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Three tenets of effective Pupil Premium practice

For this Best Practice Focus, ***Matt Bromley*** describes three steps of Pupil Premium practice – touching upon identifying barriers, planning solutions, success criteria, evaluating impact, early intervention, language and literacy, cultural capital, literacy, numeracy, and transition

Identify barriers, plan your solutions and evaluate impact

The Pupil Premium was introduced by the coalition government in 2011 and is money given to schools to help support disadvantaged pupils – "disadvantaged" being defined by three categories.

First, pupils who are categorised as "Ever 6 FSM" – meaning those who are recorded in the school census as eligible for free school meals (FSM) now or in any of the previous six years.

Second, pupils who are looked after, adopted from care or who have left care, including those on a special guardianship order or child arrangements order.

Third, those categorised as "Ever 6 service children" – meaning pupils recorded as a service child now or in any of the previous six years.

Limited impact?

Since the Pupil Premium was introduced, its success has been variable. The gap has closed fastest in schools with the highest concentration of disadvantaged pupils. In contrast, schools with the lowest proportions have seen the gap widen, particularly at key stages 2 and 4. This suggests that disadvantaged children are not prioritised when they are in the extreme minority (Hutchinson & Dunford, 2016).

What is more, the overall gap has widened. One in three children in the UK now grows up in poverty and the attainment gap between rich and poor is detectable at an early age (Barnard, 2018).

The limited impact of the Pupil Premium can, I believe, be attributed to several factors.

First, FSM eligibility is a poor proxy for educational and social disadvantage. Indeed, as many as 50 to 75 per cent of FSM children are not in the lowest income households. What is more, it is often the time-poor and the poorly educated who are less engaged and motivated at school, rather than those facing economic deprivation (Hobbs & Vignoles, 2010).

That is not to suggest that a majority of pupils from poorer households do not have difficulties at school and are not deserving of additional funds to help close the gap, but it is important to note that other pupils not currently eligible for the Pupil Premium are also academically disadvantaged and equally deserving of our attention.

Second, Pupil Premium children are not a homogeneous group and there are often significant differences among all those eligible. It is wrong to group together Pupil Premium children and assume they all face the same challenges (and must therefore be served the same solutions).

Third, closing the gap is more difficult for some schools because the size of the gap is necessarily dependent on your non-Pupil Premium demographic. Put simply, the more advantaged this cohort, the harder it is to close the gap.

Finally, Pupil Premium data is often meaningless because assessments change and the Pupil Premium cohort itself changes over time – not least as a result of recent benefits reforms which have taken a large number of pupils out of eligibility despite no discernible differences in their circumstances. Furthermore, in-school sample sizes are usually too small to make inferences and this also means that a school's "closing the gap" data is often meaningless.

All of which is not to suggest that we should abandon the Pupil Premium or hope of closing the gap. But we need to recognise the limitations of the current funding system and use common sense and pragmatism when analysing our data.

We need to ensure that we focus on every child in a school, not just those eligible for discrete funding, and work on a case-by-case basis to understand the barriers that some pupils face.

ALL IMAGES ADOBE STOCK

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The three-point plan

In this Best Practice Focus, I will be exploring my three-point plan for Pupil Premium success:

1 Identify the barriers.
2 Plan the solutions.
3 Agree the success criteria.

1, Identify the barriers

Before you can put in place intervention strategies, you must understand why a gap exists between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils.

This may sound obvious but it is a step often missed by schools who assume that all Pupil Premium pupils must be disadvantaged and similarly so. However, when identifying the barriers to learning in your school, it is important to remember that not all the pupils who are eligible will face all, or even some, of the barriers I set out below – and there is no such thing as a typical Pupil Premium child.

Rather, each child must be treated on an individual basis and the support given must be tailored to meet their needs, not the needs of a homogenous group. As such, schools should identify, on a case-by-case basis, what, if any, barriers to learning these pupils face.

Let me emphasise this: not all pupils who come from socio-economically deprived homes will struggle at school and do less well than their affluent peers. A majority will, but it is not set in stone. In short, avoid stereotypes and work hard to understand the truth for each of your pupils.

When seeking to identify barriers to learning, here are some possible answers to look out for:

- Pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) having limited vocabulary.
- Poor attendance/punctuality.
- Mobility issues caused by a pupil moving between schools.
- Issues within a pupil's family.
- Medical issues (undiagnosed?).
- A lack of sleep or poor nutrition.
- A lack of family engagement with learning.
- Education not being valued within the local community.
- A lack of role models, especially male role models.
- A lack of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Before I explore step 2 – how we should plan solutions – I want to focus on the most common cause of disadvantage among our pupils: language and literacy skills.

Language and literacy

A report by the Resolution Foundation predicts that by 2023, 37 per cent of children will live in poverty – the highest proportion since the early 1990s (Corlett, 2019).

At the same time, the academic achievement gap between rich and poor is detectable from an early age – as early as 22 months – and the gap continues to widen as children travel through the education system (Sharples et al, 2011).

Children from the lowest income homes are half as likely to get five good GCSEs and go on to higher education as the national average. And White working-class pupils (particularly boys) are among our lowest performers. However, whatever their ethnic background, pupils eligible for FSM underperform compared to those who are not (Sharples et al, 2011).

In short, if you are a high ability pupil from a low-income home (and, therefore, a low social class), you are not going to do as well in school and in later life as a low ability pupil from a higher income home and higher social class.

Interestingly, the gap does not grow at a consistent rate. If you were to divide the gap that exists by the age of 16 into fifths, two would already be present by the age of five, one would have developed during primary school and two during secondary school. Two-thirds of the primary school component develops during Reception and key stage 1 (Hutchinson & Dunford, 2016).

In other words, educational disadvantage starts early and these gaps are particularly pronounced in early language and literacy.

By the age of three, disadvantaged children are – on average – already almost 18 months behind their more affluent peers in their early language development. Around two-fifths of disadvantaged five-year-olds are not meeting the expected literacy standard for their age (Hutchinson & Dunford, 2016).

The Pupil Premium should, therefore, be spent on improving literacy and language skills...

Early intervention

Black and William (2018) argue that: "Children from working class families, who are only familiar with the restricted code of their everyday language, may find it difficult to engage with the elaborated code that is required by the learning discourse of the classroom and which those from middle class families experience in their home lives."

Children born into families who read books, newspapers and magazines, visit museums, art galleries, zoos, take regular holidays, watch the news and documentaries, and talk about current affairs, what they are reading or doing develop what is called cultural capital.

These children acquire an awareness of the world around them, an understanding of how life works, and a language with which to explain it all. This cultural capital provides a solid foundation on which to build more knowledge, skills and understanding.

> *"By the age of three, more disadvantaged children are – on average – already almost 18 months behind their more affluent peers in their early language development"*

Those children not born and brought up in such knowledge-rich environments, and who therefore do not develop this foundation of cultural capital, do not do as well in school because new knowledge and skills have nothing to "stick" to or build upon.

These children may come from broken or transitory homes, be in care, have impoverished parents who work two or more jobs and so spend little time at home or are too exhausted when they get home from work to read to or converse with their children.

Let us be clear – educational disadvantage is an accident of birth. It is not about ability, innate or otherwise. But, unfortunately, a child's birth is often their destiny.

The Matthew Effect

The Matthew Effect is a term coined by Daniel Rigney (2010) in his book of the same name, using a title taken from a passage in the Bible (Matthew 13:12) that proclaims: "The rich shall get richer and the poor shall get poorer."

In the context of academic disadvantage, the Matthew Effect posits that disadvantaged pupils shall get more disadvantaged because they do not possess the foundational knowledge they need in order to access and understand the school curriculum.

Put simply, the more you know, the easier it is to know more and so the culturally rich will always stay ahead of the impoverished, and the gap between rich and poor will continue to grow as children travel through our education system.

The new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (2019) also highlights the importance of cultural capital. From September 2019 inspectors will judge the extent to which schools are equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.

Ofsted's definition of this knowledge and cultural capital matches that found in the aims of the national curriculum: namely, that it is "the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement".

The best use of Pupil Premium funding, therefore, is to help disadvantaged pupils to build

their cultural capital. The next big question, then, is: how?

Cultural capital = word power

Cultural capital takes one tangible form: a pupil's vocabulary. The size of a pupil's vocabulary in their early years of schooling (the number and variety of words that the young person knows) is a significant predictor of academic attainment in later schooling and of success in life (Save the Children, 2016; Parsons & Schoon, 2011).

Most children are experienced speakers of the language when they begin school but reading the language requires more complex, abstract vocabulary than that used in everyday conversation.

Young people who develop reading skills early in their lives by reading frequently add to their vocabularies exponentially over time (David, 2010).

In *The Matthew Effect*, Rigney explains: "While good readers gain new skills very rapidly, and quickly move from learning to read to reading to learn, poor readers become increasingly frustrated with the act of reading, and try to avoid reading where possible. Pupils who begin with high verbal aptitudes find themselves in verbally enriched social environments and have a double advantage."

Furthermore, ED Hirsch, in *The Schools We Need* (1999), says that "the children who possess intellectual capital when they first arrive at school have the mental scaffolding and Velcro to catch hold of what is going on, and they can turn the new knowledge into still more Velcro to gain still more knowledge".

Research shows that, by the age of seven, the gap in the vocabulary known by children in the top and bottom quartiles is something like 4,000 words; children in the top quartile know around 7,000 words (Biemiller, 2004).

For this reason, when planning to use the Pupil Premium to build cultural capital we need to understand the importance of vocabulary and support its development so that children who do not develop this foundational knowledge before they start school are helped to catch up.

Building word power

So what can we do to help the word poor become richer? One answer is to plan group work activities which provide an opportunity for the word poor to mingle with the word rich, to hear language being used by pupils of their own age and in ways that they might not otherwise encounter.

> *"The size of a pupil's vocabulary in their early years of schooling is a significant predictor of academic attainment in later schooling and of success in life"*

In other words, schools need to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have equal access to a knowledge-rich diet and provide cultural experiences in addition to, not in place of, the school curriculum.

This might involve spending Pupil Premium money on museum and gallery visits, or on mentors who talk with pupils about what is happening in the world, perhaps reading a daily newspaper with them before school or at lunchtime.

Another answer is to provide additional intervention classes for the disadvantaged (taking place outside the taught timetable to avoid withdrawing pupils from classes) in which we teach and model higher order reading skills because, as the literate adults in the room, teachers use these skills subconsciously all the time so we need to make the implicit explicit.

For example, we could use these intervention sessions to model:

- Moving quickly through and across texts.
- Locating key pieces of information.
- Following the gist of articles.
- Questioning a writer's facts or interpretation.
- Linking one text with another.
- Making judgements about whether one text is better, more reliable, or more interesting than another.

We can also use Pupil Premium funding to promote the love of reading for the sake of reading – encouraging pupils to see reading as something other than a functional activity.

It is the responsibility of every adult working in a school (not just teachers and certainly not just English teachers) to show that reading because we like reading is one of the hallmarks of civilised adult life.

Community outreach

We know that the attainment gap emerges early in a child's life and that, therefore, the child's family is crucial in helping to close that gap. We know, too, that reading books from an early age is a vital weapon in the battle for social mobility.

As such, Pupil Premium funding can legitimately – and wisely – be used to support community projects such as reading mentor schemes, helping improve parents' literacy levels and encouraging parents to engage with education.

The Pupil Premium can be used, for example, to fund a community outreach officer who helps educate disadvantaged or hard-to-reach parents about the work of the school and how best to support young people with their education, who can advocate the use of community facilities such as libraries, museums and galleries, or who could lead cultural visits after school at weekends and in the holidays for those children who would not otherwise enjoy such experiences.

2, Planning the strategies

The second action in my three-point plan is to plan the solutions. There are, I believe, some common principles that we need to consider when deciding which strategies to use.

First, we should ensure our strategies promote an ethos of attainment for all pupils, rather than stereotyping disadvantaged pupils as a group with less potential.

Second, we should take an individualised approach to addressing barriers to learning and emotional support and do so at an early stage, rather than providing access to generic support as pupils near their end-of-key-stage assessments.

Third, we should focus on outcomes for individual pupils rather than on providing generic strategies for whole cohorts.

Fourth, we should deploy our best staff to support disadvantaged pupils; perhaps develop existing teachers' and teaching assistants' skills rather than using additional staff who do not know the pupils.

Fifth, we should make decisions based on frequent assessment data,

responding to changing evidence, rather than use a one-off decision point.

And finally, we should focus on high-quality teaching first rather than bolt-on strategies and activities outside school hours and outside the classroom.

Context is all and you must make decisions based on what you know about your own pupils. Having said that, in addition to building cultural capital as already discussed, I believe that Pupil Premium funding can usefully be focused on three key areas:

- Improving pupils' transition from primary school.
- Developing pupils' cross-curricular literacy skills.
- Developing pupils' cross-curricular numeracy skills.

Transition

According to Galton et al (1999), almost 40 per cent of children fail to make expected progress during the year immediately following a

change of schools, and Department for Education data from 2011 shows that average progress drops between key stage 2 and 3 for reading, writing and maths.

Moreover, the effects of transition are amplified by risk factors such as poverty and ethnicity. Those pupils eligible for Pupil Premium are, therefore, among those most likely to suffer when they change schools.

Although schools cannot mitigate all of the social and emotional affects of transition, they can do more to help pupils make the academic leap more smoothly and successfully.

There are five aspects of transition where Pupil Premium funding may be usefully employed...

1, Administration

Improve the general management of the transition process such as the formal liaison between a secondary school and its feeder primaries. In practice, this might take the form of the transfer of pupil records and achievement data, meetings with pupils and parents, and visits from headteachers, senior leaders and teachers.

> *"Numeracy skills, like literacy skills, are gateway skills that enable pupils to access and succeed in the whole school curriculum"*

2, Social and emotional

Forge better links between pupils/parents and their new school prior to and immediately after transfer. Funding can also be used to smooth the pupil induction process into their new school and might take the form of induction days, open evenings, school orientation activities, team-building days, taster classes, the production and issuing of prospectuses and booklets, etc.

3, Curriculum

Improve curriculum continuity between the primary and secondary phases of education by funding teachers to share plans that show what content is taught on either side of the transition. Pupil Premium could fund cross-phase teaching, the teaching of bridging units at the end of year 6 and start of year 7, summer schools, joint CPD networks and INSET days, the sharing of good practice and shared planning, and teacher exchanges.

4, Pedagogy

Establish a shared understanding of how pupils are taught as well as how they learn in order to achieve a greater continuity in classroom practice and teaching. This might be achieved by understanding differing teaching styles and skills, by shared CPD and teacher exchanges, and by primary and secondary teachers observing each other in practice.

5, Management of learning

Ensure that pupils are active participants, rather than passive observers, in the transition process. This might be achieved by empowering pupils and their parents with information about achievement and with the confidence to articulate their learning needs.

Numeracy

I have already touched upon how the Pupil Premium might be used to support the development of literacy skills. However, numeracy skills are also gateway skills that enable pupils to access and succeed in the whole school curriculum. Numeracy skills are also vital for success in work and life and can help to mitigate the effects of socio-economic deprivation.

Numeracy can be divided into four categories:

- Handling information.
- Space, shape and measurements.
- Operations and calculations.
- Numbers.

Handling information is about graphs and charts, comparing sets of data and types of data, processing data, and probability.

Space, shape and measurements is about both space, shape and measure, and solving problems with space, shape and measure.

Operations and calculations is about addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, number operations, and the effective use of calculators.

Numbers is about using numbers, whole numbers, size and order, place value, patterns and sequences, and numbers "in-between" whole numbers.

In addition, numeracy encompasses three sets of skills:

- Reasoning.
- Problem-solving.
- wwDecision-making.

Reasoning might involve identifying structures, being systematic, searching for patterns, developing logical thinking, and predicting and checking.

Problem-solving might involve identifying the information needed to carry out a task, breaking down a problem or task into smaller parts, interpreting solutions in context, and making mental estimates to check the reasonableness of an answer.

Decision-making might involve choosing appropriate strategies, identifying relevant information and choosing the right tools and equipment.

With these key skills in mind, funding can be used for teacher CPD to raise awareness of how to teach numeracy across the curriculum.

For example, in English, numeracy can be developed by using non-fiction texts which include mathematical vocabulary, graphs, charts and tables.

In science, pupils will order numbers including decimals, calculate means, and percentages, use negative numbers when taking temperatures, substitute into formulae, rearrange equations, decide which graph to use to represent data, and plot, interpret and predict from graphs.

In ICT, pupils will collect and classify data, enter it into data handling software to produce graphs and tables, and interpret and explain the results. When they use computer models and simulations they will draw on their abilities to manipulate numbers and identify patterns and relationships.

In art, design and technology, pupils will use measurements and patterns, spatial ideas, the properties of shapes, and symmetry, and use multiplication and ratio to enlarge and reduce the size of objects.

In history, geography and RE, pupils will collect data and use measurements of different kinds. They will study maps and use coordinates and ideas of angles, direction, position, scale, and ratio. And they will use timelines similar to number lines.

Funding can also be used for numeracy intervention strategies.

At the whole-school level, funding might help create a positive environment that celebrates numeracy and provides pupils with role models by celebrating the numeracy successes of older pupils.

At subject level, funding may be used to provide high-quality exemplar materials and display examples of numeracy work within a subject context. Departments could highlight opportunities for the use of numeracy within their subject and ensure that the learning materials that are presented to pupils match both their capability in the subject and their numerical demands.

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When interventions work

For each of the above areas, it is important to consider the best individual approach. My experience suggests that interventions work best when they are short-term, intensive, focused, and tailored.

Short-term

The best interventions help pupils to become increasingly independent over time. In other words, the scaffolds slowly fall away. Interventions should, therefore, be planned to run for a finite amount of time, ideally less than a term. Of course, if the evidence shows the intervention is working but that further improvement is needed, then the intervention can be extended, but to slate an intervention for a year, say, is often misguided.

Intensive

Similarly, interventions should be intensive, perhaps with three or more sessions a week rather than just one. And those sessions should also be intensive in the sense of being short, say 20 to 50 minutes in length rather than an hour or more.

Focused

Interventions should be keenly focused on a pupil's areas of development rather than be generic. For example, rather than setting a goal of, say, "improving a pupil's literacy skills", an intervention strategy should be focused on a specific aspect of literacy such as their knowledge of the plot of *Stone Cold* or their ability to use embedded quotations in an essay.

Tailored

Interventions need to be tailored to meet the needs of those pupils accessing them. They must be as personalised as any classroom learning and not be "off the peg" programmes. Assessment data should be used to inform the intervention and to ensure it is being pitched appropriately to fill gaps in the pupil's knowledge.

3, Agree success criteria

You need to be clear about what success will look like. Ask yourself: what do I expect to see as an outcome? What is my aim here? For example, is it to: raise attainment, expedite progress, improve attendance, improve behaviour, reduce exclusions, improve parental engagement, or expand the number of opportunities afforded to disadvantaged pupils?

Whatever your immediate goal is, ultimately you should be seeking to diminish the difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in your school and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally, as well as narrowing your within-school gap.

As such, if your initial aim is pastoral in nature, for example to improve behaviour and attendance, or reduce exclusions, then you must take it a step further and peg it to an academic outcome (even though pastoral outcomes are important in themselves).

Evaluating impact

It is crucial that any intervention strategy is monitored as it is happening and not just evaluated once it is finished. The monitoring may involve more anecdotal data such as pupil and teacher feedback, but evidence must be gathered throughout the timespan of the intervention in order to ensure it is working – or working as well as it could – and so that timely decisions can be taken to stop or tweak an intervention if it is not having the desired effect on pupil progress.

Waiting until the intervention has finished to evaluate its success is too late: if it did not work or did not work as well as it could have done, then time and money have been wasted.

What works?

Many schools turn to the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit and Early Years Toolkit when deciding which intervention strategies will work best.

The two toolkits present more than 40 approaches to improving teaching and learning, each summarised in terms of its average impact on attainment, its cost and the strength of the evidence.

The results are presented as an estimate of the average impact in terms of expected extra months of progress and based on an effect size estimate derived from the meta-analyses and the research available.

On top of the toolkits, which cover the early years and five to 16 education, the EEF publishes guidance reports providing actionable recommendations.

In *SecEd*'s Best Practice Focus 4 (Bromley, 2019) I wrote about some of the most effective strategies listed within the toolkits. However, I also gave some health warnings for users of the toolkits, not least about interpreting the results of the EEF's

meta-analyses and the blanket use of interventions.

On the latter point, I warned that rarely is there any initial theorising about precisely why some pupils are not doing as well in a certain area or of the actual barriers some of these pupils face.

Also worth reading on this point is Phil Naylor's article for *SecEd*, *An intervention epidemic?* (*SecEd*, 2019).

Exercising caution

While we are finally becoming an evidence-informed profession, we should always exercise caution. We should not regard the data as an oracle, rather we should contest it and balance what the evidence suggests with what we know from our own experiences or contexts.

We should also analyse the original studies on which the EEF effect sizes are based, because the averages may hide huge variations.

Teaching is a highly complex, nuanced art-form and we would do well not to reduce it to statistics, for only madness lies that way. SecEd

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