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Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant – Year 1 Findings

Research Summary

Social research

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The Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) was launched in 2012 and provides additional funding to schools based on the number of pupils on their roll eligible for Free School Meals (e-FSM) or who are Looked After Children (LAC). Schools are provided with and are directed to spend the additional funds on evidence-based interventions to help close the attainment gap. This report is based on the first year of evaluation activity. The evaluation incorporates three main elements: a survey of 201 schools completed in spring 2014; in-depth case studies among 22 schools, of which 12 are complete at the time of reporting; and in-depth analysis of pupil attainment and absence data from the National Pupil Database.

Key Findings:

- The introduction of the PDG has led to schools funding a significant amount of new activity aimed at supporting pupils they identify as disadvantaged.
- Although the PDG represents a relatively small proportion of the total school budget (less than 4% on average), it amounts to significant sums of money that schools spend on activities to tackle disadvantage: primary schools received an average of £12,676, and secondary schools an average £61,311 in PDG funding in 2012-13.
- Over half the interventions currently funded using the PDG (59% in primary, 71% in secondary schools) were not run in schools prior to the PDG's introduction. Even where activity pre-dated the PDG, it has usually been scaled-up as a result of the additional funding available to schools.
- Primary schools run an average of 3.4 interventions, which on average target 35 pupils each; and secondary schools run an average of 5.0 interventions, each targeting an average of 174 pupils. However, there is a considerable variation in the scale and reach of programmes funded using the PDG, particularly at the secondary level.

Further Findings

- At the primary level, PDG funding is often used to fund literacy (37% of all primary interventions) and numeracy (25% of primary interventions) programmes. There is a less clear-cut pattern at the secondary level: while literacy and numeracy interventions account for 17% and 16% of secondary interventions respectively, there is greater use of interventions aimed at pastoral issues at this level.
- The evaluation has shown that only 60% of primary pupils and 72% of secondary pupils benefitting from PDG-funded interventions are e-FSM or LAC. However, the evaluation also identified that schools contribute a significant amount of additional funding from their own budgets or other revenue streams to fund PDG activities and interventions, so that schools are not necessarily spending Grant money on non-FSM/non-LAC pupils, although this would be complex to disentangle.
- Around nine in ten schools (86% primary, 91% secondary) report supplementing the funding of PDG-funded activities, usually from the general school budget and/or the Schools Effectiveness Grant. Typically, schools' financial contributions to PDG activities from other revenue streams are significant. Case study evidence suggests that schools sometimes regard activities they would like to fund through the PDG as beneficial to pupils more generally. Several case study schools noted that PDG funding on its own could not enable them to fund the interventions they run to support disadvantaged pupils, and it is clear that the impact of the PDG is reliant on the existence of grants and funds with complementary aims.
- Schools primarily use their own monitoring data systems and experience to plan and monitor the activities they fund through PDG: 79% of primary schools and 74% of secondary schools report using their own data. Most case study schools

collected and monitored a wide range of pupil data, including attainment, attendance, and wellbeing measures.

- Less than half of schools (36% primary, 49% secondary) report using the Sutton Trust Toolkit, despite the endorsement of the Toolkit within the guidance, especially important as the Toolkit provides well-evidenced effective approaches to tackling deprivation. The case studies suggest either this is because schools feel that the Toolkit reflects the approaches they are already using, or that they do not see the Toolkit as relevant to their particular setting. Even where schools have used the Sutton Trust Toolkit, there is limited evidence that it had significantly changed the activities that schools carried-out.
- Most teachers surveyed felt that PDG-funded activities had a positive effect on pupil wellbeing and engagement. They were less positive about the impact on outcomes such as attendance and attainment. Given that wellbeing and

attendance are important prerequisites for attainment it may be that given time further outcomes will manifest as a result of PDG-funded activities

- Evidence on the sustainability of PDG activity is mixed, although it is evident that it has engendered a culture change in many schools by raising the profile and awareness of how schools can tackle disadvantage and monitor the impact of interventions targeted at disadvantaged pupils.
- At this stage of the evaluation, the assessment of whether the PDG is having an impact on attainment and absence was inconclusive on how much improvement in outcomes can be attributed to introduction of the PDG or whether this was the result of an already improving trend.
- To date, the evaluation has focussed on capturing information about the process of implementing the Pupil Deprivation Grant rather than its impact; later stages of the evaluation will aim to draw conclusions about the impact of

the Grant, and the effects of the one-off funding increase in 2014/15.

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