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Parental involvement and engagement during COVID-19 lockdowns: School staff and parents' reflections about children's learning at home

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Abstract

Valuing parental engagement, as part of home–school collaboration, can benefit children's learning. This article focuses on parents and school-based staff's ($N = 120$) experiences of children's learning occurring at home during the COVID-19 lockdowns (2020–2021), both school-mandated and other learning activities. It examines qualitative responses from a survey of 11 educational settings partnered with a university-based teacher training institution in England. Participants reflected on experiences of children's learning, relationships, and well-being, to consider positive aspects, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Inductive thematic analysis identified three key areas: contact – which focused on communication approaches and the connections established from the relationships between home and school; participation – which was school staff's facilitation of learning and parents' involvement in schooling and/or engagement with their children's learning, and the logistics of this; equitable access – which focused on evaluating the equity and accessibility of learning. Using the lens of Goodall's parental engagement continuum model, deductive analysis evaluated what learning occurred at home. This distinguished between parental involvement (where parents supported their children's learning through activities linked to coursework or homework, with limited parental agency) and engagement with

their children's learning (where parents engaged with learning beyond school – through home, leisure, and family activities, with parents exercising greater autonomy to support children's learning and achievement). Findings indicated a greater propensity of parental involvement in schooling occurring, compared with parental engagement with their children's learning, and implications and recommendations are presented to consider how educators may reflect upon and develop parental engagement.

KEYWORDS
collaboration, COVID-19, learning, parental engagement

Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

The main issue which the article addresses is what can school staff glean from the learning experiences of their pupils during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and how can this knowledge enhance future collaborative approaches between the home and educational settings to benefit parental engagement for children's learning.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

During lockdowns, there was a greater propensity of parental involvement than engagement. Future opportunities to enhance parental engagement could be through dismantling a dichotomisation between parental involvement and engagement, strengthening school staff–parent relationships, valuing parental capital, increasing trainees and serving teachers' training, and repositioning parental engagement within educational policy.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to expectations for parents and school staff to facilitate school-mandated learning at home during periods of lockdown, with parents asked to facilitate their children's access to the resources provided by teachers for formal learning, and support learning activities devised by teachers (DfE, 2021; Goodall, 2022b; Ofqual, 2021; Shum et al., 2023; Spear et al., 2023). This aligned with what may be conceptualised as 'parental involvement in schooling' (Goodall, 2017). However, learning is a broad concept, encompassing all learning experiences, not just formal school education (Goodall, 2017, 2022a, 2022b), and parental engagement with their children's learning, as opposed to their involvement with schooling, is considered more beneficial for children's achievement (Goodall, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Luo et al., 2022; Wainwright et al., 2024; Willis & Exley, 2022). Home–school collaborative partnerships can

facilitate parental engagement (Goodall, 2017; Spear et al., 2023; Willis & Exley, 2022), and Goodall (2022b) suggests the unique learning opportunities during lockdown can be capitalised on to develop these partnerships. The pandemic provided an opportunity to rethink education (Bubb & Jones, 2020) with a focus towards the 'what, how, and where of learning' (Zhao, 2020, p. 29). Vegas and Winthrop (2020, para. 4) discuss the concept of a 'powered-up school' as one being central to the community and promoting 'the most effective partnerships, including those that have emerged during COVID-19, to help learners grow and develop a broad range of competencies and skills in and out of school'; this encompasses rethinking teacher–parent relationships (Wrigley, 2020). This qualitative study explores what may be gleaned from parents, teachers, and senior leaders' perceptions of school-mandated and other learning experiences for children occurring at home during the lockdowns, and considers how this knowledge may inform ideas about future approaches to home–school collaboration to benefit parental engagement for children's learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions and key concepts underpinning this research

School/parents

The term 'school' represents all educational settings in this research: early years (for children aged 3–5), primary and secondary schools (one of which included a 6th form setting for teenagers aged 16–18). 'Parents' refers to parents, carers, guardians, and other family members. School staff, unless otherwise specified, refer to teachers and senior leaders (SLs).

Learning, education, schooling, and contexts of learning

Learning experiences have value for different purposes and to different people. Formal learning (e.g., classroom education through schooling) is directed learning for specific purposes, for example, preparing for the workplace, of value for a country's society and economy (DfE, n.d.; Goodall, 2017). Compulsory-aged formal schooling covers academic learning, behaviour, attitudes, and personal development, benefiting wider society (Goodall, 2017; see also Ofsted, 2025). Other formal education includes higher education and work-based learning. Informal learning (informal education) may occur in other settings for leisure pursuits, such as taking an art class. Non-formal learning can occur incidentally, almost by chance, for example, through discussion or partaking in everyday life experiences (Goodall, 2017) or be a hybrid of formal and informal elements (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). Goodall (2017) illustrates lifelong learning as encompassing all learning experiences and cautions that neither schooling (formal learning as a subset of education) should be conflated with education, nor schooling or education with learning.

School-mandated home learning and other learning

During the pandemic, the term 'home learning' (Eivers et al., 2020; Jones & Palikara, 2023; Spear et al., 2023) reflected educational experiences encountered by families and children accessing remote teaching, akin to school-mandated, formal education. This concept aligns with a limited view of learning, such as Epstein's (2018) framework, reflecting a school's

one-way provision of giving ideas and information to families (Goodall, 2022b; Goodall et al., 2022), supporting them to help their children at home with homework and other curriculum-linked tasks. This current research study subscribes to the idea that learning is not synonymous with schooling (formal education) and includes other learning experiences (Goodall, 2017). The term 'other learning' in this research refers to learning experiences during lockdown that were not school-mandated.

From parental involvement with the school to parent engagement with their children's learning - the Goodall continuum

This research uses the lens of a three-point continuum adapted by Goodall (2017), based on the Goodall and Montgomery (2014) model which considers development from parental involvement to engagement. The first level, parental involvement with school, reflects parents undertaking activities occurring in and around the school setting and with teachers (Goodall, 2017; Spear et al., 2023). It includes volunteering and attending meetings and social events within the setting, which may build school–parent trust but is unlikely to directly impact children's learning. The school retains agency, viewing parents as helpers, with one-way communication from school to parents. For households in lockdown, this physical parental involvement in school would have been non-existent.

The second level, parental involvement with schooling, starts the trajectory towards a learning focus, with parents supporting activities linked to coursework or homework (Goodall, 2017). Although school-based work, relying on parents and judged by schools, it occurs beyond the school location generally at home without direct staff intervention, giving parents limited agency. This echoed school-mandated learning occurring during lockdown.

The third level, parental engagement with their children's learning, occurs outside of school (e.g. through home, leisure, or family activities) to support children's learning and achievement. This is underpinned by parents' positive attitudes towards learning in the home, and the moral support and guidance they provide for their children (Goodall, 2017, 2022a, 2022b; Spear et al., 2023). It includes 'conversations around learning, active interest in the school curriculum, and parental expectations and aspirations for their children' (Spear et al., 2023, p.933). Activities from the first two levels continue (and indeed can support engagement), but shift from '"getting parents in" to "supporting children's learning" through partnership with parents and families', to focus on learning away from being 'school-led and school-centric' (Goodall, 2017, p.95). Attitudes towards learning at home become the focus through discussions around learning, reading, and adult–child interactions, not just involvement in school-based activities. This perspective views learning as ingrained in everyday life, mutually supported by parents and teachers (Spear et al., 2023).

Whilst parental involvement in schooling enhances engagement, and children in early years benefit (in literacy and standardised tests) from the first two levels of parental involvement, efforts could be directed towards parental engagement further along the continuum (Goodall, 2017), which is the most effective support for learning (Goodall, 2025). Nevertheless, parental involvement can be a precursor for parental engagement (Goodall, 2025). Although parental involvement with schools reduces with older children, Goodall explains that parental engagement with children's learning at home occurs irrespective of age. Parental engagement with children's learning is often misunderstood (Goodall et al., 2021, 2022), often equated with their interactions within the school setting (parental involvement with school; Goodall, 2017) or with school staff involving parents supporting their children's formal learning through schooling (Education Endowment Foundation [EEF], 2021, 2025; Ofsted, 2025; parental involvement with schooling), and parents relating primarily with school staff – akin to helping the teacher. Parental engagement with learning comprises 'interactions between

family members and children' (Goodall et al., 2022, p.8). Whilst parental engagement can operate independently of their involvement in school and schooling (Goodall, 2017) and involvement can pave the way to engagement, it is engagement which has the most positive impact on children's achievements (Goodall, 2025; Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Spear et al., 2023). In short, parental engagement with learning is about their 'relationship to the learning of their children' (Goodall, 2022b, p.23) rather than their school interactions.

Parent partnerships supporting children's learning and deficit models

Parents play a crucial role in their children's education, with strong home–school relationships having significant benefits, including enhancing pupils' attendance, attitudes, behaviour, and mental well-being, and increased and sustained parental interest and involvement in their children's education (e.g. EEF, 2021, 2025; de Levinthal Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2020; Goodall, 2017, 2022a, 2022b; Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Jones, Banerjee, & Jackson, 2025; Jones, Sideropoulos, & Palikara, 2025; Kambouri et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2022; Wainwright et al., 2024; Willis & Exley, 2022). Strong home–school relationships and parental involvement also strengthen parental engagement (Goodall, 2025; Goodall et al., 2021; Willis & Exley, 2022). For example, the Australian Engaging Parents in Inquiry Curriculum (EPIC) project noted 'the promised benefits of engaging parents are difficult to achieve without first laying the foundation of trusting, respectful relationships with parents by inviting their involvement in all aspects of school life' (Willis & Exley, 2022, p.32). Some of these relationships were established when parents' cultural capital was drawn upon by teachers for educational projects. However, it should be noted that whilst the EPIC researchers acknowledge there may be some applicability to schools generally, their project involved independent schools, rather than state schools which were the focus for our study.

Despite challenges, some enhanced parent–school staff relationships occurred during lockdown (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Goodall, 2022a, 2022b; Goodall et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2022), which is of pertinence given that school staff relied heavily on parents to support their children's formal education through remote academic learning (Goodall et al., 2021; Kambouri et al., 2021; Montacute & Cullinane, 2021). Nevertheless, herein lies a tension, because the support required reflects a school-mandated concept of learning, which is influenced by a deficit framework (Gorski, 2008), where educators and policy makers view the concept of parent partnerships with pre-conceived ideas of what parents should provide for their child's education (Goodall, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Spear et al., 2023). Moreover, within the deficit model, parents are also cognisant of their role linked to societal expectations, affecting their identity and feelings of self-efficacy (Goodall, 2017), often reinforced by resources and competencies featured in parental support programmes or through advice (Goodall, 2021), for example, parental guidance to support children's remote learning during the pandemic (DfE, 2020d). The DfE (Department for Education, 2021, 2022) also advised schools to monitor pupils' engagement with remote education and provide parental feedback, and to contact pupils or parents to consider re-engagement approaches if issues arose. This may have made parents aware of how they could support learning occurring at home, that is expectations about their role.

An example of the deficit framework may be further illustrated through considering marginalised groups, for example, the financially impoverished, which are perceived as having a deficit and being inadequate to provide their children with educational support, compared with their more affluent and privileged peers (Goodall, 2022b). The disadvantage is seen as needing fixing, with the result that the marginalised group is regarded as the culprits of poverty and the cause of educational outcome disparities (Goodall, 2022b, 2025; Jones, Banerjee, & Jackson, 2025). This perception leads to stereotypes and ignores the diverse

contributions of those in poverty, as well as the underlying systemic conditions causing the economic marginalisation (Gorski, 2016). Marginalised groups are perceived to lack cultural and social capital, which includes social networks, knowledge, values, and qualifications (Addi-Raccah, 2024; Bourdieu, 1986, 2011; Goodall, 2017). However, what transpires is that marginalised groups do not lack capital, but access to the capital that operates, and is seen to have value and be validated, within the current schooling system (Goodall, 2017, 2022b). This establishes a self-perpetuating cycle of a lack of pupil achievement from the marginalised groups (Goodall, 2022b). Parental involvement is seen as being subservient to the current system, ignoring factors between and within families linked to their culture, history, ethnicity, and social economic status, and maintains a perpetuation of privilege and increases academic gaps between groups of children (Goodall, 2025).

School staff can hold deficit views of marginalised parents which can lead to lower expectations and lack of recognition for their efforts to support learning within the home (Goodall, 2022b, 2025). However, some families, particularly from ethnic minority backgrounds or those facing economic deprivation, may find school engagement challenging but engage with their child's learning at home (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). It is worth noting that contrary to a deficit model, where parents from low socio-economic, working-class backgrounds are deemed not to value formal education and to be distant from their child's education (Gorski, 2008), Eivers et al.'s (2020) research highlighted that parents on lower incomes spent more time than their affluent peers in supporting their children's schoolwork during lockdown; this counters deficit models and beliefs about a culture of poverty being responsible for low achievement (Goodall, 2022b).

Improving family–school connections is complex and does not alleviate the negative consequences of poverty (Wang & McLeroy, 2023) or reduce inequalities (Goudeau et al., 2021), many of which were amplified during lockdown. Addressing deficit conceptions requires acknowledging the social and cultural capital of all families and challenging stereotypes (Gorski, 2016), alongside developing parental self-efficacy and authentic partnerships with school staff (Goodall, 2017). Moreover, given that schooling is only a subset of learning, other (non-school-mandated) learning opportunities hold significant value. For example, the value of learning opportunities at home supported by parental engagement (positive attitudes to learning, advice and aspirations, interactions with their children) can be key to narrowing the achievement gap and can occur irrespective of parental economic status or background, though systemic changes are required for this to occur productively (Goodall, 2017). Spear et al. (2023) also acknowledged the importance of everyday activities benefiting children's learning.

Home–school collaboration during the pandemic around parental involvement and engagement

Studies and reports have reflected on home–school partnerships during the pandemic, though it should be noted that some use the term ‘engagement’ when this seems more likely to be ‘parental involvement with schooling’. As part of a series of UK-wide quantitative surveys, Parentkind (2020) revealed 88% of 4864 parents felt engaged with their children's learning, with 53% feeling more engaged post-lockdown. However, engagement was equated with encouraging children to complete work or helping with learning activities, which were likely formal. As part of a series of surveys, Connect Scotland (2020) identified that 50% of 1578 parents felt that their ‘child learns from the things we do at home anyway’, with a range of sources for formal and less formal activities indicated as supporting their children's learning. However, most of their surveys (Connect Scotland, n.d.) linked to school-mandated learning.

Spear et al.'s (2023) mixed methods study explored primary school teachers' perceptions in England of parental engagement during the lockdowns. They coined the term 'parental participation in schooling' (p. 945) to signify teacher expectations about how parents facilitated their children's access to the resources provided by teachers for formal learning and support learning activities devised by teachers. Spear et al. also suggest that parents' focus on academic learning during lockdown was to the neglect of other activities that could assist learning, aligning with Goodall's (2022b) assertion that teachers may undervalue or ignore ways parents are engaged in their children's learning. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that some teachers in their research recognised the benefits of everyday activities which families could potentially engage in and which could support children's learning and engagement during lockdown, for example, through family walks, reading together, and cooking. Spear et al. recommended that teachers recognise and value these contributions to children's learning and promote them to parents.

Bubb and Jones' (2020) mixed methods study in Norway explored parents, pupils and school staff's positive perceptions, in online surveys, about the use of online technology supporting pupils' school-mandated learning in lockdown, providing post-pandemic recommendations for schools to consider developing digital skills further, pupil autonomy in organisation of learning, and homework content to be more creative and practical. They also noted positive contributions parents made to their children's school-mandated learning and stronger school–staff relationships. Meanwhile, Luo et al.'s (2022) qualitative research in China, using 285 video sources, focused on informal home–preschool collaboration and teacher–parent–child relationships through virtual home visits during the pandemic, supporting the continuity of early learning. Luo et al. note that Chinese academic culture favours teacher visits to homes, fostering relationships not through participation in school-based activities, but where schools organise parental 'involvement' aligning with the parental preference to work with their children at home, utilising additional resources and time to support their academic achievement. Here, reciprocal sharing occurred, contrasting with traditional one-way school-to-home communication (Goodall, 2022b), supported via an online professional community. Strategies and resources shared by teachers enhanced parent–child interactions, and teachers garnered information about their children's families which supported their instructional planning and practice. However, the terms 'engagement' and 'involvement' were used interchangeably within the research paper, aligning more with formal schooling, and Luo et al. acknowledged that virtual home visits fostered teacher-directed family involvement initiated by the school. Their article considers that if similar approaches were used post-pandemic, remote access for disadvantaged populations and overcoming barriers for disengaged families need consideration.

Marchant et al.'s (2021) qualitative study researched Welsh primary school staff's (senior leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, and support staff) views on school closures during the pandemic and which touched upon parental support and engagement, though the term 'engagement' aligned with parental involvement with schooling. School staff reported that parents became more aware of their children's learning needs and the curriculum and acknowledged the value of parents supporting practical activities like cooking, budgeting, and riding bikes. Home–school relationships and communications were reported as becoming strengthened. However, a main focus was on academic achievement and future recommendations suggested developing parent support and accountability for school-mandated learning during the pandemic.

Research and position papers acknowledged how family circumstances affected children's learning during the pandemic (see Goudeau et al., 2021; Pensiero et al., 2020; Ofqual, 2021; Shum et al., 2023). For example, remote learning highlighted the digital divide within UK society (Coleman, 2021; Holmes & Burgess, 2020; UK Parliament, 2020; Watts, 2020) and the English Office of Communications survey (Ofcom, 2020) highlighted that 9% of households

with children had no access to a laptop, desktop PC or tablet. Some schools distributed school-owned devices (DfE, 2021) to families in need. The government attempted some assistance to mitigate against socio-economic disparities affecting technology-related learning in the home (Archer, 2021; DfE, 2020a, 2020c) through providing devices, routers and data access, though this was limited (Children's Commissioner, 2020; UK Parliament, 2020), and some broadband providers offered special tariffs for low-income households (Gov.uk, 2020; Ofcom, 2024). Research with Israeli parents, highlighting the digital divide during lockdown (Addi-Raccah, 2024), acknowledged that although lower socio-economic status families had less digital capital than wealthier peers, they actively used it as much as possible, which countered the common deficit portrayal of parents with low socio-economic status as being uninterested or disengaged in their children's formal education. Spear et al. (2023) also recognised the digital divide challenges and noted how technology could support parents' involvement with schooling, for example, for general school communication, virtual parents' evenings to facilitate attendance, and for those reticent to come into school.

Goodall et al.'s (2021, 2022) mixed methods research focused on perceptions of parental engagement within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) among providers of ITE, student teachers, mentors, and parents in Wales during the pandemic. They noted a lack of training about parental engagement in ITE programmes and that it was perceived more within a deficit model. Their research indicated differences between respondents' conceptions of parental engagement, which focused more on involvement with schooling rather than engagement with learning during lockdown. Goodall et al.'s findings also acknowledged some valuable activities parents led were unrelated to schoolwork, a newfound respect for teachers by parents who had greater insight into their children's work, and the parental challenges of undertaking home schooling, for example, motivating their children and supporting them, whilst working full time. They advocated embedding a rigorous understanding of parental engagement in ITE programmes and incorporating it into (Welsh) teaching standards, alongside ongoing teacher training.

A 3-year Australian qualitative research project, Engaging Parents in Inquiry Curriculum [EPIC] (Griffith University, 2023), in the independent school sector recognised parents, teachers and school leaders as partners in their child's education. Some of the project occurred during the pandemic and its series of reports provides insights and possibilities about parental engagement for the future, as well as making links to Goodall's continuum. One of the reports by Willis and Exley (2022) features four case study schools and whilst there are instances of support for formal learning, the inquiry curriculum developed within the project offers 'opportunities for real-world connections and substantive conversations among students, parents, community members, and teachers' (Willis & Exley, 2022, p. 6). This has relevance as parental engagement can include 'active interest in the school curriculum' (Spear et al., 2023, p. 933). Learning, occurring in physical or virtual affinity spaces, acknowledges the contextual importance of children's backgrounds. EPIC researchers use affinity spaces to 'identify and create possible new opportunities for engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing' (Willis & Exley, 2022, p. 6), including cogenerative dialogues, between teachers and leaders, students, parents, and researchers, for example, for collaborative curriculum planning. The 'co' refers to the collaboration, whilst 'generative' refers to the interactive processes which are undertaken as new insights and ideas are developed through collaboration and may include developing better understanding around phenomena for example, parental engagement.

The present research

This research contributes to existing literature about parental engagement in their children's learning, both school-mandated and other types of learning. It builds on recent research of

parental involvement and engagement with their children's learning during the pandemic as part of home–school collaboration. This study includes the voices of parents, teachers and SLs in England from the phases of early years, primary and secondary (one of which included a 6th form) to better understand what educators can glean going forwards from the learning experiences which occurred within the home environment during the pandemic lockdowns. It analyses parents and school-based staff's perspectives of positive aspects, challenges, and opportunities for improvement based on their experiences of learning, relationships, and well-being during lockdown. The study then explored how this knowledge may inform ideas about future approaches to home–school collaboration to benefit parental engagement for children's learning.

The parental engagement continuum (Goodall, 2017) guides this research as a lens to evaluate teachers, SLs, and parents' perceptions of what learning occurred at home, linked to parental involvement and engagement during lockdown in England. Whilst Goodall's model was not conceived for a situation such as lockdown, its application has much relevance in this context (see Goodall et al., 2022).

The principal research questions were:

What can school staff learn from the learning experiences of their pupils during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

How can this knowledge enhance future collaborative approaches between the home and educational settings to benefit parental engagement for children's learning?

METHODS

Study design

This study employed a qualitative design to understand the perspectives of teachers, SLs and parents regarding their children's learning experiences during the imposed periods of COVID-19 lockdowns. Using an interpretivist framework, researchers aimed to understand participants' personal experiences (Cohen et al., 2018) from their reflections about their children's learning within a specific social context (lockdowns). Goodall's (2017) parental engagement continuum model was used to evaluate school and parent practices and collaborative approaches to children's learning. The research employed qualitative questions through a survey developed by a university interdisciplinary team from the Schools of Education and Human Sciences. The online survey used facilitated quick, anonymous data collection (Cohen et al., 2018), enabling participant completion at a time of their choosing. The researchers' university ethical approval board granted ethical clearance.

Participants

The study comprised parents, teachers, and SLs from early years and primary (combined for the purpose of the research) and secondary (which included a 6th form for those aged 16–18 years old) settings. This study used convenience sampling whereby schools partnered with teacher training programmes, within the university where the researchers worked, were invited to participate in the research. Participants from 11 settings engaged with completing an online survey via the platform Qualtrics. The breakdown of numbers of parents, teachers, and SLs according to the phase of education is given in Table 1. The overall sample ($N = 120$) included participants who were 22–59 years of age (mean age = 41.5 years) and 89% female, 10% male, and 1% missing (the options to indicate non-binary, prefer not to say, or to self-describe were available but not selected). Ethnicity of the sample was 84.2%

TABLE 1 Summary of participants by phase and type of respondent.

Phase of education	Number of schools	Parents	Teachers	SLs
Reception and primary	7	$N=53$	$N=28$	$N=5$
Secondary	3	$N=84$	$N=2$	$N=1$
6th form	1	$N=3$	$N=1$	$N=0$

Note: Based on participants who at least completed the demographics questions, there was some dropout as participants progressed through the survey.

White, 7.3% Black, 4% Asian, and 1.7% Mixed/Multiple (2.9% preferred not to say, entered their own description, or was missing).

Procedure

Research leads in participating schools received a recruitment email template to forward to parents, teachers, and SLs. The email included a link to an online Qualtrics survey with an information sheet and consent form. Participants specified their relationship to the children and their educational phase, which directed them to the relevant survey; questions were broadly the same but adapted according to participant group and phase. Participants completed a series of open-ended qualitative questions about their children's learning experiences during school closures, home–school relationships, well-being, children's transitions between key educational phases, and the pandemic's impact. Participants were also asked their views on improving future school–parent collaboration. An example of the qualitative questions is in the Appendix S1.

The survey was completed anonymously, with participants identifiable only by a self-set 6-digit code for withdrawal purposes. It was available from 8th September to 31st October 2021, after three enforced COVID-19 lockdowns between 23rd March 2020 and 8th March 2021 (Institute for Government, 2022), allowing participants to reflect on their experiences. The survey took ~20–25 min to complete. At the end, a debrief sheet thanked participants, reminded them of the research focus, and provided contact information for the research lead should they have any further questions. Links to support organisations were included for those experiencing distress from recalling the pandemic.

Content analysis

This research employed an interpretivist approach via thematic analysis of participant responses, aiming to understand their perspectives and identify key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). There were two phases of data analysis.

In phase one, an inductive approach to coding through thematic analysis was used to identify themes impacting parental involvement with schooling and parental engagement with their children's learning. This was based on participants' perspectives about their children's learning at home during COVID-19 lockdowns, alongside considerations about well-being and relationships. Thematic analysis involved coding data, generating themes, and reviewing and naming the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Stage one analysis (inductive coding) of the dataset enabled researchers to interpret participants' responses about their children's learning and considerations about well-being and relationships, by letting the data speak for itself (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2022), though acknowledging an active role for the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). QSR NVivo was used for first cycle (or free node) coding to openly code and label the dataset with words/

short phrases (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019; Miles et al., 2014), followed by second cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to organise the data into themes.

Participant responses were downloaded from Qualtrics and uploaded into QSR NVivo and subdivided into parent, teacher, and SLs survey responses. Each participant was assigned a unique ID, and demographics were removed. The coding followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps. First, the lead and second researchers familiarised themselves with the raw data, actively reading the content several times and independently noting provisional codes and themes. Next, using the notes from stage one, the two researchers independently coded all responses on NVivo. Responses were compared for consistency, with any inconsistencies checked and outcomes determined by a third researcher. Consistency was high, strengthening trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) within the research (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004; Yadav, 2022). In the third stage, the first three researchers collated the data into main overarching and sub-themes. In stage four, themes were refined to ensure coherent patterns within each theme and distinct overarching themes which supported validity, with stage five defining and naming the final themes. Table 2 presents the themes produced from data analysis and how often concepts occurred.

Stage six involved producing the results section, supported by data extracts across schools and participant groups (parents, teachers, and SLs) to support theme prevalence. Whilst sub-themes were categorised under overarching themes, they were not considered mutually exclusive, with some elements having relevance in more than one theme. Where relevant, this is briefly referred to in the discussion. To enhance trustworthiness, stages four, five, and six were vetted by the other researchers in team meetings. Due to the anonymity of the survey, there was no scope for participant feedback on data (participant validation; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Phase two analysis employed a priori (theoretically derived) coding system (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013) or deductive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore how data content from stage one analysis aligned with Goodall's (2017) parental engagement continuum. Implications and recommendations for future collaborative approaches between home and educational settings to benefit parental engagement for children's learning were informed by this analysis. It was acknowledged that parental involvement with the school setting was limited because of the context of lockdown, though online access, for example, for parent evenings could count as an equivalent. It was also appreciated that parental involvement with schooling, which sees activities undertaken in the home, outside of school, but still prescribed by school, would be aligned with school-mandated learning, which featured predominantly during lockdown. Parental engagement with their children's learning, or its

TABLE 2 Summary of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes and their occurrence (number and percentage).

Themes	*N*	% to 1d.p
Contact		
Communication	85	8.4
Connection	337	33.3
Participation		
Involvement/ Engagement	278	27.5
Logistics	127	12.5
Equitable access		
Equity	101	10.0
Accessibility	84	8.3

potential, was evidenced if there were signs of examples such as their engagement through other learning (that which was non-school-mandated) activities occurring, moral support parents showed to their children, or attitudes expressed towards learning in the home.

RESULTS

The qualitative data highlighted three key themes related to the learning experiences of parents and school staff during the COVID-19 lockdowns. These were: (1) contact – communication and connection, which focused on communication approaches and the connections established from relationships between home and school; (2) participation – involvement/engagement and logistics, which was school staff's facilitation of learning and parents' involvement with schooling and/or engagement with their children's learning, and the logistics of this; and (3) equitable access – equity and accessibility, which focused on evaluating equity and accessibility of learning. These three key themes are described in more detail with illustrative comments under the headings of positives, challenges, and ways forward (see Tables 3–11). The term 'parental involvement in schooling' will be abbreviated to PI Schooling, and 'parental engagement with their children's learning' will be abbreviated to PE Learning.

Theme 1: Contact – Communication and connection

The theme of contact relates to communication approaches used between school and home and the personal connections established. Responses indicated that most of the

TABLE 3 Theme 1: Contact – Positives.

Quote	Participant
'School teacher called regularly to check on his [the child's] progress and wellbeing'	Parent
'Although some families were initially a little suspicious of whether we were phoning to check up on them, most families were grateful for the phone calls'	SLs
'… a member of SLT phoned each family regularly… to ask how they were doing and how well the children were engaging with the work'	SLs
'Spoke to most parents each day via email. Those who did not engage were called regularly to attempt to engage and provide alternative learning opportunities'	SLs
'I called all the families of children with EHCP's [Education and Health Care Plan for Children with Special Educational Needs] or significant learning needs regularly. I feel as though I built better relationships with them during this time, and they are more likely to get in touch with me now as a result'	Teacher
'helped to build a stronger relationship with our families as we were doing weekly check in phone calls… with home learning'	Teacher
'Communication with parents was good and it provided a brilliant insight for parents into the techniques and strategies used in school'	Teacher
'[There was] A lot of support between other parents'	Parent
'The pandemic provided a great opportunity for the school community, teachers, parents, governors, pupils and all other stakeholders to work together.… It enabled all involved to find better ways of communication and information sharing'	Parent
'As the lockdowns progressed, we did notice that more parents were speaking to us about their own anxieties and mental health'	SLs
'children, parents and staff talk more openly about their feelings and if there is a problem it seems to be addressed more quickly'	Teacher

TABLE 4 Theme 1: contact – challenges.

Quote	Participant
'We called parents weekly, but lots wouldn't answer or were very brief in conversations'	Teacher
'Some [families]… didn't answer the phone or were reluctant to talk to us'	Teacher
'Felt as if I wasn't being listened to or understood and don't have a relationship with [the] school community'	Parent
'Unless a child is super keen or super naughty, there is minimal engagement [from the school]. All is communicated via digital newsletters, updates, 5-min Zoom meetings or phone calls'	Parent
'Vulnerable families were difficult to engage so socially distant home visits were undertaken for chats and to drop off home learning packs'	SLs
'There were a couple of families who I had to call because they had EHCP's who clearly found the calls intrusive and this was awkward'	Teacher

TABLE 5 Theme 1: contact – ways forward.

Quote	Participant
'More one to ones with parents on how to help and support in subject areas'	Parent
'Regular daily online communication with class teacher to engage the children'	Parent
'Parental support is key to helping and support what schools do for their children. Schools provide workshops, direct parents to online support via the school's website and give physical resources to support at home. Maybe this all needs to be simplified and accessible for any parent from any school so that we are all singing from the same unified hymn sheet'	Teacher
'Online parent consultation was great – definitely don't change that back'	Parent
'More connectivity and feedback from the teachers. Look at the gaming technology…. its connectivity and high spec software worked brilliantly and was a great example of what could be achieved and could be an opportunity as a tool for education'	Parent
'I want to start inviting parents into school for SEN coffee mornings so they can build relationships with each other'	Teacher
'I think the school should make more effort to connect parents with each other…'	Parent
'I think we need to consider how we can communicate in a timely manner'	SLs
'Consistency is the key along with building and sustaining a welcoming inclusive environment while ensuring learning is the main focus'	SLs

communications were directed one way from school to parents around school-mandated learning linked to PI Schooling, with limited examples of two-way dialogue. However, there were instances of school staff reporting that parents opened up by talking about their mental health to them. There was some evidence from parents about them connecting with other parents and communicating with the wider school community, and future ideas from parents and teachers to strengthen intra-relationships among parents, which could be interpreted as potentially benefiting social capital.

Positives

Communications from the school to parents may be conceived as well intended and being positive to the extent that it was encouraging PI with school-mandated learning and checking on progress and well-being to support families. Simultaneously, however, caution is advised to interpret comments as being positive if schools are perceived by parents as 'checking'

TABLE 6 Theme 2: participation – positives.

Quote	Participant
'Engaging with the children's learning and being involved with it'	Parent
'I got to understand more what levels my child is at'	Parent
'Parents have learnt more about the expectations of children's work	Teacher
'Children with families who support their learning journeys gained experiences in life skills'	Teacher
'Pupils who were well supported at home and had experiences outside of their home learning had a positive wellbeing'	Teacher
'[we did] Baking, gardening, art, music, PE, board games'	Parent
'My middle daughter loved spending time at home with me doing practical tasks such as building a chicken coop/ decorating/ painting/ gardening etc.'	Parent
'Engagement with nature/wildlife in garden and on countryside walks… Appreciation which kids expressed at my input – thus cementing an already strong relationship'	Parent
'Wellbeing sessions were provided… for children to discuss and show their learning … [and] showcasing their art, cooking and gardening skills'	SLs
'Some children engaged in new activities/ hobbies at home'	SLs
'They [children] also wanted to show us what else they had been doing to get by during lockdown'	Teacher
'I was astounded at how well and quickly the school reacted to and supported home learning… Lots of work was set, they used Google Classroom and videos to explain the work and teachers were on call and marking work and giving encouragement around the clock'	Parent
'Maths and English lessons were delivered by teachers via Teams and these were available live or recorded to be accessed at a time that was more easily negotiated within the family'	SLs

up on (monitoring) school-mandated work being completed and parental facilitation of this. Some responses by parents revealed parent-to-parent connections, and some parents and teachers acknowledged connections between parents, schools, and the wider school community. School staff reported that their parents became more open to talking about their mental health, which reflected an enhanced connection between them.

Challenges

All participant groups acknowledged home–school communication presenting difficulties and strained parental relationships.

Ways forward

Parents, teachers, and SLs highlighted areas where communication and connection could be improved. These responses included areas linked to PI with school and school-mandated learning, and considerations for developing relationships. Some comments are linked specifically to potential pandemic lockdowns occurring in the future, rather than considerations post-pandemic.

Theme 2: Participation – Involvement/engagement and logistics

The theme of participation considers perceptions about how willing children engaged with learning, how school staff facilitated learning, and how much parents were involved with

TABLE 7 Theme 2: participation – challenges.

Quote	Participant
'It is difficult to encourage my children to learn because they do not believe I am a teacher much less a good one. The home environment can be chaotic and may require several improvements to make it amenable to learning'	Parent
'Struggled to support my child with subjects I don't know much about. It became stressful and tiring and caused friction in the house'	Parent
'Some parents felt overwhelmed by the new expectations on them to support learning'	Teacher
'We also had parents telling us they were unable to support children with the work, particularly the printed packs, as they themselves did not understand it'	SLs
'had to juggle work and homeschooling… was an incredibly exhausting and stressful time'	Parent
'Many parents felt stressed as they were unable to get their child to engage, or sit with them to support due to work commitments'	Teacher
'For some working families, home learning would have been stressful'	SLs
'Not all the children engaged and learning was missed… We knew some parents were supporting and there were others who just weren't interested in trying to help despite the resources given/websites for info or for children to explore, play and practice'	Teacher
'It is difficult to learn at home as the environment is not always conducive and the children do not have the requisite learning aids such as laptops and iPads plus we are hardly experienced as parent-teachers'	Parent
'We also had problems with punctuality and children not attending, despite having been given devices and internet access'	Teacher
'We struggled with internet speed having everyone on together'	Parent
'… where children were logged into the live lessons at the same time and place as siblings … it was hard for them to concentrate on their own learning'	SLs
'Not all children logged onto the online learning or accessed the packs, despite encouragement. Some children had issues with their internet and some were learning on small devices like phones'	Teacher
'Some pupils weren't keen to engage online or didn't have the space at home to learn effectively'	SLs
'Too many students cannot motivate themselves when home learning'	Teacher
'His motivation was low, the temptation to skip lessons, or give minimum effort was high, with little or no feedback and we only heard from the school when his work had got very behind or was very poor'	Parent
'Couldn't get them to do anything school put in for home learning, so I decide to do my own which was baking cake and art and painting which they did enjoy'	Parent

schooling or engaged with their children's learning, which interlinked with how possible or not this was on a logistical level.

Positives

Participant responses from all groups reflected some approaches to school-mandated learning (PI Schooling) reflecting *their* conceptions of what constituted involvement and/or engagement with learning. Some comments, voiced by all groups, linked to other learning (non-school-mandated) occurring and the positive effects on well-being and relationships, with potential for PE Learning to occur. Logistically, one SL highlighted that online learning was flexible, enabling children to complete work at a time suitable for their home situation.

TABLE 8 Theme 2: participation – ways forward.

Quote	Participant
'Having families onside and invested in learning to see the benefits of it is crucial'	Teacher
'Parental support is key to helping and support what schools do for their children. Schools provide workshops, direct parents to online support via the school's website and give physical resources to support at home. …this all needs to be simplified and accessible for any parent from any school'	Teacher
'more technology in schools to enable teachers to teach skills of using technology at home – children will then be less reliant on parents to engage'	SLs
'Training sessions on how to use online platforms for children and parents'	Teacher
'Children having access to good internet and technology so that all of them have the same opportunities to join the lessons. Tech at school that was better aimed at online teaching'	Teacher
'Set less work. Give the children choices on what they do. Give positive feedback to encourage them to carry on'	Parent
'Pupils [could have] any day of off-timetable stuff, sport or art or a STEM [science, technology, engineering, mathematics] Day… Those do build community and create happiness'	Teacher
'The importance of each child having and use of technology like Chromebooks being able to use them effectively as part of normal everyday school life …enabling more independent learning… to be self-sufficient…but still provide good regular feedback. Balance this with more practical skills learning away from the classroom and the academic'	Parent
'More resources so parents can learn along with all children's work'	Parent

TABLE 9 Theme 3: equitable access – positives.

Quote	Participant
'Home learning packs were also sent to those children finding it difficult to access online and laptops were provided to Pupil Premium children and vulnerable families without a computing device'	SLs
'We were able to ensure all families had access to at least one device and the internet'	Teacher
'we were able to deliver some SEN interventions via TEAMS. Our Speech and Language Therapist also worked with a few families to deliver therapy sessions'	Teacher
'my year 11 was given a loan laptop, that was very helpful'	Parent

Challenges

Parents identified challenges with delivering school-mandated learning (PI Schooling) which included perceived expectations that they should take on the teacher role. Parents and school staff described families' experiences of stress in supporting their children with school-mandated learning and/or juggling their workload. A lack of technological devices or internet connection at home was an issue noted by all groups in relation to school-mandated learning, but school staff noted that when technology was provided some children did not fully participate. A lack of pupil motivation was identified by parents and teachers, with one parent identifying other learning (non-school-mandated) activities to engage their child.

Ways forward

Reference, by all participant groups, to parental participation linked to PI Schooling. Extracts illustrate some ways forward around the use of technology (by all groups),

TABLE 10 Theme 3: equitable access – challenges.

Quote	Participant
'It was challenging to ensure… that we provide alternatives for parents if they didn't have the language skills or the resources at home'	Teacher
'…because I am dyslexic, I struggle to help [my children]'	Parent
'Did not have many children accessing online learning due to lack of computers/internet access etc.'	Teacher
'In homes where there was more than one child, there were not enough devices to enable all children to log in to the live lessons which meant they did not have access to the teacher to ask questions to or to demonstrate their understanding as they did their learning'	SLs
'A lot of the children who needed SEN support the most could not access online learning… because their families were not able to support them. We provided paper packs and pens, pencils etc. and offered online one-to-one sessions but, again, the most needy children did not access these sessions'	Teacher
'All children and families differ, while some parents are able to support their children with their learning at home others find it difficulty due to lack of education themselves. Some parents find having to stop working or a disruption to their normal schedule challenging'	Teacher
'Unable to help my children as I was working from home, and their dad is a key worker so was not at home, so they just had to get on as best they could whilst keeping quiet so as not to disturb me'	Parent

TABLE 11 Theme 3: equitable access – ways forward.

Quote	Participant
'How can we support the adults with their children if they struggle with learning themselves? It would be good to start introducing some workshops or CPD sessions to help with this'	Teacher
'More affordable indoor leisure facilities'	Parent
'If we could receive extra support in terms of grants and free vouchers to outdoor events and extracurricular activities for our children that will be most appreciated'	Parent

feedback and additional resources (requested by parents) linked with school-mandated learning, off-timetable lessons (teacher) and pupil independence in learning (voiced by SLs and parents). One parent refers to the importance of balancing academic learning with practical skills away from the classroom, which could hold potential for PE Learning.

Theme 3: Equitable access – Equity and accessibility

The theme of equitable access relates to how equity and accessibility may have affected children and parents' ability to fully participate in school-mandated learning and the school's facilitation of this. Accessibility issues and school responses were affected by existing inequities such as parents or their children having special educational needs or the family lacking sufficient technological devices or adequate Wi-Fi connection. These technological considerations link with some logistics discussed in Theme 2. Within the equitable access theme, there was a commonality held by school staff and parents of learning being school-mandated. Additionally, accessibility was seen to be affected by parental availability or language skills to support the school-mandated learning.

Positives

School staff highlighted access to school-mandated learning via 'home learning' packs or technology, and SEN interventions via the Team platform. Positive comments about equitable access were more apparent from school staff than parents.

Challenges

Teachers and parents recognised that there were difficulties for parents who were unable to support their child's school-mandated learning (PI Schooling) due to specific needs, language skills, technological challenges, limited resources, and parental work commitments.

Ways forward

Teachers suggested that schools should engage proactively with parents, through educational workshops who themselves may have learning needs, linking to PI Schooling. SLs' suggestions for ways forward about equitable access were not apparent. Meanwhile, parents acknowledged that affordable or free access to leisure facilities was important future considerations; this links to having access to localities for informal learning to occur and holds potential for future PE Learning.

DISCUSSION

Themes

Themes are discussed under the headings of positives, challenges and ways forward, where Goodall's (2017) continuum model is used to evaluate and consider what schools can glean from their pupils' learning experiences during lockdown, and how this can enhance future collaborative approaches between home and educational settings to benefit parental engagement for children's learning. There was a greater propensity overall for PI Schooling, that is, school-mandated support with homework or coursework activities (Goodall, 2017), than PE Learning, encompassing learning activities encountered through home, leisure, or family activities (Goodall, 2017).

Positives

Contact

Under the theme of contact, communication approaches aligned with expectations for parents and schools to facilitate school-mandated learning at home (Shum et al., 2023), reflecting PI Schooling as per Goodall's continuum (Goodall, 2017; Spear et al., 2023), and how schools relied on parents to support children's education (Kambouri et al., 2021), particularly academic learning (Montacute & Cullinane, 2021). This also aligned with the Annual Parents' Survey (Ofsted, 2021) findings that schools provided 'guidance or training to help support remote learning', echoing that communication was predominantly one-way, from school to home (Goodall, 2022b), rather than two-way dialogue supportive of processes to develop PE Learning (Willis & Exley, 2022). Whilst improved communication approaches

were considered positives by participants, PI Schooling links to a deficit model of viewing parent partnerships (Goodall, 2021, 2022a; Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Spear et al., 2023).

A parent revealed that there had been a lot of support among parents themselves, though there was no elaboration about the nature of this assistance. Additionally, some parents and teachers acknowledged connections between parents, school staff and the wider school community, indicating potential for developing social capital within the school community. This strengthening of capital could benefit children in the current schooling system (Goodall, 2017). However, it does not equate with PE Learning where, although there is active interest in the school curriculum, the focus of learning shifts towards 'conversations around learning… and parental expectations and aspirations for their children' (Spear et al., 2023, p.933), away from being 'school-led and school-centric' (Goodall, 2017, p. 95). School staff reported that parents opened up about their mental health, reflecting a strengthening of relationships which could be developed post-pandemic. However, it is important to recognise that whilst parental engagement can operate independently to their involvement in school and schooling (Goodall, 2017), strong school–home relationships can support parental involvement in school and schooling, which itself can serve as a foundation for developing PE Learning (Goodall, 2025; Willis & Exley, 2022) and which is mutually supported by parents and teachers (Spear et al., 2023).

Participation

All groups referred to participation aligned with PI Schooling (Eivers et al., 2020; Jones & Palikara, 2023; Spear et al., 2023). Parents appreciated knowing their child's levels of academic achievement and having the school set work; teachers noted parents' increased awareness of expectations for their children's work; a SL reflected on lessons delivered online for ease of access. However, this school-mandated concept of learning is associated with a deficit framework of viewing parent partnerships (Goodall, 2021, 2022a; Goodall et al., 2021; Spear et al., 2023) where parents are conceived as facilitators of school-based work set by the educators, rather than as equal partners in the learning process aligned with PE Learning; this is discussed further in 'challenges'.

Other learning (non-school-mandated) activities were mentioned by all participant groups, showing potential for PE Learning (Goodall, 2017; Spear et al., 2023; Willis & Exley, 2022). Examples included children gardening and building a chicken coop (parent), families supporting their children's learning journeys to gain life skills (teacher), and children engaging with new activities and hobbies at home (a SL). These examples echoed Goodall et al.'s (2021) research on parental engagement during the pandemic which acknowledged parent–child conversations about learning, encouraging child curiosity and greater family engagement. One parent reflected, 'Couldn't get them to do anything school put in for home learning, so I decided to do my own, like baking cake and art, which they enjoyed'. This highlights how parents may see school-mandated activities (linked to PI Schooling) as the primary form of learning, only exploring other learning opportunities when their children do not engage. Spear et al. (2023) and Goodall (2022b) emphasise these other learning activities reflect ways in which parents could engage in their children's learning and should be recognised by teachers as having value in assisting learning. Moreover, engaging in such activities can help parents develop self-efficacy, crucial for interactions with schools and contributing to PE Learning, regardless of social status (Goodall et al., 2021). This approach helps counteract school staff devaluing cultural capital of marginalised groups of parents (Goodall, 2017, 2022b; Gorski, 2008) and recognises parental home contributions to develop engagement, for example, as seen in the Australian EPIC project (Willis & Exley, 2022). This also resonates with some practice which student teachers reported in Goodall et al.'s (2021) research,

noting how school staff shared ideas with parents so they could continue to support the term's learning at home, though this links with PI Schooling.

Equitable access

Equitable access homes in upon children and parents' ability to fully participate in school-mandated learning and the school's facilitation of this. It also links to the themes of contact (communication and connection) and participation (levels of involvement/ engagement and the logistical ability to engage), resonating with schools being 'attuned to their community's needs' (Moss et al., 2020, p. 4). Aligning with PI Schooling, school staff referred to providing hard copy resources for vulnerable families and technological devices to enable them to engage with school-mandated learning. Positive responses were lacking from parents, possibly because providing families with technology does not ensure its use or change affordability of expensive internet bandwidth (Archer, 2021; Children's Commissioner, 2020; DfE, 2020a, 2020c; UK Parliament, 2020). In relation to school staff providing activities for school-mandated learning, equitable access for pupils with SEND, Pupil Premium, or vulnerable students is something which may be deemed expected nationally, given the context of formal educational disruption and the need for state-funded schools to provide remote education (DfE, 2020e; Parliament UK, 2020). Negative impacts on disadvantaged children's attainment have been acknowledged (EEF, 2022), with a higher academic gap between vulnerable pupils and their peers post-pandemic than before (Rose et al., 2021), potentially taking a decade to return to pre-pandemic levels (Committee of Public Accounts, 2023).

Challenges

Contact

Weak or strained home–school communication and relationships, as noted by parents, may hinder opportunities for PI Schooling (Goodall, 2022a), where parents are expected to support school-mandated learning activities. This could also negatively impact impetus for engaging with PE Learning (Goodall, 2022a; Luo et al., 2022; Willis & Exley, 2022), where there is equitable partnership for children's learning between schools and families (Goodall, 2017). However, researchers assert that parents may still engage in their children's learning despite challenges with school engagement (Goodall, 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

The deficit model of parental partnerships (Goodall, 2021, 2022a; Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Spear et al., 2023) aligns with PI Schooling, where schools instruct parents on how to support their child's formal education and expect their involvement. Educators, the schooling system, and policymakers often perceive parental inadequacies in providing this support as a deficit needing fixing (Goodall, 2022b). This was particularly prevalent during the pandemic when schools relied heavily on parents to support their children's academic learning (Kambouri et al., 2021; Montacute & Cullinane, 2021). This seemed to underpin school staff's actions, as reflected in the findings of contacting parents as guided by the DfE (2021, 2022), where there were issues of child engagement with school-mandated learning, which could be perceived as monitoring and compliance to ensure learning was completed. This reveals a tension of both school staff and parents, on the one hand, valuing one-way communications to help parents understand work set, and challenges of parents' reluctance to engage in conversations about schoolwork, on the other hand, reflecting tense home–school relationships. Some SLs and teachers expressed frustration that parents were reticent to

communicate, contrasting with the positive communications employed by early years teachers in China to support preschool parental engagement (Luo et al., 2022). However, Luo et al. acknowledge that preschool–home collaboration is perceived as a norm in China. Their study also equates with PI Schooling and a deficit conception of parent partnerships being educator-led, as opposed to a more egalitarian partnership underpinning PE Learning.

Participation

All participant groups described parents' challenges of being involved with school-mandated learning, for example, parents felt they had to take on the teacher role, and parents and a SL commented about parents' lack of understanding about the schoolwork. Parents and school staff noted emotional stresses parents faced in supporting their children's schoolwork whilst managing their workloads, consistent with Goodall et al.'s (2021) findings about parent partnerships during the pandemic. The stresses linked to PI with school-mandated learning, for example, from juggling their work demands, were likely exacerbated during this particular timeframe of lockdown, though parental support of homework remains an issue in post-pandemic times. However, it could be argued that PE Learning, manifested, for example, through home, leisure, or family activities, may also be considered challenging in non-pandemic times with parents managing work demands.

One teacher noted, 'Not all the children engaged and learning was missed,' reflecting school-mandated learning. Another teacher expressed concern that some parents were uninterested in helping with their children's learning despite resources being given, which mirrors findings from Jones and Palikara (2023) and student teachers' reports of teachers on placement (Goodall et al., 2021), suggesting persistence of the deficit model of viewing parent partnerships and a need for training to address teachers' attitudes towards parental engagement (Jones & Palikara, 2023). All participant groups reported school staff monitoring how children engaged with school-mandated learning, for example, a SL contacting parents to check 'how well the children were engaging with the work' and calling those who did not engage to provide alternative learning opportunities. Some of these comments were reported in a positive light as they were seen as a way of touching base with parents to check that learning was on track. School staff may have judged parents' abilities to support school-mandated learning (PI Schooling), influenced by the deficit model of viewing parent partnerships (Goodall et al., 2021), coupled with the DfE's requirement for English state schools to provide remote education access or physical resources for children unable to access online sources (DfE, 2020e; UK Parliament, 2020), and its guidance to schools to resolve issues if children were not engaging in learning (DfE, 2021, 2022). Although not a government requirement, parents likely felt monitored also to ensure school-mandated work was completed by their children. One parent mentioned their child's teacher 'calling regularly to check on his progress'. However, this surveillance attitude was not just triggered from the pandemic, but has featured historically in perspectives about the expectations of the state and parents' role of supporting children's (academic) learning (Goodall, 2021). Parents also become aware of expectations made of them (Goodall, 2017), where resources and competencies are promoted in programmes under the heading of parental support (Goodall, 2021). This may be illustrated through DfE (2020d) guidance for parents supporting their child's remote education during lockdown. From this, it could be argued that parental perceptions are influenced by the deficit model and the status quo of state power over parents is maintained (Goodall, 2021).

The surveillance examples resonate with PI Schooling, associated with school-mandated activities for parents to support their children, with limited agency and lend themselves to assumptions and judgements about the role of parents by educators, the state, and society. Yet, herein lies a tension, because the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2025)

recommends that schools advise parents to direct struggling children to their teachers, rather than parents take on an instructional role, because of unfamiliarity with effective teaching strategies. During the pandemic, challenges arose with schools asking parents to support the school-mandated learning. Spear et al. (2023) noted in their research that pupils' curriculum learning loss (falling behind expectations reported by teachers – see also Sharp et al., 2020) during lockdown may have been related to lower parental engagement (with the term 'engagement' aligned with school-mandated work). PI Schooling contrasts with schools valuing PE Learning and seeking to learn more about parent–child interactions at home. If there were to be less focus on parents being involved in mandated schooling, this may facilitate parent and teacher energies to embrace PE Learning. This approach would value parental agency for their engagement with learning through home, leisure, and family activities, and their moral support and guidance they provide for their children through discussions they have with their children about learning (Goodall, 2017, 2022a, 2022b; Spear et al., 2023).

Parents and teachers noted a lack of child motivation for school-mandated work. These situations could have potentially been used as a springboard for families to draw on their attitudes to learning and moral support and guidance (e.g. referring to persistence and resilience), integral to PE Learning (Goodall, 2017), and as a way to consider other valuable learning activities. Such approaches to developing child motivation could also align with parental comments on ways forward for children to become autonomous learners. Engagement issues due to logistical problems were acknowledged as problematic. Teachers noted some parents were uninterested in supporting school-mandated learning, and issues persisted even with provided resources, website links, or internet access. This perceived lack of interest could be due to several reasons, for example, from those challenges identified in this section about the stresses from delivering school-mandated learning, juggling workloads, or emanating from a deficit model of perceiving parent partnerships, aligned with PI Schooling. Moreover, parents and teachers also mentioned a lack of appropriate technological hardware and internet speed issues. This reflected the digital divide (Addi-Raccah, 2024; Coleman, 2021; Holmes & Burgess, 2020; Watts, 2020), but also highlights the argument already made that giving families technology (Archer, 2021; Children's Commissioner, 2020; DfE, 2020a, 2020c; UK Parliament, 2020) does not ensure its use or alter affordability of expensive internet bandwidth (Gov.uk, 2025).

Equitable access

All participant groups noted access issues for parents' support of school-mandated learning linked to their specific needs, for example, dyslexia, language skills, and work commitments, affecting PI Schooling. The occurrence of parents juggling their work during lockdown may happen regardless of socio-economic status (Goodall et al., 2021). However, PE Learning's value in supporting children's achievement outweighs SES, education, and ethnicity influences (Goodall, 2017), highlighting the importance of parental contributions through other learning activities (Spear et al., 2023). A valuing of these other activities by parents and educators may have relevance for and be supportive of parents who may have struggled to help their children due to their specific needs.

Ways forward

Contact

Future developments, voiced by all participant groups, highlighted the value of schools developing closer relationships with parents through effective communication systems.

Professional development in technology (Knight, 2022; Smale, 2024), such as through professional learning networks (Parkin & Spear, 2024), could enhance teacher confidence with alternative forms of connection stimulated during lockdowns (Montacute & Cullinane, 2021; SMART Technologies, 2022) and support future online interactions and relationships with parents. Technological platforms could be used to value PE Learning, celebrating non-school-mandated learning activities. Meanwhile, one teacher noted that SEN coffee mornings could help parents develop their own relationships; this could potentially enhance their building of social capital within the schooling system which can support children's achievement (Goodall, 2017, 2022b). One parent valued online parent–teacher consultations, which may be interpreted as an offshoot of parental involvement with school due to the context of lockdown. Such an arrangement could have value in the future for parents who may find engagement with the school setting challenging, e.g. because of their work demands (Goodall et al., 2021).

Participation

Teachers suggested future training sessions to support parents in using online platforms, which itself relies on teachers' technological confidence (Knight, 2022; Smale, 2024) enhanced through professional development (Parkin & Spear, 2024). Despite low internet tariffs offered during the pandemic (UK Parliament, 2020), internet affordability remains problematic for many families (Gov.uk, 2025). The government's digital inclusion action plan (Gov.uk, 2025) aims to tackle the digital divide by exploring partnerships to bring low-cost connectivity to deprived areas.

One teacher suggested non-timetabled days for pupils to engage with curriculum days, referring to this as building community. This could also be used to celebrate the cultural capital of parents (Spear et al., 2023) and develop home–school relationships similar to the EPIC project (Willis & Exley, 2022), where parents come into school to share reflections about their profession or interests linked to the curriculum focus. Whilst involvement in curriculum days may have aspects linked to involvement in school and PI Schooling, and the cultural capital celebrated may risk being from affluent families whose capital is already valued within the education system and benefits them (Goodall, 2017), it could open up avenues for recognising all parents' cultural capital and developing their social capital.

Equitable access

A teacher suggested workshops for parents alongside staff professional development to help parents who find learning challenging, aligning with what may be considered parental involvement with the school, to attend workshops linked to the curriculum and which would then facilitate PI Schooling for school-mandated learning activities. However, this may be seen as a common sense approach with schools responding appropriately to their community's needs (Moss et al., 2020). Moreover, if parents are receiving appropriate training on effective teaching methods, it may reduce the need, as suggested by the EEF (2025), for schools to suggest that parents (who may have been unfamiliar with the school's methods) direct their struggling children to their teachers.

Parents in the survey requesting affordable or free access to leisure facilities reflected potential inequalities in access to activities valued by them as having high cultural capital. These opportunities offer potential for informal learning and other non-school-centric activities, enhancing future PE Learning (Goodall, 2017).

Implications and recommendations

Whilst fewer opportunities for PE Learning were illustrated in this research, reflection upon pupils' learning experiences during lockdown can enhance future collaborative approaches between the home and educational settings to benefit parental engagement for children's learning. We detail four implications and recommendations which support each other to facilitate PE Learning.

Dismantle dichotomisation between parental involvement and parental engagement

Lockdowns eliminated parental involvement with school activities (where parents physically come to the educational setting) and increased PI Schooling for school-mandated learning. Given the prevalence of PI Schooling reported in our study, we recognise that parental involvement has limited impact on pupils' achievement (Goodall, 2017) and reflects a deficit model that diminishes the value of parents' diverse contributions and reduces their self-efficacy (Goodall, 2017, 2022a, 2022b; Gorski, 2008). Nevertheless, PI Schooling can act as a conduit through which PE Learning may develop (Goodall, 2017, 2025). Indeed, parental involvement with school and PI Schooling operate in tandem to support children's learning, and activities from these levels continue and can support engagement as part of a continuum (Goodall, 2017). Furthermore, active interest by the parents in their child's school-based curriculum is valued as part of PE Learning (Spear et al., 2023). Goodall (2025) goes further to suggest the dichotomisation 'between parent involvement (with the school and/or with schooling) and parent engagement with learning (generally taking place outside of school) can be dismantled' (p.12) as they are components of the same process, with the same focus. The removal of this duality has implications for future practice and will need monitoring and evaluation by parents and school staff that this approach will support PE Learning. We recognise and agree with Goodall's (2025) premise that ultimately 'learning is learning, whether it takes place in or out of the home, in or out of the school' (p.12).

Strengthen relationships between school staff and parents and value parental capital to reduce barriers

Goodall (2025) re-theorises parental involvement with school (as an institution) to involvement with school staff, to emphasise authentic relationships that support PE Learning and reduce barriers. The concept of 'adults supporting learning' (p.10) rejects responsibility of one group over another, and shifts supporting children's learning from something which is done to parents towards teachers working alongside parents. Supporting parents to share power with teachers regarding their children's learning (Goodall, 2022b) could be nurtured through authentic two-way dialogue between schools and parents about children's learning which is not inadvertently constrained to activities which are academic, school-led or school-centric. Improved communication approaches, identified as positives by participants in our findings, support parental involvement in school and schooling which can then act to help strengthen home–school relationships and facilitate PE Learning (Goodall, 2017, 2025; Willis & Exley, 2022), with engagement mutually supported by parents and teachers (Spear et al., 2023). However, home–school conversations during lockdown, reflected in our findings, were mostly one-way with schools 'giving' information (Goodall, 2017) and teaching staff checking on child engagement with school-mandated activities (DfE, 2021, 2022).

Families struggling with these activities might have felt reassured if other learning opportunities they provided were valued by teachers.

Other learning (non-school-mandated) activities were mentioned by all participant groups in our study, showing potential for PE Learning (Goodall, 2017; Spear et al., 2023; Willis & Exley, 2022), and which can help parents develop self-efficacy, crucial for interactions with schools and contributing to PE Learning, regardless of social status (Goodall et al., 2021) to support equity for all children to achieve. Of critical importance to develop PE Learning is for educators to recognise and value the authentic contributions of parents' cultural capital (Spear et al., 2023) as part of egalitarian relationships between home and school. This can be manifested through appreciating what parents already undertake with self-agency to support learning, rather than parents being held to account through one-size-fits-all norms imposed by society or educational policies – the current status quo. Valuing parents' cultural capital and developing their self-efficacy through promoting the value of other learning activities, especially for marginalised families, counteracts a deficit model of perceiving parent partnerships (Goodall, 2017, 2022b; Gorski, 2008; Spear et al., 2023). One way to begin valuing cultural capital could be to invite parents in as part of a teacher's suggestion to hold curriculum days, for them to share reflections about their interests linked to the curriculum focus, or to promote their profession as part of a career day where parents can present and participate (Goodall, 2017), and which might also help develop their social capital. This approach of parental inclusion echoes that used within the EPIC project (Willis & Exley, 2022) to celebrate parents' cultural capital (Spear et al., 2023) and could develop their social capital, mirroring some of our participants' reflections about connections developing between parents, school staff, and the wider school community.

Many teachers, as parents, supported school-mandated learning during the pandemic (Goodall, 2025), which is a shared, lived experience worth drawing upon when thinking about reducing parent–school staff barriers. Other ways to reduce barriers, particularly for parents reticent to come into the school building, may include hosting off-site activities such as parent evenings in community centres, sports events in parks, and meetings in venues like supermarkets (Goodall, 2017). This may also begin a shift towards affordable or free access to leisure facilities requested by parents in our research. Barriers may also be reduced through embracing parental input and involving them in school wide decisions to inform future planning (Goodall, 2022a). For example, The EPIC project (Willis & Exley, 2022) used affinity spaces for parents, teachers and school leaders to explore opportunities for PE Learning and well-being, including cogenerative dialogues for collaborative curriculum planning.

Increase training for trainee teachers and serving teachers

Our findings not reflecting PE Learning is unsurprising, given its limited presence (Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Jones, Sideropoulos, & Palikara, 2025) or negative connotations (Goodall, 2022b) in ITE and continuing professional development for qualified teachers. Research with 1782 teachers in English schools reveals most have received no training on effective parental engagement or addressing barriers, with nearly three-quarters reporting no training to work with parents facing ‘poverty, language differences, or negative school experiences’ (Jones, Sideropoulos, & Palikara, 2025, p. 16). Similarly, the EEF (2021) reports that ‘fewer than 10% of teachers have undertaken CPD [continuous professional development] on parental engagement’ (p. 6). Moreover, few teachers recognise the importance of parent–child interactions and lack confidence with ‘promoting family-centric engagement with learning at home’ (Jones, Sideropoulos, & Palikara, 2025, p. 17),

focusing instead on less effective, traditional involvement activities (Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Jones, Sideropoulos, & Palikara, 2025). Meanwhile, ITE often focuses on 'difficult conversations' which shape perceptions of problematic interactions, reporting back and one-way communication (Goodall, 2022b). Of importance to our study's implications and recommendations is the need for improved training to navigate effective PE Learning, applicable to both ITE and practising teachers (Jones, Sideropoulos, & Palikara, 2025). Therefore, leaders of ITE and in-service training can drive change by providing clarity about what parental engagement entails and means and exploring effective, positive practices (Goodall, 2017, 2025; Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Jones, Sideropoulos, & Palikara, 2025).

There is inconsistency in ITE approaches about PE Learning (Goodall et al., 2021, 2022; Ryan, 2025). This may be counteracted by establishing training frameworks detailing parent partnership as a core professional attribute supported by policymakers, educators, school leaders and ITE providers (Ryan, 2025). Whilst the English Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITT ECF) – (the ECF is for newly qualified teachers) (DfE, 2024) – details engagement and building relationships with parents, pre-service teachers have limited exposure to families' diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts, reinforcing stereotypical, deficit views which counteract facilitating PE Learning (Goodall, 2017, 2025; Ryan, 2025). Therefore, coursework should address family diversity, poverty, and privilege, and include community interaction to help pre-service teachers value each family's unique background and foster inclusive engagement (Ryan, 2025). For example, Ryan (2025) highlights an Irish ITE module which includes introducing trainees to a Home–School–Community Liaison programme. Module outcomes have reduced trainee apprehensions about their attitudes to parents and improved their communication skills, openness to engage with parent partnerships, genuine affirmation and appreciation of parental contributions to their children's learning and their insights of family diversity, strengths, and barriers. Additionally, spotlighting collaborative *two-way communication* between teachers and parents is also deemed important within training (Ryan, 2025). We suggest this could be located within a school placement as part of an instructional coaching model (Desimone & Pak, 2017) where trainees observe practice modelled by a teacher (expert practitioner), they rehearse practice together, with the trainee subsequently demonstrating this independently. This could be supported by the ITT ECF (DfE, 2024), which positions some training content under the theme of 'Learn how to' to contextualise what the content can look like in practice.

Ryan (2025) also spotlights the integral role of school leaders' commitment to prioritise parent partnerships in continuous school development, and for post-ITE training to be maintained, including through use of communities of practice, focused on family engagement. Alternative forms of connection and communication were stimulated during lockdowns (Montacute & Cullinane, 2021; SMART Technologies, 2022). Developing teachers' professional confidence in technology through training (Knight, 2022; Smale, 2024) about harnessing the use of technological platforms may serve multiple uses. For example, this could be to develop online engagement with communities of practice and professional learning networks (Parkin & Spear, 2024; Ryan, 2025) focused on developing parental engagement. Moreover, training to support schools develop closer relationships with parents through effective communication systems, as suggested by all of our participant groups, could be to nurture online interactions and relationships with parents to value PE Learning and celebrate non-school-mandated learning activities.

Reposition parental engagement within England's educational policy

There are wider societal implications surrounding the challenges identified in this study under the theme of 'contact,' particularly linked to surveillance and the construct of the

deficit model of parental engagement. Central to this concept is that parents, for example, those from marginalised communities, may be deemed inadequate and blamed for their children's poor academic performance if they cannot support school-mandated learning (i.e. PI Schooling). This perception, held by policymakers, governments, educators/the schooling system and wider society, positions these parents as having a deficit which needs fixing (Goodall, 2022b). Addressing this perception is critical, as it resonates with Goodall's (2017) argument that PE Learning can help reduce the achievement gap between children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from more affluent families. Goodall (2017) emphasises the importance of parent autonomy and contributions, highlighting the value of 'parental self-efficacy, of parents feeling confident in their ability to fulfil the role of parents' (p. 126). Policy advice could therefore play a role in supporting parental self-belief. Goodall (2017) also recommends multi-support to parents through a universal offer for parenting classes, which should not have stigma attached to them, but be seen as an offer to parents as part of normal life, similar to the offer of antenatal classes, not located within the school, co-designed by parents and reflecting the local community's needs.

Jones, Banerjee, and Jackson (2025) analyse current English educational policy documentation for how parental engagement is positioned and note that conceptualisations of parental engagement differ and assert this may explain a mismatch between examples of parental engagement underpinned by research and those promoted in schools. We agree with their recommendation for the English Department for Education to work with stakeholders (parents, teachers, leaders of schools and ITE, and researchers) to produce a coherent and refined articulation about a vision for parental engagement, which could then direct an alignment across future policies (Jones, Banerjee, & Jackson, 2025). Whilst change is more successful if not imposed externally but from those on the chalk face implementing policy into practice (Goodall, 2025), joined-up thinking between all parties can facilitate parental engagement. For example, there is an opportunity to foster the need to develop parental relationships and engagement based on its inclusion within the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011), the ITT ECF (DfE, 2024), and the school inspection toolkit (Ofsted, 2025) and be supported by school leaders enacting the headteachers' standards (DfE, 2020b) and by the local and wider community. Moreover, England's Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, acknowledges the importance of parental engagement and not judging parents to inform future English educational policy and training for teachers (Centre for Social Justice, 2025).

Limitations and ideas for future research

It is important to note some limitations when considering the research outcomes. First, relatively small numbers of participants engaged with the survey across the 11 schools (138 parents, 31 teachers, and 6 SLs). It is possible that participants may have been motivated to share their views due to particularly positive or negative experiences or feelings associated with their school's responses during lockdown; it is unknown whether potential participants may have felt more neutral and therefore did not contribute. Moreover, a limited number of school staff responded. The main participant recruitment drive and data collection were undertaken immediately/soon after the third lockdown, which was still an intense period for education during the pandemic. Participation in research was unlikely to be a priority for staff compared with the national drive to overcome dips in academic standards (see Ofsted, 2022). In addition, whilst this study's analysis explored similarities and differences between participant groups, future research could consider similarities and differences between the settings (i.e. early years, primary, secondary, and sixth form).

Secondly, not all participants completed all questions and/or all parts of a single question, including ways forward. Future ideas were also generally limited to being in an unlikely situation of lockdown again. This was to the detriment of considering how broader key issues, aside from lockdown, might be resolved to bring about changes, or what strengths might be built upon, to develop future home–school relationships to support children's learning. Moreover, a few survey questions referred to the term 'home learning', 'learning at home' and 'learning within the home' interchangeably, with parents' responses about learning opportunities in the survey generally appearing to focus on school-mandated learning. This may be the result of an embedded perception held by parents that this was the main learning of value and would be perceived as such by researchers in the field and educators in schools. Moreover, the term 'home learning' used might inadvertently narrow the parental focus to academic tasks and future studies could consider using more neutral terminology, for example, through using a single, neutral term of 'learning' in its surveys.

A strength of this research was drawing on parents, teachers and SLs' perspectives, rather than an isolated group. Future research could develop this multi-stakeholder approach between schools and their home communities, but being mindful that parental engagement with the school institution is not the same as their being engaged with their children's learning (Goodall, 2017). Research could be conducted through a form of research and knowledge exchange within authentic partnerships (i.e. non-judgemental and away from deficit conceptualisations of viewing parent partnerships), comprising school staff, parents, and researchers to co-design and explore approaches for parental engagement and co-construct research opportunities around this theme to benefit their children's learning, similar to that seen within the Australian EPIC project (Willis & Exley, 2022). This also values parents as collaborative learners within the process of developing parental engagement. Moreover, if facilitated by researchers at teacher training institutions and incorporated into their programmes, this could benefit trainee teachers to develop their awareness of authentic and collaborative parental engagement to support children's learning, an area deemed important for Initial Teacher Education (Goodall et al., 2021; Ryan, 2025).

In light of our findings, we concur with Jones, Sideropoulos, and Palikara's (2025) assertion that future research can facilitate raising the awareness for educators and policymakers about the evidence and importance of parent–child interactions which should drive their efforts to develop PE Learning. Meanwhile, Jones, Banerjee, and Jackson (2025) highlight that future research could explore in greater depth the function of teachers, school leaders and ITE practitioners in enacting PE Learning policy, and identify potential barriers, such as teacher workload, to help adapt and facilitate future practice around parental engagement.

By rethinking learning (Zhao, 2020), experiences afforded by the pandemic lockdowns enable opportunities for stronger and more trusting home–school relationships, and for those in education to appreciate the strength of parents as collaborative partners (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020) to benefit children's learning.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data are available from the corresponding author, Ashley Brett, upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Approval was obtained from the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Committee in July 2021 (Ethics approval number: 20.5.6.10).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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