CENTRE FOR
EDUCATION STUDIES

Warwickshire Research Project

REPORT on Research Into 'Closing the Gap':

Raising Achievement for Disadvantaged Pupils

Ian Abbott

David Middlewood

Sue Robinson

Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick

April 2016

go.warwick.ac.uk/ces

Contents

1 Introduction and Purpose of the Research 3

2 Methodology 4

3 Findings and Discussion 5

3.1 Practices and strategies 5

3.2 Principles and ethos 8

3.3 Leadership 11

4 Conclusions & recommendations 14

5 References 17

1 Introduction and Purpose of the Research

This research was commissioned by Warwickshire County Council as a work stream as part of their Closing the Gap project. There is a gap in performance between children from rich and poor backgrounds in many countries, but the gap in the UK is considered to be significant (OECD, 2014; Strand 2014). Work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has estimated that there will be 3.5 million UK children living in poverty by 2020. One strategy to attempt to address the problem was the introduction of The Pupil Premium by the Coalition Government in 2011 to provide additional funding to state funded schools to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers by raising the attainment levels of those children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ofsted, 2012).

Many children do well in Warwickshire schools but a significant minority of children do not. In 2015 there was a gap of 20% in disadvantaged children in Warwickshire achieving a level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics compared to non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. This gap widens at the end of key stage 4 to 29% of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5+ A*-C at GCSE (inc English and Mathematics) in Warwickshire and compared to non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. This gap has remained fairly static over the past 4 years. A number of studies have looked at strategies to raise the attainment levels of disadvantaged children, see for example: Carpenter et al (2013); Ofsted (2014); Macleod, et al (2014); National Audit Office (2015); DfE (2015).

The purpose of this research was to identify the most effective strategies employed by schools to raise the attainment levels and close the gap in attainment of disadvantaged children. Previous research has shown that there are schools doing the same activities but achieve different levels of success, see for example Abbott, et al (2013). The difference is <u>how</u> they do it not <u>what</u> they do. We would argue that leadership and the culture of a school plays a key role in success.

The major aims of the research were:

- To assess the most effective strategies delivered by schools.
- To provide data on school improvement and the practice of school leadership in schools that have developed effective strategies.
- To understand/explain the variation in impact of the same/similar strategies in different contexts ie identify the way in which the culture of a school impacts positively on successfully addressing the disadvantage performance gap.
- To highlight aspects of good practice.

The specific objectives of the research were:

- To evaluate the most effective strategies (and where applicable the ones that do not work)
- To identify aspects of the following that make a difference in schools:
    - Culture
    - Philosophy
    - Principles
    - Commitment
    - Consider the expectations and how leadership drive that
    - Use of data strategically
    - Common themes
- To identify successful practice and how it is embedded
- To provide recommendations on the most effective practice/optimum strategies to make a positive impact on the attainment of disadvantaged children
- To recommend ways in which the process can be improved to further raise attainment levels of disadvantaged learners.

The report is structured to provide easy access to the range of qualitative data and makes extensive use of quotes from respondents to illustrate key points and to develop a series of recommendations.

We like to thank the participants who allowed us to interview them and visit their schools. We would also like to thank Warwickshire County Council officers who provided us with a range of data, support and encouragement.

2 Methodology

As the intention was to identify not only the actual strategies and methods used by schools to help raise achievement levels of disadvantaged pupils, but also the ethos in those schools that was supportive of the effectiveness of those methods, it was essential to use research instruments which gave access to the personal aspect of the procedures. Semi-structured interviews with those responsible for introducing and implementing the strategies were therefore used because these enable researchers to 'delve into the aspects which underpin so much of what is involved' (Middlewood and Abbott, 2012:53) and also to adapt to individual personalities and circumstances. It was also essential to visit the actual school sites and, where possible, walk around the buildings whilst the school was in normal working mode. School leaders were chosen as interviewees, as well as key other personnel identified by the leaders as playing crucial roles in the chosen area. Additionally, two 'stakeholders' were also interviewed as people who held key positions in the Local

Authority (LA), as related to the research area. Interviews were conducted between October 2015 and January 2016.

The sample:

This is a relatively small scale study and a list of schools was compiled for the researchers by the LA as being ones which had been effective in closing the attainment gap. We did not have access to schools which were deemed to be less successful in closing the gap. From the list of schools given by the Local Authority, the researchers aimed to select fifteen schools to visit, ten primary and five secondary. These were selected as far as possible on a geographical basis, covering various parts of the county. The numbers of disadvantaged pupils in each school varied with the lowest proportion of pupils receiving Pupil Premium funding being 8% while the highest proportion was over 40%. The visited schools were assured of anonymity in the final report, but were advised they might be invited to be 'case studies' to be used by the LA if the schools agreed. The usual research protocols were applied in the carrying out of the interviews.

Altogether, 29 interviews were carried out with school leaders and other school personnel; two stakeholders were interviewed; 13 school visits included a walk around the site, some accompanied by staff, some by school pupils.

3 Findings and Discussion

This section is divided into three parts. The first lists, in a fairly brief way, the main practices and strategies used by the chosen schools to make an impact on raising the achievement of their disadvantaged pupils. The second identifies those features of the schools which seem to play a significant part in developing a school culture within which these strategies thrive- in other words, HOW the strategies are employed. The third part notes the elements of effective leadership and management which appeared to be significant in the way those schools operated and achieved what they did.

(Note that in all parts no specific order of priority of importance is intended to be given in these lists).

3.1 Practices and strategies

The reasons why we have chosen to mention these practices in a brief way are twofold. Firstly, such practices and strategies have been widely identified, both nationally e.g. through the work of the Sutton Trust and locally, through the peer review process being carried out in Warwickshire schools. Secondly, our specific research brief was to focus on the 'how' rather than the 'what'; in other words, to focus on any more intangible aspects of certain schools who may have done the same things as other schools but were clearly more effective in doing them. Here, therefore we are simply recording that in these effective schools, the following practices and strategies were most widely used.

3.1.1 Ensuring the highest possible quality classroom teaching. (see below for appraisal procedures)

3.1.2 Monitoring and reviewing of pupil progress. All schools have huge amounts of data, but it is the use that the data is put to that is significant. These schools were 'relentless' and 'forensic' in their collection and knowledge of data about pupil progress. All schools made extensive use of charts and graphic illustration-found in many school staff offices- and could readily pinpoint individual pupil's current performance and progress. In some school offices, these were accompanied by child photographs –children were never just numbers! Some schools, especially secondary ones, used seating plans in classrooms for easy identification of PP pupils for example. Reviews of progress took place in every school at regular intervals to gain the overall picture of progress so that interventions could be put in place at once where required, either for whole groups or individuals.

3.1.3 Feedback to pupils. Some schools addressed the required improvement here by focusing first on written feedback on work submitted, analysing what seemed to be most effective, and then focusing on spoken feedback. Others did it the other way round. The remainder tackled both at the same time. In all cases, schools debated and agreed beforehand the principles involved in effective feedback for future learning. All schools had at some stage used specific staff training in this area.

3.1.4 Target-setting. The setting of attainment targets for pupils was seen by all schools as an essential tool in raising achievement. Group targets were generally set and managed by staff in different ways, with senior staff closely involved. For example, in secondary schools, subject departments would set targets for levels of achievement for specific groups after discussion with senior staff. All schools were clear that individual pupil targets were the most important, and had to be both high in aspiration and also realistic. For disadvantaged pupils this could mean targets gradually being raised as pupils grew in confidence. They often became a '*powerful tool for motivation*'. **(Deputy head in School E).**

3.1.5 Ensuring high attendance levels. All schools had strategies for improving attendance levels with a particular focus on disadvantaged pupils. Rewards were widely used (see below) ; initiatives such as breakfast clubs (see below) also made a difference. In at least five schools, home visits by an appropriate staff member were used to help children who were 'carers' or households that were struggling in various ways. Much care and time was expended on these cases and increased attendance was achieved in the majority. As noted elsewhere, there was universal recognition that attendance was not an end in itself- without a positive school experience, absences would recur. '*If we improve attendance levels, that's good, but it has to become the starting point for what they achieve when they're in school,*' **(Head of School H)**. Hence, the careful nurturing of reluctant attendees in the early stages and the focus on the achievement of which the pupil could be capable were the two key elements.

3.1.6 **Focus on good quality presentation of pupils' work**. This was identified in a number of schools as an important way in which disadvantaged pupils could see the worth of their work being valued through fairly straightforward procedures. It also taught important lessons about communicating with other people and was also a way in which everyone could be seen as capable as all others. One **primary school teacher (School F)** said that a focus on work presentation had *'hugely improved the confidence and then achievement of a Year 4 boy who had been absent for long periods.'*

3.1.7 **Mentoring.** Mentoring was widely used by all the schools in the sample. Training in mentoring was provided in the majority of them; in some schools, it was an essential part of NQT induction and in others, part of ALL staff induction. It was in most cases provided on an individual basis and staff in all kinds of roles were found to participate, depending on the identified need of the pupil. Most mentoring was provided to enable pupils to 'catch up' in various curriculum areas, but there were some examples of mentoring in what may be seen as social skills.

Peer mentoring was being used in about half of the schools visited, with others saying they planned to use it in the future. It was used in both primary and secondary schools, and again training was provided for pupils chosen as mentors. There was general agreement that peer mentoring was proving valuable for both parties involved.

3.1.8 **Use of relevant funding**. The vast majority of schools used Pupil Premium funding to support ALL disadvantaged pupils, ensuring that no single child lost out. (See below re creative use of funding).

3.1.9 **Involvement of parents and local community** (See below for examples of this).

3.1.10 **Commitment to authentic pupil voice** (See below for application of pupil voice).

3.1.11 **Provision of 'memorable life experiences'.** All schools showed a commitment to ensuring that disadvantaged pupils had opportunities through school to have access to experiences outside of their normal life and outside of normal school routines. Visits to theatres, concerts, historic buildings, art galleries, museums, sporting venues, space centres, were clearly part of this, but additionally schools used artists and writers in residence on a fairly large scale. Aware of the narrowness of the life 'horizons' of some children, schools tried to offer experiences which were simply 'different'. A visit to a farm for town children, following the course of a river, a coastal visit for children from the inland county, a 'behind the scenes' at a supermarket, visits to bookshops and libraries-these were all ways in which schools tried to *'open their eyes to things outside a very narrow world which often means never even going to the next town'*. **(Head of School D).**

The other main vehicles for memorable experiences were special events in schools, often taking the form of abandoning routines for a week or a day or so or so to explore a topic in a range of ways e g a 'bake- off day' in which everyone experimented with dishes of different kinds and of different cultures, with all staff participating and local bakeries, cafes and shops contributing. Similarly, a 'Visit to France' day when simple French phrases are used all day, written and spoken, or a multi- language day, when the various languages represented in school were to be highlighted and used. Others included involvement in a town carnival as an opportunity to be seen and applauded in the local community. *'I didn't realise that such a simple thing could cause so much joy for some children; their parents had never seen them in anything before and didn't like coming to school, but seeing them while they watched in the street was different!'* **(Teacher in School C).**

3.1.12 **Access to good careers advice** (See below for impact of this on pupil aspiration.)

3.1.13 **'Deployment of staff'** There was a general recognition that simply using addition resource to employ more staff, either teachers or teaching assistants, was not an effective strategy. Many schools had actually reduced the number of teaching assistants. Staff were increasingly being used in a focused way with specific training being provided to develop particular skills that were required to support disadvantaged pupils.

3.2 Principles and ethos

3.2.1 In these schools, pupils believed their individual opinions mattered. Whatever the ability or circumstances of a child or young person, they need to know that 'someone believes in them' (to quote one **Head**). In some dysfunctional environments, some children have no one 'to speak for them' and school can and does provide this. Some schools admitted that in their pasts, they might have had cultures where certain types of pupils predominated in much of school life, generally middle class children. Without reducing opportunities for these, these schools now ensured that ALL children and young people had an equal place and opportunity to succeed.

One **Deputy Head** expressed it well as, *'It is not a question of everyone being equal; human beings are not all equal, but they all can have equal value, or rather what they can do is shown to be equally valued. They can all make a contribution-to the school- and society. After all, if we only valued professional contributions to society, how would all the other things get done?'*

All of this appeared to permeate these effective schools in an informal way. Additionally, a very important factor in this valuing was found to be in the increasing use of more formal 'pupil voice' or 'student voice'. This development is seen by many educationalists as a crucial one in the decades ahead. It is already well established in Nordic countries (among the most successful in pupil achievement) where it is 'one of the ways in which the next generation of citizens are introduced to democracy' (Mortimore, 2013:232), a view supported by research (Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Others argue that is a recognition of the changing relationships between adults and children (Thomson, 2009) where instead of adults speaking for children, 'Children and young people are more likely to be expected to speak on their own behalf.' (Middlewood and Abbott, 2015:41). In this context, it was encouraging to find so many of these schools where pupil voice was developing into a powerful means of supporting all children, including disadvantaged ones, in making their views known and listened to. We were given examples of pupil voice having had an impact, especially on the learning environment and, excitingly, at least one school was preparing as its next initiative the primary school pupils being asked about their own learning and teaching processes through formal inquiry.

It should be noted that the emphasis on equality of treatment in no way meant that competition was not valued. In several schools, a strong competitive element was encouraged and used for motivation. In one secondary school, a house system had been introduced and it was felt to have had a big impact on student motivation leading to the '*kids challenging themselves*. **(Deputy Head, School F)**. In one primary school, the head said he was *'fiercely competitive and the school was proud of its trophy cabinet! 'If we win, we celebrate at school and say everyone helped; if we lose, we say well done to the winners and sit down and work out how we can improve next year.'* **(Head of School C)**. Other interviewees referred to competitions where taking part was important and succeeding in them even better!

3.2.2 A 'no excuses' culture is established. However dysfunctional and extreme the circumstances of an individual child, with the many barriers to effective learning these appeared to establish, these schools brooked no excuses for that child not being able to achieve to the maximum of their capability.

The **Head of a primary school (C)** described how the move from a culture which was caring but unambitious to the no excuses culture that was essential had been painful: *'Some teachers felt the school had done well to get these children to school in the first place-it was a major achievement! There was a staff turnover! Attendance is crucial but can only be the first step-what is the point of achieving getting them to school if they then don't learn anything? For one thing, they won't see the point of coming again!'*

'No child left behind' was a mantra in at least two schools visited. Others had their own key phrases, such as *'We never give up on anybody'*, to get across the school's prime values in consistent messages, so that behaviour –good and bad- could be assessed in the context of these values. The role modelling of adults in the school at all levels is critical in all this: *'You cannot expect children to behave in a certain way if they see adults in school behaving otherwise; they often have plenty of poor examples outside of school,'* **(Head of School I)** and *'We are keen to ensure there is no trace of the separate cultures for adults and children in our school; after all, schools are for them (children) not us!'* **(Head of School J)**.

3.2.3 An equally important aspect of these effective cultures was ensuring that ALL children felt safe and secure at school. Children from difficult circumstances, including in extreme cases, abusive and /or neglectful homes were in particular need for anxieties to be removed.

One head of a school in a very deprived urban area said, *'The stress that some children are under as they come to school is huge, and we need to make them discover that this is a place where they can find their true selves and, as they gain confidence in who they are, they can realise what they might achieve.'*

Schools like this one placed emphasis on child protection and safeguarding, ensuring all staff were familiar with correct procedures; training ensured all staff were alert to any signs of problems, such as abuse or neglect. The crucial element here is the link between safety and achievement (Maslow's hierarchy of needs was mentioned in at least six schools!). Some schools established 'nurture groups' in children's early days at school and others ran social skills groups, aiming to increase children's confidence in their own ability to interact with other children and adults.

3.2.4 Success and achievement was recognised and celebrated. Schools recognised that some disadvantaged children had rarely or never received praise or recognition for accomplishment and had devised systems for reward for endeavour and achievement felt to be relevant to the particular age group. Use of local resources was often crucial; thus a trip to a nearby cinema, a local walk to a bookshop to spend book vouchers, were examples of this. Pupil Premium money was used, but also local firms and businesses were encouraged to sponsor and donate prizes and rewards.

Academic achievement, behaviour, improved attendance, and, above all, effort were widely praised and rewarded when merited. *'If someone tries their hardest, there is nothing more we can ask of them,'* **(Head of School D)**. We should note that a culture which celebrates success should ensure this includes all adults, and in these schools, successes of teachers, administrative personnel, teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors, technicians, were all noted and recognised in at least half of these schools.

3.2.5 There was a major focus on learning as the reason why school is important. Whilst high quality teaching was the priority, schools were aware that it is the resultant learning that matters for the pupils. Constant reiteration of *'Learning is why we are here'* and the value of learning throughout life seemed to be central to these effective cultures. When unconventional or 'off timetable' events occurred, there was always great stress on how these were different learning opportunities. One or two schools had procedures in which every child was asked 'What have you learned today?' on leaving school at the end of the day. The teachers and other staff were expected to be able to answer that also!

The role of staff being learners was critical in an ethos of learning. The notion of the best teachers being effective learners has been long recognised (Stoll et al, 2003, Early and Bubb, 2004, Middlewood, et al, 2005, Brooks, 2012) and these schools encouraged staff learning through CPD as well as informal opportunities for all staff (see section in Leadership below). In the majority of schools, teachers were encouraged to share their own learning with the pupils, and not knowing something was in no way seen as a weakness for anyone. The use of technology was the commonest example given where pupils lead the way for the adults, right from Year 2 or 3 pupils to Years 11 and upwards!

3.2.6 High aspirations were encouraged. Part of the self-belief that disadvantaged children come to have is in what may be possible for them. Whatever their background, children were encouraged to aim as high as possible. **Deputy head in School E** said, *'It can be depressing to hear some youngsters from certain homes to say 'What's the point? I'm never going to be able to do much.' We have to get them to see that they can do better than their parents in many cases, who may be unemployed or in low paid, unrewarding jobs. This is not to denigrate the parents and you must not do that. Most parents are actually keen for their children to do better than they did at school and subsequently.'*

Career possibilities being discussed are therefore important and in at least two secondary schools, all Pupil Premium pupils had careers interviews in their first year (Year7). As explained to the researchers, these interviews are not to suggest careers but to open up awareness of possibilities and raise self-expectations. *'They may well get something to aim at from these (interviews). Of course, many will change their minds about specific jobs or careers over the next few years, but that does not matter at all. They will be on the path to aiming for something higher.'* **(Head, School B)**.

3.2.7 A 'no blame' culture develops. In essence, this relates to a 'we are all in this together' ethos. A sense of shared responsibility was important and most leaders placed a strong emphasis on equity and fairness. Collaborative working was widely encouraged; not only was this helpful to staff but children felt they were able to relate to various adults, not too dependent on one. Some of the interviewed heads –although not all- had tried to develop flatter management structures in schools, ensuring responsibility and accountability was shared widely and there was some evidence of distributed leadership.

3.3 Leadership

3.3.1 Leaders had their 'fingers on the pulse' of the school. They tend to know all or a large percentage of the pupils and the disadvantaged ones in particular. They tend to know most of these by name individually, know about their progress, where they are at present and what they are aiming at. They are well briefed before meeting any individual pupils (or their families). They are familiar with the relevant data, but are not involved in collecting data, which task is delegated to a senior colleague.

3.3.2 Leaders tended to be a visible presence in their schools-in corridors, classrooms, playgrounds and at after-school activities. Some have systematic means of ensuring this; others have more informal ways, but in all cases, pupils and staff were aware of the likelihood of the leader visiting or appearing in an area, and were comfortable with this. Informal questioning suggested it was seen as a positive expression of interest, not as any kind of threat.

3.3.3 Leaders actively encouraged the use of pupil voice. Whilst it was to be expected that enabling structures would be in place, the effective leaders saw the development of pupil voice as an indication of a 'confident' learning establishment. They saw it as a positive means of ensuring disadvantaged pupils were treated the same as others and that their views were as important. Some leaders took specific steps to ensure disadvantaged pupils were represented in bodies such as pupil councils; others felt that the democratic processes would ensure this anyway and, as confidence developed, this would occur naturally. Two primary schools were developing 'pupil leadership' and introducing programmes (at an early stage) which helped suitable pupils take leadership initiatives. Some of the secondary schools took specific steps to ensure that Pupil Premium pupils played a part, or had the opportunity to do so, in student leadership initiatives.

3.3.4 Leaders knew their local communities well. Most were skilled in using various support staff, some through a formal role, some informally, to build up a picture of the social networks, and sociological indicators of the community context e.g. in employment, poverty levels, crime, community services. They were adept at recognising their overall parental outlooks and where they were clear that formal approaches e g though curriculum workshops, would nor attract, they with key staff devised informal ways to entice parents into school. Drop-in sessions and facilities and following up on, e.g. joint parent- child work/activity at home, were all ways in which previously alienated parents were encouraged to become more involved.

3.3.5 They were creative and flexible in their use of relevant funding, such as Pupil Premium. The range of staff support roles in schools was considerable, many of them not generic but specific to a school and its community. Many were part time and all were of the local community. These were paid for with Pupil Premium money and used to work with specific groups, sometimes very small (2 or 3 pupils) ones. Some were specialists (paid at instructor level) to develop skills in for example dance, music, various sports and speech. In some cases these were used to support an individual child's outstanding talent (musical instrument or dance) where the family could not afford fees, but in others the activities such as dance or drama were used to increase children's self -confidence and '*have fun*.(To quote a dance instructor)

Another example was of the Pupil Premium money being used to reduce stress and improve performance by providing every child with a free PE kit. The school had identified the lack of proper PE clothing as a source of pupil anxiety, leading to absenteeism on PE days and poor performance in lessons. The PE kit provided brought about a clear change in improved attendance and attitude to and performance in PE.

One school had bought a minibus to greatly increase access to out of school sites for activities, such as ones mentioned above in life experiences.

Most of the schools had invested funding in provision of food for pupils. Breakfast clubs were widely available, open to ALL pupils, often for a nominal sum. Not only were these seen as an obvious aid to improved learning through better diet, but the security offered to children coming to school early, well before lessons rather than be left in an empty house was welcomed. Additionally, the social aspect of eating together was very important to the disadvantaged pupils, plus the punctuality to the first lessons was massively improved.

3.3.6 Leaders used rigorous appraisal processes to try to develop and maintain staff at a high performance level. The schools used 'customised' systems of performance standards, either adapting nationally recommended ones or devising their own. In the latter cases, and in fact in the majority of schools altogether, these were finalised following consultation with the relevant staff. Linked to this was a commitment to professional learning for all staff, whatever their role in school.

There was a strong emphasis on relevance in CPD. All school leaders were committed to development and training that was specific to the needs of the school, the group or the individual. As much as possible was provided in-house; several leaders mentioned that it was more productive to bring a speaker in to the school, than send staff out to hear such speakers. Of course, some staff did attend externally provided courses where they were seen as relevant. Most schools encouraged staff to obtain accreditation where possible, and were supportive of the gaining of relevant qualifications. *'If we don't look after the staff, we can't expect them to look after the children'* **(Head of School A).**

A further feature of leaders' staff management was to try to develop staff stability. Effective teachers were encouraged to apply for promotion within the school, to gain qualifications with the help of on-site learning, to take on different roles which recognised their acquired skills. Apart from the smallest schools in the sample, where promotion opportunities for NQTs beyond the first few years for example were very limited, the great majority of schools had records of staff long service as the norm, with several having examples of senior staff having begun there as NQTs. These schools also recognised the values of 'new blood' as well of course, but felt that the willingness of staff to remain there was a tribute to staff satisfaction and morale engendered and also helped the ethos of security for pupils that was sought. All leaders were well aware of the need to avoid any complacency, hence the focus on achievement of each pupil. *'Every new child is a challenge and you must not rely on what worked last time to automatically do the same now.'* **(Teacher in School C).**

3.3.7 Effective leaders placed emphasis on prioritising key elements in progressing to a culture of high achievement. It was important to succeed in some chosen areas and then add more; as **Head G said**, *'It is important to focus on fewer things; home in on those and ensure they are embedded before introducing other things.'* The ability of effective leaders to prioritise was identified by, among others, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) as a critical attribute of sustainable leaders in the twenty first century.

Head of School J said that *'You need to strip away all redundant stuff and focus on the agreed priorities, especially for these children.'*

3.3.8 Finally, a key feature of these effective leaders was their readiness to recognise where something was not working effectively, and their willingness to abandon it and adopt something new, or at least to amend significantly.

All leaders agreed with the **Head of School F**: *'You have to be confident enough to admit that something is not working and scrap it if necessary, not blaming anyone for its failure, but changing to a new approach.'*

4 Conclusions & recommendations

Our findings reflect the views of headteachers, senior leadership and teachers in schools who have been successful in closing the gap. In some senses there are no surprises in what we have reported. Many of the findings would be common to all successful schools. The question is why do only some schools adopt the strategies we have described? As Ball et al (2012: 11) have noted headteachers are concerned 'with good learning outcomes and with creating a broad and positive school experience for the young people in their charge.' All schools have choices to make about how they develop their strategies and the ways in which they will deploy their resources. So what sets the schools in our sample apart and what contributes to their success in closing the gap? As we noted earlier the two key areas we have identified are leadership and culture and values.

Leadership

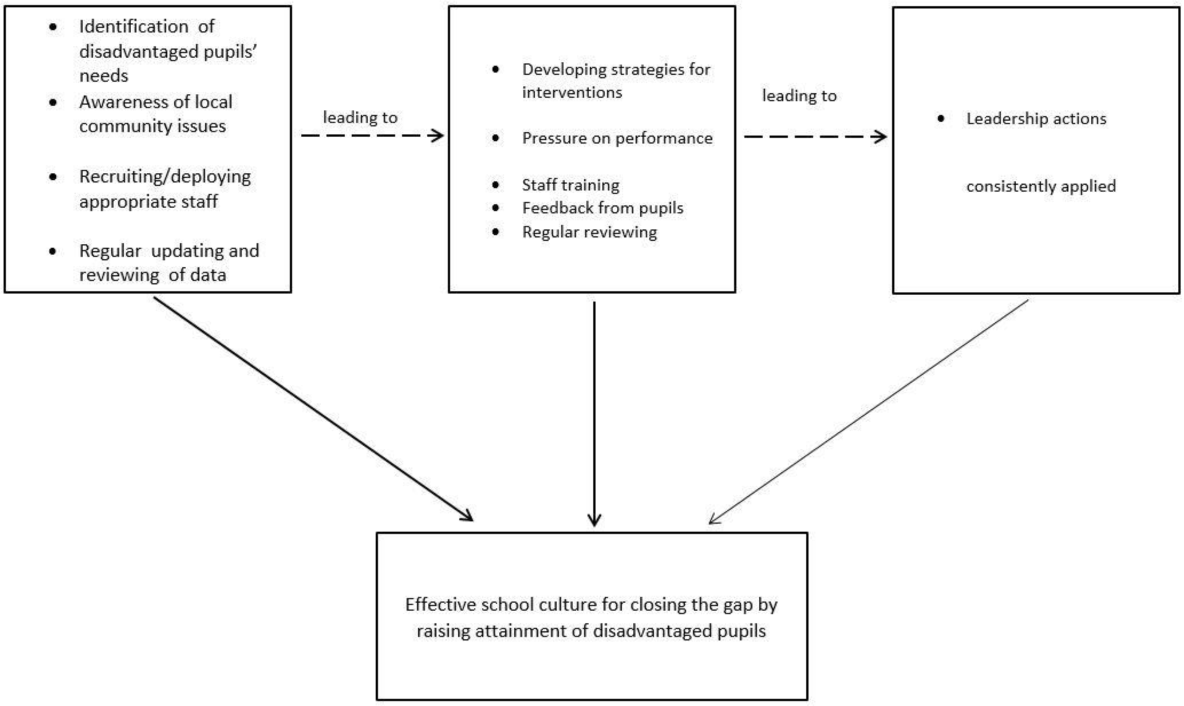
There has been a large amount of research linking improving and effective school performance with effective leadership, see for example: Leithwood et al, 2006; Robinson, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Bush and Glover, 2013; Fullan 2014. This piece of research strongly supports the link between positive and effective leadership as a major factor contributing to the success of the schools in the sample. From the research we have identified a number of common themes that need to be developed in schools to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are given the best opportunity to succeed. In particular, leadership needs to:

- Develop detailed and effective use of data which generates action with clear lines of accountability.
- Establish clear leadership responsibilities, with all staff being encouraged to take responsibility to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils.
- Develop a visible presence in the school. Be seen.
- Enable flexible and realistic use of resources.
- Focus on the importance of learning throughout the school.
- Promote high quality teaching across the school.
- Recognise the importance of the individual pupil and develop strategies that focus on individuals.
- Enable a range of staff development to take place which is accessible to all staff.
- Develop an effective and appropriate appraisal system that supports high quality teaching and pupil learning.
- Establish continuity of staffing through staff retention and the appointments process.
- Promote effective use of student voice.
- Identify a clear and consistent vision that is effectively communicated to all stakeholders.

Culture and Values

Figure 1 illustrates the factors in developing an effective school culture to close the gap.

Figure 1 Factors in developing effective 'closing the gap' school culture



There is a strong connection between leadership and the culture and values of a particular school. However, if culture is ultimately about values and beliefs, as the literature and research suggests it is (e.g. Deal and Peterson, 1999; Walker, 2010; Bush and Middlewood, 2013), then the overriding belief in the schools we carried out the research in, is that every single child or young person is worthy of respect and is capable of achieving something worthwhile. We have attempted to identify, from the research, particular aspects of culture and values that have been developed in the schools we visited:

- Strong engagement and identification with the local community.
- Development of a number of external links across a range of organisations.
- A willingness to encourage innovation.
- No excuses for poor performance.
- A recognition that policies that do not work should be reviewed and if necessary changed.
- An emphasis on detail and micro strategies.
- A focus on individual pupil achievement.
- A willingness to challenge accepted convention.
- Encouragement of innovation with no blame attached.
- A recognition of the importance of social and emotional support in addition to academic support for pupils.
- Creation of a safe and secure environment.
- Clarity of values and vision that is constantly reinforced.
- All pupils are valued and listened to.

- All staff are valued and listened to.

These effective schools have reached a stage in the establishment of a culture where 'its culture becomes more a cause than an effect,' (Middlewood and Abbott, 2015), that is, when the new people entering the culture are absorbed into it and influenced by its beliefs and values. Our final quote sums up the approach adopted by many of the schools we visited, and comes from a **Deputy Head** in a school that has undergone considerable change and improvement over recent years*: 'We were a school run for the staff, now we are a school run for the children.'* We would argue that all schools should be aiming to reach that situation.

5 References

Abbott, I., Middlewood, D. and Robinson, S. (2013) Birmingham Pupil Premium Research Report. Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry.

Ball, S. Maguire, M. and Braun, A. (2012) How Schools do Policy. London, Routledge.

Brooks, V. (2012) Key issues, opportunities and challenges for new teachers, in Brooks, V. Abbott, I. and Huddleston, P. (eds) Preparing to teach in secondary schools. Maidenhead, Open University Press.

Bush, T. and Glover, D. (2013) School Leadership: concepts and evidence revisited. Nottingham, National College for Teaching and Leadership.

Bush, T. and Middlewood, D. (2013) Leading and managing people in Education (3rd Edition). London, Sage.

Carpenter, H., Papps, I., Bragg, J., Dyson, A., Harris, D., Kerr, K., Todd, L. and Laing, K. (2013) Evaluation of Pupil Premium. London, DfE.

Deal, T. and Peterson, K. (1999) Shaping School culture: the heart of leadership. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass.

DfE (2015) Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice. DfE, London.

Early, P. and Bubb, S. (2004) Leading and Managing Continuing Professional Development. London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Fullan, M. (2014) The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Imapct. San Francisco, Ca, Jossey-Bass.

Hargreaves, A. and Fink, D. (2006) 'Sustainable Leadership. San Francisco, Ca, Jossey-Bass.

Hattie, J. (2009) Visible Learning: a synthesis of Over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement. London, Routledge.

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., and Hopkins, D. (2006) Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership. London, DfES.

Macleod, S., Sharp, C., Bernardinelli, D., Skipp, A. and Higgins, S. (2015) Supporting the Attainment of Disadvantaged Pupils: Articulating Success and Good Practice. London, DfE.

Maslow, A. (1943) A theory of human motivation. Psychological Review. 50, 370-396.

Middlewood, D. and Abbott, I. (2012) Achieving Success with your Leadership Project. London, Sage.

Middlewood, D. and Abbott, I. (2015) Improving professional learning through in-house inquiry. London, Bloomsbury.

Middlewood, D. Parker, R. and Beere, J. (2005) Creating a learning school. London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Mortimore, P. (2013) Education under siege. London, Policy Press.

National Audit Office (2015) Department for Education; Funding for Disadvantaged Pupils (HC 90). London, NAO.

OECD (2014) PISA 2012 results in focus: What 15-year-olds know and What They Can Do With What They know. Paris: OECD (online)http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf. Accessed: 10th January 2015.

Ofsted (2012) The Pupil Premium: How schools are using the Pupil Premium funding to raise achievement for disadvantaged pupils. Manchester, Ofsted.

Ofsted (2013) The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement. Manchester, Ofsted.

(Ofsted Publications available online at http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/pupil-premium)

Robinson, V. (2007) School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying what Works and Why. Winmalee, NSW, Australian Council of Leaders.

Stoll, L., Fink, D. and Earl, L. (2003) It's about learning-and it's about time. London, Routledge Falmer.

Strand, S. (2014) School effects and ethnic, gender and socio-economic gaps in educational achievement at age 11. Oxford Review of Education, Vol. 40, No. 2, 223-245.

Thomson, P. (2009) Consulting Secondary School pupils about their learning. Oxford Review of Education. Vol. 35, No. 6, 671-687.

Walker, A. (2010) Building and leading learning cultures in Bush, T. , Bell, L. and Middlewood, D. (eds) The principles of educational leadership and management. London, Sage.

Whitty, G. and Wisby, A. (2007) Whose voice? An exploration of pupil involvement in school decision-making. International Studies in Sociology of Education. Vol 17, No 2, 303-319.