives special emphasis to the task of trying to pin down, more accurately and in more detail, the contribution of Share parents and families to the achievement and progress of pupils.

This can be seen both as a reflection of a widespread interest in such matters and as a spin-off from existing educational policies such as the publication of primary league tables and the use of OFSTED inspection data to shape education policy and decision making.

Whether we like it or not, Share, like other educational developments, has increasingly to justify its success and to assess its effectiveness in terms of positive outcomes and benefits for pupils. There is, of course, much more to this than meets the eye!

Demonstrating clearly how, why and to what extent the Share approach contributes to pupils' progress is a tantalising and challenging task. There are both obvious and less obvious reasons for this:

- Children are learning and growing all the time anyway. Many other things influence their school work and progress.
- Contrary to popular belief amongst politicians, professionals and parents alike, there are no simple, practical, reliable ways of measuring progress. But we can get a reasonable picture by **combining** different kinds of information and evidence.
- Family influences, though powerful, are context bound. The same activities will have different effects in different families. We do not normally know much about, or take enough notice of, what parents do in

their own homes. Collecting data about what individual Share families **actually do** requires both ingenuity and sensitivity, particularly in relation to:

- parents who lack confidence or whose first language is not English
  - the sheer range and complexity of many family arrangements and lifestyles
  - issues of confidentiality, trust and mutual respect.
- As well as obvious, immediate and short-term measurable gains, Share, like other home-school initiatives, produces indirect, wider and longer-term benefits which can be even more impressive. This is because the Share approach often leads to permanently changed and improved behaviour and relationships, which have continuing and cumulative advantages for all those involved.
  - Finally, crude evidence of pupil improvement in terms of better reading and number scores is curiously disappointing on its own. For it does little to help us to explain or understand what has taken place and why it has worked, and so is very limited as a means of suggesting further development.

*'To be honest, it is hard work. But it's also very satisfying as you can see the improvement in children's work!'*

Year 1 teacher (St Helens)

*'I know it works, I just **know** it works! But it's very difficult to prove it!'*

Headteacher (St Helens)

*'If parents sustain their present interest and we in school continue to support them, it **must** make a difference to children's progress.'*

Headteacher (Gloucestershire)

*'Teachers **can** identify pupil progress beyond their expectations and in comparison with non-Share pupils. What they cannot do is provide figures to support this.'*

LEA co-ordinator (Kirklees)

<sup>3</sup> This section draws upon material which has been specially written for Share staff by the evaluator, to help schools with this part of their work: Bastiani, J (1997) *How do we know it's working? Evaluating the contribution of parental involvement to progress and development: a practical guide*. Coventry, CEDC.

### The views of parents

*'Share is a time-out, one-to-one, regular thing, where he will get my full attention.'*

*'It has made the time we spend together more enjoyable. I am more aware of his needs and I think we are both better listeners.'*

*'I think it all comes down to the fact that we have a different relationship in a home environment, with all the important one-to-one attention and the chance to try things out together. Also that learning doesn't have to stop at the end of the school day.'*

*'Hayley looks forward to the special time we spend together when we are doing Share work, which is also fun.'*

*'Playing games together helps so much, in that we both enjoy doing it. Most of the games help extend learning in reading, writing and maths and can be introduced in a fun way.'*

*'I never did very well in school. I wanted Joe to do much better, but I didn't know how to help him until I started Share.'*

Introductory materials describe Share as having a 'hands-on approach.' Listening to a broad cross-section of parents, it would be hard to underestimate the key role and central importance of the activity and active learning that underpin many Share tasks.

This applies to suitably adapted and developed versions of familiar games such as Snap and pairs, ABC and counting games, Bingo, Scrabble and so on. It also applies to more ambitious, complex and open-ended tasks, where parents and children have jointly:

- discussed and planned
- made things and tried them out
- assessed what they have got out of doing the task together.

As many parents have come to recognise, games and activities are a way of motivating learners and bringing a great deal of learning to life.

### The potency of learning in a home setting

We have known for a long time that what children learn out of school is both more powerful and longer-lasting than what they learn in school! This is partly due the fact that they spend 85 per cent of their growing lives out of school, but also to the sheer force of family learning and experience.

The importance of taking family learning into account, as far as possible, is very significant in the development of the Share approach. The extract below, from a parent's diary, illustrates much of this potential, which is heightened when teachers, parents and children are able to:

- make a number of connections between children's classroom learning and Share activities which are, or become, part of family life

**Lauren Madden, age 6, from Rectory Church of England Primary School, is very often helped by her grandfather.**

#### Lauren made a plum pie with her grandad.

I washed all of the plums and then my grandad cut the plums in half and then we made the pastry.

Then we left the pastry to rest in the fridge.

When it had rested we rolled it out into two circles.

Then we put a circle of pastry on to a plate.

Then we put the plums with some sugar, then we put on the top of the pie and made some leaves out of pastry.

We baked the pie in the oven.

*'The above was composed from memory by Lauren. She put it into the word processor with only verbal help from myself. The exercise took us about an hour to complete.'*

(Lauren's grandfather)

