

Challenge the Gap: Portsmouth 2017/18

Impact Summary Report

“We’ve seen first-hand how it is possible for all young people to scale the hurdles to social mobility and achieve incredible things. Yet it is still the case that those from low-income backgrounds face a litany of barriers to achieving their full potential.”

Social Mobility and the Seemingly Unbreakable Class Ceiling; A Social Mobility Report, 2017 (Teach First)

The Background

The Portsmouth Challenge the Gap programme was commissioned by the Portsmouth Education Partnership as a school improvement initiative focussing on raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The project aimed to show impact for pupils in both academic areas and non-academic areas such as attitudes and attendance.

Eighteen schools, including primary, secondary and special, took part in a programme across the academic year 2017/18, which involved staff attendance at 6 training workshops, the development of a targeted project in school and school visits from the workshop leaders. 120 primary pupils and 86 secondary students were involved initially in the projects across the city schools (approximately 10-15 target students per school).

Main findings

The schools identified that the main barriers to learning in the target groups were

- Poor reading (9 schools), writing (3 schools) or mathematical skills (1 school)
- Poor attitudes to learning, including motivation and behaviour (12 schools)
- Poor attendance and desire to come to school (2 schools)

Most of the primary projects focussed on helping pupils to develop their **reading or writing skills combined** with their **attitudes to learning**. They did this in a range of ways including: pre-teaching some of the skills and texts to be used; setting up a book club; and using pupil conferencing to ensure that staff systematically followed up any gaps in understanding. Some schools also worked with parents and others developed projects which helped pupils to improve their self-confidence and ability to learn. All of the secondary projects focussed on improving attitudes to school and to learning, with two focussing specifically on attitudes to reading. They did this through offering intensive support to pupils with academic skills, offering sessions designed to build resilience or self-regulation and mentoring. Case studies are available showing how schools addressed these areas.

There was a **positive impact on pupils**, especially on developing their reading and writing skills and their attitudes to learning. There was also a **positive impact on the staff** involved including teachers and teaching assistants who all improved their ability to identify pupils’ barriers to learning and put in place effective strategies to support them and a **positive impact on leaders** who were more confident in measuring the progress of these pupils and being able to evaluate the impact of any support or interventions. 91% of schools who took part said they were rolling out programme to others in their own school and/or other schools.

Challenge the Gap

Impact on disadvantaged pupils

Year 7 pupil reflecting on what was good about being in the project:

"I liked being given an opportunity and being recognised as having potential"



"Positive outcomes for the children involved"

"Pupils have made outstanding progress."

"I have seen how it has impacted on children's learning."

Staff comments.



Improved academic progress

- **A third of pupils** included in final data for the project did **better than had been predicted by their targets** prior to starting the programme
- Teachers noted that **more pupil premium pupils achieved as well as non-pupil premium pupils** in terms of the academic progress made, rising from 42% at the beginning to 64% by the end of the project.
- Teachers noted that **more pupil premium pupils made accelerated progress** as a result of being in the project. This figure increased from 16% to 75% during the project.
- Leaders and teachers both noted that **more pupils made progress because of improved academic skills, especially in reading and writing.**

Impact Study 1 – Improvements in Reading

A participating junior school measured ARE in reading amongst their Year 3 pupils. They reported that following their project, which in this school focussed on raising reading attainment in Year 3 pupils through participation in a book club, **83% of Year 3 pupils in the project had reached ARE for reading.** This is a reported improvement for this group of students from 61% at the start of the year. It was also noted that in this school, there has been an overall improvement in reading within the Year 3 cohort, and that the improvement for all Year 3s has increased from 74% to 84%; this suggests that the 'gap' between PP pupils and other pupils in reaching ARE in reading has been reduced to 1% across this year.

Impact Study 2- Improvements in Writing

In one primary school, a group of twelve Year 5 children in receipt of pupil premium funding took part in a project focussing on attitude and attainment in writing. The 'Fly High' group initially involved a breakfast club and after school group, although it was changed to two after-school clubs part way through the project. **100% of these pupils made expected progress or above, with 9 of the pupils meeting Age Related Expectations (ARE) at the end of Year 5**; 4 of these pupils reached greater depth for their year group. At the start of the project, 10 of the 12 (83%) pupils were working *below the ARE for Year 4* (at the end of Year 4) and at the end of the project, 9 of the 12 (75%) were working *at or beyond ARE for Year 5* (at the end of Year 5).

Improved attitudes and motivation

- Several of the projects focussed on developing attitudes or motivation *as well as* academic progress. There was a **large increase in pupils saying that they enjoyed reading**, from 44% of secondary pupils at the beginning of the project to 60% by the end. 76% of primary pupils said they liked reading before the project started and this had improved to 85% by the end.
- Pupils and teachers reported **an improvement in pupils' attitudes to learning**. Primary pupils reported improvements in their ability to stay on task, ask questions if they were confused, not being afraid to try things if they seemed hard and knowing what could help improve their learning. Secondary pupils reported that they were better at planning and managing their work, more confident in speaking up in lessons and took more pride in the presentation of their work.
- Primary pupils **reported an improved ability to get on with work with little help or independently**. 86% of primary pupils agreed that they usually worked with little help or independently prior to the project and this increased to 96% by the end. Secondary pupils said they had improved their ability to revise for tests or exams with 48% agreeing with this statement at the beginning of the project and 63% by the end.
- Staff reported significant **improvements in pupils' self-awareness as learners**. Both leaders and teachers reported clear improvements by the end of the project in pupils taking responsibility for their own learning and being able to persevere and learn from failure as well as success.

Impact study 3 – Improvements in attitudes, motivation and academic progress

One of the secondary schools, whose project group focussed on developing self-awareness and resilience as a learner, compared measures of academic progress and behaviour at the beginning and end of the project. Every child in the year group is given a rating for academic progress and behaviour at the end of each term. Data showed that the percentage of pupils in the project group, rated 1 – the highest rating – **for academic progress before the programme increased from 3.2% to 10.3% across the year**. At the same time, those in the same group rated 3 – the lowest rating – for academic progress fell from 31.4% to 20.5%, suggesting that progress is improving amongst the target group.

The data for behaviour also showed an increase in those in the project group receiving **a grade 1 rating, from 16.7% to 24.4%** by the end of the programme. Interestingly, the number of project members who received a **grade 3 rating for behaviour remained constant at 7.7%**; this was in clear contrast to the same data for the whole Year 7 cohort and all pupils receiving pupil premium. In both of these non-target groups, the grade 3 ratings approximately doubled across the year, from 2.8% to 6.1%, and 3.6% to 7.3% respectively.

Improved attendance and desire to come to school

- Pupils taking part in the programme **increased their desire to attend school**; this was particularly significant among secondary pupils with an increase from around 40% wanting to come to school before the project to over 70% by the end.
- **Around half of the pupils improved their overall attendance** during the programme.

Impact on teachers and other staff

- Teachers who were part of the programme reported an improved **ability to share effective strategies with others in school**. 75% of teachers involved reported working more effectively with others in school to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils and said they had effectively cascaded the programme knowledge to others in school.
- The Challenge the Gap programme had a **positive impact on the practice** of those staff taking part. 94% reported an increase in their knowledge and understanding of the needs of disadvantaged pupils and how to remove these barriers effectively. There were some particularly successful programmes to improve pupils' reading and writing skills, including pre-teaching some of the skills and texts to be used; setting up a book club; and using pupil conferencing to ensure that staff systematically followed up any gaps in understanding. Some schools also worked with parents and others developed projects which helped pupils to improve their self-confidence and ability in reading or writing.

- Teachers and TAs reported a **significant increase in their own knowledge of which pupil premium students were at risk of underachievement**, and therefore were able to plan effectively to meet the needs of these pupils, with 68% of teachers agreeing with this statement at the start and 100% agreeing at the end of the programme. For teaching assistants, the impact was even greater as fewer than 50% felt that they had a good awareness at the start, compared with 100% at the end of the project.
- Teachers reported an **improved ability to monitor and evaluate the progress** of pupil premium pupils, from 74% at the beginning of the project to 94% by the end.
- **Teachers were able to improve their planning** to meet the needs of pupil premium pupils. The percentage of teachers who said that their ability to use detailed analysis of pupil premium achievement to plan lessons improved from 21% at the beginning to 87% by the end.
- There was a particular rise in **confidence in knowing how to identify barriers to learning among TAs**. TAs reported an improvement in their provision of targeted support for pupil premium pupils from 68% at the beginning to 83% by the end. **Teachers and TAs also reported that they had worked more effectively together** to support students.
- **All TAs developed their pedagogical skills**. During the programme all TAs had run sessions for pupils to help them to build their academic skills, their resilience or to help pupils take responsibility for their own learning. At least two TAs developed sufficient skills to be successful in gaining a place on an ITT course by the end of the programme.
- TAs reported a significant **increase in developing good links with parents and carers**, with 30% saying they had good links at the beginning of the programme and 75% agreeing with this by the end.

It has been very enjoyable and useful to meet and share practice ideas with colleagues from other schools and in my team.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the project and in particular the networking aspect.



Quotes from participants.

Impact on leaders

- Leaders reported an improved ability to **analyse pupil premium achievement** during the course of the programme, from 62% at the beginning to 100% by the end. In particular, leaders were able to accurately differentiate between the barriers faced by these pupils and plan accordingly.
- Almost all leaders reported that they had **improved their understanding of effective ways to address barriers** such as weak attendance, poor attitudes, weak literacy and numeracy.
- There was a notable **increase in the monitoring and evaluating of the impact of interventions** and support for pupil premium pupils, from 56% to 90%.
- Leaders reported that they had **improved the monitoring of the progress** of this group of students, from 74% reporting that they monitored and evaluated these pupils' progress at least half termly, to 94% at the end of the programme.
- Leaders noted that they were much more **confident in measuring the progress of softer skills**, such as resilience and pupils' ability to improve their own work, using tools provided through the programme.
- Leaders reported an **increase in the number of support staff who were aware of the needs of pupil premium pupils** at the beginning of the project from 56% to 90% by the end.
- In at least 2 schools, **teachers** who had been involved in the programme were **promoted** as a result of this with a specific remit **to lead on pupil premium in their schools**.

"It has been great to work with others schools and find out what they are putting into practice and to share experiences."

"A fantastic experience and great opportunities to work with others and share ideas."

"It has been great to work with other schools and share their expertise; we have often 'magpie' ideas to help move our project forward."

Areas for consideration for similar projects in the future include

- Further work on effective strategies to improve parental engagement (pupils reported that their parents cared about their progress at school, however, staff and leaders felt that parents did not always actively help at home).
- Ensuring that other leaders, including governors, are aware of the barriers that these children face and strategies to overcome those barriers.
- Increasing pupils' aspirations, especially for the next steps in their schooling or career.