Using Extended Services to Tackle Disadvantage

The University of Manchester and Newcastle University were recently commissioned by DCSF to conduct a review of how schools were defining and responding to disadvantage in their development of extended services. Lisa Jones and Karen Laing from the research team explain the findings here.

Providing extended services
By the end of 2010, all state schools in England are expected to offer extended services to all children and families. Extended services are intended to enable schools to deliver the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children.

The core offer of extended services that each school is expected to provide is made up of five elements:

- A rich and varied menu of activities for pupils
- Childcare (for primary schools)
- Parenting support
- Swift and easy access to specialist services (for pupils and families)
- Community access (including adult education).

Importantly, schools are not expected to provide all of these services on their own, but should cooperate with other schools in the area to meet the needs of the community. Schools are also expected to consult with the local community to ensure the services they provide are attractive and relevant.

Although extended services are intended to be available to all, there is an often implicit assumption that those groups and individuals most in need, or defined as disadvantaged will be more likely to take up services (and thus benefit more) than more advantaged groups and individuals. However, evidence from the Ipsos Mori survey of extended services in 2009 showed that pupils and families from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to use activities compared to their more advantaged peers.

The review
In order to enhance our understanding of how schools, in a range of circumstances, were defining and responding to 'disadvantage' in their development of extended services, we conducted a review in 2009, as part of a wider evaluation of extended services in England. The review explored how fifteen schools in the North West and North East of England were targeting disadvantaged individuals and groups for particular services, and how they were encouraging the take-up of services by those groups. The review was relatively small scale and did not allow the opportunity for in-depth studies of the relationship between schools' strategies, the take-up of services, and the impact on

service users. Nonetheless, we found a remarkably similar picture in all of the schools we studied. The schools were selected because of their diverse characteristics, yet their approaches to extended services and to the issue of targeting were surprisingly similar. We summarise the main findings of the review below and then go on to discuss how schools can use these findings to inform the development of their own targeted extended service provision.

Identifying the disadvantaged

All school staff responsible for extended services were aware of the presence of disadvantage in the populations they served, and the need to target at least some of their extended services towards the most disadvantaged groups and individuals. They had given considerable thought to how this targeting could be done and how they might ensure that those who might benefit most from services would, in fact, access them. Nevertheless, although those responsible for extended services in schools were aware of the need to tackle disadvantage, they each defined disadvantage differently, and, in turn, their target groups varied. The definitions of school staff were often based upon their knowledge of local circumstances and their own perceptions of what constituted disadvantage. These definitions tended to include indicators of socio-economic disadvantage but often used a broader concept of 'vulnerability' which also included those faced with difficulties not directly related to their economic circumstances.

> "…vulnerability for us at [this school] does link to things like attendance, but basically if a child is not happy or where there is concern of quite a wide/broad brush, anything that we have a worry about, we'll term that child as vulnerable. At which point we work out then which provision is needed. [This might include] those on the edge of being excluded, those on the edge of needing extreme intervention either academically or the fact that they are vulnerable children socially and emotionally" (ES coordinator)

Schools frequently drew on available socio-economic indicators (such as entitlement to free school meals and IMD data) as evidence of disadvantage, but, in addition, relied very heavily on the knowledge that staff had built up about individuals and families. Some schools had formalised data collection and information sharing about children, families and adults and involved other agencies, but the majority relied on their professional judgement to decide who needed services within schools and such decisions were often relatively informal.

Engaging disadvantaged individuals and groups

The schools we visited had a range of procedures and practices for engaging with disadvantaged groups, often seen as 'hard to reach', in order to encourage them to access services. These practices relied heavily on personal contact with individuals and developing positive relationships. Building trust between the school and the children and adults who might benefit from services was seen as a crucial task for all schools. For the

schools, having staff in and around schools with the time and skills to engage successfully with individuals and groups who might otherwise be hard to reach was key to increasing participation by disadvantaged groups. These staff were not always teachers, and so were viewed as more approachable. The informal and personalised approach that these staff could adopt was seen by schools to be important in engaging potential service users.

> "…because all the other strategies don't work, that's why they are hard to reach. You can go out with a flyer, you can go out with a letter. And you can do all that and it won't make a blind bit of difference. You need the one to one personal touch with people that they can trust. [PSP's name] lives on the estate, [she] knows the estate and she knows a lot of people on the estate. She is trusted on the estate. That's one reason why we got her. And the fact that she's as well qualified as anyone you know up to her eyes in all sorts of letters and degrees. She's one of the few people that's made it and because she is trusted, she is the main voice. So if we need to go and get someone, she will go and get them" (ES coordinator).

Developing services

Schools often had strategies in place for consulting with children and adults about the types of services they would like, which generated useful feedback and ideas for further development. However, in some cases, such strategies did not appear to reach much further than a 'customer satisfaction' approach, and we found little evidence of the involvement of disadvantaged groups in strategic planning.

Although extended service leaders were committed to the development of their provision and were aware of the importance of targeting disadvantaged groups (however defined), much of what schools were doing in this respect relied on a personal approach. Whilst this enabled schools to respond to local and individual circumstances, it carried dangers insofar as needs assessments were often subjective and did not always take into account other evidence or other perspectives - not least, those of service users.

In addition, many schools in our sample were dependent on specific proactive individuals to provide personal knowledge and contact with disadvantaged groups. Many of these individuals were not part of the 'core' staff of teachers and were often employed on funding-dependent short-term contracts. These staff had usually built up trusting relationships with those most in need of targeted services, and relying on them carried the real risk of losing knowledge and expertise and damaging fragile relationships with families, and posed a real threat to the sustainability of provision.

Monitoring effectiveness

In most cases, the success of extended services provision in tackling disadvantage was judged by the level of take-up by disadvantaged groups and user feedback. Extended

services leaders often had a sense of how successful their targeting strategies were in engaging with and benefiting their service users. In some cases, this monitoring was formalised but in others, judgements about effectiveness relied heavily on what school staff knew about impacts on individuals. Schools were able to report individual 'success' stories usually resulting from interventions or support and guidance offered to particular families and/or children.

> "We gave them jobs being librarians. They were given responsibilities, because we had the play leaders, and a lot of the children that are the play leaders are children who were screened initially and came out as being you know, quite low self-esteem, but you know immediately they felt that they'd be given something to do and all of a sudden, they were brilliant and were coming to you and saying 'oh I've done such and such a thing' and 'can I do this?'" (ES support worker)

How might schools develop targeted provision?
Our review suggests that there is good news about the way that schools are developing their extended services for the benefit of disadvantaged groups and individuals. There is no lack of commitment, awareness, or activity on the part of extended service leaders in schools. The issue of 'disadvantage' is an important concern for them and they are building strategies for targeting disadvantaged groups, and for encouraging them to take up services.

The less good news is that these strategies rely a little too heavily on the local knowledge of particular professionals. The use of other, less personal, kinds of knowledge is limited, and disadvantaged groups themselves are too often not involved in making decisions about what services should be provided. The danger of relying on what staff members 'know' about children and families is that their knowledge may be imperfect. It is all too easy for children and families to be missed, or for their situations to be misunderstood. It also leaves the school without a targeting strategy if key staff members happen to leave.

It may, therefore, be timely for schools to consider formalising their targeting strategies. By this we do not mean abandoning a personal approach which has been shown to be invaluable for dealing with sensitive issues or increasing bureaucracy. Rather, we mean that schools should consider using a more systematic approach *alongside* the personal knowledge and contacts of individual staff members, to provide a wider ranging use of evidence, a more structured approach to targeting, and a more systematic approach to evaluation. Based on the findings of our data, we suggest below how schools may go about developing this. Figure 1 provides a model for school staff to begin thinking about how to develop a coherent strategy for tackling disadvantage using extended services.

INSERT FIGURE 1

The figure presented here presents school leaders with a framework with which to develop their services and outlines the steps in the process that they may wish to consider.

Step one: Developing a clear picture of the needs, perspectives and wishes of children, families and others in the populations they serve. Such a picture should certainly draw on individual knowledge, but this should be set against area and population statistics, the views of the school's partner agencies (who might have very different understandings of individual and local needs), and, in particular, the views of children, families and community members themselves about what they need and how it is best provided.

Step two: Establishing a pattern of provision planned to meet these needs and wishes, based on the schools overarching extended services strategy, informed by other local strategies, for instance, from the extended services cluster, the Children's Trust and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Step three: Agreeing an identification strategy aimed at identifying those who might benefit most from services. This strategy should draw on personal knowledge, but also take into account formal assessments. This can be facilitated by effective inter-agency information-sharing and the conduct of joint assessments.

Step four: Generating strategies to promote take-up, using a range of approaches including personal contact, and publicity and working with other agencies.

Step five: Formulating a monitoring and evaluation strategy, drawing on the sort of anecdotal evidence gathered through personal contact, but supplemented by detailed record keeping and analysis, and by formal evaluation procedures. To help schools consider such processes, the TDA have designed an 'Impact Evaluation Model' which we suggest may be a useful tool as part of this step. This tool can be found at the web address below.
http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/managingchange/tools/impact_evaluation.aspx

In developing a more systematic approach, it may be important for schools to bear in mind the experience of Sure Start[1][2] and the Children's Fund[3]. The evaluations of these initiatives proposed that services need to 'mature' in order to become more effective at

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[1] NESS (National Evaluation of Sure Start) (2005). Early impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes on children and families. Report 13 (London: DfES)

[2] NESS (2008) National evaluation report: the impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on three year olds and their families. Retrieved 30 July 2009 from http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/impact/documents/42.pdf

[3] Edwards, A., Barnes, M., Plewis, I. and Morris, K., et al. (2006) Working to prevent the social exclusion of children and young people final lessons from the national evaluation of the Children's Fund (Birmingham, NECF Team University of Birmingham).

targeting disadvantaged groups. We should not be surprised if, in the first phase of the development of extended services, the focus is on generating activity and ensuring that the core offer of services is indeed available. It seems likely, however, that a second phase may shift the focus to a more reflective and evidence based approach, where schools and their partners will become more thoughtful about the purposes, and working practices, of their extended services. No doubt many schools will find their own way towards such an approach - as some of the schools in our sample were already doing.

For more information about the review please see

Colleen Cummings, Alan Dyson, Lisa Jones, Karen Laing, Karen Scott & Liz Todd (2010) Thematic Review: Reaching Disadvantaged Groups and Individuals, DCSF Research report RR196 (DCSF).
Available at: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR196.pdf

A systematic approach to targeting services

Population statistics   Staff knowledge   Area strategies

School strategies

Clear picture of needs and wishes in school and area

Pattern of provision planned to meet needs and

User views   Other agency views

Formal evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation

Identification strategy

Staff knowledge

Record keeping & analysis   Anecdotal evidence

Formal assessments

Collaboration with other agencies

Take up strategies

Personal contact   Publicity