RESEARCH

Excellence in Cities
The National Evaluation of a Policy to Raise Standards in Urban Schools 2000-2003
Report Summary

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National Foundation for Educational Research
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department for
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In 2000, a consortium consisting of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), the Centre for Educational Research (CER) and the Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) at the London School of Economics LSE), and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) were commisioned to undertake an evaluation of Excellence in Cities (EiC) in secondary schools, to cover the period up to the end of the academic year 2002/2003. A series of working papers produced during the course of the evaluation is available at http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/excellence-in-cities/

Key findings

The extent and nature of the impact of EiC was different for different Key Stages, and also varied in relation to school and pupil characteristics. The greatest impact of EiC was in relation to attainment in Mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 for pupils in the most disadvantaged schools. There was also a more marked improvement in attendance in EiC schools than in non-EiC schools between the 1998/99 and 2002/03 academic years.

Some elements of EiC, such as support for gifted and talented pupils and the provision of Learning Support Units, were targeted at a minority of pupils. This may have contributed to an overall pattern of small or marginal impacts elsewhere, when considered over all pupils in EiC schools.

Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Overall, pupils attending EiC schools had higher levels of attainment in Mathematics than otherwise similar pupils (taking into account a range of school and pupil factors including attainment at the end of Key Stage 2) attending schools that were not part of EiC. This was particularly marked in Phase 1 schools, many of which were also in receipt of funding from the Pupil Learning Credits (PLC) pilot scheme.[1] There was no substantial evidence to show that EiC had an impact on levels of attainment in English or Science at the end of Key Stage 3.

The per-pupil costs of the EiC policy were modest in relation to overall school expenditure. A simple cost-benefit analysis suggested that EiC was potentially cost-effective in terms of the long term wage return to individuals at Key Stage 3.

[1] The PLC pilot scheme provided additional resources to schools in some EiC areas with high levels of entitlement to Free School Meals. The pilot, which operated from September 2001 to March 2003, enabled secondary schools to provide additional learning opportunities to pupils whose social circumstances were particularly difficult.

For pupils with moderate levels of prior attainment at Key Stage 2, differentials in progress between boys and girls in English and Science during Key Stage 3 were less in EiC schools than in non-EiC areas. Pupils from Chinese backgrounds attending EiC schools in Phase 1 areas made more progress than otherwise similar pupils in non-EiC schools. For other minority ethnic groups, the picture was more mixed.

EiC was associated with a 'partnership dividend', in that pupil progress during Key Stage 3 was greater in those LEA areas where there was a high level of engagement with the EiC Partnership.

The quantitative data showed that pupils designated as gifted and talented had higher levels of attainment than otherwise similar pupils not designated.

Pupils referred to a Learning Mentor had lower levels of attainment than otherwise similar pupils, but there was evidence to suggest that early mentoring (in Year 7) had enabled some pupils to overcome barriers to learning.

The quantitative data did not find any association between attending a Learning Support Unit (LSU) or a City Learning Centre (CLC) and attainment at Key Stage 3, once pupil and school factors had been taken into account.

There was no consistent pattern suggesting that the impact of Beacon and Specialist Schools in EiC areas differed between EiC and non-EiC areas, or that EiC Action Zones had an overall impact on performance

Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

In 2003, there was little evidence to suggest that the pupils in EiC areas were making more progress during Key Stage 4 than similar pupils (again, taking account of prior attainment and a range of school and pupil factors) in non-EiC areas. Neither did the analysis indicate that there were differences between EiC and non-EiC areas in 2001 and that these gaps were narrowing over time.

It was not possible to carry out a cost benefit analysis of EiC at Key Stage 4 because prior attainment could not be controlled for properly in the pre-EiC period.

Pupils identified as gifted and talented generally had higher levels of attainment than otherwise similar pupils not so designated. The impact of being designated as gifted and talented was not uniform, and was associated with level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, attitudes to education, behaviour and ethnicity.

In relation to the Learning Mentor Strand, there were positive associations between mentoring and achievement for some groups of pupils and some outcome measures.

There was no quantitative evidence of EiC having an impact on pupils referred to an LSU, or attending a CLC.

As at Key Stage 3, the quantitiative evidence did not suggest that EiC added value to existing Specialist and Beacon School programmes, or that EiC Action Zones had an impact on attainment.

Attendance

Using the overall percentage of half-days missed, calculated for a complete academic year on a whole-school basis (the only measure available nationally), there was an overall improvement in attendance between 1998/1999 (before EiC was introduced) and 2002/2003, with a greater improvement in EiC areas, by slightly more than one day per pupil per year.

The perceptions of stakeholders

Partnership Coordinators, school senior managers and teachers were generally very positive about EiC. Although only a minority reported a direct impact on attainment, many noted the ways in which EiC was improving pupils' motivation to learn, and was creating a more favourable climate for teaching and learning.

EiC was seen by stakeholders as:

- **widening diversity and extending opportunity** by offering extension and learning support opportunities and through enhancements to the mainstream curriculum
- **promoting inclusion and equality of opportunity,** although there were also concerns that EiC did not directly impact on the majority of young people in inner city schools
- **creating a greater sense of partnership between schools and their LEAs.**

There was less evidence that EiC was improving pupils' transition from primary to secondary school or was generating and sustaining partnerships with parents, employers or training providers.

1. The EIC policy

Excellence in Cities (EiC) is a major government policy designed to raise standards in urban schools. It aims to offer diversity of provision, so that the needs of all pupils are met within a framework of cooperation and partnership between schools. Following the announcement of EiC in spring 1999, the secondary schools in 25 local education authorities (LEAs) in the major conurbations of England worked with their LEAs to draw up a Partnership plan. Following agreement with DfES, money was released to Partnerships from September 1999. The programme was subsequently extended in 2000 (Phase 2) and 2001 (Phase 3), and now includes 57 Partnerships and about a third of England's secondary schools.

During the period of the evaluation, there were seven inter-related Strands to EiC, as well as a number of cross-cutting themes, which taken together aimed to provide a comprehensive and coherent overall strategy for improving urban schools. The seven Strands were:

- programmes to support gifted and talented children
- the provision of Learning Mentors to provide advice, access to services and support to students with barriers to learning
- the establishment of Learning Support Units (LSUs), to provide specific support for pupils with barriers to learning and who would benefit from time away from the normal classroom
- City Learning Centres (CLCs), each providing high quality ICT resources for a group of schools and for the community more widely
- EiC Action Zones,[2] which were based on the existing statutory Education Action Zones (EAZs) and which linked small groups of primary and secondary schools to address local priorities for raising standards
- an expansion of the existing Specialist and Beacon School programmes.

The cross-cutting themes within the overall EiC policy included improving the public perception of schools in urban areas, increasing cooperation and partnership between schools, improving ICT provision, and improving pupils' transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.

The whole EiC programme has been extended in a number of ways, including provision for primary pupils, and Excellence Clusters – small groups of primary schools in areas of deprivation outside the main EiC areas. Total DfES expenditure on the whole EiC programme rose from about £24 million

[2] Initially known as small Education Action Zones.

in 1999/2000 to £139 million in 2000/20001 (the first full year) and to about £386 million in 2005/2006.[3] The programme therefore represents a significant use of resources but should be seen in the context of overall local authority current expenditure on secondary schools of over £9,000 million in 2000/2001.[4]

At the same time, the programme has developed beyond the original key Strands to include the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG)[5] and the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP).[6] LIG provides increased funding to small groups of schools, known as collaboratives, in EiC areas (and to some schools outside these areas) to ensure that their leadership teams in those schools are able to transform the delivery of education. The BIP was introduced in July 2002, and aims to reduce problems associated with behaviour and attendance. As a result of these changes, EiC now focuses on three main themes: learning and teaching, behaviour and attendance, and leadership.

[3] These figures exclude spending on Specialist and Beacon schools.

[4] See http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmhansrd/vo040301/text/40301w10.htm.

[5] LIG was launched in April 2003 and included all EiC secondary schools, as well as other schools with high levels of entitlement to free schools or low levels of attainment at GCSE.

[6] The BIP was launched in July 2002 in 34 areas (almost all of which were already involved in EiC), and was subsequently extend to a further 26 EiC areas. It is aimed at improving poor behaviour and attendance in schools where these issues form significant barriers to learning and pupil progress.

2. Monitoring and evaluating EiC

The changing nature of EiC during the evaluation period was reflected in an evolving set of research objectives, which can be summarised as assessing the impact of EiC on:

- **pupils** in terms of improved achievement and inclusion
- **schools** in terms of improvements to teaching and learning, establishing a culture of professional development, greater use of ICT, better transition, and more positive public perceptions of schools
- **LEAs and Partnerships**, with greater collaboration and partnership working.

Additionally, the evaluation explored the use of resources within EiC and its cost-effectiveness.

2.1 The evidence base

The evaluation drew on national data relating to the attainments of all pupils completing Year 9 and Year 11 in each year from 1999 to 2003. From 2001, this information was linked to detailed pupil level information using data collected as part of the DfES Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), and to information about individual schools. The Database of Teacher Records was used to examine the characteristics of teachers in EiC and non-EiC areas.

Primary data collected by the evaluation consortium had the following four main elements.

Surveys of pupils, form tutors and headteachers in EiC schools

All EiC schools were invited to take part in these surveys, which took place in spring 2001, spring 2002 and spring 2003. Within each school, the headteacher and the form tutors for one year group were asked to complete questionnaires, as were all pupils in the selected year group. Schools also provided some background information about their pupils. Over this period, a comprehensive dataset was built up which allowed both the tracking of individual pupils over three years and comparisons of successive cohorts. A further group of schools, operating in circumstance comparable to those in EiC areas, took part in a similar set of surveys using modified versions of the questionnaires.

Interviews with Partnership Coordinators

Four rounds of in-depth interviews with Partnership Coordinators were conducted, in autumn 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2004.

Surveys of employers

Telephone surveys of employers and training providers with experience of those leaving school at 16 took place in summer 2001 (selected Phase 1 and 2 areas) and summer 2002 (all Phase 3 areas), with follow-up interviews in summer 2003.

Strand Studies

Each of the seven key policy Strands was the subject of a more detailed study. These Strand Studies used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including interviews with stakeholders and case studies of schools. Each Study was designed to explore specific aspects of the implementation and impact of the Strand.

2.2 The strength of the evidence base

The size of the datasets available, the range of methods used, and the sophisticated research design that provides for both cross-sectional and longitudinal perspectives, ensure that we can be reasonably confident that the findings presented are valid and reliable. Where it has been possible to carry out difference-in-differences analyses which compare pre- and post-EiC outcomes, these provide robust findings in relation to the impact of EiC. The cohort comparison and single comparison approaches allow us to establish relationships between, for example, participation in the Gifted and Talented Strand and academic outcomes, with considerably certainty, but do not provide unequivocal evidence of impact.

However, it is important to recognise the limitations, as well as the strengths, of the data. Some of these relate to the nature of EiC as an evolving policy, embedded in a wider educational system which was itself undergoing change, and some to the fact that some of the Strands, for example LSUs, directly affect only a minority of pupils. Participation in the evaluation was on a voluntary basis, and therefore information provided by schools, pupils and others may not capture the full range of experiences and attitudes. Furthermore, schools and Partnerships varied in the extent to which they had been able to use EiC as a lever for change, and 'average' levels of impact may under-estimate the potential impact of EiC when it is delivered most effectively.

2.3 A note on the Pupil Learning Credits pilot scheme

The Pupil Learning Credits (PLC) pilot scheme operated in the period September 2001 to March 2003 in about 260 schools (almost all in EiC Phase 1 areas) with high levels of entitlement to Free School Meals. This gave additional funding to schools to provide educational opportunities to pupils from financially deprived backgrounds. Because of the timing of this pilot, and the definition of schools included, it is not possible to establish the separate effects of the PLC and EiC initiatives in schools in the most challenging circumstances.

3. The impact of EiC on pupils' attainment

Pupils living in the areas included in the EiC policy are considerably more likely than those in other parts of the country to:

- be not fully fluent in English
- be entitled to Free School Meals
- have identified special educational needs
- not be from White UK backgrounds.

The first three of these factors have been shown to be associated with lack of educational progress and with relatively low levels of academic attainment (see, for example, West and Pennell, 2003). Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds also differ in terms of levels of progress and attainment.

All the analyses of pupils' performance reported here take account of these differences between pupils in EiC and non-EiC areas, as well as of pupils' prior attainment and of school-level factors such as size and overall levels of entitlement to Free School Meals which may also be associated with different levels of attainment.

A number of different statistical and econometric techniques were used, and these fall into three main groups. The 'difference-in-differences' approach used data for pupils completing Key Stage 3 in the years 1999 (i.e. immediately before the launch of EiC in Phase 1 areas) to 2003. The cohort comparison approach used multilevel modelling techniques to compare the 2001 to 2003 Key Stage 3 cohorts (using attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 as prior attainment) and for the Key Stage 4 cohorts for the same years (using end of Key Stage 3 assessments as prior attainment). Multilevel modelling was also used within single cohorts, to compare pupils in EiC and non-EiC areas.

In addition, a wide range of analyses were carried out that made use of information from the school, teacher and pupil surveys.[7] The results are reported in detail in Morris and Rutt (2005), and key findings from this report are incorporated here.

The overall impact of EiC: analysis of performance data

All the results reported here take account of a range of pupil- and school-level factors, including pupils' prior attainment.

[7] These analyses all used the cohort comparison or single cohort approaches .

3.1 Key Stage 3

Average level achieved

The average Key Stage 3 level achieved (i.e. using each pupil's average level across English, Mathematics and Science) at the end of Key Stage 3 was not associated with involvement in EiC in any of the years 2001 to 2003, or in any of the Phases of EiC.

Mathematics

The greatest impact of EiC was in relation to attainment in Mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 for pupils in the most disadvantaged schools. Overall, pupils attending EiC schools had higher levels of attainment in Mathematics than otherwise similar pupils attending schools that were not part of EiC, after taking into account a range of school and pupil factors including attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. This was equivalent to increasing the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above by between 1.1 and 1.9 percentage points, with the higher value being observed in Phase 1 schools, many of which were also in receipt of funding from the Pupil Learning Credits (PLC) pilot. For each Phase of EiC, the impact was greater in more disadvantaged schools.

English

The analysis for the period 1999 to 2003 did not suggest any relationship between attainment in English and involvement in EiC after controlling for school- and pupil-level factors. This is consistent with results for the 2003 cohort alone, which showed that pupils in EiC and non-EiC areas achieved similar levels in English.

Science

The levels achieved in Science at the end of Key Stage 3 were not associated with involvement in EiC in any of the years 2001 to 2003, either overall or for a given Phase of EiC.

Variations in impact associated with school-level entitlement to Free School Meals

The impact of EiC was greater in schools with high levels of entitlement to Free School Meals. This was particularly evident for Mathematics.

Variations in impact associated with pupils' prior attainment

For the level achieved in Mathematics, pupils with relatively high prior attainment in Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools did slightly less well – and those with relatively low levels of prior attainment did slightly better – at Key Stage 3 than would be expected given the overall relationships between performance and prior attainment.

However, for the 1999 to 2003 cohorts together, the difference-in-differences analysis suggests that, within disadvantaged schools, the effect of EiC policy

on attainment in Mathematics was greatest for pupils of medium to high ability. These findings suggest complex relationships between pupils' progress and their individual levels of prior attainment, the level of deprivation of the school (which in general will be associated with overall levels of attainment), and the participation of the school in EiC.

Pupils in EiC Phase 1 schools achieved slightly higher levels for Science at Key Stage 3 than did similar pupils attending non-EiC schools. The differences (which were again greater for lower levels of prior attainment) were very small, being about 0.05 of a level for those with an average level of 2 at Key Stage 2 level and effectively zero for pupils with an average level of 4 or above at Key Stage 2.

Variations in impact associated with gender

Girls made more progress than boys in English in both EiC and non-EiC schools. This differential between boys' and girls' progress was less in EiC Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools than in non-EiC schools for pupils with moderate levels of prior attainment. For Science, while girls generally made less progress than boys, the differential was slightly less in EiC schools than in non-EiC schools.

Variations in impact associated with ethnicity[8]

Pupils from Chinese backgrounds and attending non-EiC schools had higher levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 than otherwise similar pupils from White UK, with similar levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2, for Mathematics, Science and English. For Mathematics and Science, pupils from Chinese backgrounds in Phase 1 schools had even higher levels of attainment (equivalent to an additional two to three months of progress in each case).

For other minority ethnic groups, the picture was more mixed, and the effect associated with attending an EiC school (which was, in some cases, negative) varied by ethnic group, subject and gender. None of the differences was greater than the equivalent of two months of progress.

Cost benefit

The impact of EiC on the probability of achieving at least level 5 in Mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 was noted above, but there was no evidence of impact on English. A simple cost benefit analysis was carried out, but it was necessary to make some assumptions in doing so. The key assumptions are that.

- an improvement of one level can be interpreted as equivalent to two years of education

[8] Detailed analysis relating to minority ethnic groups focussed on non-EiC and EiC Phase 1 areas only.

- the wage return to an additional year of schooling is eight per cent and future wages will have a similar age profile, with a real terms increase of two per cent per year, to current patterns of earnings.

This analysis showed that two years after the launch of EiC (in Phase 1 and 3 areas), and three years after launch (in Phase 2 areas), the policy was generating a positive return. The estimates of this return vary from four to seven per cent, depending on Phase and year. In 2003, the rate of return for pupils in Phase 1 areas in schools which were also in the PLC pilot was about five per cent.

3.2 Key Stage 4

In 2001, pupils in Phase 2 areas were slightly more likely (with an odds ratio of 1.13)[9] than similar pupils in non-EiC or EiC Phase 1 areas, or in those areas which subsequently formed Phase 3, to achieve at least five good GCSEs.[10] Given the short interval between the launch of EiC in Phase 2 areas and the time when these pupils were completing their GCSEs (and in the absence of a similar finding in relation to the more established Phase 1 Partnerships), it is unlikely that this difference can be ascribed to EiC.

In 2002 and 2003, pupils in EiC Phase 1 schools (excluding those involved in the PLC pilot) and in Phase 2 areas had the same probability of achieving five good GCSEs as did similar pupils in similar schools in non-EiC areas. However, pupils attending schools involved in the PLC pilot (most of which were also in EiC Phase 1 areas) and completing Key Stage 4 in summer 2003 were more likely to achieve five good GCSEs than otherwise similar pupils in non-PLC schools (with an odds ratio of about 1.2). The enhanced performance at Key Stage 4 pupils attending these schools may be due to EiC, the PLC pilot, or some combination of these. It may, however, also be at least in part a result of the increasing focus on school improvement more generally, and in particular on those schools with the lowest proportions of pupils achieving at least five good GCSEs (which in general were those with high levels of entitlement to Free School Meals).

For other outcome measures considered, such as the capped and uncapped total GCSE point scores, the findings in relation to Phase 2 areas in 2001 were

[9] The odds ratio is a way of comparing whether the probability of a certain event (in this, achieving at least five good GCSEs) is the same for two groups, e.g. pupils in non-EiC and EiC Phase 1 schools. An odds ratio of 1 indicates that the probability is the same in each group. In this case, the odds ratio was greater than 1, showing that Phase 2 pupils were more likely to reach this threshold.

[10] Note that detailed pupil level information, such as ethnicity and entitlement to Free School Meals was not available for this cohort. Therefore, results are not directly comparable with those for subsequent cohorts.

similar, but there was no other evidence suggesting a relationship between EiC, PLC and attainment.

Taken together, these findings do not support the hypothesis that pupils in EiC areas were, overall, making greater progress than those in non-EiC areas. Neither do they provide evidence that, in 2001, pupils in EiC areas (or in those areas that became part of EiC with its launch in Phase 3 areas in the autumn of that year) were making less progress than similar pupils in non-EiC areas and that these differences had been reduced by 2003.

Variations in impact associated with school-level entitlement to Free School Meals

Overall, pupils in schools with relatively low overall levels of entitlement to Free School Meals had higher attainments than those of similar pupils in schools with higher levels of entitlement. However, there were complex relationships between level of attainment and level of entitlement, varying with the outcome measure considered: EiC was associated with reduced differentials in some cases and increased differentials in others.

Variations in impact associated with pupil factors

In Phase 1 areas, EiC was associated with reducing differentials in attainment related to prior attainment for the capped and uncapped point scores, and for the probability of achieving five or more good GCSEs.

There was no evidence that the effect of EiC was related to gender.

Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds who attended EiC Phase 1 schools generally had higher capped and uncapped point scores than pupils with similar characteristics and levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, in non-EiC schools.[11] The only exception was for Black Other girls in EiC schools, whose average point scores were slightly below that of otherwise similar girls in non-EiC schools. Black Other pupils in Phase 1 schools had a greater probability of achieving at least five good GCSEs than similar non-EiC pupils, while Pakistani pupils in Phase 1 areas had a slightly lower probability of achieving this benchmark than those in non-EiC areas.

3.3 Perceptions of impact on attainment

Most of the teachers and school senior managers taking part in the surveys were very positive about the policy. Although only a minority directly linked EiC with raised attainment, many noted the ways in which EiC was creating a better environment for learning, improving pupils' motivation and raising their

[11] As at Key Stage 3, this analysis considered non-EiC and Phase 1 areas only.

aspirations, and contributing to improved teaching and learning, all of which would lead in the longer term to improved levels of attainment.

Many Partnership Coordinators noted improvements in pupil performance since the implementation of EiC in their area, but they also noted the difficulty of identifying the extent to which many concurrent initiatives and multiple funding streams were contributing to this. Partnership Coordinators were, however, very positive about the ways in which EiC was creating the conditions under which learning could most effectively occur.

3.4 The Strands and pupils' attainment

The statistical analysis did not find any association between attending a Learning Support Unit or a CLC and attainment at Key Stage 3 or 4, once pupil and school factors had been taken into account.

Pupils designated as gifted and talented had higher levels of achievement at the end of Key Stage 3 than those of otherwise similar pupils not designated. This difference was greater for boys than for girls for Mathematics and for the average Key Stage 3 level achieved, and greater for girls for English. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils identified as gifted and talented generally had higher levels of attainment than otherwise similar pupils not so designated (except in the 2003 cohort for achieving five or more good GCSEs). The impact of being designated as gifted and talented was not uniform, and was associated with level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, attitudes to education, behaviour and ethnicity.

At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils referred to a Learning Mentor had made less progress than otherwise similar pupils not referred to a Mentor, but there was evidence to suggest that early mentoring (in Year 7) had enabled some pupils to overcome barriers to learning. In relation to the impact of the Learning Mentor Strand at Key Stage 4, there were associations between mentoring and achievement for some groups of pupils and some outcome measures.

There was no consistent pattern suggesting that the impact of Beacon and Specialist Schools in EiC areas differed between EiC and non-EiC areas, or that EiC Action Zones had an overall impact on performance.

4. Attendance, attitudes and behaviour

4.1 Attendance at school

The only measure of attendance available on a national basis was the overall percentage of half-days missed, calculated for a complete academic year on a whole-school basis. Using this measure, there was an overall improvement in attendance between 1998/1999 (before EiC was introduced) and 2002/2003, and a greater improvement in EiC areas, by slightly more than one day per pupil per year.

4.2 Young people's attitudes and behaviour

The detailed data derived from the pupil surveys provides some information about the relationship between pupils' attitudes and behaviour and their experience of EiC, although significant findings were restricted to Key Stage 4 pupils. Longitudinal analysis of three successive Year 11 cohorts within EiC schools showed that pupils designated as gifted and talented had more positive attitudes to learning and education, and better (self-reported) behaviour than otherwise similar pupils in terms of their general behaviour at school and completing homework. They also had lower levels of authorised absence (but higher levels of unauthorised absence) than similar pupils not so designated. Girls in the gifted and talented cohort were also less likely to have been excluded at some point in the preceding academic year. This cross-sectional analysis does, however, raise the question as to whether young people were designated as gifted and talented because they already demonstrated positive attitudes and behaved well, or whether they developed such attitudes as a result of being in the gifted and talented group. The longitudinal study, which tracked one group of both EiC and non-EiC pupils from Year 9 to Year 11, suggests the former. This showed no association between changing attitudes and involvement in EiC, either overall or for specific Strands.

Comparing three successive Year 11 cohorts, pupils who had been mentored had, on average, a less positive attitude to education and were less likely than their peers to demonstrate good behaviour in terms of self-reported punctuality, attendance, completion of homework and coursework, and attentiveness in class.

4.3 Attitudes and behaviour: the perceptions of stakeholders

Many teachers, headteachers and Partnership Coordinators reported that EiC had brought about positive changes in pupils' attitudes, motivation, behaviour and attendance. The Gifted and Talented Strand, which was seen as

improving attitudes to learning and creating a culture in which academic success was celebrated, and the Learning Mentor Strand, which was seen as a very effective way of addressing the needs of pupils who were, or were in danger of becoming, disaffected, as well as of those who faced a range of difficulties in school or at home, were particularly highly regarded. There was, however, a less positive side to these Strands, in that EiC was sometimes seen as focussing on the disaffected and on the most able, which could lead to other pupils feeling excluded and demotivated.

Other Strands were also perceived as contributing to improvements in attitudes and behaviour. For example:

- LSUs were thought to be contributing to improved attendance, improved behaviour, fewer disruptive incidents and a more cooperative attitude, improved attitudes to learning, and a greater ability to form and maintain relationships with peers and with others such as family members.
- Beacon and Specialist Schools were seen as creating more positive attitudes to learning and greater motivation. The ability of Specialist Schools to broaden the curriculum and to enhance study support and out-of-school provision, was felt to contribute to keeping potentially disaffected pupils 'on track'. It was reported that such pupils also responded well to the more 'adult' atmosphere of CLCs.

5. The impact of EiC on schools and teachers

5.1 Teachers, school managers and Partnership Coordinators

Although only a minority of teachers chose to comment on the impact of EiC, their comments were very largely favourable. Teachers were generally positive about the impact on **teaching and learning**, noting that they could now use a wider range of teaching activities, had the opportunity to try new teaching and learning methods and had more opportunities for the exchange of ideas with colleagues, and that the **quality of their working life and professional development** had improved. Very few teachers noted any negative impacts of EiC on teaching and learning. There were also favourable comments in relation to additional resources and assistance for teachers in the classroom. Changes in teaching and learning approaches were also noted by schools, with almost a third reporting changes in grouping arrangements, with greater use of setting or banding and a corresponding decrease in mixed ability teaching and streaming.

In relation to **ICT**, in 2003 EiC schools were still generally less well resourced than schools in non-EiC areas, but at that time about three-quarters of the teachers taking part in the surveys reported that the ICT facilities in their schools were good or excellent, with those in EiC areas being slightly more positive than those elsewhere. Pupils were also positive about their school's ICT resources. In 2001, pupils in EiC schools reported less access to ICT at school than those in non-EiC institutions, but by 2003 pupils in EiC and non-EiC schools reported similar levels of access.

Over the course of the evaluation, there was a noticeable increase in the proportions of schools offering **additional study opportunities** such as homework clubs, summer schools, and literacy and numeracy activities. Increasing the range of opportunities available to pupils outside normal teaching has been an important theme in educational policy over the last few years, and some of this growth reported by EiC schools may be related to the PLC pilot scheme or to more general school developments. Nevertheless, significant proportions of schools attributed these developments to EiC.

The relatively poor progress of many pupils in the early years of secondary education has been a concern, and EiC sought to address inadequacies in **transition from primary to secondary school** in urban areas, with an increasing use of strategies such as collaborative cross-phase activities and holiday projects. However, most Partnership Coordinators did not feel that EiC overall had led to substantial improvements in the transition from Key

Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, although EiC Action Zones and Learning Mentors were seen as making a contribution.

In comparison with national data on the **turnover of teaching staff** (Statistics of Education, 2003), the EiC schools surveyed appeared to have a similar rate of turnover. Although there was a slight increase in the numbers of teachers leaving EiC schools across the three years of the surveys, senior managers of EiC schools generally reported that they had maintained their ability to recruit staff to replace those who left, but they saw the retention of good quality teachers as being more difficult in 2003 than it had been in 2002, suggesting that retention presents a continuing challenge to EiC schools.

Despite concerns about the challenges facing teachers in inner city schools, in 2003 many of the teachers surveyed intended to remain within teaching and indeed within their EiC school. A sizeable minority of teachers reported that, if they were to apply for a new post, EiC in general and the Gifted and Talented and LSU Strands in particular would positively influence their decision to apply to a school. For those who did not intend to remain in teaching, the main reasons cited were workload, difficult pupils and the stressful nature of teaching.

The main concerns of school senior managers and teachers in relation to EiC were related to the practicalities of implementing EiC and of integrating it with other initiatives.

5.2 The perceptions of local employers

Surveys of employers and training providers suggested that schools in EiC areas were at least maintaining their contact with the wider employment and training communities, although such contacts could be enhanced and developed. Although they were often reluctant to judge the quality of local schools and school leavers, most employers interviewed considered that schools were at least satisfactory, and a third perceived them as good or very good, and they were more positive about pupil behaviour and school leadership in 2003 than previously. While training providers remained largely positive that young people made an informed choice about their destinations post-16 and had the necessary ability to succeed, half the providers felt that young people were not well-prepared when they embarked on their courses, and a quarter were concerned that pupils did not possess the appropriate skills and characteristics to succeed.

There were indications of growing awareness, and appreciation of the potential benefits, of EiC among employers and training providers, but it appears that in 2003 there was still considerable scope for the creation of stronger links between schools and the local business community.

6. Impact at the local area level

One of the central aims of EiC was to encourage schools to work together in the expectation that this could achieve more for pupils, parents and communities than schools working in isolation or in competition. Each Partnership had a Coordinator and included, as a minimum, an LEA and its maintained secondary schools, although many Partnerships chose to include a variety of other stakeholders, including local further education colleges, training providers and employers.

This role of the Partnership Coordinator became less operational and more strategic as the EiC programme became more established and school 'ownership' developed. A central role for Coordinators was to manage and distribute the EiC finances, according to government funding regulations and Partnership agreements. In the final round of interviews in autumn 2004, some Coordinators expressed concern that proposals to change the way in which schools are funded from 2006 would make it more difficult to retain resources for coordination and other activities at Partnership level. Creating a partnership ethos was seen to be easier in the smaller Partnerships and, towards the end of the evaluation period, the collaboratives – the small groups of schools created by the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) in EiC areas – than in larger Partnerships.

6.1 Partnership engagement and the impact on pupils

Using information provided by Partnership Coordinators in autumn 2004, Partnerships were grouped into five categories, ranging from those seen by their Coordinator to be at an early stage in developing a 'partnership ethos' to those where it was well embedded in school and Partnership practice. Although this categorisation should be treated with some caution, two key findings emerged. First, this categorisation was not, as might be expected, closely related to the maturity of the Partnership, and indeed each category included Partnerships from all three Phases of EiC. Second, pupils' progress during Key Stage 3 (but not during Key Stage 4) was greater in those areas showing high levels of engagement with the partnership principle of EiC than it was in EiC Partnerships where the level of engagement was lower. This was equivalent to a difference of about a month of progress (0.04 of a level) between those EiC Partnerships with the lowest levels of engagement and those with the highest levels.

7. The EiC Strands

Teachers and school managers were positive about the impact of the Gifted and Talented and Learning Mentor Strands of EiC, which they perceived to be reducing barriers to learning and hence leading to improved attainment.

Partnership Coordinators also saw these Strands as two of the most effective in terms of raising attainment, but other Strands were also contributing. While there were many successful Specialist and Beacon Schools, Coordinators did not generally feel that this success was associated with EiC.

7.1 The Gifted and Talented Strand

Successful implementation of the Gifted and Talented Strand was, to some extent, dependent on the Strand being actively managed in schools and supported by schools' senior management, but school coordinators for gifted and talented pupils did not always feel they had sufficient time to fulfil their role. Overall, coordinators were confident about the identification of gifted and talented pupils: most used assessment data to identify 'gifted' pupils and teacher nominations to identify 'talented' pupils as well as those with potential to achieve.

By 2003, the Strand was regarded by most practitioners as having a positive effect on pupils' attitudes and achievements, and on the school as a whole by creating an ethos of high expectations and of celebrating success, but there were also widespread concerns about the potentially elitist and divisive nature of the Strand.

During the course of the evaluation, provision for pupils identified as gifted or talented developed from largely separate and self-standing extension and enrichment activities for relatively small numbers of pupils towards provision which was much more embedded in teaching and learning and potentially of benefit to all pupils. Enrichment activities were seen as being more difficult to maintain without specific funding than the changes which were taking place within the classroom.

7.2 Learning Mentor Strand

Learning Mentors work with young people in a variety of ways, generally encompassing behavioural, pastoral and educational approaches. The Strand has been widely welcomed in schools and, along with the Gifted and Talented Strand, was one of the benefits of EiC most frequently mentioned by teachers, senior school managers and Partnership Coordinators as a strength of EiC. Pupils appreciated the time Learning Mentors had to offer, their more informal

and relaxed approach, and their skills and knowledge. Some schools were so positive about Learning Mentors that they were paying for additional Learning Mentors out of their own budget.

Despite these successes, implementing the Learning Mentor Strand presented challenges. It was sometimes difficult to ensure that new Mentors received appropriate induction and professional development that took account of their wide range of backgrounds and experience. At the outset, teachers had not fully understood the role of Learning Mentors but, with time, teachers began to realise the contribution that Mentors could make to individual pupils and to reducing staff workload.

7.3 Learning Support Units

By 2003, almost 65 per cent of EiC schools surveyed reported that they had a Learning Support Unit on site. When EiC was launched, it was envisaged that each school would have access to such a Unit. In practice, the extent of shared provision between schools was very limited.

Staffing the Units was a concern in many EiC areas, and a third of the schools with a Unit reported difficulties in recruitment. Working in the Units was said to be very demanding on individuals, and Unit managers, school senior managers and Partnership LSU Strand Coordinators all noted the lack of a clear job specification and of any specialised training or accreditation for LSU managers.

Although it took some time for the Strand to become established, most stakeholders felt that it was making good progress. It was felt to be very important for the success of the Unit that the ethos of the LSU was shared by the host school, and that the Unit was given status and support by the school. Many schools were very positive about their LSU, and wished to see it continue, if necessary by finding resources from within the school budget. However, they were also concerned that the impact of the Units would be limited until there was a more coherent strategy for them. In particular, some LSU staff noted that there were pupils who could thrive in the Unit but who could not, realistically, return to normal classes, and the future for such pupils was unclear.

7.4 Specialist Schools

Specialist status provided school with capital funding for projects to enhance the quality and quantity of physical resources available at the Specialist Schools included in the Strand Study. There was great variation in how EiC schools were operationalising their Specialist status, with differing emphasis on whole school versus departmental development, and on enhancing existing provision versus developing new areas. Most were offering additional out-of-hours classes, and new curricular activities were offered to challenge the more able as well as well as to engage potentially disaffected pupils.

Stakeholders believed that at least some elements of the Specialist Schools programme were effective in terms of raising standards within schools, but there were aspects which were seen as less successful, particularly the support offered to other schools. Many Partnership Coordinators and schools would have welcomed guidance and clarification from DfES on how the role of Specialist Schools 'added value' to the EiC programme. Specialist Schools were recognised as an important resource, but one that was presently under-used and which could, in some circumstances, work against the ideas of cooperation and Partnership that EiC seeks to foster.

7.5 Beacon Schools

Beacon activity in the schools visited as part of the Strand Study was varied, and encompassed academic and pastoral provision, organisational issues and teachers' professional development. Many of the issues and perceptions relating to Specialist Schools were also relevant to the Beacon School Strand, including concerns that the Beacon Strand had an adverse effect on the positive collaboration fostered elsewhere in EiC. In some Partnerships, collaborative working and the sharing of practice had been successfully developed but, overall, the Beacon School Strand was not seen to be as effective as some other Strands in bringing about change in EiC areas.

EiC Beacon Schools were working largely within their own local areas, although they were more likely than Beacon Schools in other areas to be working with primary schools. Some EiC Beacon Schools felt that they were 'under-used' within their own LEAs, and that it would be to the benefit of all schools if EiC Partnerships could assist in capitalising further on this willingness of schools to collaborate.

7.6 City Learning Centres

Generally, CLC managers were satisfied with the funding they had received to set up the Centres, although there were concerns about whether the revenue budget would be sufficient to ensure that CLCs could continue to offer state-of-the-art resources in a period of rapid change and development in ICT.

The CLCs worked in partnership with a number of schools, although in many cases the host school and its feeder primary schools were the main users. The CLCs were accessible not only to pupils, but also to teachers and other school staff, for training and professional development. In a minority of cases, they were also used by businesses, youth service staff, unemployed people and other groups in the wider community. This community use required extended opening hours, which could create difficulties in ensuring that the Centre was always adequately staffed. A further concern was that staff in the Centres enhanced their professional skills and moved on to advisory roles elsewhere. This created additional pressure on CLCs, which were continually having to train and develop new staff.

There was considerable evidence that stakeholders felt that pupils were benefiting from the Centres, and in 2003 almost 40 per cent of the teachers surveyed felt that their pupils had benefited from accessing a CLC. CLC staff felt that pupil behaviour and end of Key Stage test and examination results had improved amongst pupils who had used the Centre.

Despite these strengths of the Strand, CLC managers had ongoing concerns about the implementation and sustainability of the Centres, centred on what was seen as a lack of equity in access to CLC resources, and the resource implications of maintaining the Centres.

7.7 EiC Action Zones

The case studies of EiC Action Zones showed that the pre-existence of partnerships between schools was a significant factor in the development of many of the Zones, but that even so it took time to build relationships and for initiatives involving changes in teaching and learning to become embedded in classroom practice.

In many cases, Coordinators reported favourably on the impact of the Zones, and noted that the small scale of the EiC Action Zones, in comparison to the large EiC Partnership, was an asset. However, in several of the EiC Action Zones visited, primary headteachers did not have a clear view of the Zone's priorities and targets. Awareness of EiC was generally better within secondary schools, but even here there was sometimes a feeling that EiC was only tangentially linked to the Action Zone.

The majority of school staff and Partnership Coordinators hoped that EiC Action Zones would continue, although many Zone Directors noted that, without continued funding, most of the EiC Action Zones would not be sustainable in their current form. However, schools appeared more confident that the most successful aspects of Zone involvement – the partnerships between schools, leading to, amongst other things, sharing of good practice – would be sustainable.

7.8 Links and interactions between Strands

There was some evidence of interaction between the individual policy Strands of EiC, particularly with regard to the Gifted and Talented, Learning Mentor and LSU Strands. There was also some evidence of Learning Mentors supporting pupils in CLCs, and of Beacon and Specialist Schools providing activities for Gifted and Talented pupils.

However, stakeholders commonly recognised that the level of linkage between the Strands was under-developed and needed to be addressed in the future if each of the Strands was to be seen as part of a wider network of support within schools.

8. Messages for future policy developments

- While EiC was envisaged as a unified overarching strategy of support for pupils and schools, many stakeholders saw the Strands as inter-related but essentially separate initiatives. Future initiatives that adopt a strand-based approach should consider how to ensure that overall coherence is not lost, particularly if funding is essentially 'ring-fenced' to specific strands.
- The impact of EiC was greatest in schools in more challenging circumstances, and the question must then be asked about whether the inclusion of all schools in an LEA in an EiC Partnership was the most effective way of allocating resources. There was also evidence that smaller groups of schools, such as EiC Action Zones and the LIG collaboratives, were able to develop effective partnerships more easily than larger groups. At the same time, there were benefits from the more inclusive approach, with some evidence of a 'partnership dividend'. The Education Improvement Partnerships now being created may provide a means of achieving a balance between the benefits of a wide-ranging partnership and the cost-effective targeting of resources.
- The different Strands operated at very different levels, and targeted different schools and different pupil groups within schools. They therefore had varying potentials to effect change. Measurable change was often marginal when overall populations were examined. Partnerships had considerable freedom to implement EiC and its individual Strands as determined by local needs. This evaluation has demonstrated the complexity of strand- and area-based programmes. This complexity needs to be understood and accounted for in the design and evaluation of multifaceted initiatives.
- There should be realistic expectations about the timescale needed in order for any new initiative to bring about substantial and measurable change. In the case of EiC, pupils who were in Year 7 in Phase 1 schools in the academic year 1999/2000 completed Key Stage 4 in summer 2004. These pupils were the first to experience the whole of their secondary education in an EiC school, although many Phase 1 Partnerships were not able to implement the full EiC programme from September 1999. The progress of this group will be an important measure of the overall impact of EiC, but it may be only with subsequent cohorts of pupils that the full impact of EiC will become evident.
- While a policy such as EiC in secondary schools can contribute to improved educational outcomes, it will have maximum impact only if pupils enter secondary school with the appropriate skills and attitudes. EiC needs to be able to build on policies and strategies aimed at improving skills and attitudes at an earlier stage in young people's development.

- Identifying the unique impact of a particular policy or initiative in a complex and changing policy context creates considerable difficulties for evaluators. The expansion of EiC to new areas during the course of this evaluation meant that many of the comparison schools identified at the outset became part of EiC. For future evaluations, greater consideration could be given to establishing and maintaining a control group, unaffected by the initiative under scrutiny, in order to ensure that the impact and cost-effectiveness of the initiative can be established as accurately as possible.

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