



Department
for Education

Summer Schools Programme for Disadvantaged Pupils: Evaluation 2012

Research brief

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NFER & Ecorys

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25 February 2013 National Foundation for Educational Research and ECORYS

Introduction

In May 2012, the Department for Education commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and Ecorys to conduct an evaluation of the Summer Schools programme for disadvantaged pupils¹. This research brief highlights the findings from that evaluation.

The aims of the Summer Schools evaluation were to:

- I. provide evidence of how the Summer School funding was being spent
- II. evaluate the implementation of the Summer Schools programme (especially in relation to familiarising primary pupils with their new school environment, familiarising schools with the needs of their new pupils and improving the educational attainment of disadvantaged children);
- III. identify evidence of effective practice, which could be shared with participating schools; and
- IV. enable the DfE to refine the Summer Schools policy in the future.

Key Findings

94 per cent of schools surveyed considered their Summer Schools a success and 95 per cent would take part in the programme again. Staff felt that the greatest effect the programme had was on pupils' social and emotional well-being.

- Schools had two main overarching aims for their Summer Schools: to prepare disadvantaged pupils socially and emotionally for transition; and to secure general improvements in pupils' academic progress and capacity to learn. 44 per cent of schools surveyed had explicit aims to close the attainment gap and 21 per cent aimed specifically to improve pupils' attainment. The most common activities were team-building, arts and sports.
- Summer Schools were delivered in a combination of ways involving a range of personnel. The majority of Summer Schools involved staff from the secondary school. 13 per cent of Summer Schools surveyed were delivered entirely by external contractors.

¹ Pupils eligible for Summer School funding include those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and those looked after continuously for more than six months by the local authority.

- The average (median) cost of running a Summer School for all participating pupils (both disadvantaged and other pupils) was £7,833. The average cost per pupil per week was £185.
- Getting pupils to attend was one of the most common challenges for schools. Half of the disadvantaged pupils invited to a Summer School attended at least once. The retention rate of disadvantaged pupils who agreed to attend was high, with an average drop-out rate of four pupils per Summer School.

The key findings from the case studies are:

- The 10 case-study schools used the programme's broad aims to set their aims and objectives. They also designed their Summer Schools to complement existing transition support. Echoing the survey findings, most focused on school readiness, social and emotional wellbeing and preparing pupils for the academic year ahead. Case-study Summer Schools typically offered a combination of curricular and enrichment activities with an emphasis on 'fun'.
- The largest item of expenditure was staff costs, together with residential trips in those Summer Schools that offered them.
- Many of the case-study schools faced a challenge in accessing timely and complete data about pupils eligible for the programme, despite working collaboratively with their feeder primaries.
- Case-study schools had differing views on the optimum timing for running a Summer School. A session early in the school holidays helped to maximise pupil and teacher availability, but a later session had the advantage of being more closely identified with starting in Year 7.
- The most challenging aspects were a lower than expected take-up from disadvantaged pupils and a limited success in engaging parents and carers.

Background

In September 2011, The Department for Education announced that, as part of the Pupil Premium, £50 million would be made available for a Summer Schools programme for disadvantaged pupils in 2012. The programme aims to help pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and those looked after in public care continuously for more than six months, to make a successful transition from primary to secondary school.

Each participating secondary school in England was funded £250 per eligible child per week for programme activities (up to a maximum of 2 weeks). Schools were free to

design their programme based on the needs of their incoming Year 7 cohort. Although there was a clear expectation that the funding should be used to provide summer activities for disadvantaged pupils, schools could offer places to other children if they did not need to spend the full amount on disadvantaged pupils or if a disadvantaged pupil turned down a planned place'. A total of 1,763 Summer Schools were held across England between July and September 2012.

Methodology

The evaluation consisted of 3 research strands:

1. A survey of 1,597 schools who participated in the Summer Schools programme.
2. 10 qualitative case studies with participating schools, pupils, parents and carers. Visits were conducted while Summer Schools were being delivered and again within the first four months of pupils entering Year 7.
3. An impact assessment of the Summer Schools programme on pupils' self-confidence and readiness for school. Survey responses of Summer School attendees will be compared with those from disadvantaged pupils at schools which did not take part in the programme (scheduled to be completed later in 2013).

There are 3 outputs from this evaluation: an overview report, a summary key findings report for schools focusing on effective Summer School practise and a report quantifying the impact of the programme on pupils' self-confidence and readiness for school. This research brief relates to Strands 1 and 2 of the evaluation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings from this study indicate that the Summer Schools programme has been successfully implemented by the vast majority of schools that applied to take part. The initiative is viewed extremely positively by schools, pupils and their parents and carers. As with any new programme, some of the difficulties encountered relate to issues that could be addressed by providing schools with a greater lead-in time to plan and develop their provision.

The funding allocation for the programme was sufficient and allowed for a broad range of Summer School activities to be delivered. The Summer Schools programme appears to be supporting disadvantaged pupils' social and emotional wellbeing in particular, and providing a positive foundation for successful transition. There is a

need to improve take up by disadvantaged pupils and focus more directly on the impact of Summer Schools in improving their attainment.

The recommendations for schools were to:

- I. Build good relationships with feeder primary schools in advance and involve them in the planning.
- II. Include a combination of activities such as 'fun' sports and arts, together with numeracy and literacy activities delivered through engaging themes.
- III. Where places are offered to other pupils, in addition to those who are disadvantaged, ensure that there are strategies in place to identify the needs of disadvantaged pupils
- IV. Provide specific activities and support to help pupils overcome their fear of bullying, including details of strategies the school has in place to counteract bullying and what pupils should do if it happens to them
- V. Ensure pupils have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the secondary school environment and to meet with older pupils from the school to ask questions.
- VI. Monitor the success and impact of Summer Schools through collating pupil outcomes and feedback from pupils and their parents/carers, including personal, social and educational objectives.

It has also been recommended for the DfE to consider:

- I. Notifying schools earlier of their Summer School funding in order to help them plan and source high quality extended activities.
- II. Disseminating effective Summer School practice to schools, particularly in relation to the identification and retention of disadvantaged pupils. Providing schools with a bank of Summer School resources and materials developed by other schools, and encouraging schools to network and share ideas.
- III. Promoting the Pupil Premium aims (especially improving the educational attainment of disadvantaged pupils) to ensure schools prioritise them within their Summer Schools, whilst further clarifying the funding criteria.



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