
Extended services subsidy pathfinder in schools: evaluation

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Background

The report examines data collected as part of the evaluation of the extended services disadvantaged subsidy pathfinder. The broad overall aim of this research is to find out how funding can best be targeted so as to engage disadvantaged children and young people in schools' extended services. The focus is on implementation and management of the subsidy through the pathfinder schools rather than attempting to assess long term outcomes.

Findings are based on:

- Two quantitative surveys of schools (the first in December 2008 – February 2009, the second in October – December 2009)
- Collections of management information from schools (relating to summer term 2008, spring term 2009, and summer term 2009)
- A quantitative survey of parents and pupils (in September – November 2009)
- Qualitative case studies amongst pathfinder schools (between November 2008 and January 2010)

As such, all findings are self-reported.

Findings relating to schools are taken from the second survey of schools (unless otherwise stated) and, as such, refer to a time period around a year after the introduction of the subsidy. Findings from parents and pupils also relate to a similar time period.

The defined and flexible models

Schools following the flexible model were free to choose how they defined economic disadvantage, but the definition of the target group was generally set at cluster level¹ with the input of some schools in the cluster (although schools took decisions on how to interpret the definition). The definitions used included those eligible for free school meals and children in care (the defined model eligibility criteria), but also included a wide range of other criteria.

Most schools on the flexible model found it easy to identify who was in the target group but around a fifth found it difficult, mostly because families do not always share information about their financial situation with the school.

Schools following the flexible model were much more likely than schools following the defined model to think the definition of economic disadvantage they were using was effective, especially if the school had been involved in choosing the definition.

Many schools following the defined model found it difficult to meet the fixed hours requirements of the model: 54 per cent found it difficult to provide two hours of activities a week to the target group and 66 per cent found it difficult to provide 30 hours of activities during school holidays.

Consultation

The vast majority (86 per cent) of schools had engaged in consultation with parents, pupils or both, and most saw consultation as an ongoing process.

Speaking to parents and pupils informally and asking them to complete questionnaires or surveys were the two most commonly used methods of consulting, and also the two methods deemed most effective by schools.

Parents did not tend to recall being consulted – only 22 per cent recalled being asked for their opinion on the kinds of activities the school should be offering. However, around half of parents thought their child's school took at least 'a fair amount' of notice of parents' views on extended services.

When asked how they would like to be consulted, the most common answers given by parents were being given questionnaires to complete, and through letters and leaflets. However, qualitative evidence suggested face to face consultation was more effective in reaching parents.

Half of pupils recalled being consulted about activities – mostly by filling in questionnaires or through discussions with teachers (in classes, assemblies or at other times).

¹ All schools involved in the subsidy pathfinder were part of a cluster – there were 37 clusters involved in the pathfinder with between 3 and 33 schools in each (on average, there were 12 schools in a cluster). Each cluster had a cluster lead (who was sometimes based in the local authority, and sometimes based at one of the schools in the cluster) who was responsible for guiding the schools in their cluster in the implementation and use of the subsidy.

Promotion of activities

A quarter of schools said they struggle to engage economically disadvantaged pupils in extended schools activities. However, nearly nine in ten schools thought that economically disadvantaged pupils are keen to participate in the activities that they offer.

All schools involved in the pathfinder had used some methods to promote the uptake of activities to the target group, with letters to parents being the most common promotion method used, followed by speaking informally to parents and pupils. In line with this, most parents said their child's school let them know about activities by letter – either letters given to their child to bring home, or letters sent directly to them.

Most parents felt at least quite well informed about the activities on offer at their child's school, but 24 per cent of parents did not feel very well informed, and a further 12 per cent did not feel at all informed.

A quarter of schools agreed that economically disadvantaged pupils face a sense of stigma which prevents them participating in activities. Strategies used by schools to make the subsidy available to the target group without causing stigmatisation were: general discretion in approaching parents and pupils; approaching parents so pupils do not know who is being subsidised; having activities open to all or free to all; and organising the funding so that pupils do not know they are being subsidised or do not know they are in the target group.

Participation in activities

Management information collected from schools showed that 35 per cent of the target group had taken part in any activities in the summer term or summer holidays 2008 (pre-subsidy), and this had risen to 71 per cent in the summer term or summer holidays 2009 (post-subsidy).

On average, respondents to the schools survey rated the impact of the subsidy on participation rates of the target group as 6.9 on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 10 is the highest impact). Schools following the flexible model gave higher scores on average than those following the defined model.

According to data from parents and pupils, three quarters of pupils had taken part in term time activities in the last year (since the introduction of the subsidy), with by far the most commonly undertaken activity being sports. On average, pupils were doing 2.5 hours of activities a week during term time.

Around one in five pupils had taken part in holiday activities in the last year (mostly during the summer holidays 2009) and, again, sports were the most commonly undertaken type of activity.

Just under half of pupils were taking part in activities in their local area that were not provided (or signposted to) by their school.

Charging for activities

In three quarters of schools respondents agreed that economically disadvantaged pupils struggle to afford extended schools activities, demonstrating the need for the subsidy. And just under a third of parents said they found it difficult to meet the costs of activities offered by their child's school.

Before the introduction of the subsidy, seven in ten schools were charging for at least some activities. A year or so after the introduction of the subsidy 82 per cent of schools were not charging pupils in the target

group for any activities, and where schools did charge the target group this was usually only for certain activities, and often they were charged a reduced rate.

Around half of schools had changed their charging practices as a result of the subsidy, with the most common changes made being to stop charging (the target group) for activities, and to reduce the price of activities (for the target group).

Data from parents showed that, with the exception of day trips and holidays away, most of the activities that target group pupils were attending did not have to be paid for. Most parents who had paid for activities considered the amount they had to pay to be reasonable, but around one in five thought charges were unreasonable.

Three in ten parents thought their child's school was offering more activities for free than it had been before the subsidy.

Use of external providers

Nearly all schools were working with external providers to provide extended schools activities. Around three-quarters of schools had formed new partnerships with external providers since the introduction of the subsidy.

School staff acknowledged the benefits of working with external providers but found making links to be a challenge. Vital ingredients for engaging with external providers were found to be the development of good relationships, understanding differing working patterns and cultures, and providers having an understanding of the needs of the children in specific schools.

Benefits of the subsidy

Two in five schools were targeting or providing support for economically disadvantaged pupils to take part in extended schools activities before the introduction of the subsidy.

Just over a third of schools were using schemes other than the subsidy to fund activities for economically disadvantaged pupils, and this had actually increased slightly since schools had been using the subsidy.

Nine in ten schools said the subsidy had enabled them to increase the number of activities on offer, although only four in ten parents and seven in ten pupils thought their school had increased the number of activities on offer.

Almost all schools (96 per cent) said the subsidy had improved economically disadvantaged pupils' access to activities.

86 per cent of schools said the subsidy had enabled them to improve the quality of their provision for economically disadvantaged pupils. However, only 37 per cent of parents and 61 per cent of pupils thought the quality of provision at their school had improved.

Most parents said their child was able to go to all or most of the activities they would like them to. However, 19 per cent said they could only go to some activities, and five per cent said they could go to none.

Parents and pupils' views on activities

Half of parents were satisfied with the availability of clubs and activities (not necessarily related to school) suitable for their child in the area where they live, but just over a third were dissatisfied. Eight in ten parents and pupils thought there needed to be more or better things for young people to do in the area where they live when they are not at school. Two-thirds of parents said they would like such activities to be provided at or near their child's school.

Three quarters of parents thought the activities their child attended at school were very or fairly good, and less than one in ten thought they were poor. Similarly, around three quarters of parents said activities met their needs very or quite well. Pupils also mostly had positive views on activities with seven in ten thinking they were very or fairly good overall.

The vast majority (86 per cent) of parents of primary school pupils said their child enjoys term time activities all or most of the time, and 73 per cent said their child enjoys holiday activities all or most of the time. Enjoyment was slightly lower amongst secondary school pupils: 71 per cent said they enjoy term time activities all or most of the time and 68 per cent said they enjoy holiday activities all or most of the time.

Parents tended to see the main benefits of activities as their child having fun, making friends, getting exercise, and learning new things, and four in ten parents thought that going to activities helped their child do better in school.

Amongst secondary school pupils, those taking part in term time activities for an hour a week or more were more likely to say they enjoyed school all or most of the time than those who did less than an hour a week (or no) activities (70 per cent compared with 40 per cent).

Three quarters (76 per cent) of parents and 81 per cent of pupils thought their school needed to improve the activities it offers. Both groups were particularly likely to think that activities during the summer holidays needed to be improved.

Where pupils had not taken part in any activities, the most common reason given by parents was that the activities on offer did not interest their child. Various barriers were also mentioned such as costs, lack of transport, and lack of time/other commitments.

Staff workload

In 83 per cent of schools, managing the subsidy funding had caused an increase in workload for staff at the school. For both primary and secondary schools, workloads had most commonly increased amongst administrative or support staff. In primary schools headteachers were likely to see an increase in workload, and in secondary schools it tended to be other members of the senior management team and extended services co-ordinators whose workload had increased.

A minority of schools had taken measures to increase their resources in order to cope with the additional workload, but most had coped using existing resources: by staff working longer hours or reassigning workloads between staff. Findings from the case studies showed that, in some cases where staff worked longer hours to implement the subsidy, they did this on a voluntary basis and were not compensated for it. In other schools, some extra funding was used to pay staff for their time.

Identifying and overcoming challenges

A little under half (43 per cent) of schools reported encountering problems or barriers in implementing or using the subsidy funding. The most frequently cited problem was the additional workload of organising and running activities.

Lack of interest from parents; confusion or lack of guidance as to how the subsidy should be used; and pupils schools would like to target not falling under the definition of the target group were also mentioned by notable minorities of schools.

Cost of provision

According to analysis of management information provided by schools, the average hourly cost per pupil of activities was slightly more than average private sector child care costs but less than average private sector 'specialist activities' (e.g. sports coaching, drama)

There were big differences between schools in average hourly costs but these were only systematically related to the proportion of 'one-off' and summer activities, which were, on average, more expensive. Case study interview data suggested that the willingness of schools to partially fund activities from other budgets and 'voluntary labour' from staff may also have contributed to cost variations.

Roughly one fifth of the subsidy was recorded as 'unspent'. Case study evidence suggest this was due in part to 'teething problems' as schools learned how to use the money effectively. In addition, 'unspent subsidy' was eleven percentage points higher for schools whose subsidy was mediated by a local authority.

There was some evidence from the case study interviews that schools were becoming increasingly conscious of cost variations and were taking these into account in their current decisions.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at www.education.gov.uk/research

Further information about this research can be obtained from
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This research 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).

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