
Evaluation of the Extra Mile

Christopher Chapman¹, Denis Mongon¹, Daniel Muijs², Julian Williams¹, Maria Pampaka¹, Daniel Wakefield¹ and Sara Weiner¹

1 = University of Manchester

2 = University of Southampton

Introduction

The former Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the Department for Education) commissioned the University of Manchester to undertake an evaluation of the Extra Mile (EM).

The EM trialled a series of activities in both primary and secondary schools identified during visits by Schools Standards Advisers (SSAs)¹ as being critical to increasing attainment amongst the most deprived pupils. The EM assessed the extent to which the impact of these activities could be harnessed and realised in other contexts. Specifically, the EM aimed to:

- raise the aspirations and attainment of disadvantaged pupils, and to engage them in their own education
- narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers
- transfer identified school improvement processes and key activities which have been particularly successful in raising aspirations and attainment in trial schools to other schools with similar intakes.

This research brief presents the findings of the evaluation of the EM.

Key Findings

- Qualitative evidence, considered alongside a limited range of performance data, suggests that the EM is likely to be associated with a positive impact on pupil attainment, achievement, confidence and ambition.
- The analysis revealed one statistically significant difference between pupils taking part in EM activities and a matched sample of pupils not taking part. In relation to 'points scored at GCSE', EM pupils performed better than the comparator group. The evaluation did not identify any other statistically significant differences in performance.

¹ School Standards Advisers, now The Effective Practice Team, are consultants who work with discretion in a civil service context and support policies of the government of the day. Each member is a qualified teacher and has worked as an HMI, a head teacher or held a senior position in a local authority.

- EM has stimulated a focus on the attainment gap between FSM-eligible and non-eligible pupils and increased the motivation and confidence of staff and pupils to address this gap. During evaluation interviews, school leaders, staff, pupils and local authority (LA) officers all reported observing improvements in either attainment, achievement, confidence or levels of ambition.
- Schools comfortably aligned EM activities and support with their own strategic planning and with other initiatives. In general schools implemented EM in a faithful way. Schools consistently developed activities which could be categorised within the EM activity framework for their phase and which were focussed on the target group of FSM children with the intention of raising the attainment of that group faster than other averages.
- Embedding the principles of EM was more important to schools than sustaining its activities. That said, two thirds of schools intended to continue running EM activities either in the same format, or with adjustments.
- The continuing effect of EM is more likely to be a 'legacy' than a sustainable activity. Interviewees consistently reported that EM had changed the long-term attitudes and approaches of staff in relation to recognising potential, reinforcing accountability, developing shared professional learning and building social capital.

Background

In 2007, SSAs visited 45 primary and 50 secondary schools that had successfully raised the attainment of pupils from some of the most disadvantaged wards in England. From these visits, 12 common activities in secondary schools were identified as being critical to this increase in attainment, and seven activities in primary schools. The EM trial was set up to see if other schools, with similar intakes, could adopt these activities with the same success.

The EM operated in three phases: Phase 1 (secondary) in 2008-9 involved 23 secondary schools across 11 LAs, Phase 2 (secondary) in 2009-10 involved 60 schools across 30 LAs. Phase 1 (primary) began in September 2009 to run for one year and involved 40 schools forming self-supportive clusters of four across ten LAs. A SSA visited each EM school usually once per term to meet with key people involved in implementing the project and also offered continuous telephone support. The role of the SSA was to provide critical friendship and monitor progress against the school's EM action plan.

Research Methods

The evaluation was guided by the following research questions:

- Is being part of the EM a particular catalyst for narrowing the FSM achievement gap?
- In what EM activity did schools engage?
- What are the drivers for and challenges to sustainability of any observed EM impact, both within schools and across their LAs?

To address these questions a mixed methods design was developed to provide a quantitative analysis of achievement data combined with qualitative reviews of MI, telephone interviews with key EM personnel in schools or LAs and narrative accounts of practice based on interviews conducted at 14 case study schools. Specifically, the evaluation involved:

- **Quantitative analysis of impact** - this aimed to assess the extent to which pupils in receipt of EM interventions exceeded (or otherwise) their expected levels of achievement at Key Stages 2 and 4 compared to a matched sample of pupils from the same schools. The 'core' EM sample was small, consisting of 196 pupils, who came from 9 secondary and 2 primary schools. The comparative sample

consisted of 4794 pupils. Descriptive analysis and Generalised Linear Modelling were used to compare performance. Due to the low sample size of EM pupils, the results of this analysis should be treated with caution and are solely indicative.

- **Qualitative analysis of impact, activity and sustainability** - The qualitative analysis included a review of MI provided by 37 EM schools, a series of 53 telephone interviews with LAs and participant schools, and case study visits to 14 EM schools which included interviews with staff and EM pupils and the analysis of relevant documentary evidence.

Findings

Impact

- Participating schools reported that the EM was a worthwhile project with positive outcomes for pupils and staff. It stimulated a focus in schools on the attainment gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM. Involvement with the EM increased the motivation of staff and pupils and raised their confidence in tackling this particular gap. The processes adopted as part of the EM and their associated emergent outcomes have encouraged them to believe the gap can be reduced.
- The analysis of national data revealed one statistically significant difference between pupils taking part in EM activities and a matched sample of pupils not taking part. In relation to 'points scored at GCSE', EM pupils performed better than the comparator group. The analysis did not identify any other statistically significant differences in performance.
- In the research interviews, school leaders, staff, pupils and local authority (LA) officers used a local mixture of mainly impressionistic information and, occasionally, numeric data to describe improvements in pupil attainment, achievement, confidence and ambition. All of the respondents reported that they had observed some improvement.
- Most schools commented on how early it was to expect measurable improvement in attainment based on EM activity. Fewer than half of the case study schools made a direct reference to internal, short-term measures which might be used to track attainment, especially between or ahead of end of Key Stage assessments.

Activity

- Overall, schools comfortably aligned EM activities and support with their own strategic planning and with other initiatives. This flexibility was almost universally described as a positive feature of EM. In the main, this involved schools accommodating or moulding EM activity around their own school's existing priorities and extending any associated activities.
- With one or two exceptions where local activity deviated, schools implemented EM in a faithful way. Schools consistently developed activities which could be categorised within the EM activity framework for their phase and which were focussed on the target group of FSM pupils with the intention of raising the attainment of that group faster than other averages.
- Schools adapted the EM framework in a variety of ways, accommodating local interests and priorities whilst remaining consistent with the framework.

Sustainability

- All but one of the case study schools talked about the continuing effect of EM in very positive terms. At the one school where senior leaders spoke less positively about continuation, there was a

commitment to review their position when the case study interviews revealed the depth of the students' continuing commitment.

- Based on comments from the large majority of schools, it would be more appropriate to describe the continuing effect of EM in terms of a legacy rather than sustainability. For most schools, embedding the principles of EM was more important than embedding particular activities.
- Although around two thirds of the case study schools intended to continue some EM activity, most were uncertain. Funding issues were described by a minority of schools as a critical factor in that uncertainty. Schools occasionally reported that the initial activity had run its course – their learning showed that it needed to be replaced by a new activity or, in some cases, had revealed underlying issues which needed to be addressed differently.
- Interviewees consistently reported that EM had changed the attitudes and approaches of staff, notably the recognition of potential, the reinforcement of accountability, the development of shared professional learning and the building of social capital. While particular EM activities might or might not be sustainable, the EM appears to have created a positive cultural legacy embedded in those changes.

Conclusion

EM benefited from six features of its approach:

EM was aligned with the values of local participants - it was highly regarded by school leaders and teachers because it focused on issues that resonated with their values and priorities, even if they did not realise that at first contact. This alignment was a source of energy and commitment for everyone involved.

EM provided a non-prescriptive framework for activity - it provided an agenda for engagement and an overarching framework for change without being interpreted by schools as a top-down, centrally imposed directive. The EM approach encouraged schools to reflect on their context and the action needed to improve the situation. This 'socialised' the issues and created ownership at school-level from an early stage. The freedom and space provided within the EM framework had a positive impact on staff motivation. Most staff viewed EM as a project or series of projects developed by the school for their community with support from government.

EM raised awareness of a compelling issue for improvement - it was very successful at raising awareness of the nature and complexity of key issues for school improvement. Some schools were unaware that the FSM achievement gap was a core issue; some were naïve in their approach to within-school variation; others were 'data rich' but showed a poor understanding of how to use data to inform improvement.

EM allowed local contexts to determine the design of local activity - it helped schools to develop their capacity for localised problem solving. EM supported schools to develop tactics and strategies that worked in their context while still adhering to the core values and overarching aims of the EM.

EM offered good quality external support and critical friendship – EM schools appreciated the contribution of the SSAs who worked with them. In most cases their work was highly valued by the schools and the critical friendship they provided made a positive contribution to EM.

EM promoted, but did not impose opportunities for collaboration - it provided opportunities for different types of collaboration which was reflective of the diverse range of schools and localities engaged in EM.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>
Further information about this research can be obtained from
John Screeton, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT
John.SCREENON@education.gsi.gov.uk

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.