

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

The Pupil Premium, Next Steps - Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Foundation

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Summary

The Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) recently hosted a summit meeting bringing together policy-makers, academics and the teaching profession to discuss the future of the pupil premium. It considered a new report [Pupil Premium: Next Steps](#) (July 2015) which made a series of recommendations including that the government should automatically reward schools that successfully and consistently improve results for their disadvantaged pupils and for introducing more effective systems to allow schools to identify pupils eligible for pupil premium funding.

New polling commissioned for the summit revealed that 50% of primary school teachers and 44% of secondary teachers feel the premium is being used to continue activities that would not otherwise happen due to funding pressures in other areas of their budget. It also shows that the use of evidence in the classroom is growing: 64% of school leaders said they used research to decide how to spend their pupil premium, compared with 52% in 2012.

This briefing will be of particular interest to cabinet portfolio and overview and scrutiny (elected) members and senior officers with responsibility for education and for children in care.

Briefing in Full

The Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) recently hosted a summit meeting on the future of the pupil premium bringing together policy-makers, academics and the teaching profession to discuss how best to improve attainment for disadvantaged pupils, and closing the gap between them and their peers.

The summit meeting considered a new report [Pupil Premium: Next Steps](#) which includes new polling on the use of the premium pupil, its impact and the methods used by schools to decide how to spend the funding, as well as a number of short essays written by some of the summit participants. At the summit there were keynote speeches from Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State for Education, and the Pupil Premium Champion, Sir John Dunford, together with expert panels discussing best practice and the use of evidence. The summit also heard from the Head of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw. This briefing brings together the key issues covered by all these contributions.

Background on the pupil premium:

- The Pupil Premium is paid for pupils who have been eligible for free school meals over the previous six years or who have been in care.
- It is currently paid at £1,320 per primary pupil and £935 for secondary pupils.

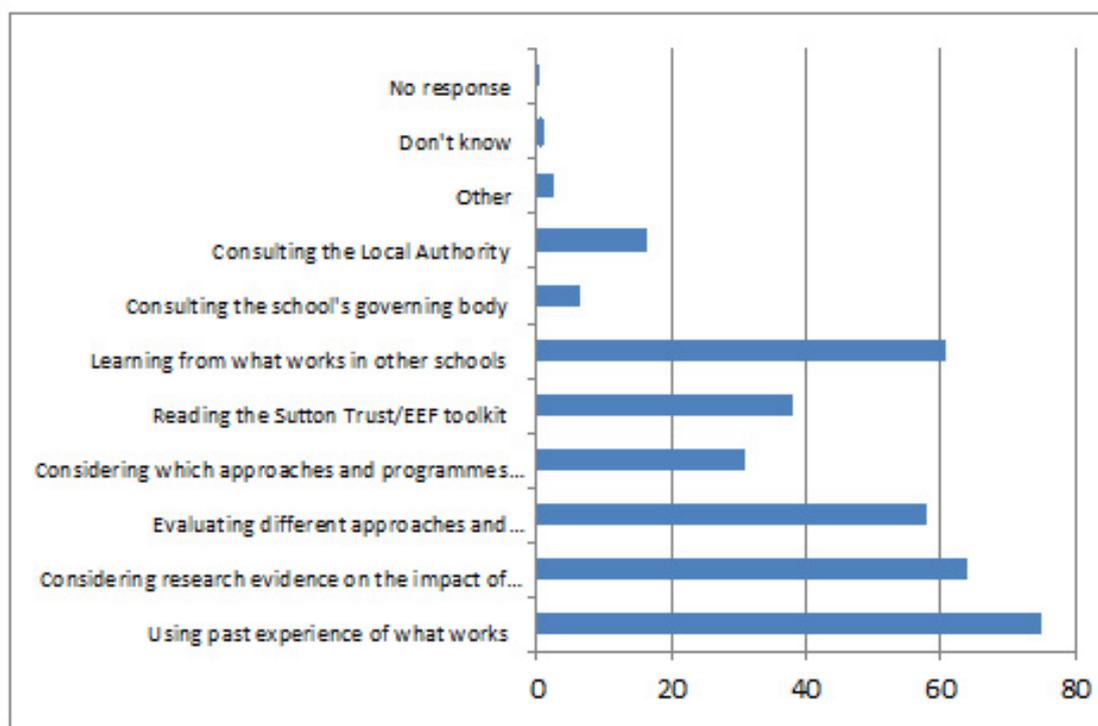
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- Schools also receive £1,900 for pupils who have been in care but are now adopted or have left care under certain guardianship orders.
- A separate grant of £300 is paid to schools to enable them to support the children of members of the armed forces.
- A total of £2.5 billion a year is now spent on the premium, over 6% of the £38.8 billion schools budget.
- More recently, an Early Years' Premium has been introduced for disadvantaged three and four-olds receiving free pre-school education (approximately 13% of all 3 and 4-year-olds) providing an additional £300 a year for each eligible child.

How are schools responding to the pupil premium?

The number of school leaders who said they consider research evidence before taking spending decisions on the pupil premium has increased from 52% in 2012 to 64%. Many learn from what works in other schools (62%) and most are using past experience before deciding what approaches and programmes to adopt. Almost half of secondary school leaders (48%) and a third (32%) of primary school leaders also say they make use of the [Sutton Trust/EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#). Figure 1, below, taken from the report shows the main approaches schools' take.

Figure 1: How does your school decide which approaches and programmes to adopt to improve pupil learning? (Senior leaders)



Overall schools are positive about the premium, with three-quarters of teachers saying that to 'great' or 'some' extent the funding is allowing them to target resources to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. That enthusiasm is stronger among primary school teachers (with 37% of primary teachers say it helps to a 'great extent' compared with 23% secondary teachers). This pattern is mirrored on whether the premium allows schools to raise attainment for pupils who are

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falling behind. Many also see the premium as supporting improved attainment for all pupils (with 55% of primary and 40% of secondary teachers) and plugging funding gaps left by budget reductions caused by tighter national spending (50% of primary and 44% of secondary teachers) enabling schools to continue activities that would not otherwise happen.

There is a significant preference – as in previous years – for spending the premium funding on early intervention schemes (31% of all schools). Other popular measures include employing extra teachers or teaching assistants - though this is more common in primary schools - and one-to-one tuition. The report notes that relatively few schools choose what it considers some of the “best low cost proven approaches” like improving feedback between teachers and pupils (4%) and peer-to-peer tutoring (1%). (See Table 5, below, taken from the report showing school spending preferences). These spending patterns have changed over time, with a marked decline on using the funding to reduce class sizes (down from 15% to 3% since 2012), together with a significant increase in investing in early intervention schemes (up from 16% to 31%).

Table 5: With the money received through the Pupil Premium, what is the main priority for extra spending at your school in 2014/2015?

	All	Primary	Secondary
	%	%	%
Reducing class sizes	3	3	3
Additional teaching assistants	10	14	5
Additional teachers	9	13	5
More one-to-one tuition	16	15	17
Peer-to-peer tutoring schemes for pupils	1	0	1
Improving feedback between teachers and pupils / providing more feedback that is effective	4	4	5
Early intervention schemes	31	32	30
Extending the breadth of the curriculum	2	3	1
Improving the classroom or school environment	1	1	1
Offsetting budget cuts elsewhere	2	1	3

The impact of the pupil premium

The report says that it is too early to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the pupil premium, noting there are challenges comparing data over time due to changes in how performance measures are calculated. There has been a narrowing of the attainment gap at primary level, from

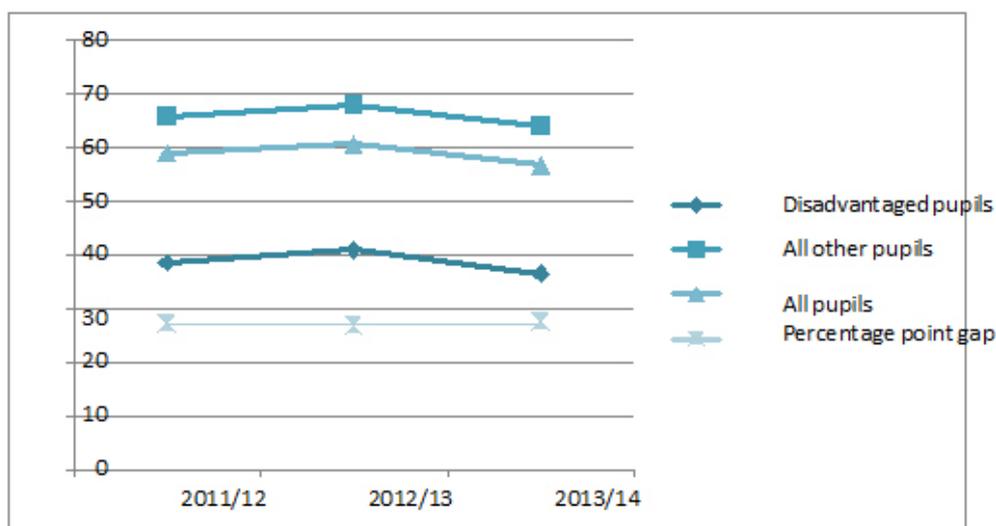
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18.4 to 13.7 percentage points between 2011 and 2014. But at secondary level as measured by the five good GCSE measure the gap has not narrowed, indeed it has slightly increased (by 0.2 percentage points). See table 7 and figure 2, below, taken from the report.

Table 7: Percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more grades A*-C including GCSE English & mathematics¹⁰

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Disadvantaged pupils	38.5	40.9	36.5
All other pupils	65.7	67.9	64
All pupils	58.8	60.6	56.6
Percentage point gap	27.2	26.9	27.4

Figure 2: Percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more grades A*-C including GCSE English & mathematics



However, the way in which the attainment gap will be measured and tracked over time at both primary and secondary school levels is expected to change from 2016. This is because of changes in the assessment and grades at both key stage 2 and 4 levels (i.e. the new 9 point grading scale for GCSEs and new scaled scores for key stage 2) which will make it difficult to make comparison with preceding years on the current way in which the gap is measured in terms of percentage points. The Department for Education is currently developing an alternative - the Disadvantaged Pupils Attainment Gap Index - based on separate mean ranking of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils' performance at key stage 2 and GCSE to allow comparability on their English and Maths scores, and then taking an average of these. It may be supplemented by an 'Attainment 8' point score to assess attainment across a broader curriculum (with English and maths double-weighted).

Consequently, while under the existing GCSEs measure things do not appear to be getting much better at the secondary level as measured by, by this proposed index the attainment gap has been narrowing consistently, and by 3.74 percentage points since 2012. Indeed, according to Dr Rebecca Allen (see below) it *"is closing so fast that, if current trends continue, it will be zero by*

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2032” rapidly in the case of children achieving a Level 4B or better in Key Stage 2 at the age of 11 (a good predictor of the likelihood of achieving five good GCSEs).

Discussion on the key issues

Acting strategically, and changing the culture

The National Pupil Premium Champion, Sir John Dunford, put the challenge into context by telling the summit that given that no previous generation of school leaders were able to close the attainment gap, to do so would be remembered for a very long time. He hoped the moral purpose of the profession could be the driving force behind this work. Calling on schools not to lose focus on the quality of teaching, and advising them not to think about the premium separately to their overall school improvement strategy.

Similarly Headteacher Clare de Sausmarez (Bel Vue Infants and Newport Junior School in Aldershot) said that in her experience the first challenge had been to gain commitment from the whole of the school to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils - getting the message across to staff that we are all in this together. Without this she would not have got anywhere. Success was based on using research evidence, acting strategically and on knowing the individual needs of each child and understanding what works with them. Fellow Headteacher John Tomsett (at the Huntingdon School in York) said teachers were delighted to be working within an environment where practice is informed by research evidence, and where that is linked to performance management you could then have a culture of improvement.

Addressing the double-edge sword of school autonomy

Kevan Collins (Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation) sees that one of the biggest challenges is inconsistency between similar schools. Moving from *“bright spots to a system that delivers for all”* will he says be determined in large part by the way autonomy is dealt with. As a ‘double edged sword’, autonomy can drive innovation and be beneficial in responding to local needs, but it can also isolate schools. So innovation only works - at a system level - if there are mechanisms in place to capture and share the knowledge that is generated, recognising that autonomy does not require every school to start with a blank sheet of paper. However too many schools are disregarding the knowledge which has been gained through the efforts of their peers, especially those with persistent attainment gaps. A school-led system *“requires courage and heads need both the nerve to try something new [and] the confidence to resist the pressure to tinker with what is already working well”*; with innovation only making a difference when it is evaluated, embedded and reliably repeated.

Ensuring that evidence is used most effectively

Dr Lee Elliot (Chief Executive of Sutton Trust) and Professor Steve Higgins (Durham University) strike an opportunistic note claiming that teachers and policy makers are talking about evidence and what works in the classroom more than ever. Nonetheless tensions remain, and they point to some enduring questions about how evidence is used most effectively.

First, encouraging teachers to embrace evidence without slipping into a compliance culture where, being seen to do the right thing is more important than the real impact. Elliot and Higgins warn that given the increasingly strong school accountability measures, consideration needs to be given to how to ensure schools use their premium funding effectively and avoid shallow compliance. This strikes accord with Russell Hobby (General Secretary of the National Association of Head

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Teachers) who believes there is a bias towards being able to demonstrate money has been spent on visible interventions like one-to-one tuition rather than the less visible, and more effective measures like improving training for all staff.

Second, there is also the potential for misinterpretation when trying to make evidence accessible and through losing the nuance of its findings. Elliot and Higgins give the example of where Inspectors' use of evidence on the value of giving pupil feedback had led to an unhelpful narrow focus on marking, when it is just one element of effective feedback.

Spending the funding

Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan, warned that simply spending the premium in a “*scatter gun fashion, with the assumption that it will find its way to those who need it, is not transformative enough.*” She gave some selective examples, drawn from EEF research including that extrinsic rewards like money or free tickets have very little effect on teenage motivation and GCSE grades but that - at a minimal cost - memorable trips and storytelling sessions can vastly improve the writing skills of 6 and 7 year olds.

Dame Sharon Hollows (Principal at the Charter Academy in Portsmouth) said she used the pupil premium funding to focus on overcoming barriers so for example, her school spent money on sending a car to collect pupils from some local families every morning. And they do not send pupils home when clothed incorrectly and instead use a kitty of spare clothes to make sure pupils wear suitable clothing for their lessons.

The white working class

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Head of Ofsted, told the summit that the attainment gap could not be narrowed without improvements in the results of disadvantaged white pupils pointing out that, two-thirds of pupils on free school meals come from “*white working-class, low income backgrounds*” stating that “*that’s the greatest challenge. If we don’t resolve that, weren’t not going to close the gap*”, warning that “*they feel forgotten...they have been abandoned and let down.*” He wants to see national policies to support these children together with more political drive at both a local and national level. But he questioned whether local politicians were really driving this forward, saying that unless good heads and better teachers were introduced into areas which were quite obviously failing, radical change will not happen. He concluded that can only be realistically achieved by central government.

Securing parental support

Sir Michael also criticised the “fleckless parent” who do not support their child’s education, or the school, telling his audience that he took a no-nonsense approach when he worked as a head, and encouraged others to do the same adding that he would have liked the legal backing to fine parents who did not support the school. He admitted that introducing such a measure would be controversial and said that fining must be a last resort only for families which were obviously not making any effort. It wasn’t the first time Sir Michael has [introduced the idea](#), a year ago he called on head teachers to be allowed to impose financial penalties on parents who allow homework to be left undone, miss parents’ evening or fail to read with their children.

Measuring the gap

The measurement of the attainment gap is fraught with difficulties according to Dr Rebecca Allen (Director of the Education Data Lab). In particular, she sees that the current five good GCSEs

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(including English and Maths) measure is a relatively poor one since it ignores many improvements that may have taken place as it exclusively focuses on the C/D grade boundary and on English and maths. In contrast, she sees the new measurement being proposed by the Department for Education from 2016 as more desirable because the grades of all pupils are used and therefore recognises the improvement being made by those pupils at the top and bottom of the attainment range. Dr Allen is also positive about the prospective that this new measure may also involve a wider range of subjects which provide a better alignment with the more traditional academic subjects. Nonetheless, she highlighted that a number of measurement problems still remain.

The fluctuation in the eligibility for free-school meals for instance, falling for children as they get older (because their family's benefits entitlement declines and parents are better able to access work with older children in the house) meant there are difficulties in monitoring the attainment gap at different stages of education, which may lead to the gap at secondary level remaining - even with significant earlier interventions to close it.

The diverse nature of the non-FSM pupils also meant that it is more difficult to compare the attainment gap across schools. Many have always had pupil premium gaps close to zero because their non-claiming pupils are no different in their social or educational background to their pupil premium children. Some even have "a reverse gap" with non-pupil premium students attaining less well than those on the premium.

Closing the gap or fulfilling potential?

Given this, Dr Allen advises that it is better for schools to concentrate their focus on the attainment of their FSM pupils rather than the size of their own attainment gap. Stressing that, "*what matters to children from low-income families is that a school enables them to achieve a qualification to get on in life. If a low-income student gets a poor education from a school, it is little consolation or use for them to learn that the school served the higher income students equally poorly (i.e. the school's 'gap' was small)*". She points to the fact that "*great schools tend to be great schools for all children in the school*" and the strong statistical correlation between who does well for FSM children and who does well for non-FSM children.

This accords with the view expressed by Nicky Morgan that the pupil premium "*has got to be about more than closing the gap*", wanting to see disadvantaged pupils encouraged to reach their full potential "*and go further than simply 'catching-up'*". She cited the decisions to ensure that every secondary school starter in September 2015 must study EBacc subjects at GCSE level to ensure children from poorer homes "*were not parked into easier subjects*", and to intervene in 'coasting', as well as failing schools. In other words those schools "*which allow children to get by on 'good enough' instead of stretching them to their full potential*".

The report's recommendations

The report made a series of recommendations which can be summarised as:

- To continue support for the pupil premium and to continue to pay it on the basis of disadvantage, not prior attainment, so there is no discrimination between low and high attainers. Success will depend on the degree to which the premium is spent effectively, while recognising that disadvantaged but bright pupils often fall behind at school and that stretching lessons for them is critically important to gain access to higher education.

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- A strong commitment to promoting rigorous evidence, particularly where it has been tested in randomised control trials. Seeing evidence as a crucial tool to inform decision making on spending the pupil premium, the report believes that Ofsted should consider a school's use of evidence in their inspection framework, while schools should be supported to evaluate approaches themselves.
- Improved teacher training and professional development so that all school leaders and classroom teachers understand how to use data and interpret research effectively.
- The introduction of a data-sharing system so that schools are automatically informed when pupils are entitled to free school meals, and therefore the pupil premium.
- Linking some of the pupil premium systematically to school rewards so that schools that successfully and consistently improve results for all while narrowing the attainment gap are properly recognised.
- Where school networks and structures exist they should be re-designed in such a way that increases the spread of knowledge (to other schools) so that greater autonomy does not lead to increased isolation.

Comment

The summit meeting coincided with the publication of a report from the National Audit Office which examined whether the Department for Education is on course to achieving its objective of narrowing the attainment gap. (An [earlier CSN briefing](#) covered this report). The Department has set for itself the aspiration to see a 'significant impact' for primary school pupils by 2015 and for secondary pupils by 2020 although the full impact is not expected to be felt until 2023 for secondary pupils when eligible pupils will have been funded for their entire education. Significantly the Department has not defined by what they mean by 'significant impact'.

The NAO felt that the early signs are that the policy does have the potential to bring about a significant improvement in outcomes, but while the gap has narrowed it found no clear trend with the gap remaining wide. The NAO called on the government and schools to do more if the potential is to be realised by: identifying disadvantaged pupils more consistently; spending the premium funding more effectively; setting a fairer formula for core school funding; and recommending that the Department for Education be more specific about how it will measure the premium's impact.

At the recent [Public Accounts Committee hearing](#) on the NAO report, officials from the Department for Education were pressed on how they would demonstrate that they had made a significant impact without setting any targets. The Committee were told that targets had not been set because of the *"large risk of perverse incentives"* and that *"gap closing, as such, doesn't always tell you anything"*. However, Permanent Secretary Chris Wormald said that his Department was looking to how to *"benchmark ourselves against the best jurisdictions in the world"* and would *"set the challenge of being the best as the best in the world as opposed to setting ourselves numerical targets"* adding that officials will be looking in the future to expand how they measure outcomes for disadvantaged pupils to include employment and not in education, employment or training (NEET) figures.

The attainment gap at primary level, according to the NAO, has narrowed from 18.4 to 13.7 percentage points which could be described as making 'significant' progress. Of concern, however, is that most of this progress was made in the early years of the premium, between 2011

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and 2012, after which it has slowed to the rate of improvement seen before the policy was introduced. At the secondary level the gap has not closed since 2011 (it is now 27.4 from 27.2).

Critics of the current way in which the attainment gap is measure point to necessary moves to replace it with an indexation which is explained earlier in this briefing (and on which more details can be found in a [working paper](#) from the Department for Education). This shows an improved picture at GCSE level with the gap narrowing by 2.1 percentage points between 2012 and 2013, and again by a further 1.8 percentage points by 2014. The Department for Education explains this as due to the focus on English and maths and so eliminates the impact of the changes to qualifications counted as GCSE equivalents. And as Dr Allen explains (see above) it captures the improved performance of all disadvantaged pupils, and not just those above and below the C grade threshold. (This proposed new measure does not change the picture at Key Stage 2).

Going forward the Conservative Party manifesto committed the Government to providing the pupil premium protected at current rates and to introducing a fair schools funding formula. They have yet to decide how exactly that will be implemented and rolled out. No doubt that will be addressed in the autumn's spending review although whether decisions will take place at the same time as the spending review, or will be consequential to it, is not known. However, there must be a growing danger, with the schools budget expected to be frozen in cash terms in the next public spending period, that pupil premium money may be directed towards other priorities. Indeed the survey conducted by the Sutton Trust and the EEF reveal around half of teachers believe that pupil premium funding is being used to continue activities that would not otherwise happen due to funding pressures, and the NAO report found that 77% of schools are using some pupil premium funding on activities which benefit all pupils.

External Links

Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation report - ["Pupil Premium: Next Steps"](#)

[Nicky Morgan's speech to the Pupil Premium Summit](#)

[Sutton Trust/EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#)

[Pupil Premium Summit website](#)

[Statistical working paper – measuring disadvantage pupils' attainment gaps over time](#) (updated, January 2015), Department for Education

Other related LGIU briefings

[Funding for disadvantaged pupils: NAO Report](#) (July 2015)

[Briefing: Cracking the code: how schools can improve social mobility – SMPC report](#) (November 2014)

[Pupil Premium – Ofsted Report](#) (August 2014)

[Lessons from London schools – Government research](#) (July 2014)

[Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children – Commons Education Committee](#) (June 2014)

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