PUPIL PREMIUM SPENDING - DOES IT ADD UP TO MAKING ANY DIFFERENCE?

Meanu Bajwa-Patel
University of Northampton, Northampton, UK

Improving the educational achievement of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is a central tenet of education policy in many developed countries, including the UK, which has a significant problem with poor rates of literacy and numeracy across young adults (OECD Survey of Adult Skills 2013). In England in 2012-13 an extra £1.25 billion, one of the UK Coalition government's flagship policies known as Pupil Premium (PP) funding, was made available to schools to spend on their most disadvantaged students, however, according to research by the Sutton Trust, this extra funding will have limited impact on poorer pupils. In their survey of over 1700 teachers the Sutton Trust found that few schools were actually spending their PP funding on what they outline, in their Toolkit (EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit), as the most effective interventions, i.e. providing effective feedback on pupil's performance, and enabling pupils to teach their peers.

This paper reports on an evaluation carried out across a large urban secondary comprehensive in England, where approximately 32% (687) of the students receive PP funding. The rationale of the evaluation was to investigate, through a qualitative evaluation of the PP interventions, if the range of interventions that the school was spending its PP funding on met their aims and objectives. The evaluation provided evidence which was utilised, alongside the school's own quantitative data, to help evaluate the successes of the different interventions and enabled the school to measure whether the impact had been worth the cost.

The research questions were

1. What effects and impact did the programme of interventions have on the perceptions and transition of Year 7 PP students (and their families)?
2. What effects and impact did the programme of interventions have on year 10 PP students (and their families)?
3. Which interventions appeared to be the most effective and how/why?

The research adopted a case study approach (Stake, 1995), which allows for a holistic understanding of the intricacies of a situation within a real life context and helped address the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. The methods used included surveys; one-to-one semi-structured interviews with students, parents and outreach workers; focus group interviews with staff and observations and work scrutiny of PP students.