Part 3: Qualitative Case Studies

How low SES families support children’s learning in the home

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The focus of our qualitative case studies is on the experience of low SES families from five ethnic groups: White U.K., Pakistani, Black Caribbean, Black African and Bangladeshi. The broad objective of our analysis has been to establish how (and why) some poorer families in each of these communities are able to provide better support for their children’s learning at home. Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2006) evidence shows that Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean children are more likely to experience deprivation than White UK children:

For example, 70% of Bangladeshi pupils and almost 60% of Pakistani and Black African pupils live in the 20% most deprived postcode areas (as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation) compared to less than 20% of White British pupils. (DfES, 2006, p.5).

This part of the report begins by identifying the context of the study and provides a rationale for the loose theoretical framework that was applied in the initial stages of analysis. The EPPE project (Sylva et al., 2004) has shown that various specific parental activities explain (in the statistical sense) a substantial variance in attainment. On their child’s entry to the EPPE study, over ninety-eight per cent of parents were interviewed based on an 11 page interview schedule. When compared with child attainments, analysis of this child/parent/home data identified a range of indicators of disadvantage. In terms of child characteristics, for example, children tended to be disadvantaged where English was an additional language (EAL), where they lived in large families with 3 or more siblings or were born prematurely, or with a low birth weight (below 2500 grams).

Although the parents’ SES and levels of education were also strongly related to child outcomes, the quality of the home learning environment (HLE) was found to be more important. At age 3 years and onwards strong associations were found between poor cognitive attainment and a less stimulating HLE. By comparison there was only a moderate, positive association between the HLE and parents’ SES and qualifications (r=0.3). For example, the children of parents who reported that they regularly taught/played with the ‘ABC’ had pre-reading scores 4.5 points higher than children whose parents did not teach/play with the alphabet. This could be compared to the impact of social class where it was found that the difference between the lowest classification (IV and V) and highest (I) was only 2.4 points (Sammons et al., 2002). In other words, EPPE found that it is what parents did that was more important than who they were (Melhuish et al., 2001). New evidence on the importance of the HLE has been included in earlier sections of the report.
As we have seen from the evidence presented in Part 1 and 2 of this report:

- The provision of positive early HLEs are still associated with children achieving more in terms of both cognitive and social/behavioural development at age 10.

- We have found that members of some ethnic and socio-economic groups tend to provide lower HLEs. The reasons for this may be associated with both material and the less tangible aspects of poverty (e.g. related to social capital) experienced by many ethnic and socio-economic groups.

Given the strength of the evidence for these two findings, if we are to reduce underachievement, it would seem that there are two practical responses that should be considered:

a) that efforts should be made to try to improve young children’s HLEs

b) that schools and pre-schools should provide greater educational support for those children who need it.

In preparing this report we have taken the view that ideally we should be looking for strategies to achieve both of these objectives in addressing the Every Child Matters agenda. The Government’s aims for ‘Every Child Matters’ are for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support that they need to:

- **Be healthy**
- **Stay safe**
- **Enjoy and achieve**
- **Make a positive contribution**
- **Achieve economic well-being**

As we shall see, these are also the aspirations that our minority ethnic and working class parent respondents have for their own children. But the biggest question still remains: How are these ends to be achieved?

Some readers may feel uncomfortable in discussing the ‘quality’ of HLEs provided by some social and minority ethnic groups and we therefore felt that it was important for us to acknowledge from the start that there are legitimate concerns to be addressed in this respect, perhaps especially for policy makers. Notions of ‘cultural deficit’ have been voiced in the past and it is therefore essential in our discussions of the HLEs that we shouldn’t be seen to be blaming those experiencing educational underachievement for their own problems. In most academic circles theories of cultural deficit have been rejected, thanks in most part to the efforts of conflict theorists who have argued that schools should do more to recognise the strengths that minority ethnic and working class children bring with them into school.
But educational research concerned with parent partnership and participation remains a controversial area and a wide range of understandings of parental partnership and participation have been applied in educational literature and practice. Bastiani (1987) identified conceptualisations that ranged from ‘compensation’ (or deficit) models to those proposing a more genuine participation. But as Croll (2004) and others have noted, despite the rise in interest and in the establishment of partnership initiatives over the years, professionals often continue to see parents more as problems than as equal participants. Pugh et al., (1987) may have been among the first to offer a participatory account for early childhood although Basil Bernstein’s paper *Education cannot compensate for society* was published in *New Society* in 1970.

In order to clarify our position we would argue that the perspective that we take on these issues is entirely congruent with those of Bernstein’s when he wrote:

> It is an accepted educational principle that we should work with what the child can offer; so why don’t we practise it? The introduction of the child to the universalistic meanings of public forms of thought is not ‘compensatory education’ it is *education* (p.345).

> We need to distinguish between the principles and operations that teachers transmit and develop in the children, and the contexts they create in order to do this. We should start knowing that the social experience the child already possesses is valid and significant, and that this social experience should be reflected back to him as being valid and significant.

But as Jones and Allebone (1998) have argued, initiatives continue to be developed that appear to offer parents the opportunity to participate in the culture of the school while offering no real opportunity to recognise the contribution that their own knowledge and social background might be making to the children’s education. Yet:

> …More recently projects *have* developed in which there is a more equal notion of partnership developed between the school and the community and in which the richness of the home environment *is* recognised. (E.g. Bouchard et al., 1998; Civil, 1996; Macbeath, 1996) (*Op cit, with our emphasis*).

To start where the child is, or to be ‘child centred’, is to acknowledge and value the child’s home culture and experience. It may also involve us supporting the family in their development of a more positive HLE. The solution to this apparent contradiction is to recognise that this is not an either-or situation. The parents that we interviewed saw no contradiction and neither did the children. The child can be successful at school and simultaneously true to their ‘roots’ and community. In fact they may ultimately be better equipped to serve their community interests precisely because they have achieved academic success.

In recognition of the role played by an often quite wide range of extended family members in providing for the HLEs that we investigate, we have chosen to refer throughout this report to the participation of ‘families’ rather than to parents alone. We have also recognised the weakness of theoretical models that fail to account for the agency of the children themselves in the construction of HLEs (Edwards and David, 1997; Runyan, et al., 1998; Harpham et al., 2002). In conducting the study we have therefore been concerned to provide the children’s own perspectives.
Apart from EPPE, a number of other studies on family involvement in the early years of schooling for Reading and Literacy development (see Hewison, 1988; Spreadbury, 1995), suggest that children’s educational development can be enhanced with long term positive effects. However, other researchers suggest that some forms and patterns of parental involvement can constrain and even contribute towards the reproduction of social inequalities (Brown, 2000).

In working with parents then, this suggests that pre-school and primary staff require careful preparation and planning. The research also needs to be looked at carefully and critically. In fact the literature continues to provide a range of typologies and particularly influential among these have been the large-scale and longitudinal studies conducted by Joyce Epstein (1987; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) in the United States. Epstein (1996) provides a particularly useful typology of the six main types of family-school-community involvement summarised below:

Type 1: Basic Obligations of Parents (for example building positive home environments that foster children’s learning and development and assisting schools to understand families).

Type 2: Basic Obligations of Schools (for example communicating with parents about program expectations, evaluations, and children’s progress).

Type 3: Parent Involvement at School (for example volunteering in classrooms to support school and children).

Type 4: Parent Involvement in Learning and Developmental Activities at Home (for example providing material and ideas to parents about how to interact with children at home to help them with academic learning activities such as reading).

Type 5: Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy (for example including parents in decision making, advisory councils, and parent–teacher organizations).

Type 6: Collaborating with Community (for example working together with community businesses, social service agencies, and other members of community (McBride et al., 2003).

Recent governments have been increasingly concerned to foster parental choice and participation in the process of their children’s education and as Epstein & Dauber (1991) and Siraj-Blatchford & Brooker (1998) have shown, most educational settings are good at promoting Types 2 and 3 but they have failed to make adequate provision and processes to achieve Types 1, 4, 5 and 6. Arguably, these latter types are more highly correlated with successful family involvement towards genuine participation and towards a better education for children. Research by Dauber and Epstein (1993) also suggests that families become more involved in supporting their children’s education in the home when they perceive their contribution is actively encouraged by the school.

We are indebted to Deslandes (2001) for drawing our attention to the ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) complementarity of applying, alongside Epstein (1996), the typology created by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) and a model of parental partnership developed by Bouchard et al. (1998).
Hoover-Demsey and Sandler’s model suggests that families decide to participate when:

a) They understand that participation is a legitimate part of their role as a member of the family.

b) When they believe that they can make a difference to the child’s learning outcomes.

c) When they believe the child and the school want them to be involved.

The model also suggests that family involvement:

- influences children’s educational outcomes by means of modelling, reinforcement and instruction, three mechanisms which are, in turn, mediated by the developmental appropriateness of parents’ strategies and the fit between parents’ actions and the expectations of the school.

(Deslandes, 2001, p4)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) argue that it isn’t enough for parents to feel invited to become involved, their parental role construction and self efficacy are crucial in the process. The family’s understanding of their role depends on a range of factors including their understandings of child development and learning, and family members develop their sense of self efficacy in the process of actively engaging in the child’s education. When anticipated outcomes are achieved, then more challenging goals are adopted and an even stronger sense of self efficacy is developed (Bandura, 1997). So Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) are suggesting that any efforts to encourage greater family involvement must initially focus upon parents’ own perspectives on the issue.

According to Deslandes (2001), a number of writers including Pourtois and Desmet (1997), Bouchard et al., (1998), and Dunst et al., (1992) provide reciprocal partnership models based on the principles of enabling and empowerment, and they call for family-school relations that involve a more complete sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences. ‘Enabling’ in this sense refers to the families’ ability to define their role and the nature of the collaboration. ‘Empowerment’ involves the actualisation of their resources and competencies. As Vincent (1996) has argued, empowerment should also be defined in a way that opens up the possibility of collective action. Rhetoric is not enough, and initiatives will not encourage family involvement unless they address themselves to ‘people’s immediate experiences and realities’ (Vincent, 1996, p78).

As Deslandes (2001) suggests, while Epstein’s model provides a means of holistically analysing the factors that influence family – school collaboration, the conceptual framework provided by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) emphasises the importance of family knowledge and perceptions and the role of the child. The enabling and empowerment model in turn refocuses attention on the interactional dimensions at the centre of any collaboration:

To sum up, the three models described here complement each other to the extent that they lead to strategies for improving the efficacy of all the actors involved, thereby creating successful school-family partnerships.

(Deslandes, 2001)
The qualitative case-study research questions

The specific research questions to be addressed in the study were determined in collaboration with the Equalities Review Team and sought to provide answers to a range of questions that were identified in the main from their own independent review of the extant literature (including that of the EPPE project):

i. How does HLE affect children’s experience of the transition between home and pre-school?

ii. Does the type of pre-school provision used affect transitions? (Or: Do particular patterns of pre-school use support transitions?).

iii. Where a particular group is characterised by relatively low HLE, e.g. Pakistani children and low SES White boys – are there any common factors?

iv. What is it that parents do practically to support the HLE and how do they support their children?

v. How do parents and children see the quality of HLE affecting the pre-school experience, and how does this vary according to individual characteristics?

vi. What are the key characteristics and motivations of the higher HLE/low SES families?

vii. What family aspirations and expectations exist and how do these support, maintain or constrain achievement?

viii. What level of information or understanding of the early years and primary education system do these parents have, what do they understand of the benefits?

ix. What do the children and their parents think are the reasons for their children’s success?

x. What external influences (e.g. pre-school staff, work colleagues media etc.) have supported or encouraged the development of the HLE?

xi. What social capital do these families possess?

We have found that the first three of these questions are most appropriately answered by drawing upon a range of EPPE qualitative and quantitative findings. In the following pages these are therefore covered first. Rather more qualitative data are presented in addressing the rest of the questions which have been organised according to the Epstein (1996), Hoover et al., (1995), and Bouchard (1998) models of parent participation referred to above:

Family constructions of the parental role – addressing questions 4 and 5

The family’s sense of efficacy in supporting their children’s learning – questions 6 to 9

The active encouragement of parent participation by schools – question 10

Social Capital and the development of reciprocal partnerships – question 11
The process followed in our analysis was therefore to initially code our data according to these broad categories, this was followed by NVIVO (qualitative data analysis software) analysis which identified a number of key issues that sprang from the data such as ‘learning dispositions’ (referred to in our findings below). The overall process of engagement with the literature and with the research questions was thus iterative and incremental.

**Home Learning Environment (HLE)**

As noted in an earlier section of the report, the EPPE HLE index had been constructed in a process that initially involved the collection of a wide range of data from parents that extant literature suggested might be of relevance to children’s early learning in the home. The interview schedule was completed with 98 per cent of the EPPE parents and subsequent analysis identified which of their responses, to our open and closed questions, were the most significant in predicting children's cognitive and social/behavioural development when other background factors were taken into account. The HLE study might thus be considered to be ‘grounded’ in the concrete behaviours of over 3,000 families drawn from differing social backgrounds across England.

The quantitative analysis cited earlier in this report were applied to identify a possible sample for selection for the case studies. A total of 57 families were initially identified as possible respondents. Of these we were able to identify 21 individual children and their parent/s with moderate or relatively high HLE and attainment (demographically adjusted as described above) and relatively low SES from the range of diverse backgrounds; seven of these are boys. EPPE found that the HLEs provided for boys are lower overall than for girls, and given the low proportion of some of the ethnic minorities in the cohort it proved impossible to identify an equal number of male respondents in all of the target groups. We also identified a further five children, one from each ethnic group selected for the purpose of comparison with a more ‘typical’ low HLE, but were only able to recruit three of them, making the total sample 24.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with each child and parent. Wherever possible, and in all of the interviews involving Pakistani, Bangladeshi and White UK families the interviews were carried out by trained interviewers from the appropriate ethnic group (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 1997; Jones and Allebone, 1998). Several of the interviews were conducted in the appropriate community languages and translated by the interviewer before transcription.

A central aim of the interviews was to encourage the respondents to provide a narrative account that would demonstrate a sense of direction and meaning in their experiences (Gergen & Gergen, 1984). In an effort to support respondent recall, timelines were constructed prior to the interviews for each family showing each of the institutions (e.g. schools, pre-schools) that the child had attended. Parent and child respondents were encouraged to refer to (and elaborate upon) these time lines throughout the interview (Gagnon, 1981).
Features of the qualitative sample

Of the 21 children included in the sample with above average HLE (and low SES) scores for their group, 12 (57 per cent) were brought up in single parent families and 9 (43 per cent) were of low birth weight (i.e. had a birth weight under 2500 grams). All of the families were categorised as belonging to the lower SES groups, with a third of parents having ‘never worked’. Thirteen (54 per cent) of the children were receiving FSMs at reception to primary school. Fifty per cent of the parents had no qualifications at all, and for another 42 per cent, their highest qualification was achieved at the age of 16 in the UK or overseas. Twenty of the 24 families lived in areas identified by post code analysis as deprived using the index of multiple deprivations (IMD), with the majority of areas showing extreme deprivation with high levels of crime, poor housing and environment etc. Half of the respondents lived in the ten per cent most deprived areas of the country. Despite all of these disadvantages, the individual HLEs were on average 6.3 points above the mean for their group (See Table 3.1 below).

<table>
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<th>Attended Pre-school</th>
<th>FSM in Recep</th>
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6  Pseudonyms provided in the interests of anonymity.
Findings

a) **How does the HLE affect children’s experience of the transition between home and pre-school?**

The answers to this from EPPE are clear, the early years HLE has been found to have an independent influence on cognitive attainment at age 3, rising 5 years and also on progress during the pre-school period. In fact we now know that a better early years HLE helps the child adjust to both pre-school and to primary school. A better early years HLE (just like better pre-school quality) gives a child a better start to school and sets them on a more positive learner trajectory in terms of social/behavioural development especially important for ‘Independence and Concentration’. These effects are strong and independent of other predictors. We have found that the early years HLE effect (high verses low) is similar in magnitude to that of having a mother with a degree verses a mother with no qualification.

Our analyses also show that combining a good early years HLE with attendance at a high quality pre-school promotes better attainment at age 10 years. But our findings at age 10 suggest that for disadvantaged children, attending a medium or high quality pre-school, or having a medium high early years HLE on its own, may not be enough. They really require both.

The qualitative analysis suggests that one of the main reasons relatively higher HLE families decide to send their children to pre-school is to give them a head-start in education. While our data provides little indication of the specific factors parents applied in evaluating their pre-schools it is clear that they were looking for some indication of educational quality (see next section on pre-school choices). In many of our interviews comments from both the parents and the children suggest that they now believe that their decision has paid off.

*Lorraine’s Stepfather:* I think because she’d been to pre-school... this was before my time, we’d just got together about six months before she started primary school... but you’d have her in playschool and she could count, she could read as well as anybody there and she’d been going there for a year or so, hadn’t she, in the mornings, so [when she entered primary school] she was pretty well ready for the challenge.

Further details of our findings related to HLE and children’s subsequent progress and achievement in pre-school and in primary education may be found in an earlier quantitative section of this report.
As Bruner (1996) has argued, culture shapes the mind, and learning must be considered within its situated context. Here, learning is seen as situated social practice, where the individual is developing her/his identity as a member of a particular community. This is seen as a socially negotiated and mediated process. Rogoff, et al. (1993), in their studies, observed interactions between young children and their caregivers in four communities and found that learning was taking place within all the communities, despite very different interactions taking place. Within the two working class communities, where the children were not segregated from adult activities, children were keen observers and were oriented by their caregivers towards any adult activity that was taking place. Within the two middle class communities, where children were segregated from adult’s activities, learning was a more structured process, with the caregiver managing learning through a special discourse and organised, instructive events.

Similarly, in her study of the development of narrative between mothers and their young children within different language communities in the USA, Melzi (2000) found that Spanish speaking mothers were active listeners and gave general conversational guidelines to their children, whilst English speaking mothers took a more guiding role in organising the story for the child. Melzi (2000) concludes that the “elicitation styles adopted by European American and Latino mothers corresponded to cultural definitions of conversational contexts and roles…” (p.157). These studies demonstrate how children in different communities are enabled to learn accepted practices and discourses within their social contexts.

As much of the work conducted by Tizard and Hughes (1988), and Wood (1988) in the 1980s shows, an advantage that the parent has over the teacher is that in the home environment the child’s own interest and embedded previous knowledge can become the starting point for any pedagogic exchange. Between parent and child there can be an interactive partnership, where the child becomes responsible for the direction of much of his/her own learning, with the parent serving as a source of information as it is required:

> Not only may the experience at home provide something not readily available in school but also it seems that the skills involved apply as much to the process of attention, perseverence, task performance and work organisation as to particular areas of knowledge. Learning how to learn may be as important as the specifics of what is learned. (Rutter, 1985)

While relatively few studies have addressed the specific issue of transition from home to pre-school, Sanders et al. (2005) provide a useful summary of the main findings from the broader research into children’s experiences of transition. These show that:

- On the whole, children view transition in a positive light.
- Work and workload are of concern to children making educational transitions.
- Friendships, siblings and social skills may help children to settle into a new setting more easily.
- Children are concerned about the rules and conventions of school.
- Children from minority ethnic groups, those with English as an additional language (EAL), and children with special educational needs (SEN) often find transition more difficult.
With regard to any specific factors that affect the transitions from home to pre-
school related to contrasting aims, values, philosophy, approaches etc. our study
has found little evidence to base any firm conclusions upon. Whilst it is impossible
to make generalisations from any such small scale study, the data do provide
sufficient depth to illuminate some possible tensions.

While one of the children reported an apparent disjuncture in the approaches
applied in early literacy instruction, the EPPE evidence suggests that the kind of
contribution that parent’s are currently making (and described in the following
transcript) do provide significant support.

**Lorraine:** *I didn’t know the sounds of the letters, I knew how to say them, like
ABC, but not “a”, “buh”, “cuh”, because that’s what they were teaching then,
that’s what the pre-school tried to teach me, but my mum had taught me the
ABC, so I had to get used to a totally new thing.*

But while modern approaches to the teaching of reading prioritise the early
introduction of a phonic alphabet we are aware of no research that would
suggest that any previous introduction to the formal alphabet and letter names
could interfere with the learning processes involved. We would therefore assume
from the evidence that we currently have available that an introduction to the
formal letter names could provide a valuable precursor to learning phonics.

While some children may be disadvantaged by other discontinuities of experience
between the home and school, there remains little consensus of opinion regarding
the extent of such disadvantages. In a few cases parents expressed concern that
teachers were relatively permissive in the classroom and some parents also
complained that teachers provided insufficient support and encouragement.
Both Louis and Winston’s Mothers also referred to some degree of cultural
misunderstanding:

*I think it’s the teachers who do not understand black culture… I had a
conversation with one of my eldest boys when they went to [Secondary
school] they actually asked a question and it was seen that he was challenging
the teacher, and in our culture we ask … ‘Mum why did you say no?’, and I
think it’s important that if you say no… that the child should know why you
said no…and it’s seen as challenging, and that sort of suppresses an individual
person, specially boys because they’re sort of more emotional than girls,
because a lot of it is to do with suppressing the black child at school more
than letting them be themselves, and that might add to the bit of why they
don’t bother…*

Wood and Bennett (2001) report on two teachers involved in their study who
discussed the discontinuities they sometimes perceived in the transition from
home to school:

*… there is a mismatch and the children get confused. Part of the transfer
process should be making the children as settled and confident as possible so
that they can learn. The way teachers interact with children, is different to
what they have experienced in the home… so you have to bridge that gap
because there are cultural differences. (Nursery)*
The children come from an area where there hasn’t generally been a positive attitude towards school. So before the children can learn anything there has to be a positive ethos … to make sure that every child has positive self-esteem… That is something that runs throughout the school … and every step they take is rewarded. That is the caring side of it. (Reception)

Taking the first of these comments, we would assume that similar adjustments must routinely be made by teachers at every stage of their schooling as approaches to pedagogy and discipline continue to vary significantly between professional educators (O’Brien, 1991). The second statement may have more specific relevance to transitions between the home and school and the experience of our low HLE ‘comparison’ families may be relevant. Sally’s Mother told us, “I do try but sometimes they take no notice of you”.

Some teachers clearly see the role of the reception teacher (at least) to act as an important ‘socializing agent’. Wood and Bennett (2001) report on a teacher who emphasised the importance of continuity in behaviour policies, particularly because she considered some of the children weren’t ‘really given boundaries at home’:

We build on work that has been done in Reception, establishing boundaries within the school, sanctions for bad behaviour, expectations of what we do expect, giving rewards for appropriate behaviour and good work and all those sorts of things, which enable us to teach the curriculum.

The subject of the effect of the HLE on the children’s further progress in primary school is dealt with more fully in the earlier quantitative sections of this report.

b) Does the type of pre-school provision used affect transitions?

EPPE has found that, regardless of all other factors, children who did not experience any pre-school provision were less cognitively advanced and showed poorer social/behavioural development, especially ‘Peer Sociability’ and ‘Independence and Concentration’, at school entry (Sammons et al., 2002, 2004). Questions related to the specific measures taken by schools to ease the transition from home to school for such children are therefore especially important. Unfortunately our qualitative case study sample did not lend itself to investigating this problem as only one of the children did not attend a pre-school.

The EPPE study also examined whether there were systematic variations in centre effectiveness for the six types of provision included in the sample of 141 pre-school centres. The findings suggest that differences in children’s cognitive progress related to type of provision do emerge during the pre-school period. While outlier centres, both positive and negative, were found in each type of provision and the differences between individual centres are likely to be more important than differences between types, certain patterns did emerge to suggest that some forms of provision were more effective.

7 Outlier centre – where children’s performance was above (positive) or below (negative) the predicted level of attainment given their backgrounds.
Integrated provision (i.e. combining education and care) showed a significant positive impact for several measures. These settings have explicit educational objectives and they are generally committed to providing for parental partnership and family support. Nursery schools also showed some positive effects compared with other types of provision and similar to those found for Integrated provision. By contrast, children who attended Local authority day care nurseries tended to make relatively poor progress, especially for Pre-reading. Children from low SES families also showed better outcomes if they attended Integrated provision or Nursery schools. Both of these forms of provision also showed higher scores in observed quality.

Although Private day nurseries did not show up as significantly more effective in the analyses of impact of type of provision on progress (except in comparisons with Local authority day care nurseries for Pre-reading and Language) a number of the positive outlier centres for Pre-reading were found to be Private day nurseries. This may reflect curricular differences in emphasis and priorities. The results suggest that centres classified as Private day nurseries in particular show much greater variation in effects and quality, some having a specific educational philosophy or tradition (e.g. Montessori). It should be noted that the analyses took account of the compositional effects of concentrations of more advantaged children in different centres; this is particularly relevant to comparisons of Private day nurseries.

The presence of compositional effects would suggest that the clustering of disadvantaged children within specific centres may not be advantageous for young children’s cognitive progress. Policies aimed at encouraging a social mix of children may be more appropriate, although this may be difficult to achieve in practice, given many parents’ preferences/needs for a local centre in close proximity to home, and the extent to which different social and ethnic groups are clustered in some neighbourhoods.

The EPPE study also demonstrated that there was significant variation both between individual centres and by type of provision in the observed quality of provision (see Sylva et al., 1999 for details). But when account was taken of variation in the quality of the centre environments, the impact of the type of provision was reduced. This indicates that the impact of type of provision is likely to be, at least in part, attributed to variations in environmental quality and adult-child interactions. We have found that by age 10 the statistical pre-school ‘type’ effect that we identified in the early analysis had washed out, but the effect of pre-school quality on children’s outcomes remains very strong. It is important to recognise in this context that the Integrated centres and Nursery schools that did better overall served significantly more multiply disadvantaged children from families with less positive HLEs.

In interpreting the findings on type of provision, it is also important to acknowledge the very different resourcing levels typical of different types of provision, which have implications for staffing, training and facilities. The maintained sector differs quite markedly in this respect from voluntary provision, particularly Playgroups which, in the past, have had little access to resources in England and often few staff with higher levels of relevant qualifications (for further discussion of these issues see Taggart et al., 2000).
Given the research evidence referred to above that identifies the importance of friendships, siblings and the social skills that help children to settle into new settings more easily (see also Stephen and Cope, 2001; Margetts, 2003), it is especially interesting to note that EPPE found a statistically significant difference between the ‘Co-operation & Conformity’ of children attending Nursery classes and Integrated centres compared to Playgroups, Private day nurseries and Local authority day nurseries. Children in Nursery classes and Integrated centres made more cognitive and social/behavioural developmental gains. Nursery classes also showed a positive impact for ‘Peer Sociability’ compared with Playgroups and Local authority day nurseries.

There were also some indications that poorer outcomes in terms of the factor ‘Anti-social/worried’ behaviour’ (i.e. a worsening of ‘Anti-social/worried behaviour’) were associated with both Private and Local authority day care nurseries. These differences were statistically significant in comparison with Nursery classes and Nursery schools (Sammons et al., 2003b).

When we asked our higher than average HLE child respondents about their experiences of transition, most of the children found it difficult to recall their first impressions of pre-school although many had fond memories of the time that they had spent there playing with sand, bicycles etc., and in their outdoor play. But in common with other studies looking at transitions to primary school (Hendy and Whitebread, 2000; Potter and Briggs, 2003; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Clarke and Sharpe, 2003) the children referred to the increased influence of adults and a reduction in choice. Given the limitations of our qualitative sample it would be inappropriate to attempt to differentiate between these responses according to the type of pre-school attended:

Faiza: In infants you were playing all the time and like work was more like fun, but then it’s more like serious.

Lorraine: All I remember is lots of bean bags and tiddly little chairs about that big and I remember these letter cards we used to have where you used to spell out the letters and then write them down on a piece of A4 paper ….

Safia: We used to play with toys and games there; they used to read us stories.

Shaun: All I remember is when you went in you had to take your name off like a Velcro thing and take it in and put it on another Velcro thing, so you used to go and find your name.

When we asked the children about their move into primary school a few references were made to the size of the school, to uniform requirements, and to the increased number of children they were with. Some of the children expected it to be more ‘strict’ that it turned out to be. The biggest difference most of the children found was that there was more ‘work’ and less opportunity to ‘play’ (particularly outside). Although for at least one of the children this rather simplistic distinction was already being questioned:

Leilani: Well, it seemed like playing, but we probably were learning at the same time.
These findings resonate with those of Ofsted (2004) and Fabian (1998) which focused on the transition from Reception to Year 1 and found that while children had mostly positive views of the transition, they also had some prior concerns, especially about the more formal work that might be demanded of them.

As a number of previous studies have found (Dockett and Perry, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2003; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Griebel and Niesel, 2000), on secondary transfer the children had many more concerns regarding the expected standards of discipline (this was often associated with the wearing of uniforms), and the need to make new friends. But most of the EPPE children who had made the transfer found it easier than expected. Of the others most told us that they were looking forward to going, even if the prospect was a little more daunting for a few. For many parents, the anticipation of, and preparation for, secondary transfer may be equally stressful and daunting. Louis was given 6 months of private tutoring (2 hours each week) in preparation for the 11+. He started at his new Grammar school in September 2006 but only after a fairly considerable effort was made by his Mother:

**Louis’ Mother:** Well, it’s like with the Eleven Plus. None of the teachers knew anything, I had to go and sort that out for myself. A few parents I had to tell them myself. And the school is saying, ‘What’s wrong with the schools around here’. When you looked at my list for the Eleven Plus, for the secondary school, grammar school, grammar school, grammar school, grammar school. I had five grammar schools on it. The secretary took one look and she said, ‘I’ve noticed there’s no ordinary school on it.’ I said, ‘Yes.’ I turned around and I said, ‘No. You’re not deterring me’. I’m thinking a secretary and teachers should be encouraging us.

As Crozier and Davies (2005) have argued, while there is now substantial information available for parents regarding their rights of school choice and how to help their children in school, many schools remain unable to adequately convey this information to some groups of parents.

c)** Where a particular group is characterised by relatively low HLE are there any common factors?**

As has been seen in earlier sections of this report the common factors identified in our quantitative analysis of the EPPE data conducted for the Equalities Review were as follows:

- Poor mother’s education,
- Larger families,
- Early developmental problems,
- Area of higher deprivation and
- If going to pre-school, going to one that is mainly homogeneous in terms of low mother’s qualifications.
d) Family constructions of the parental role

As suggested earlier, families decide to participate when they understand that participation is a legitimate part of their role as a member of the family (Hoover-Demsey and Sandler, 1995). Type 1 and 2 of Epstein’s (1996) typology of participatory forms was therefore applied to compile the evidence related to the basic obligations perceived by families and in with respect to their involvement in the school and pre-school classrooms.

We asked the children who they thought that they had learnt the most from at home and it is clear from their responses that a very wide range of family members provide support for children’s learning. In the circumstances the notion of ‘parental participation or partnership’ does seem inappropriate. In addition to the parents and brothers and sisters, the contributions of aunts and uncles, grandparents and even cousins were referred to. All of the parents from each of these high HLE, low SES groups studied, read to their children in their early years and went on to listen to them read at an early age. Numerous other educational stimulus and activities were provided. Some variation in both the motivations for, and the content of, these activities is apparent across the different ethnic groups:

African Respondents

Anike and Desola’s (Twins) Mother read fairy tale books (‘like Cinderella’) to them, she took them to the library, and she heard the girls read books from school. This was probably as part of a reading scheme: “Yeah, yeah. I have to … one day I have to listen to them…” (Mother 1927/8). The children recall learning their alphabet and numbers at home.

Daniella remembered being helped with letters and numbers at home. Daniella’s Mother provided a lot of encouragement for her daughter, she read to her from an early age and she also heard Daniella read: “I used to get her loads of books and read with her, read together, bible stories, anything” (Mother 2282). Her Mother had developed the habit of using a public library in Sierra Leone and she felt it was important for her children to know how to use the resource as well. Books were also purchased, as well as collected from the library and brought home from school. Daniella’s father also made a major contribution:

Daniella’s Mother: I did most of the thing but if I am at work then she would do it in the evenings. Most times I always try, he will be there and sit down with them, if I am in the kitchen, you know, he will help them out with their studies and reading and stuff. And when I am free I will join in as well.

Daniella’s Father: We did our best because it was always when [Daniella] was born I was a bus driver so I was always there swapping shifts to be at home in the evenings and if I wasn’t there the mum was always there so we feel we’ve done well.
Yosola’s parents took her to the library from an early age, and they read to her every day throughout her early years:

**Yosola’s Mother:** Normal bedtime stories, normal things, sometimes she gets some books, they go to the library and get books, I mean I used to read to them when they were younger, but since they started reading themselves, been independent as far as reading is concerned, go the library, Dad reads as well, they take part in this thing that happens during the summer holidays, it’s a reading kind of competition where they are supposed to read x number of books, she’s quite good with that, got medals and stuff like that.

**Bangladeshi Respondents**

Firoja’s parents bought a lot of books and she sometimes went to the library with her as well. Earlier research had shown us that the HLE provided for Firoja’s younger sister Nadiya was quite different (see below), we therefore took the opportunity of investigating this situation more closely. We were informed:

**Nadiya’s Mother:** …we gave a bit more time to Firoja as she is the eldest. The other two had less attention. Firoja is our first child. She got undivided attention.

But while Firoja recalled learning the alphabet and a few words of English at home it wasn’t entirely clear whether this was something her parents had supported her with or whether it had been her sister’s home tutor:

**Firoja’s Mother:** The lady used to read to both of them. Their father also read to both of them together.

That said, Firoja’s Mother did clearly recognise the importance of the HLE:

**Firoja’s Mother:** When kids are very young, someone should read to them to start the teaching. They need to learn from early childhood and reading helps that way. We were also informed that the parents listened to them to correct if they were not reading accurately and they were given help with their spelling.

Tanuja remembered learning to write her name at home and this was confirmed by her mother:

**Tanuja’s mother:** Tanuja learnt numbers and letters from her sister and me. When school started to teach these things we brought books home and supported her learning.

**Tanuja:** I used to read Bengali books, Islamic books, English alphabet etc. I used to read because if I didn’t read, she would only play. You have to grow interest in study from very early age.

Both Sahira and Deepa’s Mothers helped them learn the alphabet and they read story books (some from the library) to them. They also listened to them read ‘to improve their reading’:

**Deepa’s Mother:** She enjoyed it. I enjoyed it too. She is my first child. Both of us felt alone. This was a good way to pass time.
Sundara’s Mother reported on the fairy stories that she read to her in the early years, and on Sundara reading to her as well (possibly as a part of a reading scheme). The books came from a variety of sources:

**Sundara’s Mother** Some of them, they used to get from school, she had to change every week, so I can’t remember what kinds they were. Short stories, from school, and library … and they joined the local library here.

**Pakistani Respondents**

Safia had rhyme books that her parents would read to her before she used to go to bed. They took her to the library and they would also hear her read a couple of times a week:

**Int:** Why did you choose to read to her?

**Father:** …going back to 1971 when we first arrived in England, I couldn’t speak a word of English and I only spent what less than a year in London, where we stayed, again not knowing a word of English and I spent about five years at Barnaby School, nine months at a technical college and thereafter I just started work… my father had to go to India, and somebody had to find a job…then what I did, I thought to myself well look, your standard of education is still low, I can’t go to school, I must study at home so in the Sun Paper I saw an advert of like a course and I sent that away…and I used to study at home, in one of the quiet bedrooms in the house, and that made me realise how important it really is. So this is where I thought well, my children, they are going to have the best of education, I’m going to support them all the way…

Safia’s father regularly provided Safia with pages of arithmetic sums and gave her spellings to complete at home.

Ikram remembered his Mother teaching him letters and numbers. His parents read to him nearly every day from an early age, they also encouraged him to read by himself. The importance of home learning was clearly recognised:

**Ikram’s Father:** It’s good for his English and his … to do well at school.

Faiza didn’t attend a pre-school as there was “no playgroup round this way” (Older Sister). But she was given ‘something to do’ every day. She remembers learning her letters and about money and counting at home. Members of the family read to her every day and many of the books she used came from a local library:

**Int:** Now why did she think it was important to listen to her read?

**Faiza’s Older Sister:** Basically there was a fear from my older brother ‘cos he’s got autism and so it was important to listen to her to see if she had anything wrong with her…Generally as well to help her, to give her something on a child basis to start on so she did know something when she went to school not just like nothing.” …“When she was younger when she was about four or five, you know in reception, the school used to give little word boxes, and in the words and that, were words that me mum could pick out cos me mum’s limited, but my Dad when he was here he did actually read with her. Mum did teach her how to write like you know dot to dot when reception started out she [the child] couldn’t really write anything.
Caribbean Respondents

In the early years Leilani’s Mother collected books from the Nursery class and she read to her every day. She informed us that she did this:

Leilani’s Mother: ...to find out how she was getting on, but also to help her...

Her Mother taught her to write her name and she also told us that her Mother had also taught her numbers and the alphabet before she was taught it in school.

Louis told us that his Mum had always helped him with his education although he felt that his parents sometimes pushed him too hard. His mother regularly took him to the library, she read to him from birth and she later heard him read.

Winston’s Mother also took him with her to the library from an early age, she read to him (about three times a week). Winston also benefited from the support of older siblings and from attendance at a Saturday Supplementary School:

Int: And when you did read to him, what sort of things were you reading?

Winston’s Mother: ...it depends what age it is, because if he was under five, it would be reading books, like Jack and Jill, and Thomas the Tank and stuff like that, I think by the time he was the age of five he used to go to Saturday school so I used to read a lot of black history books to Winston, also the newspaper with Winston as well, and I think by that time Winston was bringing books home from school as well, so I’d ask him to read the book and then probably write, as he grew older I said well read the book and you write down to me what the book’s actually saying, then I’d read the book and see whether he could retain it.

Celine told us that she “Learnt a lot at home, did lots of writing at home, with more detail at school”. Home learning was given a high priority by Celine’s Mother and time was set aside for reading on a daily basis:

Celine’s Mother: When she first started I’d sit with the normal children’s books, the ABCs that kind of thing, I used to buy those books that you can get from WH Smiths, that go along with the year that they are in school, key stage books, and one of her favourite games as a younger child was playing schools ...so she went through those stages, and then she went through a stage of choosing her own likes and dislikes, cos she’s also been part of the library since she was two, so we used to get books out the library as well and she’d have a choice of books.

White UK respondents

Tanya’s Mother bought her books and read to her ‘ever since she’s been tiny’. Later she also listened to her read.

Int: Were there ever books that she brought home from playgroup or school, or …

Tanya’s Mother: They never really brought books home from playschool, and school books … not very often, she wouldn’t really bring very many books home from school.
Tanya recalled practicing writing her name ‘a lot’ at home and her Mother told us that she had taught her all of her alphabet and numbers.

Lorraine’s Mother taught her first letters and numbers and she read to her from an early age and later listened to her read at least 3-4 pages every day – apparently she was reading sentences from the age of 5:

**Lorraine’s Mother:** I read to her things what she enjoyed and what was also slightly a little bit advanced for her and what she was interested in and there was, as she got a little bit older, there were certain authors and people who she liked and so, I’d read them sort of books.

Shaun’s parents read to him from an early age and continued to listen to him read when he brought books home from school as a part of their reading scheme:

**Shaun’s Mother:** He just got certain books, he doesn’t have a choice at school, he just got given books, like that went up in stages, and he just got given books.

Shaun learnt his alphabet from a video before he went to nursery:

**Shaun’s Mother:** …he used to sit and watch it like, a nursery one but it like sang the alphabet and that’s how he more or less knew the alphabet off that video ‘cos he never had it off.

Shaun also reported that he had learnt most of what he knew about drawing and science at home, especially from his Grandad.

Daniel didn’t attend pre-school but he was clearly given a good deal of support at home:

**Int:** Did you learn things at home when you were little?

**Daniel:** Yes, lots.

**Int:** What sort of things did you learn before you went to school?

**Daniel:** Some of the alphabet and numbers.

**Int:** And who taught you that?

**Daniel:** My Mam…and sometimes, the numbers, Sonia.

Daniel’s Mother taught him his first numbers and letters and she used to read to him every night. It was only in Year 6 that this changed:

**Daniel’s Mother:** …from you reading to him to him actually sitting down and pulling the book out and sitting there with me and reading to me…

Occasionally he would be taken to the library as well.

**Int:** Why did you read to him?

**Daniel’s Mother:** Well, I suppose it was just to learn him as well, because once I had read the book to Daniel, he used to sit with me and he used to read it back.
The role of children in maintaining the HLE

Parent’s often commented upon the active role played by the children themselves in maintaining support in the home:

**Lorraine’s Stepfather:** [Lorraine] was about three or four years old just before she went to primary school when we got together and [Lorraine] used to demand a certain amount of attention from her mum because she was jealous that we might be sitting downstairs after she’d gone to bed, so she used to demand a lot more reading and got a lot more reading than perhaps a child who had grown up with the same two parents all the time.

Similarly Daniella’s Mother explained why it was that she regularly listened to daughter’s reading:

**Daniella’s Mother:** Actually because she gets annoyed if you don’t listen to her, like sometimes …mum you are not paying attention, you know, so I like to give everything to her, for her to know that I am proud of her.

The provision of structure in the home

Apart from the positive home learning practices that we have investigated, indicators such as bedtime requirements suggest that these parents provide a significant amount of structure. Twenty of the 21 higher HLE parents continue to set a fixed bedtime (typically 9 o’clock on a weekday) at age 10/11. Most of the girls are given regular chores to do around the house although this was less prevalent among the white working class children and the Pakistani boys.

**Int:** Are there any special jobs that you have to do around the home?

**Desola:** Yeah, like doing the dishes, cleaning up my room, hoovering the floor.

**Int:** And have you always done those jobs?

**Desola:** The dishes, I’ve always done the dishes, and tidying up my room, and I’ve done most of them.

**Celine:** Cooking, washing, hoovering, polishing, and house-hold chores. Sometimes I’m asked to do them, but usually just does it.

For some children the responsibilities they were taking were significantly more demanding:

**Sundara:** I helped my mum with housework and for looking after my brother. I am doing it since year 6.

**Int:** Are there any special jobs you have to do around the home?

**Sahira:** Yeah, look after my brothers. I have two younger brothers, well I have two younger brothers, so I have to look after them.

**Int:** And have you always done these things?

**Sahira:** Yeah.
Pre-school choices

Given what we know about the enduring advantage to children of attending a high quality pre-school (Sylva, et al., 2004), one of the most significant things that families can do to support their children in the early years is to find them a good pre-school setting. EPPE has shown that for those children who attend pre-school for two years, cognitive development at the age of five is four to six months more advanced than for those who have not attended at all. The EPPE project also showed that disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where they are with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds.

All but one of our high HLE sample had enrolled their child at pre-school. Even in that case the child’s name had been ‘put down’ for it but it was oversubscribed and there were no other alternatives. While many of the case study parents informed us that that they were concerned to find the best setting for their children, for some of the other parents their first choice turned out to be oversubscribed and they were therefore unable to obtain a place for their child. For some, similar difficulties were experienced in the case of primary school enrolment, and even more so when it came to gaining a place at their preferred secondary school. As far as the pre-schools were concerned, most of the parents informed us that there was simply too little choice in the near vicinity that was available at prices that they could afford.

Int: When it came to organising pre-school childcare for Yosola, what were the choices that were available to you at the time?

Yosola’s Mother: There wasn’t a lot actually from when she started pre-school because at the age when she started [Nursery associated with African and Caribbean Family Project] she was about eighteen months, and it was quite expensive, so we didn’t have a choice but to put her somewhere on a part time basis, which in a way wasn’t ideal because what it meant was we settled her for two days and then we took her out and there’s that gap and then we bring her back again, it took a long time for her to settle.

Int: So if it hadn’t been expensive do you think you would have kept her there full time?

Yosola’s Mother: Definitely.

Int: So it was the expense?

Yosola’s Mother: And it was one of the reasons why we took her out eventually for her to go to Gillespie, cos we couldn’t afford it any more.

Int: With [LEA Integrated Centre] then, when it came to choosing that centre for her, what sort of options were available to you when it came to making that choice?

Yosola’s Mother: I think it was more because [LEA Integrated Centre] was not too far from where we were at that point, it was just the next street away, and it was a strict run nursery, we did have a look around, but like we normally do, we just have a feel for the place, and if it feels right, that’s fine.
For many of the parents the preference for a nursery that was close to their home was clearly not simply an issue of convenience:

**Ghalib’s Mother:** *Well when it comes to nursery or pre-school because a child is young and if anything happens you’ve got to get there quick.*

The reasons most frequently given by parents for choosing to put their child in a nursery was to give them a head start in education, prepare them for school, and to give them opportunities to spend time with other children. For those parents with English as an additional language (EAL) the opportunities offered by a nursery setting in supporting their children in learning English was clearly significant. This was also the most frequently cited reason that the children with EAL cited as the reasons their parents would have chosen to send them.

Crozier and Davies (2005) found that most Pakistani parents had a broad understanding of the education system and their children’s progress. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the higher than average HLE sample, our findings contrast strongly with Crozier and Davies (2005) who found that few of the Bangladeshi parents they surveyed knew very much about the education system or what their children were doing in school.

Epstein’s (1996) Type 3 Involvement concerns parents volunteering in classrooms to support school and children and we found that many of the parents did provide this support particularly in the early years.

**Other educational provisions**

Eight of the 21 high HLE children attended subject-focused classes outside of school. Three attended classes that had a specific cultural focus, and many more confirmed their attendance of religious classes associated with their local church or mosque. Faiza, for example told us about the Saturday and Sunday religious classes she had attended since she was six years old to learn how to read the Koran and to learn about ‘religious stories’ and Tanuja’s Mother told us about the Bangladeshi rhymes she used to introduce her child to, Bengali alongside English rhymes like ‘ring-a-ring-a roses.’

When Winston started at the Saturday School at the age of 5 his mother read Black History books with him at home and Celine’s Mother took her to an after-school club which taught her science, Mathematics, English and Black History.

It is quite clear from these data that the positive HLEs were not provided as an alternative to these additional early educational, community language and religious instruction provisions.

**Daniella’s Mother:** *We wanted to give them something like from our background, you know, they’ve never been to my country, so we taught them songs from there as well, to learn to sing our own traditional songs, because I think it’s important for them to learn their background as well, so for that reason that’s why we taught them.*

Several of the parents also paid for private home tutorial support when a particular educational weakness was identified (and in one case in preparation for an 11+ selection test), showing further commitment to educational support.
Barriers to providing for the HLE

We asked the parents what they felt the barriers were to providing a positive HLE but the only reasons that they could give us were related to the time available and their personal circumstances such as health.

We also interviewed 3 children and their parent/s from Bengali, Pakistani and White UK families who were providing much less support in the HLE.

Sally didn’t attend preschool and her HLE was one of the lowest that was recorded in the study (HLE = 1). She was clearly fond of books but received little support or encouragement for this at home:

Sally’s Mother: *She’s always came home with loads of reading books, see she’s the type of person, if she reads, she use to when she was younger she used to follow it by the picture.*

Int: *So she liked the picture books.*

Sally’s Mother: *...So I used to think that she couldn’t read, because that’s the way I used to do it when I was a bairn, I used to take it off by the picture and then I did used to work out the story, find out by the subject the picture and she does exactly the same.*

Sally’s Mother reported that when it came to listening to her read, her older brother would sometimes hear her, and on occasions her Father would also help:

Sally’s Mother: *...if you’re sitting doing nothing he’ll sit and read and let out reading, and if she gets stuck they’re barking out tha shall go to her Da, but her Da’s really the good one, the one who’s got a good head on.*

Int: *...Reading, to Sally, do you read to Sally, has that changed at all?*

Sally’s Mother: *Well ah’ve never ever been so much of a good reader meself because I always went to a problem school from being young meself, and I always say you get an odd one or two like you, but lucky ah’ve hit and I haven’t, and I was just praying it wasn’t her what turned out like me, cos I had problems from start.*

As previously reported, when she was asked if there was anything she could do to try to help Sally, her Mother told us: “*I do try but sometimes they take no notice of you*”.

Other family pressures also made it very difficult for some families to provide support. Aftab’s mother only heard him read once a week when he brought a book home as part of his school’s reading scheme.

Int: *Did you ever read to him when he was younger?*

Aftab’s mother: *I think he used to read to me more than I used to read to him.*

Int: *Any times you can think of that you used to sit down and read with him?*

Aftab’s mother: “*No…. because I’ve got like, you know, a disabled daughter as well, and looking after her and ...*
As previously suggested, Nadiya’s experience in her Bangladeshi family was also influenced by other members of the family: “We gave a bit more time to Firoja as she is the eldest. The other two had less attention”. Their father became too busy with his business to provide the support that he had made for the older sibling. He couldn’t read to Nadiya so frequently: “Now we have become even busier in the case of helping our third child”. The solution that the family found was to regularly bring in a home tutor.

For most parent’s any dip in the child’s attainment was met with a new strategy. When Sahira’s Mother was informed that her daughter was talking too much with her friends in class and her performance was slipping she immediately talked to her about it. Earlier in the year Sahira had asked her Father if she could have a computer for her Birthday so the parents agreed that if she met the standards they wanted then she could have it. Apparently the teachers were really surprised at how quickly Sahira’s behaviour changed and what an effect it had on her performance. This wasn’t the only incentive that we heard about:

Daniella’s Mother: …when it is holidays we try as best as we can to please them and do what we can for them because all we ask for in return is that they focus on their education so we give them as best as we can.

We also found that even in the most diligent of households, the HLE provisions made for individual children sometimes changed when the home circumstances changed and family pressures made it more difficult to provide support:

Celine’s Mother: I do believe it’s important to stretch their minds, you know I mean, probably as well since Ruth’s been born, she’s the only one out of four children where I’ve worked since before she was born, and worked during her childhood, hers has been different from the others, due to the fact that she’s been the child that’s has gone to after school, gone to school clubs in the holidays and hasn’t always had me. So Ruth’s had a different upbringing to the others and there is a difference in their personality because of it, the way that they are as children, the ages they’re different, her sister was different to that at twelve, when she was twelve she was a very naïve twelve, whereas Ruth is very worldly wise at twelve.

When a good HLE is not enough

Unfortunately for some of the higher than average HLE families that we interviewed a positive HLE wasn’t enough where other influences led to underachievement. Despite his positive HLE and a promising start, we found that Ghalib’s recent educational achievements had been modest. He was born with a low birth weight and a hole in his heart and had clearly overcome some significant early disadvantages. His Father, a taxi driver, was critical of Ghalib’s teachers but was quite clear that he would make up for lost ground:

Ghalib’s Father: We have to do something for him. He’s still got three years before his GCSEs, four years before his GCSEs, so we’ve got a lot of time to push, his GCSEs are the most important thing for the rest of his life. Then if his A Levels are good enough...
Tanya’s HLE was very high and she benefited from a pre-school that EPPE had identified as particularly effective in terms of their work on Early Number. But her attainment in primary school was disappointing. Her parents had split up, and it seems likely that she had been at very least a witness to a period of domestic violence. She had moved with her Mother to a refuge in a new area. Tanya is now diagnosed as dyslexic and she is deliberately harming herself. When we asked her about her lessons at secondary school she told us that she sometimes walked out of her classes:

**Tanya:** I just give up, cos I find it all too hard.

**Int:** OK, and so what happens when you give up?

**Tanya:** I just start talking to other people.

**Int:** Right, and then what happens?

**Tanya:** Then they all start talking and we all get in trouble. It’s the same in French, I hate French, and I don’t understand anything. I want to speak German, but I don’t want to do French.

**Tanya:** Cos I’m always having people going, don’t give up so easily, you’re always giving up, try harder, you should listen more, and …

**Int:** Do you think they’re right or do you think they’re wrong?

**Tanya:** I think they’re right, but I just find it really hard. I try, but …

It now seems that the early benefits of her positive HLE and pre-school experiences have been lost, the good HLE practices are no longer being consistently maintained, as her Mother informed us:

**Tanya’s Mother:** Oh god, yeah, homework, oh the slanging matches over homework, she just won’t do it, and even if I try to help her do it….The homework’s absolutely horrendous, absolutely. The amount of arguments we’ve had over homework is unbelievable.

Tanya also told us that she usually didn’t tell her Mother about the problems that she was having in school:

**Tanya:** Cos I don’t see what she can do about it, she’ll probably just make it worse by telling someone at school and then they’ll try harder and I just don’t, I can’t be bothered with it all. So I just get on with stuff.

Shaun provides yet another case where a promising start has ended badly with his expulsion from school. His Mother told us that his typical reaction to any difficulties with his homework was to ‘stomp off’ and leave it saying: “I’m not doing that I dinna understand it”. She told us that she would usually be able to coax him back to the work later.

Daniel’s low self esteem will be mentioned further in the report, for the time being it is enough to note that again, despite an effective pre-school and his HLE being promising, we found that he was now underachieving and displaying some behavioural problems that involved him seeing a psychiatrist. He told us that whenever he found things difficult in school he would now ‘just leave it’. 
In a recent paper, Edwards and Alldred (2000) cite the Children Act (1989) to emphasise children's rights, and to argue that a balance needs to be struck between children's 'social' and 'educational' interests. The social interests that they refer to are not very clearly defined except where they suggest that in some cases where parents cannot be involved, parent involvement initiatives may reinforce the “social powerlessness” (p.453) of young children. The major concerns appear to be related to the possibility of challenges being made to children's developing sense of privacy and autonomy. The implication is that the perceived demands may result in underachieving children becoming more resistant and alienated than they are already. The only evidential basis that Edwards and Alldred have for these concerns appear to be children's comments that if people from school visited the home they would hide in the bedroom or go out: “feeling that the state of their home and their family life was being judged”.

Similar concerns have been expressed by Crowley (2006) who argued that it would be a mistake to encourage HLE developments in cases where basic parent-child emotional bonds are negative or destructive or where, ‘a parent is enduring one or more major problems such as domestic violence, depression or other mental illness or woefully inadequate housing’ (p.1). While our sample included several families that fitted the latter statement, given the higher than average HLE criteria applied in our sampling, it is probably unsurprising that we found little evidence of any problematic emotional bonds. The one exception to this might have been with Tanya where, as we have seen, there was clearly evidence of conflict with her Mother related to the completion of homework. Following her escape from a violent home, and despite the support provided in a Women's refuge, Tanya has clearly become an extremely unhappy and insecure young person. Her educational progress is suffering, and the positive HLE has been inadequate on its own in compensating for this. But we would argue that this does not make it a part of the problem. Tanya and her Mother need, and deserve, help, and more family support for all families such as theirs is required. But that is a quite separate issue.

An assumption that seems to be being made here by Edwards and Alldred (2000), and by Crowley (2006), is that the values and expectations of families and of educationalists may, at times, be irreconcilable. We reject this assumption, not least on the grounds that the home learning activities that our research shows often make a difference to children's learning may also be applied to support families in developing more constructive relationships with their children.

One of the most significant things that our case studies also demonstrate is that for each of the multiply disadvantaged groups that we investigated, there are at least some families whose educational aspirations and efforts appear to mirror those of schools very closely.

e) **The family's sense of efficacy in supporting their children's learning**

A variety of reasons were given by parents for the reasons they supported the education of their children at home but all of the parent responses showed that they had a very clear idea of the major benefits:

**Celine's Mother:** I think books are important I've always been a reader, and I've always encouraged my children to read as well, I think there is a world of knowledge in reading…
Daniella’s Mother: …my own personal belief is that you don’t leave everything to the teachers, the school plays a big role but at home is where you get the majority of what you know in life. You have to help out, you have to help the children, you don’t just leave it to the teachers, so it is like we are preparing them.

Yosola’s Mother: It was part of the winding down process every day, plus the fact that the more you read to them, the more likelihood they are able to identify pictures, want to learn to read as well. And to identify that it’s not anything major.

Int: And why did you like listening to him read?

Daniel’s Mother: Just so I could keep an eye on him and make sure that if he’d done a mistake on the word, so he could like make him read it, spell it out, so he knew exactly what was what

Winston’s Mother: …listening to Winston read, it would help him with his speech, helps me with his language helps him with his communication, and by then I’d be able to see whether he could recognise words. Put words together.

Winston’s Mother told us that she provided the support because it was something her parents had done for her:

Winston’s Mother: I don’t know, well, it’s something that my parents did to me, I think once reading helps you to pronounce your words, recognising words and all sorts, so that’s why I thought reading was quite important for him.

It was clear from a number of responses that the application of reading schemes had at the very least encouraged the home based support and in at least one case an informal educational source had provided the stimulus for developing the HLE:

Int: Why did you feel it was important to read to Daniella when she was little?

Daniella’s Mother: We found it important because when Declan, the elder brother was born, there was a programme on TV about how you can start with them as early as possible and we found that it worked on Declan, he was very bright and smart for his age and stuff you know. The primary schools, all the teachers loved him because of his capability, they said he was very capable and everything so I think that helped him

Int: And so because that helped with Declan you carried it through?

Daniella’s Mother: Yes.

Aspirations and expectations

As Bourdieu (1983) has argued, in order to understand how power is applied in society we need to consider those resources drawn from social relationships; ‘social capital’, as well as the ‘symbolic and cultural capital’ that individuals deploy. Each of these forms of capital play a part in the reproduction of class relationships. Our findings related to Social Capital are discussed later. But at this point it is worth noting that according to this model, individuals draw upon cultural, social and symbolic resources to maintain or enhance their positions in the social order. ‘Aspiration’ may be considered a feature of cultural capacity and it is in this light that we consider that aspiration may be important.
In a lecture to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Prime Minister Tony Blair (2006) identified some of the most difficult perceived problems of social exclusion very clearly:

Their poverty is not just about poverty of income, but poverty of aspiration, of opportunity, of prospects of advancement. We must not in any way let up on the action we take to deal directly with child poverty. But at the same time, we have to recognise that for some families, their problems are more multiple, more deep and more pervasive than simply low income. The barriers to opportunity are about their social and human capital as much as financial.” (Blair, 2006)

Low ‘teacher expectations’ and the notion of ‘self-fulfilling prophesies’ has provided an enduring topic for educational research associated with social exclusion. It is therefore important to consider any possible effects of lower parental expectations on children’s educational performance. Ball’s (2003) study has been helpful in drawing attention to the fact that the operation of high expectations may often act to improve the performance of middle class children. Most of the research conducted in this area in the past has been associated with the detrimental effects of low expectations. Yet the processes involved in the formation of high expectations deserves equal attention.

Equally relevant to family research are those studies conducted to look at the more subtle ‘sustaining expectation effects’ where teachers continue to respond to children on the basis of previously formed expectations even where there are changes in student performance. While a child or group may be ready to move on, it is suggested that teachers may sometimes assume that the difficulties that they have experienced in the past continue to limit their progress. While the self-fulfilling prophecy has therefore been considered to bring about changes in a child’s performance, ‘sustaining expectations’ have thus been seen to prevent changes. The distinction is important because there is a good deal of robust evidence for this latter effect (Cotton, 1989; McGrew and Evans, 2003). It was also a phenomenon explicitly referred to by one of our respondents:

**Shaun:** The school’s alright, it’s just the headmaster didn’t like us.

*Int:* Tell us why that’s happened, why he doesn’t like you

**Shaun:** Think its cos me [Colin] and [Gary] went down and then up so he didn’t like us

*Int:* I didn’t really understand that…

**Shaun:** [Colin] and [Gary] used to go to [Primary School]

*Int:* So who’s Ben and Craig

**Shaun:** Me cousins

*Int:* Oh right so your cousins went there

**Shaun:** And them be naughty and that, so I think it’s because of them why he doesn’t like me.
The experiences and values that young children hold are shaped and constructed from the views of parents and their educators, as well as by their peers, media images etc. In the absence of strong and positive role models some children are left with a negative perception of people like themselves. This bias can start from birth. Many parents and early childhood practitioners may conclude from children’s behaviour that they are incapable, without considering their own contribution to the children’s behaviour, or considering the impact of role modelling. Of course even the youngest children play an active part in all of this and mutual adaptations of behaviour occur between children and the adults who care for them. Children, for example, often encourage early childhood practitioners, through their behaviour, to play out the social games that they have learnt in the home. Early childhood practitioners may therefore quite inadvertently find themselves taking up the role of a dominating parent or sibling. Early childhood practitioners may therefore lower their demands, and provide children with too much help, giving away answers to problems or questions rather than encouraging and supporting them to come up with answers for themselves.

When we asked parents what they considered the benefits of schooling and pre-schooling to be, most of the parents (and the children) demonstrated highly instrumental attitudes towards schooling. The most frequent references were made to achieving economic independence, and to either specific or more general employment opportunities. In fact we found that the parents’ expectations for their children were extremely high with all of the higher HLE parents suggesting their children should attend higher education with most going on to professional careers. To a large extent the children’s aspirations mirrored these and were similarly instrumental (or performance) based – although they were more likely to suggest an alternative interest as well. These were often strikingly different from their first choice career.

**Louis’s Mother:** *Education. Probably aim for Oxford or Cambridge. That’s the goal of life, it moves mountains.*

**Daniella’s Mother:** *I would love to see her do law or medicine, that is what I’d like to see her do but what we try to do is we don’t push her, we always trust her, we try to guide her but what we want to do we are there for you. I would love her to be a lawyer to be honest yes.*

**Tanuja’s Mother:** *She will be self-dependent. She will find jobs if educated. We don’t know English. That’s why we need help in everything. We have gone to other people to ask about things. That won’t happen if she gets educated.*

**Safia’s Father:** *Well one of the things I say to both of them is that in today’s world they are growing and they have got the future ahead of them, it’s going to be very tough for them, if they don’t educate themselves to a good reasonable standard. I’m afraid there are labouring jobs that pay £5 or £6 an hour but with that kind of wages, you can’t go out and buy a house nowadays, nor can you afford the luxury in life you want, like cars and good clothes and what not so that’s something that I’ll always sort of put into their brain, put into their conscious, but you know, keep yourself educated it’s your future.*
For Firoja’s parents the eldest child was given more support in terms of the HLE:

**Firoja’s Mother:** We want [Firoja] to be a doctor. We always say this. We believe that she can be a doctor as she is so focused. For the other two of the daughters, we depend on Allah.

**Int:** How about [Nadiya]?

**Firoja’s Mother:** We are not sure about her. She expresses so little, that we don’t understand her.

**Int:** Still, what is your expectation from her?

**Firoja’s Mother:** That is still not clear. We don’t have any definite expectation about her future job.

Most of these ambitions were shared by the children who also gained strong encouragement from their parent’s views on the matter:

**Safia’s Mother:** One of the things I always say to her, I’ve said it many times, I said [Safia] you are so bright, and you’re intelligent. I think you can run this country, that’s what I say to her because…all the subjects she’s doing very good, so we think yeah, she can achieve probably what she wants.

**Int:** What kind of job would you like to have when you grow up?

**Louis:** Footballer. If I wasn’t a footballer, I’d be the first black Prime Minister. And then, if I wasn’t that, I’d probably be, I’d like to be an engineer. Then if I wasn’t that I’d just go for a police officer. My parents don’t want me to be a police officer but I’d like to be one.

Yosola, for example, told us that she was making an extra effort with her Mathematics: “So if I could be an accountant when I’m older, I could obviously work to it, and progress more”.

**Tanya’s Mother:** As long as she can try and get a nice education, then she can, you know, the world’s her oyster, she can do whatever she wants then.

**Daniella’s Mother:** Education is the key to life now. In the whole world, not only in England and Africa, the whole world, anywhere you go, education is the key to your success or for your future in life.

**Faiza’s Mother:** Basically if there’s no education there is nothing you can do because now in society you do need education, and if she has got education she can achieve what she wants to achieve, and a lot more doors will be open for her, like good jobs and everything.

Crozier and Davies (2005) found a similar pattern for the 591 Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents that they surveyed. Most had high aspirations for their children, wanting them to go to university and take up professional careers:

All of the parents, irrespective of their ethnicity or socio-economic background, expressed a value for education and a desire for their children to do well. Two key elements of this were their Islamic values and wanting better opportunities for their children than they had. (op cit)
Many of the parents also referred to their own educational ambitions. For example, Sundara’s Mother told us that she had completed an English level 1 adult Literacy to improve her grammar and she was planning to do a pre-GCSE course in the following year:

**Louis’s Mother:** I’d have liked to have helped myself even with my education, going back to school. I think there’s a lot more out there for me. Because education’s never too much. And I’m sort of thinking well one day, I will.

**Daniella’s Mother:** We didn’t get like university education and stuff, that is why we are trying our best, what we didn’t get for them to have. We are doing courses, little courses, I didn’t go to University but I am hoping I want to, definitely.

**Int:** What would you like to do?

**Daniella’s Mother:** I am thinking, maybe, I wanted to do teaching, but maybe it’s too much for me, social services, I would like to do social work.

The involvement of the parents in courses will have also provided motivation for the children. As Yosola’s Mother put it: *it shows the children that these things can be done. ‘Cos they remember when Daddy used to go to college and Mummy used to go to school.‘*

For at least two of the parents racism provided an additional incentive:

**Louis’s Mother:** I think children need education and without it they’ve got nothing. And education’s free, for the time being. And especially like I’m saying with the colour what we’ve got, I think we have to work twice as hard.

**Winston’s Mother:** I have to say whilst having an awareness of how society views a black child, he needs to be aware of that as well, and try not to make that suppress him, because it is suppressing out there.

For both Louis and Daniella’s parents a major objective was also to escape the local neighbourhood. As Louis put it himself:

*I just started to stay in, and then, it’s hard to try and stay away from them because really it’s just you by yourself doing what you’re going to do and then you’re not having a laugh. It’s like a bad influence because every time you go to play or something you always end up doing something bad and always get in trouble.*

Aftab, one of our low HLE ‘comparison’ children also reported incidents of racism in his primary school: “calling names and all that.” Apparently when the incidents were reported the teachers kept some of the children in but it didn’t stop until the culprits left the school when he got to Year 5. Sally, the other ‘comparison’ respondent provided yet another perspective on the problem when she talked about her primary school:

**Sally:** There’s only a couple of white people, I didn’t like them coloured people.

**Int:** What was the problem?

**Sally:** Didn’t like playing with them black ones.

**Int:** Why was that?
Sally: Dunno, don’t like them.
Int: Was there a particular thing you didn’t like?
Sally: Mm hmm
Int: What was the particular thing you didn’t like?
Sally: Some people,
Int: Tell me a little bit about them.
Sally: Like if they were playing with them, they would go off somewhere and play with someone else.

Three of the parents referred to education providing for more general objectives:

Celine’s Mother: …she often says she can’t wait to be out and going to work and she wants to go to work and she wants to get on with life, and she wants to have her own place and drive a car, and I know a lot of children talk like this, but she does say it, when she says it I believe her, I do believe her…but I do say to her you know it doesn’t fall in your hands, you have to work, she’s quite willing to work, she’s not afraid of the work. If she doesn’t attain what her dreams hold, which are not inaccessible, her dreams are quite feasible, quite accessible, even if she didn’t attain those dreams, I think it would have an impact again on her self esteem and self worth.

Int: Now what did you hope Ghalib would gain from going to school?
Ghalib’s Mother: Well teaching him the facts of life really. We expect it to make him a good, fit, honest person and to achieve education

Firoja and Nadiya’s Mother: “It’s our dream to have our daughters highly educated. Not to just receive ‘some education’ like some others kids in the Bengali community; our aim is to see our daughters as properly educated and established in life.”

Other motivations for providing the HLE

Some of the parents drew upon their own childhood experience and wanted the educational advantages for their children that they had been unable to gain for themselves:

Lorraine’s Father: I think that [Lorraine’s Mother] was equally as bright, but was distracted by the bright lights and boys and whatever and never ended up taking it all the way through to passing exams and going to University and things like that. The same thing could happen to Lorraine if the academic work became less important and the social life became more important. It’s a question of…finding a happy medium…holding her interest at school, which they will only do if she’s challenged. If she had to bumble along at the bottom end of the scale, then it wouldn’t be enough to hold her interest.
Safia’s Father: When we first arrived in England, I couldn’t speak a word of English…and I spent about five years at Banbury School…and then only about 9 months at the technical college, I started work because my father had to go to India. Somebody had to find a job to pay for the housekeeping, then what I did, I thought to myself well look, your standard of education is still low, I can’t go to school, I must study at home…. So this is where I thought well my children they are going to have the best of education, I’m going to support them all the way, and that’s why I’ve encouraged them always to do with that…. that was a starting point but you know, if I’ve missed it I don’t want my kid to miss it. Read as much as you can and then when we go into town, don’t buy ridiculous toys and stuff, just get some reading books.

Deepa’s Mother: I am a single parent and I am suffering from depression and anxiety. It sometimes makes Deepa worried. But I always tell her not to worry and assure her that I will do everything possible to help her to get a good education. I always push her to do better. I told her I don’t want you to be like me. I regret that I am not educated. As I don’t understand English, I have to ask people to do many things. I have to depend on others for many jobs. She must not be like……

Positive learning dispositions

In an earlier section of this report it was reported that the strongest effect on children’s resilience was found to be their level of ‘Self-regulation’ (‘Independence and Concentration’) at the start of school. The item’s used to measure this included the child’s willingness to ‘work things out for themselves’, ‘seeing task through to end’ and ‘perseveres in face of difficulty’. Presenting data on the positive learning dispositions being developed by children Dweck and Leggett (1988) categorise learners as ‘mastery oriented’ or ‘helpless’ according to their response to failure or difficulty. ‘Helpless’ children tend to be less persistent, they give up easily as they worry about their lack of ability. But when ‘mastery oriented’ children experience a setback; they tend to focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent. These dispositions to learn are very powerful and are associated with the development of positive personal and social identities. Positive dispositions provide resilience (Werner & Smith, 1982; Claxton, 1999) and lead to positive lifelong ‘learning trajectories’ (Gorard et al., 1999).

As Deslandes (2001) has observed, family members become involved when they come to believe that their own (and the child’s) efforts will be rewarded. But if they consider the child’s educational success to be dependent less upon effort and more upon the child’s (or their own) innate ability, then they are much less likely to involve themselves. We explicitly asked the parents why they thought some children did better at school than others and most told us that they thought that it was the result of being more attentive in the classroom and making more of an effort:

Daniella’s Mother: She is very hardworking as well, she is very serious in her work you know, she is that kind of person she has got the (word unclear), she loves a challenge as well so I think, you know, that if she puts her heart to it she’ll be able to do anything. That is how she is, very focused and organised. Very determined.
Yosola’s Mother: I think she puts in a lot of effort, she’s that way inclined, she puts in a lot of effort, she reaps what she puts in.

We also asked the children why they thought some children did better at school and the most capable children in the sample who benefited from better HLEs showed masterful learning orientations, and the responses of children with lower HLEs and attainment suggested learned helplessness:

Lorraine: I’m one of those people who keep trying to do what they wanted until they actually got it done.

Louis: Some people don’t listen and some people just stay up, like, younger than me. I go to bed about nine o’clock and they’ll be outside and I’m trying to sleep about eleven o’clock and stuff like that.

Daniella: Because some people don’t listen and they just do their own thing while teachers are trying to explain things.

Leilani: Cause they listen, maybe do their homework more often. That’s probably why.

Tanya: Concentration, paying attention. Make the effort to listen, and do their homework, extra work at home, parents encourage more.

Others told us it was because some of the children missed classes or ‘play around’. One of the ‘comparison’ children explained this was not so much because they found it hard, but rather because they were bored:

Faiza: Some people in my class would drive me up the wall.

Yosola: some people don’t listen and they just do their own thing while teachers are trying to explain things.

Desola: Because some people don’t really like school…they don’t really pay attention so they don’t really understand it.

Sally, one of the low HLE and lower attaining children suggested that children didn’t do so well when it was ‘too hard’ for them, and she also told us they ‘get bored’. Another child, Daniel, who was underachieving and displaying some behavioural problems provided a similar account:

Int: Why do you think some people do better than others at school?

Daniel: It’s just ‘cos of their brain. Because people are brainier. I don’t know, because people are brainier, and I’m not brainy.

Some of the children showed a clear awareness of the contribution that their parents had made to their success:

Lorraine: ..my mum taught me the alphabet before I went to pre-school.

Int: So, you feel that gave you a bit of a head start?

Lorraine: Yes, because all the other children never knew theirs. And I think I could write it as well, couldn’t I, really, by the time I was into nursery, which was a year later, I could write my alphabet.
Some parent’s also told us how they actively encouraged their children to be masterful:

**Safia’s Mother:** I think one of the things I’ve always encouraged my oldest as well as [Safia] to ask lots of questions. It’s not good sitting in the middle row or back row not asking because at the end of the day you are trying to achieve something out of the subject that you are in, and if you are not sure of something just raise your hand and ask, or even if you feel that you feel a bit embarrassed and that, just stay behind after class and ask the teacher when she’s on her own so and … oh and a number of time she has to like come to me for things and I’ve helped her, over the years with that.

**f) The active encouragement of parent participation by schools**

Hoover-Demsey and Sandler’s (1995) model suggests that families decide to participate when they believe the child and the school want them to be involved. Epstein’s (1996) participation types 2, 3 and 4 are all relevant here in considering the basic obligations of schools in communicating with families about program expectations, evaluations, and children’s progress. The family’s own involvement at the school (e.g. in volunteering in classrooms to support school and children) is relevant, as well as the school support for family involvement in the HLE.

In EPPE Technical Paper 10 (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003), we describe 14 case studies of Foundation Stage settings that were drawn from our overall EPPE sample of 141 settings. This investigation focused particularly strongly on the pedagogies that were employed in the settings that might explain their good to excellent outcomes.

In two of the Private day nurseries that were included in the EPPE qualitative case studies the value added scores on social/behavioural development were high. It was also interesting to note that the predominantly (upper) middle class parents in these settings consistently prioritised the importance of their children developing social skills in the pre-school. They were less concerned about the educational provisions as they were aware they were providing a strong educational environment in the home:

*She’d been looking at numbers at school then I’d do that at home. If she mentioned she liked a particular book at school we’d find that in the library and we do letters at home. So, yes I do try to follow it at home.* (PDN parent)
We were interested to see if the parents of children from more disadvantaged communities where the cognitive and social outcome scores were also high were supporting their children’s learning at home, or whether it was entirely the setting’s work with the children that gave them a ‘head start’. We already knew from our observational analysis that some of the pre-schools had excellent pedagogical practices. EPPE conducted a total of 107 interviews with parents from the 14 case study settings and communication between parents and staff was, on the whole, found to be very consistent, but generally informal and responsive to the needs of the child in terms of their general welfare and well-being. We found that all of the 14 settings studied had policies to encourage parents to read with their children, but in those settings that encouraged continuity of learning between the early years setting and home, the children achieved better cognitive outcomes. Although the following example may not appear remarkable, the consistent approaches by staff to inform parents about their child’s progress and to communicate what the settings were trying to achieve with individuals was emphasised over and over again by the parents of children achieving higher than might otherwise be expected:

_They suggest things you can do at home and you take home books. You’ve got the library and they suggest how to talk to them if you’ve got any problems you know how to approach it. They do really help. I know they learn quickly and I know I’ve got the setting to thank for that. I know I’ve done some hard work but they’ve done a lot as well._ (EPPE Parent)

This was not the kind of experience that parents reported to us on this occasion. In fact we found very little evidence of the schools or pre-schools providing sustained in depth support. Many of the parents were however quite proactive.

**Safia’s Mother:** Whenever I used to go to the parents meeting and that or any other kind of get together we’d have, I used to ask lots of questions and that, I always used to say to the teacher, if there’s anything they want to know, here are my contact numbers.

In only one case was it suggested that a school or pre-school might have been proactive in supporting the HLE:

**Int:** Where do you think you learnt the alphabet, was that something you did at home or at school?

**Louis:** Both, really. Like first we learnt it really, and they told my mum to do it so my mum done it for a bit…so she done it a bit more…When I went to [Nursery School] it was like I had a head start really.

The EPPE pre-school qualitative analysis identified an association between pre-school effectiveness, curriculum differentiation, and matching in terms of cognitive challenge, and ‘sustained shared thinking’. But the evidence also showed that some settings might be effective even where these conditions were not strongly met. Our findings suggested that where a special relationship, in terms of shared educational aims, had been developed or agreed with parents, and pedagogical efforts were being made at home similar outcomes could be achieved.
Some very successful settings with good outcomes were providing regular information through records of achievement and monthly meetings with key workers. In the case of two of the settings weekly feedback was provided. What was distinctive about all of these settings was that they focused on the specific learning objectives that they were working towards with the children, and reported regularly to parents on their children’s achievements in those terms. The settings were engaged in more regular on-going assessment of children’s learning, and this supported the parents from these settings in engaging more in complementary educational activities in the home.

The weekly report has a section on what activities the group has been doing we have talked about squirrels this week and things like that. She has mostly played this week with this type of material and she’s learned the letter P and R she now knows numbers 1 to 4 for example. And the last bit is what she has enjoyed most. The end of report is like 3 or 4 pages, much more detailed and goes to cognitive development and social development of the child. What she has learned in terms of letters, drawing and ballet and French. (PDN parent)

All three of the Integrated Settings (2 Early Excellence and 1 Daycare) that were included in the EPPE case studies provided excellent parent support, an open door policy, classes for parent development (e.g. computers, assertiveness) and a very friendly informal environment for parents to meet each other. EPPE found that these forms of provision were very successful despite operating in disadvantaged areas. The one exception to this pattern in our qualitative pre-school case studies was an Early Excellence Centre (EEC) which was achieving relatively poor cognitive outcomes. While it was providing excellent family services, it was found to be employing a less effective strategy by emphasising parents’ needs above those of their children, rather than seeing the needs of children and parents as different but complementary. The setting also promoted social development and support above educational development, rather than seeing these as complementary.

I think I probably don’t follow things up from here as such. Again I haven’t been coming in as much. I suppose if he becomes interested in something from the nursery then we will do something at home that follows on from it. (Early Excellence Centre parent)

For families from more disadvantaged backgrounds, EPPE found that parental involvement (which was largely conceived by parents as ‘helping out’), was not common or associated with children’s learning outcomes. In fact, some of the highest scoring settings had no voluntary parent involvement at all. Parental support was common in the EECs and the Local authority day nurseries but where it was combined with shared educational goals the outcomes were higher.

In contrast to this, EPPE found that settings where the cognitive outcomes were worse than expected (although not the social), tended not to communicate the children’s progress regularly to parents. Sometimes parents were given feedback in a daily chat (where requested by the parents), or a summative report, often at the end of year or term. Parents felt that settings, which were sensitive, responsive and consistent (in terms of staff), were more effective.
In this study where we have focused on individual children and their families, we found that some of the parents (all mothers) did spend some time ‘helping out’ in the pre-schools, mostly when requested in support of special projects, trips etc. For most this was not sustained into primary school. The parents also reported on the feedback that they received, which was usually either in response to specific (e.g. behavioural) problems or provided on an annual or termly basis providing a summary of their child’s progress. None of the parents provided positive examples of feedback that might inform them in their efforts to provide additional support at home during the pre-school years.

Any serious mismatch of expectations between families and educators could be extremely problematic. It may be that some early childhood settings and schools expect all parents to intervene in their children’s education, to be equally proactive and demanding. Where parents appear to take no interest in the child’s educational progress such schools and pre-schools could abdicate responsibility themselves, seeing the parental attitude as the problem to be addressed rather than the child’s education.

Research has shown that middle class parents do intervene in their children’s education, and they often do this because they don’t entirely trust the educational and care establishments (Vincent and Ball, 2001; 2006). There may be significant problems where some minority ethnic and working class parents put their trust entirely in the professionals, believing the experts know best, and that they are acting in the best interests of their children. Tragically, some parents may even lower their own expectations of their children’s capabilities according to a pre-school, or school report on their child’s progress. This is where the notion of combined care and education provision comes into its own. The best of our integrated or combined children’s centres don’t just wait for parents to become involved in pre-school education and care, they are proactive in this respect.

Crozier and Davies (2005) critique of home school communications have been referred to earlier and Siraj-Blatchford (2000), Caddell et al., (2000), and many others provide even broader criticism. But the point here is not to blame the schools, it is to find solutions for the broader problems:

Many teachers have had little or no training in home-school relations and may not possess the knowledge and skills necessary for work with parents (Morris & Taylor, 1998). This raises the question as to whether schools are the best people to take on the task of educating parents. If working with parents is an important field of work are relationships with parents too important to be left solely to their untrained staff? Is this not a space for partnership between schools and family literacy/adult and community education to promote parental understanding? Liaison with other agencies who support families can help to identify factors which may influence parental involvement, build up a deep knowledge of parents’ skills, knowledge and interests which can be drawn upon to develop and provide effective means of sharing information. (Caddell et al., 2000)
g) Social capital and the development of reciprocal partnerships

Here we are concerned with the kind of reciprocal partnership models referred to by Bouchard et al., (1998), and Dunst et al., (1992). Epstein’s (1996) 5 and 6 type involvements are relevant. Those related to governance and advocacy and in collaboration at the community level. But in this study we found no evidence of these at all. A few of the parents were vaguely aware of the fact that some schools had parent governors but none of them had had any contact with them. All of the meetings that they attended in schools appeared to be either directly related to their child, to inform them of changes that had already been decided, or concerned with secondary transfer.

There is still a good deal of work to be done to identify the resources in terms of social capital that these families have been drawing upon in developing their HLEs. But it seems that as far as this particular sample is concerned, the contribution of schools and pre-schools to these processes may have been quite modest. The evidence would rather seem to provide support for the kind of work provided by Reynolds (2006a; 2006b) who has been documenting the ways in which Caribbean young people in the UK construct their ethnic identity, and the ways in which they apply transnational family and kinship networks and relationships as social and material resources.

Our study also support Deslandes’ (1996) suggestion that family role expectations are developed predominantly in their membership of family, school, church, and other community groups. For a few parents, support has come from their religious community, but the strongest influence would seem to be from the role models and influences of extended families:

Firoja’s Mother: All of their aunties [paternal] are in good professions. We grew up in the same environment. Our parents always encouraged us to study.

Winston’s Mother: …our families are professional people so Winston has role models within his family that he can reflect on.

Many of the children’s responses provided equally convincing evidence of the effect of role modelling, for example:

Daniella: Because my brother and my dad and my mum were good at Mathematics and I wanted to be good at all subjects.

Both the effect of the parental peer group reported in an earlier section of this report and our findings related to the impact of extended family members suggest that child and/or parent mentoring might be applied to support those families who lack these elements of social capital. Attachment theory tells us that a child’s relation to adults is important for her (or his) cognitive and emotional development (Bowlby, 1969). Resilience research has also often found that children who do well in spite of disadvantage have had a close and nurturing relationship with a ‘significant other’, often an adult from outside their immediate family (Werner and Smith, 1982). Mentoring schemes aim to facilitate the creation of such relationships.
Educational disaffection develops gradually and it may be that in the case of those children who started off well, with very positive HLEs, early identification and support for their needs would have been effective. The potential role that might be played in this through the new ‘Common Assessment Framework’ (CAF) and Learning Mentorship initiatives could be substantial. Guidance provided by Sheffield Local Authority (2006) suggests that the CAF may be applied whenever a child is thought to have additional needs, which may be identified by ‘a combination of relatively minor issues, which you feel you need to understand the impact of on the child’ (op cit). The examples provided by the Sheffield LA include late attendance at school, deterioration in concentration and presentation, or failure to keep appointments. The CAF can be used to facilitate planning an intervention and ensuring that the outcome of that intervention is reviewed.

As Pope (2005) have suggested:

Pupils of all ability levels can underachieve, and learning mentors target these pupils and help them to identify and address what it is that is getting in the way of their learning. These barriers can be wide ranging and often very personal to the individual pupil. They may include the need to develop better learning and study skills, personal organisation, difficulties at home, behaviour, bullying, or disaffection and disengagement from learning.

As Brandon et al., (2006) have noted, one of the key purposes of ‘Every Child Matters’ has always been to ‘mainstream preventative approaches’ (DfES, 2003, 1.18):

As part of this initiative, the common assessment framework is intended to shift thresholds downwards and change the focus from dealing with the consequences of difficulties in children’s lives to preventing things from going wrong in the first place.

But Brandon et al.’s (2006) evaluation of the CAF has found, in the early stages of implementation at least, the thresholds for intervention may actually be rising in some areas. Clearly there are resource implications.

Arguably, the current evidence suggests that in terms of learning interventions we are dealing with a situation where Rose’s Theorem might be considered to apply; where a very large number of children initially at relatively small risk may give rise to more serious problems in the future, than that smaller number who are at very high risk (Rose, 1992). While numerous mentoring projects have been set up for children and young people with existing behavioural problems we are aware of few projects with a strong educational focus providing early identification of learned helplessness combined with targeted intervention. Few systematic evaluations of mentoring schemes are available, although those that have been carried out (mostly concerned with older children) suggest that mentoring can be effective where it is provided for young people experiencing conditions of environmental risk or disadvantage (Dubois et al., 2002). As Morris et al., (2004) found there is sufficient evidence to support the ‘mainstreaming’ of learner mentors:

...research has shown that pupils receiving support from learning mentors were one and a half times more likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C than young people with similar prior attainment who had not been mentored.
Although a greater clarity of objectives and a closer partnership between mentors and teachers may be required if effective initiatives are to be developed (St James-Roberts, and Samlal Singh, 2001).

As Mirza and Reay (2000) have argued, African and Caribbean supplementary schools provide evidence of thriving black communities and social capital that needs to be taken into account in the development of reciprocal partnerships. With the possible exception of our White UK respondents each of the communities that we studied does have similar resources and we believe these should be built upon. Some policy theorists may find this suggestion problematic. In Putnam’s (2000, 2002) account of social capital a distinction is made between the ‘bridging ties’ in social capital that cut across social divides and enable a broader set of linkages, and the ‘bonding ties’ of social capital that are based on commonalities such as ethnicity. As a number of writers have recently observed (e.g. Mand, 2006; Goulbourne, 2006a; 2006b) for Putnam ‘bridging ties’ thus create social capital as ‘bonded ties’ may be seen to limit the span of social resources. Goulbourne (2006a; 2006b) therefore argues that social capital itself may be viewed positively or negatively, it can be a resource for individuals to draw upon and foster social integration, but it can also act as a social constraint and inhibit processes of integration.

In the active construction of their identities, children, as with all those family members who support them, distance themselves from ‘others’ (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 1997). In this study we have identified a number of the terms that are being applied by these aspirant parents and children in their efforts to attain educational success and achievement. But as individuals we don’t usually see ourselves primarily in terms of our family role as a parent or a child, or even in socio-economic, ethnic, or even gender terms, we tend to see ourselves holistically. So it isn’t at all surprising that our respondents described their situations, their aspirations, challenges and frustrations as they cut across each of their multi-faceted identities.

As Mirza and Sheridan’s (2003) Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) study on Black and minority ethnic women points out:

For example, an older Asian widowed woman who has worked in the family business will have a very different identity and face different equality issues compared with a younger professional Somali woman refugee doctor unable to secure employment. Each woman therefore, has a different ‘story’ to tell. Just as their experiences are different so too multiple definitions of themselves have evolved in terms of everyday lived experience of gendered and racialised social relations. (Brah, 1996; Mirza, 1997)

An Irish Equality Authority (EA) study conducted by Pierce (2003) made a similar point in the context of experiencing disability and as Zappone (2003) has argued:

Taking a ‘multiple identities’ focus offers a more holistic understanding of the diversity within individuals and how they experience barriers to equality and discrimination in light of this. All individuals hold multiple identities, but the social significance of personal characteristics is what can determine their experience of equality or inequality, the fulfilment or violation of human rights.
Having multiple identities allows a person to relate to different people in different situations and contexts in different ways at different times. It also means that their social relations can be multi-faceted and imbued with contradictions. It is notable in this context that in carrying out this study we have been particularly impressed by the resilience and strength of character of many of the 10-11 year old child respondents, as well as many of those siblings who often offered their support in the interviews with parents.

As Stipek et al., (1994) argued, children with home backgrounds that do not correspond with the norms, expectations and language of their schools negotiate two (or more) cultures on a daily basis. In the process of data collection we witnessed our respondents and their siblings taking on the role of cultural brokers and translators for their family. For many, this is a role that they continue to apply throughout their lives in interaction with their classmates, their teachers, and their neighbours. It may be that we need to consider more carefully the kinds of support that we can offer them in their efforts to move between their home and institutional environments.

We might also take their example seriously in our consideration of the alleged tensions (or contradictions) referred to earlier, that are considered to exist between ‘bridging ties’ and ‘bonded ties’. In doing so we would need to recognise that society is itself multi-faceted, and that it isn’t actually necessary for the social capital that we develop as effective citizens to be exactly the same as that developed by members of our particular ethnic or social group. If schools are to improve their performance when it comes to the development of reciprocal partnership it may be that they need to recognise first that multicultural identity is something that we must all achieve in your heads before we try to apply it in our institutional practices and policies.

**Summary**

This research, commissioned by the Equalities Review, sought to expand the quantitative analyses, reported earlier by the EPPE Team, to address the following research question: “Why do some parents behave in more educationally supportive ways than others”? The focus of the case studies is on low SES families from five ethnic groups: White UK, Pakistani, Black Caribbean, Black African and Bangladeshi. Interviews were carried out with 21 individual children and their parent/s with moderate or relatively high HLEs and attainment and relatively low SES from the range of diverse backgrounds, seven of these are boys. We also identified a further three children, from different ethnic groups with a ‘typical’ low HLE and attainment making the total sample 24. The case studies explored how and why some low SES families provide a higher quality HLE, which has been shown to reduce the adverse impact of poverty or minority status.
We developed a timeline of each child's life history to act as an aide memoir for both the respondent and the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were employed and the analysis initially involved coding our data according to a series of broad categories, drawn from the work of Epstein (1996), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) and Bouchard et al., (1998). This was followed by an iterative and incremental Nvivo (qualitative data analysis software) analysis.

As both Sammons (1995) and Siraj-Blatchford (1985) observed, while prior research has provided us with quite a lot of information about the factors associated with underachievement, we know rather less about the factors associated with high achievement. To some extent this small study may be seen to contribute to that end.

Three of the research questions addressed in this qualitative part of the study actually lent themselves most appropriately to quantitative analysis:

**How does the home learning environment (HLE) affect children’s experience of the transition between home and pre-school?**

EPPE found that the HLE is an independent influence on cognitive attainment at age three, and at pre-school and primary school. A better HLE gives a child a better start to school and sets them on a more positive learner trajectory in terms of social/behavioural development especially important for ‘Independence and Concentration’. These effects are strong and independent of other predictors.

Our analyses also show that combining a good HLE with attendance at a high quality pre-school promotes better attainment at age 10 years. But our findings at age 10 suggest that for disadvantaged children attending a medium or high quality pre-school, or having a medium to good HLE on its own may not be enough. They really require both.

While the qualitative analysis was unable to identify any contrasting aims, values, philosophy, approaches etc. some possible tensions were revealed. We have argued that any concerns related to the different approaches to early literacy used by families and pre-schools may be misguided. However, different perceptions of children’s needs related to individual support and behaviour management may be apparent at times. These suggest the need for improved communications and collaboration between families and schools.

The subject of the effect of the HLE on the children’s further progress in primary school is dealt with more fully in the quantitative sections of this report.

**Does the type of pre-school provision used affect transitions?**

The early EPPE evidence indicated an association between certain types of provision and both the quality of provision and effectiveness as measured by child outcomes at age 5. While all types of settings included some that were effective, this analysis showed that Integrated centres and Nursery schools did better overall but they served significantly more multiply disadvantaged children and those with lower HLEs. By age 10 this pre-school ‘type’ effect had washed out but the effect of pre-school ‘quality’ on children’s outcomes remains very strong.
The EPPE analysis showed that centres classified as Private day nurseries showed more variation in effects and quality, than other types suggesting the effects of variation in educational philosophies or traditions. The EPPE study also showed that the clustering of disadvantaged children within specific centres may not be advantageous. Analysis, conducted for this report, now show that a similar effect exists in the case of parents. It may therefore be equally disadvantageous for a cluster of parents with limited educational backgrounds to use the services of a particular pre-school.

EPPE found that the ‘Co-operation and Conformity’ of children attending Nursery classes and Integrated Centres was significantly higher than those attending Playgroups, Private day nurseries and Local authority day nurseries. This may be of special importance given research evidence to suggest the importance of friendships, siblings and social skills in helping children settle into new settings more easily. There were indications that poorer outcomes in terms of ‘Anti-social/worried’ behaviour’ (i.e. a worsening of ‘Anti-social/worried’ behaviour) were associated with both Private and Local authority day nurseries.

Our qualitative analysis of the experiences of higher than average HLE families suggest there is a need for improved communications and collaboration between families and schools in the context of transition between institutions.

**Where a particular group is characterised by relatively low HLE are there any common factors?**

As has been seen in an earlier section of this report the common factors identified in our quantitative analysis of the EPPE data conducted for the Equalities Review were as follows:

- Poor mother’s education,
- Larger families,
- Early developmental problems,
- Area of higher deprivation and
- If going to pre-school going to one that is homogeneous for low mother’s qualifications.

The qualitative analysis provides answers to many of the other questions posed by the Equalities Review team:

**Family constructions of the parental role**

We were asked to investigate what parents did practically to support the HLE, how parents and children saw the quality of HLE affecting their pre-school experience, and how this varied according to individual characteristics.
Our findings suggest that the minority ethnic and social groups that we studied have a good deal more in common than they have differences in the ways in which they supported their children in the home. We also found that a very wide range of family members provide support for children’s learning. All of the families from each of the high HLE, low SES groups studied, provided their children with a good deal of structure; they read to their children in their early years and went on to listen to them read at an early age. Numerous other educational stimulus and activities were also provided. The children themselves were active in maintaining these practices. We found that our respondents from each of the target communities possessed a fairly broad understanding of education and a strong desire to benefit from the services available.

All but one of our high HLE sample had enrolled their child at pre-school. Even in that case the child’s name had been ‘put down’ for it but it was oversubscribed and there were no other alternatives. While many of the case study parents informed us that that they were concerned to find the best educational placements for their children, first choices were often oversubscribed. As far as the pre-schools were concerned, most of the parents informed us that there was simply too little choice for them in the near vicinity that was available at prices that they could afford.

For parents with English as an additional language (EAL) the opportunities offered by a pre-school in supporting their children in learning English was clearly significant. Given the almost universal use of pre-school services by the case study families we were unable to provide any insight into the question raised in the Equality Review Seminar regarding the low take up of pre-school and early years services by Pakistani and Bangladeshi families. No clear view has therefore been reached in this case study as to whether this is down to inadequate service provision, discriminatory practices or cultural preference.

Several of the parents paid for private home tutorial support when a particular educational weakness was identified and in one case in preparation for an 11+ selection test. It was also clear from the data that the positive HLEs that we identified were provided as an alternative to other culturally appropriate educational provisions, community language or religious instructions. In some cases they clearly complement these provisions strongly (e.g. in African-Caribbean Supplementary Schools).

We asked the parents what they felt the barriers were to providing a positive HLE but the only reasons that they could given us were related to the time available and their personal circumstances such as health. Other family pressures made it very difficult for some families to provide support and even in the most diligent of households, the HLE provisions made for individual children sometimes changed when home circumstances changed (e.g. with the birth of an additional child).

For most parents any dip in the child’s attainment was met with a new strategy, but for a few the problems that they were facing proved too difficult to overcome. In such cases there was a need for further support to be provided through family services.
The family’s sense of efficacy in supporting their children’s learning

We were asked to investigate the key characteristics and motivations of the higher HLE/low SES families including their family aspirations and expectations. We were asked to identify the reasons children and their parents gave to explain their success, and to find out more about the parent’s level of knowledge about the early years and primary education system.

A variety of reasons were given for parents supporting the education of their children at home but all of the parent responses showed that they had a very clear idea of the major benefits. Both the parents and the children from high HLEs were found to believe that the reason some children did better in school was because they were more attentive in the classroom and making more of an effort. For those families where there was a poor HLE, or where the children’s progress was disappointing (for a variety of reasons) despite their positive beginnings, the reason for children’s success was put down more to innate ability.

When we asked them what they considered the benefits of schooling and pre-schooling to be, most of the parents and the children demonstrated highly instrumental attitudes towards schooling. These may be seen to be closely in tune with the Every Child Matters agenda. The most frequent references were made to achieving economic independence, and to either specific or more general employment opportunities.

The parents’ expectations for their children are extremely high with all of the higher HLE parents suggesting their children should attend higher education and then go on to professional careers. Many of the parents also referred to their own educational ambitions. To a large extent the children’s aspirations mirrored these and were similarly instrumental (or performance) based – although they were more likely to suggest an alternative interest as well (e.g. becoming a sportsman/sportswoman, pop star, actor etc). Many of the parents also referred to their own educational ambitions.

Crozier and Davies (2005) found a similar pattern for the 591 Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents that they surveyed. Most had high aspirations for their children, wanting them to go to university and take up professional careers. For some of the African Caribbean parents in particular, in the EPPE case studies, their educational efforts were in part an attempt to overcome the disadvantages of racism and the negative influences of their local neighbourhood.

Family members become involved in the education of their children when they come to believe that their own (and the child’s) efforts will be rewarded. If they consider the child’s educational success to be dependent less upon effort and more upon the child’s (or their own) innate ability, then they are less likely to become involved. We explicitly asked the parents why they thought some children did better at school than others, and most told us that they thought that it was the result of being more attentive in the classroom and making more of an effort. The children’s responses were very similar with the most capable children in the sample who had benefited from better HLEs showing ‘masterful learning’ orientations. The responses of children with lower HLEs and attainment suggested ‘learned helplessness’.
The active encouragement of parent participation by schools

We were asked to investigate those external influences that supported or encouraged the development of the HLEs.

We found little evidence of any support being provided to parents apart from the application of reading schemes. For many parents, the anticipation of, and preparation for, secondary transfer was especially stressful and daunting. The case study evidence suggests that as Crozier and Davies (2005) also found, schools need to be doing more to encourage the involvement of the wider family in children’s education. It may be that early childhood settings and schools expect parents to intervene in their children’s education, to be proactive and demanding. Research has shown that middle class parents intervene in their children’s education, and they do this because they don’t trust the educational and care establishments. Much of the same attitude was evident in some of our parent responses.

While the EPPE study has shown that some pre-schools (particularly Integrated Centres and Nursery Schools) provide sustained support for parents in their development of an effective HLE little evidence of this was found in this more limited study.

We found that some of the parents spent some time ‘helping out’ in the pre-schools, mostly when requested in support of special projects, trips etc. For most this was not sustained into primary school. The parents also reported on the feedback that they received which was usually either in response to specific (e.g. behavioural) problems or provided on an annual or termly basis providing a summary of their child’s progress. None of the parents provided positive examples of feedback that might inform them in their efforts to provide additional support at home during the pre-school years.

Middle class parents often provide very strong HLEs and argue for a less academic approach to learning in pre-schools (Vincent and Ball, 2001; 2006). They favour pre-schools that provide the maximum opportunity for their children to develop their capabilities in terms of social interaction and self expression. There may be a significant problem where some minority ethnic and working class parents put their trust entirely in the professionals, believing the experts know best, and that they are acting in the best interests of their children. Tragically, some parents may even lower their own expectations of their children’s capabilities according to a pre-school, or school report on their child’s progress.

Research on pre-school education in five countries evaluated by Sylva and Siraj-Blatchford (1996) for UNESCO also considered the links between home and school. The authors report the importance of involving parents and the local community in the construction and implementation of the curriculum. When they begin school or early childhood education, children and their parents “bring to the school a wealth of cultural, linguistic and economic experience which the school can call upon” (p.37).
Sylva and Siraj-Blatchford (1996) conclude that:

“It therefore becomes the responsibility of the teacher to localise the curriculum and to enlist the support of the local community and families in framing school policy and practice and making the school and educational materials familiar and relevant to the children’s experience” (p.37).

**Social capital and the development of reciprocal partnerships**

In terms of broad definition, we consider our perspective on family partnership to be generally in line with that recently adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government. This is an account that recognises participation is a good deal more than simply providing information or consultation. It also recognises that different levels of participation exist, and that the highest level is not always the most appropriate level to begin in any particular initiative:

*Participation is about being involved in decision-making at all levels. There are a number of models of participation, but most highlight the difference between information, consultation and participation. Some describe levels of participation in terms of a ladder, with the power shifting from organisations to service users towards the top of the ladder. (Isaac, 2006)*

Community focused supplementary schools and classes would seem therefore to provide important educational resources, and every effort should be made to involve them fully in any future HLE support initiative.

We were asked to identify the social capital possessed by the higher than average HLE families. Our case study analysis provides support for Reynolds (2006a; 2006b) who has been documenting the ways in which Caribbean young people in the UK construct their ethnic identity, and the ways in which they apply transnational family and kinship networks and relationships as social and material resources. Extended family support and role modelling was found to be evident in all the communities studied. Given the difficulty of providing such resources externally this evidence would lend support to initiatives involving some element of mentoring. As Newburn and Shiner (2005) have suggested, the benefits of such schemes may not be restricted to educational gains alone. Mentees often speak of the benefits in terms of the better relations developed with parents and siblings (op cit). A substantial role might be played in this through the new ‘Common Assessment Framework’ (CAF) and through ‘mainstreaming’ Learning Mentorship initiatives.

Many of our respondents could be seen to be acting as cultural brokers who saw no particular problem in reconciling their cultural, religious and academic aspirations.

**Key Findings**

**Qualitative case studies of children and families**

This research, commissioned by the Equalities Review sought to expand the quantitative analyses, reported earlier by the EPPE Team, to address the following research question: “Why do some parents behave in more educationally supportive ways than others”? 
The effect HLE has on children’s experience of the transition between home and pre-school

A better HLE helps a child adjust to both pre-school and primary school and sets them off on a more positive learner trajectory.

The combination of a good HLE with attendance at a high quality pre-school promotes even better attainment at age 10 years.

For many multiply disadvantaged children, neither a good HLE, nor a high quality pre-school, is enough. They require both.

A number of discontinuities are apparent in the transition from home to school. While research provides little evidence regarding the scale of these problems they do highlight the need for improved communication and collaboration between parents and schools in early childhood education.

The effects of pre-school ‘type’

Disadvantaged children do better, in terms of cognitive and social/behavioural developmental, in the early years when they attend Integrated centres, and Nursery schools that are generally committed to providing for parental partnership and family support.

Disadvantaged children benefit from a broad social mix. In the interest of their cognitive progress, as far as possible, they should therefore not be clustered in particular centres.

At age 10 the effects on children’s outcomes of pre-school quality (as measured on environmental rating scales) remains very strong.

Some parents experienced particular difficulties at the stage of secondary transfer. Again this highlights the need for improved communication and collaboration between parents and schools.

The common factors characterising (relatively) low HLE groups

Our qualitative evidence suggests that these groups have much more in common than sets them apart. The common factors identified in our quantitative analysis are all demographic:

- Poor mother’s education,
- Larger families,
- Early developmental problems,
- Area of higher deprivation, and;
- If going to pre-school, going to one that is homogeneous for low mother’s qualifications (i.e. where other mothers have equally low qualifications).
Family constructions of the parental role

A very wide range of family members (i.e. not just parents) provide support for children’s learning and the children themselves were active in maintaining these practices.

Respondents from each of the target communities possessed a fairly broad understanding of education and a strong desire to benefit from the services available.

For parents with English as an additional language (EAL) the opportunities offered by a pre-school in supporting their children in learning English was clearly significant.

The positive HLE respondents attended a range of other culturally appropriate educational provisions. In some cases they complemented the HLE strongly (e.g. in supplementary schools and community classes).

Family pressures sometimes made it very difficult for families to provide support and the HLE provisions made for individual children sometimes changed when home circumstances changed.

Where families require additional support the provision of a positive HLE may not be sufficient in providing for the child’s needs. In such circumstances home learning activities might however be promoted in the direct support of families developing more constructive relationships with each other.

The family’s sense of efficacy

Both the parents and the children from high HLEs were found to believe that the reason some children did better in school was because they were more attentive in the classroom and making more of an effort.

Both the parents and the children held highly instrumental attitudes towards schooling that may be seen to be closely in tune with the Every Child Matters agenda. Frequent references were made to the achievement of economic independence, and to either specific or more general employment opportunities.

The parents’ expectations for their children are extremely high with all of the higher HLE parents suggesting their children should attend higher education and then go on to professional careers.

The active encouragement of parent participation by schools

Apart from the single case of an inner city Nursery School, little evidence was found of support being provided to the parents in developing the HLE apart from the application of reading schemes.

Schools and pre-schools need to be doing more to encourage the involvement of parents and the wider family, particularly in the education of disadvantaged children.
Social capital and the development of reciprocal partnerships

Our evidence lends support to initiatives involving some element of family and/or child mentoring.

Further application of the ‘Common Assessment Framework’ (CAF) and the mainstreaming of Learning Mentorship initiatives may have strong roles to play in supporting the development of social capital.

Community focused supplementary schools and classes provide important educational resources, and every effort should be made to involve them fully in future HLE support initiatives.

Schools and pre-schools require further support in the development of family participation and reciprocal partnership.