
Achievement for All National Evaluation: Final report

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Achievement for All

The *Achievement for All* (AfA) pilot involved ten local authorities (LAs) selected by the Department for Children Families and Schools (now the DfE). Each LA selected schools to participate and in total there were 454 schools (including primary and secondary mainstream schools, special schools, and a small number of pupil referral units). AfA received £31m funding over a two year period.

AfA was conceptualised as a means to support schools and LAs to provide better opportunities for learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to fulfil their potential. There were three main strands:

- **Strand 1: Assessment, tracking and intervention** included, in the initial stages, the use of the Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) approach to track pupils' progress, the setting of curriculum targets and implementation of appropriate interventions to support children and young people to make progress in their learning (National Strategies, 2009).
- **Strand 2: Structured conversations with parents** focused on the use of a clear framework for developing an open, ongoing dialogue with parents about their child's learning. Training was provided for schools, which emphasized the building of parental engagement and confidence via a four-stage model (explore, focus, plan, review) in up to 3 structured conversations per year with parents.
- **Strand 3: Provision for developing wider outcomes** involved schools developing whole school strategies and key actions to support children and young people with SEND to make progress in any two of the following areas: attendance, behaviour, bullying, positive relationships (pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil) and participation in extended service provision.

Schools were given strategic support in their implementation of these three strands by professionals working at local and regional levels.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The main aim of the national evaluation project was to examine the impact of AfA on a variety of outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We also aimed to find out what processes and practices in schools were most effective in improving these outcomes.

The evaluation was driven by the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of AfA on outcomes for pupils with SEND?

- a. In relation to attainment in English and Maths?
- b. In relation to wider outcomes such as behaviour, attendance, and positive relationships?
- c. In relation to parental engagement and confidence?
- d. To what extent is any impact mediated by variation in LA, school and pupil level factors?

2. What processes and practices are most effective in improving the above outcomes?

- a. In relation to activity at LA, school and classroom levels?
- b. What contextual and pupil factors influence the relative success of these processes and practices?
- c. How sustainable and transferable are these processes and practices?

In order to answer these questions, we implemented a research design that incorporated quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component of the evaluation focused primarily upon Research Question 1 and consisted of teacher surveys, parent surveys, attendance and attainment data and school level surveys/data. Our focus was pupils with SEND in Years 1, 5, 7 and 10. In some of our analyses (e.g. academic attainment) we were able to compare data for pupils in AfA schools to national averages for pupils with and without SEND. In others analyses (e.g. behaviour) we were able to compare data for pupils in AfA schools to those in comparison (e.g. non-AfA) schools. The qualitative component of the research focused primarily on Research Question 2 and comprised interviews with local and regional AfA lead professionals, longitudinal case studies of 20 AfA schools (including case profiles of pupils in each school) and ad-hoc data collected informally at AfA launch and update conferences and other events.

Key findings

1. Significant impact upon progress in English and Maths

AfA had a **significant impact upon progress in English and Maths** among pupils with SEND. All four year groups in our target cohort made **significantly greater progress during the course of the pilot compared to pupils with SEND nationally** over an equivalent period of time. Additionally, in several of the analyses the progress of the AfA cohort was also **significantly greater than that made by pupils without SEND nationally**. The effect sizes associated with these differences ranged from small to very large, but in all cases they were big enough to be practically meaningful (for instance, pupils in Year 10 were on course to achieve a greater number of A*-C GCSEs). In this sense, **the AfA pilot proved to be very successful in narrowing the well established achievement gap between pupils with and without SEND**.

2. Significant improvements in positive relationships, and reductions in bullying and behaviour problems

The AfA pilot was successful in improving wider outcomes such as behaviour, attendance and positive relationships. Our analyses of teacher survey data demonstrated that **AfA led to significant improvements in positive relationships, and reductions in bullying and behaviour problems** among pupils when compared to those in non-AfA schools. These findings were partially supported by parental survey data. Analysis of attendance patterns for children classified as persistent absentees (e.g. those with less than 80% attendance) in the year prior to the AfA pilot indicated **dramatic improvements in**

attendance by the end of the pilot – an average increase of just over **10%**. Our parent surveys demonstrated that parental engagement with schools also improved over the course of the AfA pilot. However, the change in parental engagement was not statistically significant. This non-significant finding was most likely an artefact of the reduced sample size for this analysis (especially given the clear trend of greatly increased parental engagement and confidence that emerged in our case studies).

3. Increased awareness of and focus on SEND

The quantitative findings outlined above were verified by the perceptions of a range of respondents in our qualitative case studies. Additionally, the qualitative data provided indications of impact in areas not assessed by our outcome measures. For example, many schools reported an **increased awareness of and focus on SEND and inclusion issues** throughout the whole school, with a **greater emphasis on understanding and addressing pupils' wider needs**. Teachers began to take a **more active role in the assessment and monitoring of the pupils with SEND** in their classrooms. In several schools it was felt that the additional information and knowledge about pupils that emerged from the structured conversations with parents enabled teachers to **change their expectations and recognise the full potential of their pupils**. This resulted in **more personalised teaching and learning** approaches. Continuing professional development (CPD) and training opportunities associated with AfA, particularly around the structured conversations, were seen as valuable by teachers and were applied more widely in day-to-day interactions with staff and non-AfA parents.

4. Schools played an important role

Our multi-level analyses demonstrated that the impact of AfA on the range of outcomes highlighted above was mediated by variation at both school and pupil levels. Individual differences between pupils always accounted for the largest proportion of variance in outcomes, but differences between schools also played an important role, accounting for between 2.9% and 20.2% of the variance in our multi-level models. Through these analyses, we were able to establish that in schools where there were improvements in one or more of the range of outcomes measured at the pupil level (e.g. academic attainment) the following things were important:

- (i) The AfA lead was the Head Teacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**
- (ii) Teachers were more frequently involved in reviewing individual pupil targets**
- (iii) Parents were more frequently involved in reviewing individual pupil targets**
- (iv) A greater range of methods of communicating information to parents about pupils' progress were used**
- (v) A greater range of professionals had access to pupil information**
- (vi) 2 or 3 structured conversations were completed for a larger proportion of pupils**
- (vii) And, the structured conversation model was implemented with greater fidelity**

Our qualitative case studies supported the above findings and provided further details of the key processes and practices across the three strands of the project. In relation to assessment, tracking and intervention for pupils with SEND, schools developed, refined and modified their existing systems. **Successful schools 'made the most of the data'**; that is, they used it at a variety of levels and for a variety of purposes. The use of data within school through effective assessment, tracking and monitoring enabled them to evaluate interventions and make decisions about which to continue funding. Data-led professional

conversations between members of the senior leadership teams and class teachers in schools ensured that children who were not making expected progress were identified and appropriate classroom support given.

5. Structured conversation success

In terms of the structured conversations with parents, schools used the suggested model of practice as a vehicle for changing home-school relationships. **Success was seen where a collaborative relationship – involving a two-way exchange of information, ideas, aspirations and concerns –** was formed. Schools expressed determination to involve the most ‘hard to reach’ parents, and were extremely creative and flexible in the approaches they used in this regard. Finally, in relation to developing provision for wider outcomes, schools implemented an extraordinary range of approaches and strategies. A recurrent theme was that the nature of the work undertaken was determined very much by local contexts and circumstances and the needs of pupils within each school.

6. Inter-related nature of AfA

A further fundamental principle that emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research was the inter-related nature of the different components of AfA. Schools quickly drew links within and between each of the three strands, and the nature of developments in their provision reflected this with, for example, structured conversations being used to discuss wider outcomes such as attendance. This principle was also borne out in our quantitative analyses; thus, pupils’ positive relationships were shown to contribute to their academic progress. Likewise, school processes and practices relating to assessment, tracking and intervention and structured conversations with parents were associated with changes in wider outcomes such as behaviour.

7. Importance of school characteristics

Our multi-level analyses demonstrated that schools characterised by **higher attendance and achievement, stronger home-school relations prior to the start of AfA, and smaller pupil populations** tended to achieve better outcomes. Conversely, schools with **larger proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), speaking English as an Additional Language (EAL), or at the latter stages of SEND provision, e.g. School Action Plus (SA+), Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN),** made progress, but not of the same magnitude. Our qualitative case studies reaffirmed the importance of such contextual factors. Furthermore, they demonstrated that where AfA was successful, it was seen as **an opportunity to build on existing good practice** rather than having to do something very different. It enabled the development of a more inclusive ethos and positive attitudes towards embedding support for children with SEND across the school. There has been an **attitudinal shift** as a result of AfA running in schools, with **class teachers taking responsibility for teaching all of the children in their classroom** rather than focusing on the majority and leaving children with SEND to teaching assistants or other professionals.

8. Importance of pupil characteristics

Changes in outcomes also varied as a function of a variety of factors at pupil level. Our quantitative analyses demonstrated that, generally speaking, pupils with **stronger positive relationships, who attended school more regularly, and with higher levels of academic achievement at the beginning of**

the AfA pilot experienced better outcomes. Pupils at **SA+** or with **SSEN** generally experienced less improvement when compared to others, as did pupils eligible for **FSM**. In terms of identified primary need, there were few consistent findings across outcomes. However, of particular note are pupils with **Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)**, who experienced accelerated academic progress, but were also at greatly increased risk of less positive wider outcomes than other learners; this pattern also applied to a lesser extent to pupils with **Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**.

We do not have sufficient data to form firm hypotheses regarding the reasons why certain groups of learners experienced relatively less progress in certain outcomes. The findings may be a reflection of certain established relationships – for example, the less positive outcomes for pupils eligible for FSM may be underpinned by the deeply entrenched relationship between poverty and poorer educational outcomes. Likewise, the nature of the difficulties experienced by pupils with BESD means that wider outcomes such as developing positive relationships and improving behaviour may be more challenging. Similarly, pupils at the latter stages of provision, such as SA+ and SSEN, typically have more complex difficulties, regardless of the area of primary need. As such, we would perhaps not expect to see as much progress for such pupils when compared to those at SA.

The key issue here is that there are certain groups of learners who may be considered ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at-risk’, even in the context of a highly successful intervention such as AfA. **Schools may wish to focus additional provision and resources on these groups of pupils in particular when continuing their implementation of the programme.**

9. Schools' intent to sustain AfA

Given the success of the project, the sustainability and transferability of the work undertaken beyond the immediate lifespan of the pilot (and, indeed, the target cohorts) is of paramount importance. The **overwhelming majority of schools gave clear indications of their intention to sustain AfA**, and in some cases, to extend the processes and practices developed in the pilot to other groups of pupils (and parents). This, of course, is another indication of the perceived success of the project itself. A central issue from the outset has been the relative importance of funding. Clearly, this has been an enabling factor; for instance, it has allowed schools to experiment with different interventions that were not previously part of their repertoire, and engage in practices that are human resource-intensive (such as the structured conversations with parents). However, there has also been a theme of focusing on sustainability from the outset; thus, **schools strategically invested the funding that was made available to them in areas that would be beneficial in both the short and long term**, e.g. training of staff. There was also a clear sense that many of the changes brought about through participation in the AfA pilot – such as the development of a more inclusive ethos – were not tied to financial resources.

10. National roll-out recommendations

The findings of this national evaluation suggest that the AfA pilot has been successful in improving a range of outcomes for children and young people with SEND. **The decision to bring the AfA approach ‘to scale’, first proposed in the recent SEND Green Paper (DfE, 2011), has therefore been vindicated.** However, it is important to note that transferring the learning from this pilot to a national roll-out will not be straightforward. It is perhaps inevitable that aspects of the AfA approach adopted in the pilot will be modified, adapted and/or diluted in schools across the country. As such, it may be helpful to consider the ‘must dos’ that our various analyses suggested were necessary conditions for success:

1. **Effective strategic support** should be in place beyond the school level that supports and challenges schools, promotes communication and sharing of ideas and practice between them, and helps to develop thinking about how SEND is defined and understood (including raising aspirations).
2. AfA is most successful where it is seen as a **means to extend or enhance existing good practice**. It is important that it is promoted as such and not viewed as a 'bolt on' approach.
3. **Good practice can be prompted and sustained by enhancing communication and sharing of ideas and practice between schools**. This provides opportunities for staff to learn and benefit from the work being carried out elsewhere **through the sharing of resources and expertise**.
4. The **AfA Lead in a given school should be the Head Teacher or a member of the SLT**. School leadership for AfA gives it credibility and buy-in for all staff and helps to drive implementation forward.
5. Leadership in participating schools should ensure that the more **human resource-intensive elements of AfA (for example, structured conversations with parents)** are fully supported, particularly in the early stages of implementation before processes and practices become fully embedded.
6. The **implementation of structured conversations with parents should be faithful to the original guidance**; schools should aim to conduct **at least two conversations per year** with parents where this is feasible and appropriate to individual needs and circumstances.
7. Assessment, tracking and intervention for pupils with SEND should be characterised by:
 - **Frequent involvement of class/subject teachers** in reviewing individual targets
 - **Frequent involvement of parents** in reviewing individual targets
 - A range of stakeholders having **access to relevant pupil information/data**
 - A **comprehensive range of interventions**, whose success is routinely monitored
 - **Use of data at a range of levels** (e.g. pupil, class, school) and for a **variety of purposes** (e.g. to inform target setting, to explore progress patterns among potentially vulnerable groups of learners)
 - **Monitoring systems that take into account individual pupils' needs** – for example, use of P/National Curriculum (NC) levels and sub-level data may miss smaller, but nonetheless important steps forward made by certain groups of learners.
8. Developing provision for wider outcomes should be **determined by local contexts and circumstances**, and the needs of pupils within each school. Schools may benefit from **more explicit guidance and training** in relation to developing positive relationships, improving attendance, reducing behaviour problems, eliminating bullying, and promoting wider participation. The relationship between each of these outcomes should also be emphasized.
9. **The inter-related nature of the three strands of AfA should be emphasized**; this will help to ensure that schools take a holistic, rather than piecemeal approach to implementation.
10. Schools should ensure that provision is put in place such that **groups of potentially vulnerable learners (e.g. those at SA+, and/or those with BESD) have the support they need** to achieve their potential.
11. The **'key teacher'** – a pupil's class teacher in primary schools, or personal tutor or head of year in secondary schools - should act as a **main point of contact with parents**, in addition to the SENCo.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>
Further information about this research can be obtained from
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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.