

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1	Meeting:	Children and Young People’s Services Cabinet Member and Advisers
2	Date:	Wednesday 18 th November 2009
3	Title:	The ‘Extra Mile’ Project
4	Directorate:	Children and Young People’s Services

5 **Summary**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet Member and Advisers for Children and Young People’s Services of the background, progress to date and initial recommendations of the project.

6 **Recommendations**

- **That the report be received.**
- **That the Cabinet Member and Advisers note the concerns related to the gap in attainment between that of pupils eligible for free school meals and their more affluent peers at all key stages.**
- **That the Cabinet Member endorses the drive to encourage all schools to narrow the gap by addressing the needs of vulnerable pupils and their families.**
- **That the Cabinet Member and Advisers recognise the work of the project group which aims to improve future outcomes in the academic attainment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.**

7 Proposals and Details

Background.

Breaking the link between poverty and educational achievement is one of the most difficult and persistent problems to overcome. Large gaps remain between the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and their more affluent peers. Research is revealing a significant range of very concerning data – for example

- The best odds of a child from a deprived background achieving the expected standard are in Foundation Stage, and even then they are two and a half times less likely to achieve it than their more affluent peers. The odds worsen by the end of KS1 and remain stable at three times less likely to achieve the expected standard at KS2 and through to the age of 19.
- Only 176 of the 30,000 pupils achieving 3 As at A Level in 2007 were eligible for FSM.
- Most children from lower socio economic status identified as more able at 3 and 4 fall behind by the age of 7 and never catch up.
- The evidence is clear: given 2 pupils of similar ability who are both attaining below expectations, the child from the deprived background is less likely to catch up and keep up.

In March 2009 the Secretary of State launched 'Breaking the link between disadvantage and low attainment: everyone's business'. This document set the challenge to everyone involved in education and childcare to change the historical pattern of underachievement of children from deprived communities. It recognised that the effects of disadvantage are cumulative and pervasive, and that generational poverty in many communities adds the additional barrier of low aspiration to material poverty.

The publication of the 'Extra Mile' document was designed to promote the implementation of school improvement measures to enhance these pupils' chances of success. Visits to 45 primary schools which had shown success in raising the attainment of pupils in deprived communities confirmed that the following elements are essential (what all good schools do)

- Dynamic, distributed leadership
- Creation of a 'can do' and 'will do' culture.
- Strong systems for quality assuring the curriculum, teaching and learning
- An absolute focus on pupil progress, which is rigorously tracked and monitored. Intervention is immediate for those falling off track. They do not give up on any pupil, no matter how challenging and time consuming they are.
- They engage the support of a range of agencies in order to address barriers to learning – ECM is a reality.

It was found that in addition to doing what good schools do, the 45 primary schools in the study implemented some deliberate and specific extra measures. These became the 7 essential activities of the 'Extra Mile' document.

1. Provide a coherent curriculum with a strong focus on speaking and listening
2. Engage pupils in their learning
3. Help pupils to articulate and manage their emotions
4. Broaden pupils' horizons by providing a wide range of stimulating activities
5. Provide support at transition points
6. Recruit, develop and retain staff with empathy for the pupils and their background.
7. Promote and value partnerships with parents/carers and the local community

The National Extra Mile Project

In 2008-09 the DCSF funded a number of secondary schools to conduct research into what would make a difference for FSM pupils. The project has now been extended to include primary schools in 2009 -10. Rotherham made a successful application and is one of only 10 local authorities to be involved in the project. It was launched nationally at conferences in Birmingham and Leeds in September. Essential criteria for the project include the following:

- LAs must select a partner (lead) school and 4 trial schools.
- The schools and LA should select one of the 7 activities from the 'Extra Mile' document as a basis for the project.
- The schools and LAs could select one of 2 models – intervention or entitlement. Intervention would involve the development of Extra Mile activities to support a small focus group of pupils, with activities scaled up at a later stage to include a wider group of pupils or the whole school. The entitlement model would involve whole classes or the whole school in the activities, with particular emphasis on a discrete focus group.
- LAs and schools should be willing to be involved in regular monitoring and evaluation by the DCSF, including the publication of a case study at the end of the project.

The Rotherham Extra Mile Project

Selection of Schools

Thornhill Primary School was selected to become the partner, or lead school, as it is currently receiving national recognition as an excellent ISP(Improving Schools Programme) school which already goes the 'Extra Mile' on behalf of its pupils. The 4 trial schools are in the ISP programme, and serve disadvantaged communities within the 3 Education Action Zones (EAZs). All of the schools, with the exception of one, have high or increasing numbers of pupils with EAL (English as an additional language). The identified trial schools are

1. Coleridge Primary
2. East Dene Primary
3. Thrybergh Primary
4. Badsley Moor Junior School

Two further 'associate' schools were included in the project. One of these, Badsley Moor Infant School, volunteered because of its obvious links with the only junior school in the project, and the other, Ferham Primary, was already involved in similar work. These schools will not receive funding, except for some cover costs associated with training.

Selection of Activity

The group decided to select activity 1 - Provide a coherent curriculum with a strong focus on speaking and listening, as a focus for the project. Current research was taken into account when selecting this activity.

- Low vocabulary is the main cause of academic failure.
- 59% of time is spent by children aged 4 in deprived areas not talking at all.
- Inability to communicate leads to problems with personal and social development, and the ability to read and write - 'The limits of my language are the limits of my life'.

The project would focus on the development of guided talk, the extension of children's vocabulary and talk for writing. It was agreed that parental involvement would be essential, so Activity 7, Promote and value partnerships with parents/carers and the local community, would be an additional focus.

Selection of Model

All of the schools in the project reported low levels of attainment in their current Year 3 classes. This would probably be compounded by the 'dip' very often experienced on transition to Key Stage 2. It was therefore decided that it would be pertinent to include Activity 5 - Provide support at transition points, in the project. It was agreed that the entitlement model would be used, with Year 3 teachers involving all of the children in the year group, but with a particular focus on 6 disadvantaged pupils in each class.

Progress to Date

The schools have started to identify their focus groups of pupils. As some teachers and teaching assistants report a lack of confidence in developing children's speaking and listening skills, the project will be launched on 2nd November with an INSET day. This will also be attended by teachers from the Learning Support Service, who have expressed an interest in the project.

Monitoring Visit by DCSF

On 23 October, the Schools Standards Adviser responsible for monitoring the project visited in order to establish the quality of planning and progress to date. He met with LA personnel, headteachers and project directors of the 3 EAZs. He also visited Thornhill Primary School and talked to pupils and staff. He was very impressed with the Rotherham approach to the project, for the following reasons

- A very valid focus for the project and excellent action planning
- All schools having the same focus – this was not the case in some authorities. This would provide better evidence for research purposes.
- The involvement of the EAZs. This would provide additional support for the schools in the form of EAZ literacy and Family Learning consultants.

The EAZ project directors are passionate about the project (for example, the 'Extra Mile' features in the Clifton Learning Community's vision for excellence) and have the potential to 'drive' the project in other schools should it prove to be successful.

The Schools Standards Adviser has already requested that LA personnel should present the Rotherham approach to the project in London in the spring or summer. He gave the project so far a RAG rating of green.

8 Finance

Funding for the identification of, intervention in and support for schools that are underachieving is a key focus for the core budget of the School Effectiveness Service.

Additional grant funding of £30,000 has been provided by the DCSF for the 'Extra Mile' project. This will give the five participating schools £5000, with the remaining £5,000 being retained by the LA to fund CPD for the schools and also cover costs for the associate schools.

9 Risks and Uncertainties

Should Rotherham's schools show insufficient progress in narrowing the gap in future years, this could result in:

- Declining and lower standards at the end of KS2
- Significant numbers of children underachieving, which reduces their opportunities post statutory education
- The Council's rating, in relation to the quality of services and its statutory responsibility to raise standards will be affected through the CPA and APA systems
- The Council's intervention rating with DCSF could be increased.

10 **Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Pupil achievement is a key performance indicator (Learning), in the Community Strategy, the Corporate Plan, the Children and Young People's Single Plan and The learning without Limits Partnership Plan (schools).

11 **Background Papers and Consultation**

- Pre school, school and family influences on children's development during Key Stage 2 – DCSF (2009)
- Breaking the link between disadvantage and low attainment –DCSF (2009)
- The Extra Mile – DCSF (2009)

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