

WIRRAL CHILDREN'S TRUST BOARD – 24 SEPTEMBER 2010

Narrowing the Gap projects 2009 – 2010

1.0 Background

The underpinning principle of Narrowing the Gap (NtG) was that every child should be able to be equipped to succeed in their adult lives, regardless of where they live, where they go to school, or their family background.

In 2008 only 23% of the children entitled to free school meals (roughly the poorest 15% of the population) achieved five or more good GCSEs including English and maths. This equated to them being less than half as likely to get good GCSE grades as their peers who were not entitled to free school meals. Boys generally performed more poorly than girls.

The purpose of Narrowing the Gap was to break the link between disadvantage and low attainment. This link is demonstrated by the 'within school variation' (wsv) outlined in the paragraph above: the variation in pupils' performance *within* individual schools is four times greater than the variation of the performance *between* schools. In other words it is poverty, not individual schools' performance, which is strongly linked to low attainment.

Schools needed to be made aware of this variance and identify groups of vulnerable pupils, monitor their progress and put in place improvement measures to ensure effective teaching of a consistently high standard, year on year, class by class.

In Wirral during 2009 – 2010, support to Narrow the Gap was not only aimed at teaching or at individual schools, as the solutions do not lie uniquely with schools, but stretch across all services for children and their families. Parents, pupils, partners, the community and the teaching and non-teaching staff in schools were all targeted.

2.0 Introduction

Wirral allocated £100,000 for 2009- 2010 to work in collaboration with schools and other stakeholders, to Narrow the Gap. The strategy was to provide training and opportunities which would lead to permanent changes in practice, rather than fund 'one-off' projects whose benefits would not be sustained. While the NtG funding supported a range of activities, examples of which are summarised below, the imperative to narrow the attainment gap permeated far more widely than targeted schools and continues to do so.

3.0 Summary of NtG projects

3.1 Hays Ignition

12 Primary schools ran awareness- and aspiration-raising sessions to help pupils understand the importance of their education and its links to their future working life, and that career paths have specific skills sets and help. It also aimed to help Year 6 children undergo a smoother transition between primary and secondary to avoid the dip in attainment which typically accompanies this period of change. Uptake of the training was cluster-wide in the Oxton/ Prenton cluster which ran the Hays Ignition programme in all its primary schools, with sessions being given to Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 children.

Outcome: Evaluation supplied by pupils and teachers in the schools demonstrated highly positive comments with the percentage marking it as excellent in all aspects in the high 90s. The Oxton/ Prenton head teachers were so pleased with the Ignition programme they have decided use cluster funding to run the project again for the same year groups during the academic year 2010/11. There was no attempt to measure impact as the workshops for Years 3, 4 and 5 only lasted an hour; and potential effects of the longer sessions the Year 6 children will not be apparent until after transition.

3.2 Communication-Friendly Spaces

Running alongside existing projects in Wirral schools which are assessing the home and school environments for young children and the effects these have on their ability to communicate and to learn, Wirral NtG and Elizabeth Jarman Training Ltd designed and ran an enquiry-based project from January – June 09 to look into the preferred learning and communicating environments for boys in three targeted schools. The schools were selected on the basis of their baseline on entry which indicated a gender imbalance with very low language development (some as low as 18 months). The project involved senior staff training and whole-staff briefing, followed by the selection of three boys from each class whose interactions with their environment were observed, followed by the involvement of parents to record the children's behaviour in the home, and to ask which environments the children preferred: small/large; confined/open, cluttered/clear, noisy/quiet etc.

Outcome: On an individual level, the project triggered direct contact with the parents and carers which lead to a more open communication with them; the project encouraged them to become more involved in the development of their child's communication skills. There was also an improvement in communication – particularly listening – reported among the boys who took part, while all the adults reported changes in their thinking and practice and greater communication with the boys.

Despite the short duration of the project, qualitative feedback suggested it made an important contribution to understanding which surroundings are best suited to boys being able to learn: the boys preferred to be in small groups, with 'small world' preferred by younger boys. This learning has been disseminated, with the wider Communication-Friendly Spaces principles, to all primary schools.

3.3 Growing to Learn – Learning to Grow (Kagan)

'Growing to Learn – Learning to Grow' is an ongoing project designed to support the development of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) through training, networking and consultation. 16 schools, at differing development stages and committed to whole-school AfL improvements, have been enlisted for training from T2T Kagan Training company and support. The aims of the project are to:

- ❖ exploring new AfL strategies to promote collaborative learning,
- ❖ to embed all aspects of AfL across the whole school,
- ❖ to raise attainment, aspirations and expectations of pupils, staff, parents/carers and Governors and
- ❖ to support the continued implementation of APP.

Outcome: At the half way stage in March 2010, the overwhelming majority of schools reported that the project had changed their teaching, the way their children learn and the children's attitude to learning and that it was having a positive impact across the whole school, by helping to raise standards.

3.4 Tranmere Rovers Football Journalism Programme

This project, which took place at the football ground, aimed to improve writing skills for KS2 and KS3 pupils. Targeted groups analysed match before watching a live game at Tranmere and then writing their own report of that game. Following a 2008/2009 pilot, funded by NtG, the 2009/2010 programme was offered to all Wirral primary schools. Schools identified participants based on the expectation that they would not reach the expected level in writing during the academic year. Participating schools targeted groups of 10-20 pupils who attended five sessions at Tranmere Rovers Football Club ground, and a live match.

Outcomes: not all the performance data has been collected, but the following evidence from Greasby Primary School is typical:

Impact on Progress and Attainment:-

Of the 11 pupils who took part, 9 (82%) made better than expected progress in their writing, from July 09 to July 10. Only 2 did not make expected progress, one of whom has English as an additional language.

The expected progress, expressed as Average Points Score, is 3 APS in one academic year. Of the 11 taking part, 6 made progress of 4 APS and 2 made 6 APS (2 years progress in one academic year). One pupil made progress of 10 APS (more than 3 years progress in one academic year). This indicates OUTSTANDING progress made by these children. Of the 11 pupils taking part, 9 achieved Level 4+ with 1 achieving Level 5 in writing. Reading results are even better but given the writing focus of the project, only writing attainment is being considered. The targeted group were pupils identified as needing additional support in order to achieve Level 4. Following this project, 82% achieved Level 4."

Other NtG projects included:

Aim Higher Programme: Engaging a number of schools with the Professor Fluffy Programme run by Liverpool University.

Developing a Curriculum that Matters: linked to the Rose Review, and involved a group of schools working together with Focus Education.

Two opportunities to attend a **One-day Literacy Conference**. For KS1 Literacy Co-ordinators plus headteachers on Big Talk, led by Alistair Bryce Clay.

Conference - Day 2 of the Big Write: for KS2 teachers, led by Peter Halsall. There will be follow up with writing project at Tranmere Rovers for six schools.

Maths Outreach Programme: the development of a maths outreach programme in collaboration with schools which have Maths as a focus for development.

Recommendation

That the Wirral Children's Trust Board notes the report.

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