

Unfinished business: where next for extended schools?

The role of extended schools in reducing poverty and disadvantage

We know that child poverty is caused by low pay, unemployment, sickness, disability and inadequate benefits – all of which result in low income. Growing up in a household with a low income affects a child's life chances, which in turn can lead to poorer educational outcomes, poorer health and low self-esteem. Tackling poverty requires a range of interventions, one of which is extended schools. Importantly, 'extended' refers not only to additional provision for both pupils and communities, but also the 'extension of the school into their community'.¹ Schools, of course, play a central role in children's lives and have a wide reach into the community. They are unique in being able to facilitate interventions that are universal and that can benefit disadvantaged children.

When schools were first told by the Department for Education and Skills in 2005 to provide a core set of extended services, these services were orientated towards serving 'all schools and all pupils, whether or not they are in some sense disadvantaged'.² This was based on the idea of 'progressive universalism' – making a service available to all, and making sure that disadvantaged groups will benefit most.

Extended schools do, of course, have their limitations: they cannot influence the structural conditions in which families live or transform the home learning environment, for example. However, there is good evidence that they can both support parental employment and improve children's outcomes, including their educational attainment, social and emotional skills, welfare and wellbeing.

Providing childcare

One of the ways in which extended schools can support parental employment, and thus employment income, is by providing before- and after-school activities, which act as a form of childcare. The ability of parents – in particular, mothers – to enter or increase their hours of employment

Schools which deliver a range of services beyond their core function of classroom education are known as 'extended schools', offering anything from childcare outside basic school hours, to sports and arts activities and adult learning sessions. Evidence shows that wraparound childcare can help parents stay in work, while sports and arts activities can improve children's 'soft' skills and motivation to learn, leading to better educational and employment outcomes.

Alice Woudhuysen looks at a new report from CPAG and the Family and Childcare Trust, which takes stock of the extent and success of extended schools by mapping the current provision in England and comparing it with parental demand for services. The report also considers the role these services have in tackling disadvantage and poverty, and sets out a new vision for extended schools.

very much depends on their ability to access affordable and quality childcare. A Department for Work and Pensions survey of parents' childcare and work decisions found that around 62 per cent of parents in households with an annual income of £13,000 to £22,000 said they wanted to increase their work, with 40 per cent citing a lack of affordable childcare as a reason for not being able to do so.³

Childcare in a school setting is cheaper than other forms of childcare as a result of reduced premises costs. The most recent data shows that the average weekly cost of an after-school club is £48.97, while care from a childminder after school is £63.53.⁴ When schools also provide training programmes and skills training, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), extended services can also help parents' ability to support their child's education and boost their employability.

Supporting educational attainment

Extended schools can also reduce the impact of child poverty by supporting pupils' educational attainment through activities which support core learning, such as homework clubs and exam revision sessions. Research has found that there is a strong association between childhood poverty and lower educational attainment, as well as an association between educational attainment and income in adulthood. Education protects against poverty in the long term and study-support activities can lead to improved academic outcomes, such as attainment and attitudes to school and attendance.⁵ Schools can also provide a quiet environment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to access direct support from teachers.

While it is difficult to assess the direct impact of extended services on attainment, there is evidence to suggest that the benefits are more observable among disadvantaged groups. For example, a recent report by University College London found that disadvantaged primary school children who attended after-school clubs had significantly higher scores in key stage two than those who did not attend.⁶

Improving social and welfare outcomes

Extended schools can also lead to improved social and welfare outcomes. Participating in sport, in particular, leads to health benefits, improved social connectedness and a sense of belonging, as well as improved self-esteem, confidence and concentration:⁷ all skills that may be conducive to improving educational outcomes, as well as being important in their own right. Importantly, extended school services can disproportionately benefit disadvantaged children by increasing opportunities that might not otherwise be available to them, which better-off children often obtain elsewhere through clubs or other after-school activities.⁸

Extended schools can also help to alleviate some of the symptoms of disadvantage and poverty by tackling poor nutrition and hunger among schoolchildren, especially through breakfast and holiday clubs. Many children from low-income backgrounds come to school hungry or eat low quality, unhealthy food. Free school meals can lessen the financial burden on low-income families, but not every family is entitled to them and some eligible families do not apply. In researching the cost of the school day, CPAG was told by one teacher that when she asked her class of 20 how many had eaten breakfast, only two children had.⁹ Breakfast clubs are therefore a way of ensuring that children eat breakfast in the morning, while holiday

clubs can alleviate the pressure on families who struggle with the additional cost of food during the holidays when children no longer receive school meals, and in a non-stigmatising way.

Mapping extended schools

The report takes stock of the extent and success of extended schools by mapping the current provision in England and comparing it with parental demand for services. It draws on an online survey of 1,088 head teachers of English primary and secondary schools in May 2015, as well as a YouGov online survey of 1,181 children, which was undertaken to gauge their attitudes and interests towards before- and after-school activities.

Many of the key findings are very encouraging: extended schools are now the norm, with only 2 per cent of schools surveyed saying they did not offer any provision; provision is also broadly in line with the expressed need. Extended schools are popular with children and schools, with only 7 per cent of children reporting that they were not interested in extended school services and head teachers reporting that they were more likely to want to expand, rather than reduce, services. The most commonly cited extended services are extra-curricular activities: after-school sports clubs (90 per cent) and music/arts clubs (78 per cent). Provision of breakfast clubs is also widespread (75 per cent) and homework clubs/exam revision/catch-up classes are prevalent (61 per cent).

However, the report also finds considerable gaps in provision. Only 53 per cent of schools surveyed provide after-school childcare clubs, yet 64 per cent said a need had been expressed for them, while 29 per cent of schools provide holiday childcare, yet 39 per cent said there was a need for it. Extended services are geared more towards the pupils than the wider community: only 49 per cent of schools have community groups that used school facilities and 46 per cent provide parenting support, counselling and/or ESOL classes.

Are extended schools reaching disadvantaged groups?

Crucially, the report finds that the provision of extended services is not necessarily reaching disadvantaged groups. In order to gauge whether extended services were being used by disadvantaged families, head teachers were asked which statement best described their pattern of use. Eighty-four per cent chose: 'Our extended services are used by a mix of more and less advantaged families', 6 per cent stated that the services were disproportionately used

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by disadvantaged families and 10 per cent said that their services were disproportionately used by better-off families. These results suggest that in a small, yet significant, proportion of schools, disadvantaged families use extended services less and may therefore face barriers to use, particularly costs.

The YouGov survey results also support this conclusion. The survey found there was a difference in interest in activities according to socio-economic group. For example, children in families in social groups C2, D or E showed 8 per cent less interest in a range of extended school activities than those in groups A, B or C1 (at 26 and 32 per cent respectively). While these findings relate to interest in activities rather than actual usage, they are significant as they suggest that interest is directly related to circumstance. This could be because disadvantaged pupils are less willing or less able to use after-school activities, or because they have not previously been able to do the kinds of things the services offer – and so are less inclined to pursue activities that are unfamiliar.

The research also found that children with a retired or unemployed parent were less interested in extended school activities, compared with children with a parent working full or part time. Children whose parents were not looking for work out of choice had comparatively higher interest than those with unemployed or retired parents – which implies that income, rather than the fact of being economically inactive *per se*, influences families' attitudes to, and interest in, the services.

Barriers to extended school services

Encouragingly, the research found that around three-quarters of schools would like to expand the number of children using their services and the range of services offered, and one-third of schools wanted to expand their opening hours. The most common barrier to expansion, though, was a lack of funding. When asked about expanding extended schools services, schools reported the constraints on expanding as a lack of funding (two-thirds), a lack of space (47 per cent) and a lack of staffing (54 per cent). Only 6 per cent of schools said a lack of need was a barrier to expansion.

Funding for extended schools is fragmented. It remains part of the dedicated schools grant allocated to local authorities in England and money is transferred from the Treasury to the devolved governments for extended schools provision, but there is little analysis on how this money is being used. Other sources of funding for extended school services include parental

contributions and the 'pupil premium', which is additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers.

The schools sampled in the report said that funding for extended services came mostly from the 'pupil premium' (75 per cent), from parental contributions (71 per cent) and from core school funding (49 per cent). Primary schools were much more likely to cite parental contributions (80 per cent) as a source of funding than secondary schools (21 per cent), but less likely to cite core school funding (42 per cent, compared with 68 per cent).

The fact that parental contributions are so important to schools is worrying in two ways: it shows the widespread need for schools to fund extended provision from outside their budgets and that accessibility is an issue, as lower income families may not have the ability to pay and so face a financial barrier to accessing these services. Indeed, the *Extended Services Evaluation* report shows that pupils eligible for free school meals participated in fewer hours of activities, with parents with an eligible child more likely to cite cost as a barrier.¹⁰

Interestingly, the report finds that it is unclear whether schools are using pupil premium funding to support the target group of disadvantaged pupils, or whether the funding is being spent in a less targeted way to fund services which are available for all pupils. Ofsted's own review of how effectively schools are spending pupil premium grants to target disadvantaged pupils suggests that this varies across schools.¹¹

A new vision for extended school services

The vision for an extended schools programme in England was first articulated in a report published as part of the government's neighbourhood renewal strategy in 1999. In 2005, education policy in England committed all schools to providing a core of extended provision by 2010, making about £300 million of annual ring-fenced funding available to local authorities to deliver the extended schools programme. However, in 2011, the ring fence was removed, increasing the likelihood of some funding being diverted to other purposes, and under the coalition government, extended school provision by and large fell off the agenda.

The government has made some progress recently, announcing plans to give parents of children from reception to year nine a right to

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request that their school consider providing wraparound and holiday childcare. Under these proposals, childcare providers also have the right to request the use of school facilities when they are not being used by the school. In the 2016 spring Budget, the government also outlined plans to use the revenue from a new levy on the soft drinks industry to provide funding for 25 per cent of schools to extend their school day by offering a wider range of activities for pupils.

However, the government has still failed to articulate a set vision for the role of schools in providing extended education beyond the classroom. Fortunately, a majority of schools have continued to offer extended services and have developed a level of provision beyond the core curriculum. As the report shows, extended services are popular with schools, with parents and with children and have enormous potential to tackle disadvantage and poverty. Schools also want to expand the number of children using services and the range of services offered. However, as evidenced by the report, they feel restricted in what they can provide because of limited funding, services are not meeting families' needs for after-school and holiday childcare, and provision is orientated largely towards pupils, rather than the wider community.

Perhaps most concerning, though, is the evidence in the report that extended schools are failing to fully engage the most disadvantaged children, who arguably need them most. Given the strong evidence that extended schools act as a valuable vehicle for tackling disadvantage and poverty, the findings in the report suggest that current provision is largely falling short of its poverty-combating potential.

The report makes the following proposals for a new vision for extended schools:

- The government should clearly articulate the role of schools in childcare provision and support them to deliver this. The lower premises and equipment costs could help bring down the cost of high-quality childcare for school-aged children, as well as increasing supply.
- The government should clearly articulate its expectation of the role that local authorities should play in improving the spread and quality of extended school services and in facilitating collaboration between schools and sharing best practice to make sure all children can access them.
- Schools should be encouraged to monitor the use of their extended services by disad-

vantaged children and should work with all families, including disadvantaged families, to understand the barriers to participation and then take action to overcome these.

- All out-of-school childcare should be registered, so parents can claim the childcare element in tax credits and universal credit. Schools should also monitor and respond to the impact that charges for services have on the participation of disadvantaged pupils, and should consider different charges if necessary. Schools that use the 'pupil premium' to fund services should not charge children eligible for free school meals for any services.
- The government should expand the funding announced in the Budget for after-school activities in 25 per cent of secondary schools to *all* schools.
- Parents must be openly informed of their rights to request wraparound and holiday childcare and the process adopted by schools should give their request the best chance of success.

In sum, the extended school model presents clear opportunities to deliver positive impacts on the lives of disadvantaged children and families and should be an important strand in a broader strategy for tackling child poverty. ■

Alice Woudhuysen is London Campaign Manager at CPAG. *Unfinished Business: where next for extended schools?*, published by CPAG and the Family and Childcare Trust, is available at www.cpag.org.uk/content/unfinished-business-where-next-extended-schools

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