

**FINAL REPORT OF MEMBER-LED REVIEW OF NARROWING THE ATTAINMENT GAP AT PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE**

**To:** Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014

**From:** Jane Belman, Scrutiny and Improvement Officer

**Electoral division:** All

**Forward plan ref.:** N/a **Key decision:** No

**Purpose:** To report on the findings of the Committee's member-led review of good practice in narrowing the attainment gap at primary school level between children receiving free school meals and children overall.

**Recommendation:** Members consider the report and agree the recommendations.

| <b><i>Officer contact:</i></b> |  | <b><i>Member contact:</i></b> |  |
|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Name                           | Jane Belman  | Name:                         | Cllr Paul Clapp  |
| Post:                          | Scrutiny and Improvement Officer   | Portfolio                     | Chairman, CYP Overview and Scrutiny Committee  |
| Email:                         | <a href="mailto:Jane.Belman@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">Jane.Belman@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a> | Email:                        | <a href="mailto:Paul.Clapp@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">Paul.Clapp@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a> |
| Tel:                           | 01223 699140   | Tel:                          | 07956 273848   |

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The gap in educational attainment between children from deprived backgrounds and those from more affluent families is a world-wide phenomenon. It is particularly acute in the UK where the gap in wealth is greater than in some other developed countries. Greater professional and academic attention has been given to this in recent years and in April 2011 the Government introduced the Pupil Premium (see below) as a way of redressing the balance.
- 1.2 Although the 'gap' is prevalent across the country, it appears to be greater in shire counties and here in Cambridgeshire, the attainment gap between pupils receiving Free School Meals (FSM) and pupils overall is greater in comparison to England as a whole and our statistical neighbours. The most recent (2013) performance figures for attainment for pupils achieving Level 4 at Key Stage 2 in Reading, Writing TA and Maths, showed an FSM/non-FSM attainment gap of 30 points. This was 7 points wider than the gap across our statistical neighbours (23 points) and 11 points wider than the gap nationally (19 points).
- 1.3 Part of the 'gap' can be explained by the way the data works. The up-take of FSM tends to be lower in shire counties than elsewhere. Department for Education (DfE) research indicates that in Cambridgeshire 19% of those entitled to a Free School Meal do not claim. The DfE's research into who does not claim although they are eligible reflects the Cambridgeshire social pattern and indicates that many of those who do not claim come from a family background where they probably perform at expected levels or above. If these children's results were to be included in the FSM results and excluded from the non-FSM, the 'gap' would be smaller.
- 1.4 That said, Cambridgeshire County Council's Members and Officers are committed to raising attainment levels for all children and particularly for the most financially and socially vulnerable. The Children and Young People OSC therefore set up a member-led working group to contribute to this policy by reviewing how primary school attainment levels of materially disadvantaged children (defined as those receiving FSM) can be improved, with the aim of identifying successful practice locally and promoting it to all primary head teachers and Chairs of Governors in Cambridgeshire.
- 1.5 Members of the working group were Cllrs Clapp, Dent, Downes, Kenney, Nethsingha and Taylor. The review was supported by Jane Belman, Scrutiny and Improvement officer.

## **2. THE PUPIL PREMIUM (PP)**

- 2.1 The PP gives schools extra funding to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils from reception to year 11. It is given for every child currently registered as eligible for free school meals, and children who have been registered as eligible for free school meals at any point in the past 6 years.
- 2.2 PP is also given for looked after children, and for service children. In the 2013- 2014 financial year, PP funding for FSM primary-school age pupils was £953 per pupil; in 2014-15 this will increase to £1,300 per pupil.

- 2.3 The PP is paid directly to schools as they are best placed to assess what additional provision their pupils need. Ofsted inspections report on how schools' use of the funding affects the attainment of their disadvantaged pupils.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 The review group met with officers in November 2013, when the information relating to 2012/13 was available, and examined the primary school Key Stage 2 attainment results from 2008/9 to 2012/13 in order to identify which schools were performing consistently well in reducing the attainment gap. Four schools were selected which had achieved improvements in relation to Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics. Two had been rated good and two rated outstanding in their last Ofsted inspections.
- 3.2 Members visited four schools in different parts of the County. They met with head teachers, other teachers, teaching assistants and pupils, to explore what approaches and techniques were proving effective, focusing particularly on how the PP funding was used to best effect to improve attainment among FSM pupils. Three of the schools, Arbury and Kings Hedges in Cambridge, and Thongsley Fields in Huntingdon had a large number of FSM pupils (over 130 in each school), and each school received PP funding of over £130,000 in 2013/14.
- 3.3 In order to provide an example of good practice in raising attainment where the school has few FSM children and therefore receives a much smaller amount of PP, members visited a fourth school, Holywell at Needingworth, which had fewer than 10 FSM children, and received around £7,600 PP funding in 2013/14.

### **4. FINDINGS**

- 4.1 There was considerable variation between the schools in relation to the demographic characteristics and social and economic circumstances of the population they served, and the impact of these on the educational and pastoral needs of its pupils. While each school had developed ways of working that were appropriate to its particular circumstances, the findings identified a range of themes and aspects of good practice that were common to all the schools, as set out below. All of these inter-relate, and are not set out in priority order.

#### **General principles**

#### **4.2 Focus on the individual child**

- 4.2.1 A key principle was that interventions should be based on the needs of the individual child, whether or not they received FSM; this approach also avoided stigmatising or isolating FSM children. Schools therefore provided a range of interventions, both group and 1:1 based, depending on the needs of the child. These were open to all pupils who would benefit from them.

- 4.2.2 However, schools were very aware of the importance of ensuring that PP funding was targeted on the pupils for whom it was intended, rather than for the school's pupils as a whole. Schools which received a large amount of PP therefore used a combination of PP and other funding to cover the cost of the interventions that were open to all pupils, and monitored their PP spending in relation to their FSM pupils.
- 4.2.3 Schools emphasised the importance of teachers knowing and having a nurturing approach to each child and understanding what would work for them. It was important to identify and to address both the pastoral and academic needs of the child.
- 4.2.4 Creative solutions were used to meet the needs of individual children e.g. one school was funding two places at Histon Football Academy.
- 4.2.5 It was pointed out that some children whose family income was too high to qualify for FSM could still require considerable additional support – for example, where parents worked long shifts which limited the time they had available to spend with their children. Conversely, some children on FSM needed little or no extra support.
- 4.2.6 All the schools recognised the importance of providing targeted support for economically disadvantaged children regardless of whether the school had a large or small number of FSM pupils

#### 4.3 Focus on high quality teaching and teacher ownership of pupil progress

- 4.3.1 Teachers had clear responsibility for ensuring and monitoring their pupils' progress, and were held accountable for this. Resources were put into teacher development, to strengthen their capacity to provide good quality teaching, monitor pupil progress, and adjust their teaching plans accordingly. Performance management, recruitment and induction arrangements were also aimed at ensuring that teaching staff operated at a high standard.

#### 4.4 Effective use of Teaching Assistants (TAs)

- 4.4.1 The contribution of TAs was seen as crucial in all the schools; they were highly valued, and used in a very effective way as an integral part of the staff team. In order to achieve this, all the schools had invested in TA training and development. Schools were clear that the role of TAs was to support and not replace the teacher, enhancing good quality teaching by bridging the learning between the teacher and the child. Key points for TA effectiveness included:

- Ensuring that they had the necessary subject knowledge and skills – many were highly qualified
- TAs and teachers working in partnership, e.g. in planning and feeding back outcomes from TA activities, which then goes into the child's learning plan
- TAs working in a way that supports pupils' independence, by making the pupil do the work e.g. by giving the child an independent work tray, rather than by doing it for them

- Ensuring that their time was used effectively, with as much of it as possible used in working directly with children
- Provision of ongoing guidance, support, training and performance management.

Some examples of TA activity include support with reading; support with speech and language development; breakfast clubs and homework clubs.

#### 4.5 Leadership

- 4.5.1 Effective leadership from the head teacher, supported by staff with other lead responsibilities e.g. for Special Educational Needs, Key Stages 1 and 2, year groups and maths, was seen as crucial. This included setting expectations of staff and pupils and ensuring that these were met, providing ongoing support to teachers and TAs, fostering team working and ensuring ongoing staff commitment to the aims and values of the school. Where resources allowed, lead staff had some time in their schedule allocated for their role.

#### 4.6 Systematic monitoring of pupil progress

- 4.6.1 Schools had systems for tracking each child's progress, whether or not they were on FSM or had special educational needs. Baseline assessments were made at entry to reception. One approach was for teachers to then make a baseline assessment at the start of each school year, which included an expected trajectory during the year; ongoing tracking and regular reviews (at least half-termly) to identify where a pupil was not making the expected progress, so that teachers could act on this, in discussion with the head teacher or relevant lead member of staff. In all schools, there was ongoing discussion between class teachers and lead staff about children's progress and what should happen next. This helped to reinforce and support teacher ownership of and responsibility for the child's progress.

- 4.6.2 At a day-to-day level, schools had good marking practice, in which marked work was discussed with the child in a positive way, with a focus on the child's next steps in their learning, which was then reflected in lesson planning for that child. Doing this in a consistent way created an ongoing feedback – learning cycle.

#### 4.7 Systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of interventions

- 4.7.1 The impact of interventions, particularly those funded by the Pupil Premium, was systematically and regularly monitored and reviewed both at the level of the individual child, and in terms of the impact on overall attainment – though with the proviso that as a child might receive a combination of interventions over a period, it was not always possible to identify which had the most effect. One school was researching the impact of PP on a cohort of children.
- 4.7.2 Schools emphasised the importance of making sure that they used their PP and other resources to maximum effect. Setting clear targets and timescales e.g. a term, for an intervention, such as help with reading, coupled with regular monitoring, helped the school to quickly identify whether a particular approach was working for a child. Identifying where a child had made good progress and

therefore no longer needed that particular support, would also enable it to be offered to another child.

- 4.7.3 All schools tracked how they were spending their PP and published an annual report on how they had spent the PP over the year.

#### 4.8 Developing good relationships with families

- 4.8.1 The level of parental engagement with the schools varied considerably. Considerable efforts were made, over a long period, to break down the barriers to parental involvement, by building and sustaining good relationships and trust between the staff and the child's family, and encouraging and enabling parents to be involved in their child's progress and in the work of the school. Good communication between staff and parents enabled staff to know when family circumstances had changed.
- 4.8.2 Head teachers made a point of being at the school gate at the start of every day, and often at the end of the day as well, so that families who might be wary of coming into the school could engage with them in an informal setting. Home visits to parents before their child started their foundation year were also a useful way of breaking down barriers. Schools also made clear to parents what was expected of them.
- 4.8.3 Primary schools in Cambridge had set up a charity, 'Red Hen', which supported parents and children to overcome barriers to learning. One school had set up workshops on 'reading with your child' for a targeted group of parents.
- 4.8.4 Volunteer contributions from parents, such as participation in the governing body or helping in the classroom, were actively encouraged. Events and open days were also used to encourage parental involvement.

#### 4.9 Attendance

- 4.9.1 Schools had made considerable efforts to raise attendance levels where this had been an issue; this included systematically tracking attendance, knowing and working with the families, and working with educational welfare officers.

#### 4.10 Encouraging FSM claims

- 4.10.1 Staff were proactive in encouraging parents to apply for FSM. Having good relationships with parents and knowledge of family circumstances were key; staff would offer to fill in and submit the forms. Schools recognised however that more needed to be done to break down the barriers to claiming. In particular, they were concerned about how children who qualified for PP would be identified in future when free meals are introduced for all Key Stage 1 primary school pupils from September 2014.

#### 4.11 The school environment

- 4.11.1 There was a strong focus on creating a positive and secure school environment, which was conducive both to learning and to personal development. Schools

fostered a nurturing and supportive environment, where children were expected to be accepting of one another and were happy to be there. High expectations were placed on pupils regarding behaviour. Clear and consistent expectations and a well-understood system of sanctions were particularly important for pupils from disadvantaged home backgrounds.

- 4.11.2 This linked to having a clear ethos for the school, and building commitment to it from pupils, teachers and parents; leadership was key to this.

#### 4.12 Extra-curricular activities and inclusion

- 4.12.1 Raising attainment is not just about formal lessons; extra-curricular activity has a key role in motivating children and making school an enjoyable experience. Councillors therefore welcomed the use of PP and other sources of funding to enable FSM children to take part in such activities.
  - 4.12.2 It was recognised that participation in school outings and other activities could have major benefits. They could provide children with experiences such as going to the theatre or the seaside, or participating in team sports, that they would not otherwise have. Examples of outcomes from residential trips included a reduction in a child's anxiety about being away from home; and a child who discovered at a residential event at Grafham Water that they had a talent for balance and is now training at a racing stable.
  - 4.12.3 There was a clear principle that FSM (and other) pupils should not be excluded from school trips or other extra-curricular activity for financial reasons. Schools used PP where appropriate, and/or charitable funding to pay for or subsidise trips where parents were not able to contribute enough to cover the cost. One school had a policy of only taking children on trips which cost £5 per head or less. Another had a policy of not asking for any contribution from PP children.
  - 4.12.4 One school provided music tuition with a range of instruments for Years 3 - 6 pupils, funded through its mainstream budgets, which was free of charge for all children, so that access did not depend on parents being able or willing to pay for tuition.
- #### 4.13 Other examples of good practice which complemented the use of PP funding
- 4.13.1 Schools were proactive and creative in obtaining and utilising both financial and human resources. Examples include a school which set up a charity to help fund a breakfast club and another which used Lottery funding for a speech project for 2-3 year olds.
  - 4.13.2 Schools had links with and provided student placements for teacher-training colleges such as Homerton, and made use of non-qualified teachers.
  - 4.13.3 One school used sixth-formers and university students to support more able children to develop their mathematics skills; and volunteers from a local branch of a law firm to mentor and talk with 5- 6 year olds who lacked strong adult role models.

## **Specific areas of focus**

### **4.14 Early acquisition of basic skills**

- 4.14.1 It was recognised that early acquisition of speech and language skills, including basic vocabulary, are essential for learning later on. Schools therefore provided targeted help with speech and language, at nursery and reception stage, where children were significantly behind their peers. Nursery age children are not eligible for PP, so interventions at this stage were funded through other sources. An example is the Lottery-funded 'So to Speak' project in one school, which has places for 24 2-3 year-olds who needed help with speech.
- 4.14.2 One school had found that strategies to support vulnerable learners who were bilingual or who had English as an additional language had an equally positive effect on PP children, especially in the explicit teaching of language and sentence structure.

### **4.15 Fitness to learn**

- 4.15.1 There were initiatives aimed at ensuring children were 'fit to learn' at the start of the day. These included breakfast clubs, free of charge or subsidised where appropriate, which also provided an opportunity for the child to tell staff about issues that they had, and improved punctuality.
- 4.15.2 One school provided 'sensory circuits' – a combination of active and calming exercises, at the start of the day. Play therapy and counselling were also used to help children be in a position to learn.

### **4.16 Provision for high achievers**

- 4.16.1 While there was a strong focus on teaching the basics, to ensure that children attained the expected Key stage level skills in reading, writing and mathematics, with additional targeted support provided where needed, all schools made provision for high achievers within their mainstream budget, whether or not they received FSM e.g. advanced maths groups, an art club. One school was planning to use PP funding to undertake more focused work with high-achieving children on FSM.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation 1.**

Members work with officers to:

- Share the review findings with all primary head teachers and Chairs of governing bodies, by taking part in forthcoming Governor briefings and leadership briefings and promoting it via the online directory of effective practice.
- Promote the use of the Pupil Premium Review Toolkit which officers have developed to help evaluate the use of PP spending and to identify appropriate interventions for pupils receiving this additional funding



- Encourage schools to take part in the forthcoming refresh of the Narrowing the Gap strategy
- Identify further ways in which expertise and good practice can be shared between schools – including those who get a low level of PP.

### Recommendation 2

The Committee circulate the report to Cabinet members and to the members of the incoming Children and Young People Committee.

| Source Documents  | Location   |
|---|--|
| Progress report to CYP OSC<br>6 <sup>th</sup> February 2014 | <a href="http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk">www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a><br>Jane Belman<br><a href="mailto:Jane.Belman@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">Jane.Belman@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a><br>Tel: 01223 699140 |