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Ten-point plan for spending the pupil premium successfully

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Schools need to adopt effective strategies to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. There is plenty of evidence about what works well, but not all these successful strategies will be appropriate to the particular context in which a school is working.

The methodology described below sets out a process to help schools decide on the optimum strategies and to maintain efficient and effective use of pupil premium (PP) funding over time. With thought and planning on the part of a school, this money really can make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged children.

£2.5 billion of PP funding in 2014-15 is a lot of money to put into schools for a single initiative. We saw these levels of funding for the national strategies in the post-1997 era, but this is different. This isn't the government telling schools what to do in increasingly mind-numbing detail, as has been the case so often during the last 30 years; this is the government saying to schools: 'Increasing social mobility is important for the health of our society and you, the schools, have a key role to play. So we are giving you significant extra funding for every deprived pupil on your roll. We will hold you to account for the impact you make with this money, but we won't tell you how to do it. Over to you.' Rarely has school autonomy seemed so big, so important or so scary.

Underpinning the process described below, schools should focus on the quality of teaching. There is solid evidence that poor teaching disproportionately disadvantages deprived children. Equally, evidence tells us that excellent teaching disproportionately benefits them. So high quality teaching must be at the core of all pupil premium work. It follows that it is legitimate to spend PP funding on raising the quality of teaching.

Step 1. Set an ambition for what you want your school to achieve with PP funding.

Some of the schools aiming high express this ambition in terms of becoming one of the 17 per cent of schools in which those on free school meals (FSM) do better than the average for all pupils nationally.

Step 2. The process of decision-making on PP spending starts with an analysis of the barriers to learning for PP pupils.

Barriers to learning might include poor parenting, limited access to language, poor literacy levels, poor attendance, low aspirations, low expectations, narrow experience of life outside school. Each school will want to make its own list.

Step 3. Decide on the desired outcomes of your PP spending.

Schools should decide for themselves what outcomes they are aiming for with PP funding, but these might include: raising attainment of PP-eligible pupils; closing the gap between PP pupils and others in the school; closing the gap between the school's PP pupils and all pupils nationally; improving attendance; reducing exclusions; accelerated progress by all PP pupils; increasing the engagement of parents with their children's education and with the school; increasing opportunities for PP-eligible pupils and broadening their experience.

Step 4. Against each desired outcome, identify success criteria.

Against each of the desired outcomes which the school decides to pursue, school leaders should set one or more success criteria. This could be expressed as a number – 'closing the gap between the attainment of PP-eligible pupils and that of all pupils nationally by x per cent this year and by y per cent the following year'. For outcomes such as parental engagement, there are no easy metrics, so schools need to discuss what success looks like for them against these aims.

Step 5. Evaluate your current PP strategies.

Having set out a range of desired outcomes and put success criteria against them, schools can evaluate their current strategies and assess how successful each of the strategies is in pursuit of the stated outcomes.

Consider how much of your PP spending is on year 6 or year 11 pupils and how much on younger pupils. What are the percentages?

Consider how much you are spending on the needs of individual pupils and how much on whole-school strategies. What are the percentages?

There are no 'right answers' for the proportion of PP funding spent on different groups, but it will help your evaluation to know these figures.

A lot of PP funding is spent on additional classroom assistants, so schools should use the research report on the deployment and impact of support staff (http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/oxed/primary/literacy/osi_teaching_assistants_report_web.pdf?region=uk) to help them evaluate the effectiveness of learning assistants and ensure that they are working in the most effective way.

Step 6. Research the evidence of what works best.

Schools need to look outwards for evidence of what works well elsewhere. I recommend three places to look initially.

First, seek out excellent practice in other schools, using http://apps.nationalcollege.org.uk/closing_the_gap/index.cfm and <http://www.pupilpremiumawards.co.uk> and consider how you might adapt their successful PP strategies to the context of your school.

Second, use the excellent Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/>, looking first at the strategies that make the most difference (feedback, metacognition, peer tutoring, etc) and think about how these could best be used in your school.

Third, study the Ofsted report on pupil premium, published in February 2013, where there is a list of successful approaches on page 3: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/pupil-premium-how-schools-are-spending-funding-successfully-maximise-achievement>. Evaluate PP strategies in your school in the light of the points made in this report.

Step 7. Decide on the optimum range of strategies to be adopted.

Using the evidence gathered from other schools and through your research in the EEF Toolkit and elsewhere, involve the leadership team, staff and governing body in deciding on the best strategies to use in the context of your school.

These should not be seen as separate from your other efforts to raise attainment and accelerate progress. Make sure that the PP strategies are embedded in your overall school improvement plan.

Consider too how you can adapt the curriculum to benefit disadvantaged pupils. The question ‘What curriculum does most for disadvantaged pupils?’ promotes rich discussion among staff and governors about the knowledge and skills that will maximise the life chances of young people from less well-off backgrounds. See the Whole Education website (www.wholeeducation.org) to learn about how Whole Education Network schools are developing a fully rounded education for their pupils as part of their ‘closing the gap’ and raising achievement strategies.

Don’t forget the needs of bright PP-eligible pupils. You can spend funding on them to push them further and also to broaden their expectations and opportunities. Oxbridge visits and music tuition are fruitful examples.

Another group that especially needs additional help and support is the group of looked-after children, who have historically generally obtained very poor qualifications. Each school may have few of them, but heads need to work with the local ‘virtual head’ to deploy resources effectively for these children with their varied backgrounds and needs.

And, don’t forget, excellent teaching can be the best strategy of all for raising the attainment of PP-eligible pupils and closing the gap.

Step 8. Staff training.

There are no short cuts to success with the strategies you adopt. If they are to be successful, in-depth training for all staff must take place

Step 9. Monitor the progress of PP-eligible pupils frequently.

Collect, analyse and use your data to maximum effect in monitoring the progress of every PP-eligible pupil. This should be done frequently, so that interventions can be put in place quickly, as soon as a pupil is starting to slip.

Step 10. Put an audit trail on the school website for PP spending.

The school needs to put in a prominent place on the website an account of PP spending. The head and governing body are held to account for the impact that the school is making with PP funding. This can be done in tabular form, listing each strategy, its cost, evaluation reports on its effectiveness, and its impact. In addition, schools can use anonymised case studies of the difference that PP funding is making to the lives of pupils.

This also fulfils the governing body's legal obligation to report to parents on how the PP is being spent and the impact that is being made with it.