Evaluation of Pupil Premium

Research Brief

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Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report, commissioned by the Department for Education, presents the findings of an independent evaluation of the Pupil Premium. The Pupil Premium takes the form of additional funding allocated to schools on the basis of the numbers of children entitled to and registered for free school meals (FSM) and children who have been looked after continuously for more than six months. Schools received £488 per eligible pupil - approximately 18% of the pupil population - in 2011-12 and £623 per eligible pupil in 2012-13. Eligibility was widened to cover approximately 27% of the population in 2012-13 with the inclusion of those recorded as eligible for FSM at any point in the last six years. The expectation is that this additional funding will be used to support Pupil Premium eligible pupils and close the attainment gap between them and their peers. A survey of schools during the Autumn term of 2012 to collect quantitative information and financial data, case studies and analysis of the National Pupil Database were conducted to investigate how Pupil Premium funding is being spent by schools in England. The evaluation aims to answer the following specific questions:

- How have primary, secondary and special schools, and pupil referral units within the sample spent Pupil Premium funds?

- How do schools decide how to spend the Pupil Premium?

- Are there differences in the use of Pupil Premium funds between schools with different characteristics? (In particular are there differences between schools with high, medium and low proportions of FSM pupils?)

- What do schools perceive the impact of Pupil Premium funding to have been so far?

- What do schools plan to do with Pupil Premium funding in future years?

Key findings

Identifying and targeting disadvantaged pupils for support

Schools in the survey were using a wide range of criteria to define disadvantage, not just Free School Meals (FSM) and looked after children[1]. They often combined funding from the Pupil Premium with funding from other sources in order to sustain provision targeted at a wide range of disadvantaged pupils. This range included, but was not restricted to, members of those groups of pupils who attracted the Pupil Premium.

Case study schools were all aware of which pupils were entitled to FSM, though in some cases they were not aware of how to identify pupils who fell into the 'Ever6' category who have also attracted the Pupil Premium since 2012-13. They were also usually aware of a wide range of other factors which might act as barriers to learning, including whether pupils were looked after. All of the schools were aware that they were expected to pay particular attention to the needs of the pupils who attracted the Pupil Premium. However, they were usually reluctant to use FSM entitlement as the only criterion for making additional provision, preferring instead to make such provision on the basis of their assessment of educational rather than economic need.

Most schools surveyed (91% of PRUs, 90% of special schools, 84% of primary schools and 78% of secondary schools) aimed their support at all disadvantaged pupils (according to their definition of disadvantage) but a minority targeted specific groups or individuals – most commonly those with low attainment or not making good progress. Most primary and secondary schools (69% and 73% respectively) had different support for different age groups.

Over three-quarters of schools surveyed (88% of primary schools, 84% of secondary schools, 78% of special schools and 75% of PRUs) had encouraged families to register for FSM since the introduction of the Pupil Premium. In most cases this was an activity they would have undertaken anyway and was not done because of the Pupil Premium. However, when encouraging families to register for FSM, most schools surveyed (80% of both primary and secondary schools) did tell parents that this would increase the funding the school gets. Some case study schools suggested they were prevented from encouraging registration by risks of stigma and the potential demands of parents aware of the way Pupil Premium funding is allocated.

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[1] The Pupil Premium is allocated to schools for pupils who have been recorded as eligible for FSM at any point in the last six years, known as 'Ever6 Free School Meals' and pupils who have been looked after continuously for more than six months by the local authority.

Selecting and providing effective interventions for disadvantaged pupils

The types of support schools offered were determined by the needs of their pupils: the case studies found some schools with evidence-based systems for assessing the needs of pupils. These systems appeared to be sophisticated, though it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to observe their operation in detail. Not all support was directly aimed at raising attainment. Some support focused on wider issues in children's and families' lives, particularly where schools perceived these to be a 'barrier to learning' and felt that dealing with them would lead to improved attainment.

All schools in the survey were offering a range of different types of support to help pupils they considered to be disadvantaged such as: additional support both inside and outside the classroom (including one-to-one tutoring and small group teaching); additional staff (which may include teaching assistants, extra teachers, learning mentors and family support workers – schools were not asked which of these they were using); school trips; out of hours activities; provision of materials or resources; parental support; and support from specialist services[2]. Primary and secondary schools with higher proportions of FSM pupils tended to offer more types of support. This range of support had been built up over time, not introduced since Pupil Premium funding began.

The biggest items of expenditure amongst surveyed schools were support for pupils focused on learning in the curriculum and social, emotional and behavioural support. Secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRU) also had a substantial amount of expenditure on alternative learning pathways and curriculum[3]. The pattern of expenditure across types of provision did not differ significantly by level of FSM in schools. The expenditure reported by surveyed schools does not relate solely to those funded by the Pupil Premium as schools were reporting all expenditure for their definitions of disadvantaged pupils.

In general, schools had been providing support for pupils they saw as disadvantaged before the introduction of the Pupil Premium and the most common resource they used when deciding how to spend the Pupil Premium was their own experience of what works (used by over 90% of schools surveyed). The case studies suggest that this evidence often included careful monitoring of the impacts of support on these pupils. However, many schools were also using other sources, particularly evidence from other schools (70% or more amongst different types of schools) and academic research (45% or more).

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[2] Additional support inside and outside the classroom, additional staff and school trips were all offered by 90% of schools or more, the other types of provision mentioned above were all offered by at least 70% of schools.

[3] These are alternatives for pupils who are having difficulties with the traditional learning pathway. For example, arrangements with a local FE College or other provider to deliver specific courses or programmes resulting in qualifications such as BTEC; ASDAN; PECI.

Most schools surveyed (around 70% or more) were working with other schools, their local authority and/or external providers in order to provide support for pupils, and many schools were pooling budgets with other schools when doing so. The case studies found that external providers (including the local authority) were important for providing services the school itself would not be able to offer, such as educational psychologists.

Almost all surveyed schools considered the types of support they were offering to be effective, but the type of support most consistently likely to be considered *very* effective was additional staff: around three-quarters (75%) or more of surveyed schools using additional staff to support disadvantaged pupils thought this was *very* effective). Additional support outside the classroom was thought to be *very* effective by at least 60% of the schools offering this, and additional support inside the classroom was thought to be *very* effective by around 70% of primary schools, special schools and PRUs, but only 41% of secondary schools.

It is too early to measure the impacts of the Pupil Premium on attainment, and this evaluation only aimed to look at schools' perceptions of the Pupil Premium, and how it has influenced the support provided to pupils. However, almost all schools surveyed (95% or more) were monitoring the impact of the support they were providing for the pupils they targeted – in particular they were looking for improvements in attainment but also improvements in attendance, confidence and behaviour and, for secondary schools and PRUs, reductions in exclusions and in pupils being NEET after leaving school. The case studies found some schools with what appeared to be sophisticated systems for monitoring the impact of their support, including systems that could be used to monitor specific groups of pupils, such as those eligible for FSM.

Trends in support following introduction of the Pupil Premium

Early scoping work suggested that many schools were likely to have been pooling Pupil Premium funding with other budgets – as indeed proved to be the case – and that they tended to offer a wide range of support for disadvantaged pupils, some of which was funded by the Pupil Premium and some funded from other sources (and these were not necessarily differentiated). Some schools might be able to say directly what they had spent the Pupil Premium on but in other cases, the specific items funded by the Pupil Premium would not necessarily be defined separately in schools' financial data and so would be difficult to provide. Given these issues, to ensure useable findings the survey requested financial data about the support offered for pupils they view as 'disadvantaged' in more general terms than Pupil Premium eligibility, alongside information on which pupils they tended to include in this.

Over 60% of schools surveyed reported reduced overall budgets between 2010-11 and 2011-12[45]. Even more schools expected to experience reduced budgets between 2011-12 and 2012-13. It is important to consider this context when examining how schools have used Pupil Premium funding.

Pupil Premium funding constitutes a relatively small proportion of schools' total income – in 2011-12 it was, on average, between 3.8% for primary schools with high levels of FSM and 1.0% for secondary schools with low levels of FSM. However, the case studies found that, despite being a relatively small amount of funding, it was often significant in that it was earmarked for spending on disadvantaged pupils and so helped schools to maintain (or even increase) their support for these pupils, in the face of pressures on budgets.

The vast majority of schools surveyed (91% of secondary schools, 88% of primary schools, 86% of PRUs and 83% of special schools) were explicitly targeting pupils they considered to be disadvantaged for additional support before the introduction of the Pupil Premium, although most now had more support on offer than they did before the Pupil Premium (with the remainder having the same level of support as before).

This is reflected in expenditure data. Most schools surveyed were spending on provision to address disadvantage (according to their definition of disadvantage) before the introduction of the Pupil Premium (95% of schools that could report figures for spending on disadvantage had positive spending in 2010-11) and about 70% of schools had increased such expenditure since the introduction of the Pupil Premium. Moreover, schools were increasing spending on this provision even in the face of pressures on their budgets.

The majority of schools surveyed were spending more than their Pupil Premium allocation on provision to address disadvantage, according to their own definition of disadvantage, (84% of primary schools and 91% of secondary schools in 2011-12). A minority of schools reported spending less than their Pupil Premium allocation but, as discussed further in section 3.3.1, in some cases this will be due to under-reporting of spending on disadvantage, rather than schools spending their Pupil Premium allocation on other things.

A major determinant of how schools made use of the Pupil Premium was the state and trajectory of their overall budgets: schools with stable or increasing budgets tended to treat the Pupil Premium as additional funding; schools with decreasing real funding

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[4] DfE data shows that primary and secondary schools, on average, actually had a small increase in nominal per pupil funding over this time period. However, the survey looked at total real funding including external funding and income, taking into account local authorities charging for services that had previously been provided free of charge and inflation.

[5] Schools in the survey were asked to provide information for financial years and most did, although a few were only able to answer for academic years. The data reported here is therefore mostly, but not exclusively, based on financial years.

tended to use it to maintain provision that had previously been funded from other sources. If existing support is to be maintained or expanded it is therefore important to take into account other changes in school resources.

Perceptions of the Pupil Premium's impact on support

Over 90% of schools surveyed had been focused on supporting disadvantaged pupils before the introduction of Pupil Premium, and over 80% reported that the Pupil Premium alone was not enough to fund the support they offered for disadvantaged pupils, including a wider group of pupils than those eligible for Pupil Premium funding. However, Schools had some positive attitudes towards the Pupil Premium: at least two thirds agreed that they would not be able to do as much for disadvantaged pupils (however they defined disadvantage) without it. With the exception of PRUs, at least two thirds agreed it allowed them to maintain services they might not have been able to without Pupil Premium funding.

Most schools surveyed (82% of PRUs, 70% of special schools, 66% of primary schools and 56% of secondary schools) would aim not to withdraw any of the types of support they offer if they did not have Pupil Premium funding but they would have to reduce the level of support offered. Amongst schools that would have to withdraw support without the Pupil Premium the most likely type of support they would withdraw would be additional staff. This is an intervention schools had perceived to be very effective. At the time of the survey 98% of primary schools and 95% of secondary schools were using additional staff to support disadvantaged pupils: without Pupil Premium funding this would reduce to 76% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools. Smaller, but still notable reductions would be seen for other types of support, particularly additional support outside the classroom and out of hours activities.

The majority of schools in the survey (80% of secondary schools, 73% of special schools, 67% of primary schools, and 53% of PRUs) said they had introduced new support and/or enhanced their existing support for disadvantaged pupils as a direct result of the Pupil Premium. The case studies suggested a more complex situation of evolving provision which the Pupil Premium contributed to, with schools generally having used Pupil Premium money to finance existing forms of support rather than doing anything 'brand new'.

Future plans for supporting disadvantaged pupils

Many surveyed schools (60% of secondary schools, 49% of PRUs, 40% or primary schools and 40% of special schools) were planning on increasing their support for disadvantaged pupils (according to their definition of disadvantage) over the coming year, while most of the rest were planning to continue at the same level.

Most schools surveyed (79% of secondary schools, 75% of special schools, 68% of primary schools and 57% of PRUs) were planning on introducing new forms of support

over the coming year using Pupil Premium funding. The most common types of support schools were planning to introduce were additional support outside the classroom and additional staff. Case study findings suggested a slightly more cautious picture, with schools less willing to expand their provision at a time of uncertain budgets.

Recommendations for national policy

There is a tension between the criteria that are used to allocate Pupil Premium funding and the criteria that have been used by schools to define and respond to educational disadvantage more generally. This is probably inevitable given that allocation mechanisms need to be simple whilst the nature of disadvantage is complex. However, schools could be given clearer messages about the distinction between the two, and about whether their targeting of the Pupil Premium is legitimate.

Likewise, there is a tension between the forms of provision which schools believe to be necessary and effective, using their professional judgement and experience, and their understandings of external expectations. The nature of these expectations, and the extent to which they are binding on schools, could be made clearer.

The extent to which and in what ways schools should be held to account for their specific use of the Pupil Premium are important. Given that the Pupil Premium is often pooled with other funds and used to support a wide range of provision, simply asking schools how they use it is unlikely to produce an illuminating answer. A more nuanced inquiry into how they use all of their funding to maintain all of their provision for disadvantaged pupils would be more complex to undertake but would be likely to reveal more. This has implications for Ofsted inspections, during which schools are asked about their use of the Pupil Premium.

The ways academic research and schools' own evidence might best be used to shape provision seem unclear. Academic research is likely to be relatively robust, but cannot take into account the particular contexts of particular schools. Schools' own evidence is likely to be less robust, but much more context-sensitive and familiar to them. The implication is that both forms of evidence are necessary, but schools may need, and should seek out, support in making appropriate use of both.

Schools' systems for assessing needs in their population, for formulating responses to those needs, and for monitoring the impacts of provision often appear to be highly impressive. If schools are to use the flexibility offered by the Pupil Premium in the best interests of their pupils, they will all need to develop robust systems of this kind. However, there is considerable variation in how systems work, and it seems unlikely that they are all currently equally robust. Schools should be encouraged and supported to develop their capacity in this respect, with best practice disseminated across the system.

Background

Pupil Premium funding was introduced in April 2011 and is additional funding given to schools so that they can support their Pupil Premium eligible pupils and close the attainment gap between them and their peers. The Pupil Premium funding is paid to schools[6] for each pupil who is eligible for free school meals[7], or has been continuously looked after for more than six months by the local authority. Schools received £488 per eligible pupil in 2011-12 and £623 per eligible pupil in 2012-13. In 2013-14 the per pupil funding rises to £900 per eligible pupil.

It is up to head teachers to decide what interventions to spend Pupil Premium money on, as they are best placed to understand the educational needs of their Pupil Premium eligible pupils. However, it is important for the Department for Education to know what initial impacts the Pupil Premium is having on schools, how they are spending it, and whether it is helping improve the life chances of eligible pupils. It is too soon to answer this final question, but this evaluation seeks to address the first two. The Department commissioned a research consortium led by TNS BMRB to investigate school expenditure of the Pupil Premium; how the decisions are made on the way it is spent; and the perceived impact it is having so far.

Methodology

There were four strands to this evaluation:

- A scoping stage involving short case studies of five schools in June and July 2012 - this stage was undertaken to gain an initial picture of how schools were responding to the Pupil Premium in order to inform design of the survey instruments and case study topic guide;

- A 20 minute telephone survey of 1,240 maintained and academy schools in October to December 2012 that collected financial information (via a datasheet, sent in advance of the interview) and also asked about the support schools provided for disadvantaged pupils, and their opinions of the Pupil Premium. Schools with higher levels of FSM pupils were intentionally over-represented but the sample was otherwise representative. Only a little over half of respondents completed the datasheet with financial information;

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[6] Funding is paid directly to Academies and Free Schools. For other schools the funding is paid to local authorities but, in the case of mainstream schools, LAs are required to pass the funding to schools they maintain. For pupils in non-mainstream provision LAs can choose whether to allocate funding to the establishment or use it to make central provision for the pupils.

[7] In 2012-13 eligibility for the Pupil Premium was increased to include pupils that had been recorded as eligible for free school meals in the last 6 years, known as Ever6.

- Case studies of 34 schools between September 2012 and February 2013 to explore schools' uses of the Pupil Premium in greater depth – these included interviews with the head teacher, the school business manager, the senior leader responsible for work on educational disadvantage (for instance the Inclusion Manager), and staff members managing relevant budgets;

- Analysis of data from the National Pupil Database to examine the characteristics of schools that took part in the survey and compare them to schools nationally, and also, where possible, to break down survey findings for schools with different characteristics.

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