

TACKLING POVERTY IN SCHOOLS: FINAL PROJECT REPORT

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1. Introduction

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), together with Diane Dixon Associates, has been working with schools in London to explore the role of primary schools in tackling child poverty. This report contains an outline of the main project activities, as well as a summary of the key learning to emerge from the project with a particular focus on how to scale up this type of work in schools. This pilot project builds on the findings from a short-term research project on tackling child poverty in schools, also conducted by CPAG and Diane Dixon Associates.

Background: extended schools

The term ‘extended schools’ refers to services delivered by schools that go beyond the core function of the classroom education of children within the normal school day. The extended schools programme was a pillar of the Every Child Matters policy agenda, launched in 2003. Since then, national policies have changed, but many schools continue to provide elements of extended schools, including:¹

- Support services for children delivered within school – e.g. therapeutic services;
- Homework clubs/additional classes for disadvantaged children;
- Sporting and cultural enrichment activities;
- Before- and after-school childcare and holiday childcare/play provision;
- Support services for parents – e.g., adult education or employment support;
- Activities targeted at the wider community - e.g. sports clubs on the school site.

Evidence shows that extended schools programmes are particularly beneficial for children and families living in poverty. Extended schools programmes can engage pupils more positively with school² and narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.³ Play and physical activity are important for children’s health and wellbeing and extended schools programmes can improve children’s access to sports and cultural facilities.⁴ Such programmes can also support parents in a number of ways. Breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday

clubs can provide convenient and, often, low-cost childcare that can support parents to work and enable a route out of poverty or prevent families falling into poverty.⁵

Ring-fenced funding for extended schools in England ended in 2011 and continuing to fund these types of activities has become difficult for schools with increasingly tight budgets. Despite this challenging environment, our project found evidence that extended schools programmes continue in many London schools but that provision is not consistent across schools. In some cases such services were being run at a financial loss to the school.

This report uses the term ‘extended schools’ as a short hand to refer to any activity or service provided by a school that goes beyond the core task of teaching children, including but not limited to the list of activities outlined above.

2. Summary of project activities across schools

This project has involved working with eleven primary schools to help them develop their extended schools programme, with a particular focus on increasing support for families on a low income to help tackle child poverty. A key aspect of this work has involved the delivery of welfare rights advice within schools. A summary of the key deliverables for the project, and a breakdown of the activities across the different clusters / schools is provided below.

Key deliverables

Needs assessments	Schools co-ordinators (x2) to conduct needs assessments across the 11 participating schools, involving pupils, parents/carers, and staff.
Actions plans / extended school activities	Schools co-ordinators to work with schools to develop action plans with schools, informed by the needs assessment process – action plans may include the establishment of new activities, the development of existing activities, or a targeted area of work (e.g. building relationships with local voluntary sector services).
Welfare rights advice	The delivery of welfare rights advice sessions across all schools.
Practice Network	3 x Practice Network meetings throughout the project, bringing schools together to discuss activities and share learning.
Monitoring and evaluation	Working with the GLA and the independent evaluators to provide progress reports and data as required.

Needs assessment process

All schools have been encouraged to undertake a needs assessment at the beginning of their involvement in the project. A needs assessment involves consulting with pupils, parents/carers and staff to understand the usage of current services or activities offered by the school and attitudes towards the school as a provider of support. Questions were also asked regarding improvements that could be made to existing provision, as well as identifying

any gaps in support for children and families. The children's survey also captured data about the extent to which children believed their family's income impacted on their participation in extended school activities.

The process has involved conducting an online survey with children, and paper based surveys and face to face consultation with parents/carers and staff. Schools co-ordinators have then worked closely with schools to develop an action plan with schools, based on the findings of the needs assessment. As the recruitment of schools has taken longer in some areas (see the final section of the report), some schools have conducted a more comprehensive needs assessment than others, and in some schools the needs assessment is still ongoing.

Kensington and Chelsea

Cluster wide activities: the development of a directory of referral and partner service providers with input from schools, employability advice across all schools (see below), and engagement in the project by local authority officials and an elected member. The creation of the ABC Community Forum formed by all three schools as a vehicle for organising inclusive extended school activities as a cluster of three schools; the organisation of an ABC Winter Festival, partially funded by John Lyon's Charity and drawing on in-kind donations from Queen's Park Ranger Football Club, the Lyric Theatre, Venture Community Association, Kensington Aldridge Academy, a local independent school, Al-Manaar Hub kitchen and the Felix Project. The Winter Festival involves two community events open to all (23rd December, 3rd January) and a programme of activities over the holidays (including tickets for the football and a local pantomime) where children in families on a low income have been prioritised. The ABC Community Forum cluster group will continue to build strategic links with local organisations, including the local authority, to develop their extended schools programme.

Colville Primary

- **Parent champions:** two parent champions have been successfully recruited and training is being developed (delivered by the schools co-ordinators) alongside a guide for the school. The information and advice parent champions' role is designed to help improve parental engagement with the school by building a network of parent volunteers who play a role in promoting activities at the school and signposting parents to relevant support services as needed. Although there is precedent for the model in the context of early education (co-ordinated by the Family and Childcare Trust) the parent champion model based in schools is an untested one and the process of recruitment and training development has thrown up some interesting issues in relation to its delivery e.g. boundaries, confidentiality, safeguarding and communication pathways. The solutions to these issues will be helpful learning for other schools looking to develop similar initiatives.
- **Employability advice:** The Family and Community Employment Service (FACES) has provided employability advice sessions at the school to help parents who are interested in getting into employment and training. There is an example of a parent, whose support only commenced at the beginning of this term, securing employment and realising a net gain of £1597.16 per month through wages and benefits.
- **Holiday hunger:** as a result of learning about similar partnerships between schools and 'holiday hunger' community services at the Practice Network, the school established a link with the Al-Manaar Hub kitchen. The kitchen provided meals to families over the summer holidays and half-term. The initial response over the summer and half-term, which had to be organised very quickly and had a focus on food and hunger, has been developed into an inclusive one that aims to organise activities that are open to all rather than targeted at families who are experiencing poverty.
- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (weekly) were delivered in the school from July - December.

- **Funding applications for the sustainability of activities:** the schools co-ordinator worked with the school to identify potential sources of funding for activities and support services in the school, for example by applying for community based charitable grants.

Bevington:

- **Employability advice:** as outlined above FACES provided employability advice sessions at the school to help parents to get into employment and training.
- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (weekly) were delivered in the school from July - December.
- **Coffee mornings and flyers:** the school promoted their role in providing support and information to families, including promoting the welfare rights advice.
- **Holiday hunger:** as outlined above Bevington was linked in with the Al-Manaar Centre and Hub kitchen so that families could access meals over the school holidays.

Avondale Park:

- **Employability advice:** as outlined above FACES provided employability advice sessions at the school to help parents to get into employment and training and assisted parents from Hammersmith & Fulham to access similar local services.
- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (fortnightly) were delivered in the school from October - December.
- **Advice over the summer holidays:** Avondale Park and the schools co-ordinator facilitated the provision of welfare rights advice at a local community service (Grenfell Nursery) over the summer holidays.
- **Coffee mornings and flyers:** the school promoted their role in providing support and information to families. This has included a focus on 1) promoting the role of the senior SENCO in providing support to families on a range of issues 2) the welfare rights advice sessions and 3) the employability advice available from FACES.
- **Holiday hunger:** as outlined above Avondale Park was linked in with the Al-Manaar Centre and Hub kitchen so that families can access meals over the school holidays.

Southwark

Cluster wide activities: the development of a Southwark directory of referral and partner service providers with input from schools. The schools co-ordinator has also worked with schools to develop content which can be used as the basis of a webpage for families to go on the school's website, signposting them to useful sources of information and advice. There are also plans to engage the local authority in the project, and details of Southwark's Food Security Action Plan and how to join the Southwark Food Action Alliance (a network of statutory, voluntary and community organisations collaborating to mitigate the impact of cuts in Southwark) have been shared with schools. Work has been undertaken by the schools co-ordinator to link up schools with a local welfare rights advice provider, to ensure a warm referral pathway once the co-located advice in schools is finished.

Surrey Square:

- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (weekly) were delivered at the school from July-December.
- **Advice over the summer holidays:** Surrey Square and the schools co-ordinator facilitated the provision of welfare rights advice at a local community service (Pembroke House) over the summer holidays.

- **Active participation:** in Practice Network Meetings and knowledge sharing across the cluster, in particular, invaluable feedback on the services available to families in Southwark to inform other cluster schools (e.g. sharing information about holiday hunger programmes, and involvement in Citizens UK amongst others)
- **Parent Champions:** having learnt more about the programme and how it is running in other participating schools Surrey Square has shown an interest in setting up a program in the spring term and is in conversation with the schools co-ordinator about this.

Rye Oak:

- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (weekly) were delivered at the school from July - December.
- **Parent champions:** (see above for details - Colville school) the schools co-ordinator is working with the family worker to explore the establishment of a parents' champions scheme at the school as a way of improving parental engagement.
- **Breakfast Club:** research undertaken and shared with the school in relation to potential funding sources for the school breakfast club, to make it more accessible for families on a low income.
- **Community engagement:** details of Peckham Citizens (part of Citizens UK) discussed with the family worker with a view to the school joining their local chapter.

John Donne and John Keates (x2 schools)

- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (fortnightly) were delivered at the school from October-December.

Newham

Cluster wide activities: the development of a Newham directory of referral and partner service providers with input from schools. The schools co-ordinator has also worked with schools to develop content which can be used as the basis of a webpage for families to go on the school's website, signposting them to useful sources of information and advice. There are also plans to engage the local authority in the project. Work has been undertaken by the schools co-ordinator to link schools up with a local welfare rights advice provider, to ensure a warm referral pathway once the co-located advice in schools is finished.

Manor:

- **Leadership team engagement:** Child Welfare and Inclusion Officer and Deputy Head have worked to raise the profile of the project with the Senior Leadership Team and engage them with the activities being undertaken and the support available to families.
- **Raising the profile of the support provided by the Child Welfare and Inclusion Officer:** raising parental awareness of the full range of support provided by the Officer via the production of a bespoke flyer and other promotional activities.
- **Parent champions:** (see above for details - Colville school) programme is up and running. Three Parent Champions interviewed, recruited and trained by the schools co-ordinator.
- **Forging links with local support organisations and services:** the school identified feeling quite isolated from the local community and wanting to address this as part of the project. The schools co-ordinator has worked with the Child Welfare and Inclusion Officer to build warm relationships with local services, including Monday A&E (welfare benefits support), West Ham Foundation (community projects), The East London Citizens Organisation (TELCO) and Newham Citizens.

- **Promotion of extended schools clubs / other help available with childcare:** in the needs assessment parents identified childcare as an issue they need support with. In response, the school has promoted the existing provision of school-based childcare (breakfast and after school club) as well as providing information about the help that is available with childcare costs (e.g. childcare payments via universal credit, the childcare offer available to working parents).
- **Breakfast Club:** research undertaken and shared with the school in relation to potential funding sources for the school breakfast club, to make it more accessible for families on a low income.
- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (weekly) were delivered at the school from July - December.

St Helen's:

- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (fortnightly) were delivered at the school from October-December.
- **Breakfast Club:** research undertaken and shared with the school in relation to potential funding sources for the school breakfast club to make it more accessible for families on a low income.
- **Information for families:** based on the directory of local services in Newham, the school co-ordinator has worked with the school to put together a website for families which will signpost them to useful sources of information, advice and support across Newham.

Camden

Cluster wide activities: the Camden schools were recruited later on in the project (late Sept 2019) so work with these schools has been limited by the time available. Despite the short timeframe the schools have been enthusiastic and the schools co-ordinator has been working hard to get plans in place quickly. Some promising links with the local authority have already been established. A meeting with the local authority locality lead took place in late November to discuss the creation of clear referral paths between the schools and existing services in Camden for families with children under five and social housing tenants. These services include welfare rights advice and employability support (together with a range of other support on offer through children's centres). The Integrated Early Years Service also has a pool of trained parent champions who operate across the localities and can be linked in with schools to supplement schools based parent champions.

Brecknock:

- **Coffee morning:** the school promoted the project (including the welfare rights advice and other available local services) at a coffee morning.
- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (fortnightly) were delivered at the school from October - December.

Primrose Hill:

- **Coffee morning:** the school promoted the project (including the welfare rights advice) at a recent coffee morning.
- **Welfare rights advice:** welfare rights advice sessions (fortnightly) were delivered at the school from October - December.

Welfare rights advice: headline outcomes

Welfare rights advice was delivered in the eleven schools that participated in the project. Five schools received weekly welfare rights advice (half day session of 3x 1 hour appointments) from July - December 2019. The remaining six schools received fortnightly advice from October - December 2019. Two welfare rights workers were responsible for delivering the advice, one working on a full time basis and one on a part time basis.

79 clients were seen by the advisers in relation to 126 separate matters. Key issues clients presented with included help with doing a benefit check, making or maintaining a universal credit claim, appealing a benefit decision, and issues with tax credits, disability living allowance, and housing benefit.

75% of clients identified as women. 21% identified as having a disability. 70% identified as being Black, Asian, or minority ethnic (BAME). These figures support findings from the Scottish pilot that found that groups that are less likely to access advice from mainstream advice agencies, namely women and people from a BAME background, are more likely to access advice when it is available at a school.

£122,197.83 was gained for clients in terms of ongoing financial gains (per year), and **£16,627.78** was gained for clients in terms of one-off payments.

3. Key lessons

Key lessons to emerge from the pilot project are outlined below. Where the learning is particularly relevant to thinking about how to scale-up this work in schools, lessons for scale-up are included.

Establishment phase:

Recruitment of schools takes time

The recruitment of schools to participate in the project took time and resources. Some schools came on board quickly due to existing relationships and/or involvement in the research project that pre-dated the pilot. However, in the areas where none of the organisations involved (CPAG, Diane Dixon Associates, GLA) had warm relationships with schools, the recruitment took significantly longer and some attempts at bringing schools on board failed altogether. A key learning from this process was that recommendations or endorsements from another education professional (e.g. another headteacher) was much more likely to prompt engagement with the project, rather than the fact that the project had strategic importance and was supported by the London Mayor.

Once schools had decided to participate in the project, it still took time to get project activities started, for example the needs assessments and the development of action plans. School staff and particularly senior leadership were often incredibly busy and the project team had to be flexible to school schedules and competing demands. Furthermore, differing levels of engagement from key contacts at the school meant that, in some schools, a large amount of time had to be invested in relationship-building as a precursor to any activity taking place.

Lessons for scale up: recruiting schools to take part in projects that sit outside of their core responsibilities takes time. Any attempt to scale up this work within schools would need to ensure a long lead in time. It would also

need to account for the fact that inevitably some schools will engage more with project activities than others. Bringing schools together (see below on sharing the learning) can help with motivating and engaging schools.

The importance of having a dedicated contact in each school, with pastoral responsibilities

This work was only possible because of the dedication and hard work of the key contacts in each school and the knowledge and understanding of their school community which they were able to bring to the project. These contacts acted as our main liaison point and were responsible for putting the project plans into action. The vast majority of these contacts did not have teaching responsibilities and most had a pastoral care element to their role (family worker or similar). This helped to embed the project activities within each school as they were often closely aligned to the role of pastoral staff (e.g. responsibility for referring families to external support services or extended school activities) and meant that in some cases, they had already engendered a sense of trust between themselves and families at the school. It also ensured that teaching responsibilities did not get in the way of project delivery.

Lessons for scale up: a dedicated contact within each school (ideally in a pastoral care role) who is committed to developing the support that is provided to families in their school is essential for developing this work in schools.

The importance of the school co-ordinator role

School co-ordinators worked closely with the key staff in each individual school to ensure the project was a success. The key contacts for the project, who were often the only practitioners in their role in a school, reported the value of working alongside a school co-ordinator to develop this work in their school. The school co-ordinators were able to give dedicated time to staff to help them think through what was needed in their school and this allowed for a tailored response that fitted their particular circumstances. The co-ordinators also spent a considerable amount of time linking schools into their local communities, for example compiling community directories of available support services, and establishing links with other schools in their cluster. Working across a number of different schools involved in the project also enabled shared learning at local and pan-London levels.

Lessons for scale up: the school co-ordinator model was successful at providing the support that schools need to develop their extended school activities and any future work in schools should consider how this model could be replicated at scale.

The importance of a 'whole school' and integrated approach to tackling child poverty - which takes time

This delivery of this type of work in schools is a change management process at its heart. It requires school practitioners to think differently, and to change their way of working – in any organisation this takes time. School co-ordinators spent time promoting this change at different levels within the school structure to encourage a 'whole school' approach to tackling child poverty and one that situates it at the heart of what a school does and not separate from education as such. The rationale for this is that the consequences of poverty are proven to impact on a child's ability to learn and participate fully in activities and experiences that will give them the best start in life.⁶

This requires a top-down and a bottom-up approach, with buy-in from senior leadership that supports family workers and others in a pastoral care role. It requires all staff to understand the role they play in supporting families. By way of example, one school reported that children attending the breakfast club would often confide

in breakfast club staff, these being the first adults they would meet after leaving their homes in the morning. The Breakfast Club Manager would share information with the Family Support Worker which added to her knowledge of the child's circumstances out of school and aided her thinking around what might help that child/family.

Lessons for scale up: funding for this work in schools should be provided over a longer period (1-2 school years at a minimum) to allow time for the development of a 'whole school' and integrated approach to tackling child poverty.

Developing extended school activities:

The value of asking, not assuming what families need

As outlined above, a key stage in our work with schools involved conducting needs assessments. The needs assessment process involved conducting surveys with pupils, parents/carers, and staff to understand the usage of current services or activities offered by the school and any improvements that could be made to existing provision, as well as identifying any gaps in support for children and families. For many of the schools that completed the needs assessment (some are still ongoing) they learned new things about their school community that proved helpful when thinking about how best to support families on a low income. For example, in one school parents overwhelmingly reported that they were much more likely to turn to friends and family in times of need than the school directly. In response the school is establishing a 'Parent Champions' volunteer programme that trains parents to reach out to and act as a resource for other parents. Ultimately, the role is to promote the school as a point of support and signposting to services in the local community. In addition to learning more about their school community, schools also reported that the process of the needs assessment was valuable in itself (regardless of the findings) as it demonstrated that it doesn't have to be a huge task to consult with a school community and useful information can emerge that can help tailor the activities of the school to the community it serves.

Lessons for scale up: any scale up work in schools should ensure some level of consultation (and where possible, co-design) with pupils, parents/carers, and staff to ensure the views of the school community inform the design and development of extended school activities.

There is 'no one size fits all' model for schools

A clear lesson to emerge from the pilot is that there is no one model of delivery that will work across all schools in London. The needs assessment (see above) demonstrated that the issues affecting communities in London can vary hugely, for example in one Newham school staff reported that they have a high number of families who have recently arrived in the UK and need help with immigration advice but in another school in Kensington and Chelsea staff reported that immigration advice is less of an issue for their families who have been settled in the UK for generations. In addition to understanding the issues that affect local families and the local community (and therefore should inform a schools response), schools themselves can be at different stages in developing this work. For example, across the schools we worked with there were a couple of schools that had comprehensive extended school programmes that were targeted at families on a low income and extremely well used, and others were beginning to think about how they could improve the support that they provide to families on a low income. Schools will inevitably be at different stages in this process and any work with them to help them develop their extended school activities will need to reflect this.

Lessons for scale-up: any scale-up of this work would need to be flexible to each school's individual

circumstances, both externally (the local community, and the issues affecting families) and internally (the internal school environment, which may or may not be focused on the needs of low income families). Bringing schools together (see below on sharing the learning) can help with motivating and engaging schools.

Developing activities:

Activities to support families on low incomes need ongoing promotion

A key learning to emerge from the project was that the promotion of activities is essential for their success, and this promotion must be ongoing. For example, two schools arranged for the welfare rights advice to be offered to families over the summer holidays from local community venues (as the school was closed). The key contacts at each school promoted the advice heavily to families in the final weeks of the summer term, however the advice over the summer holidays was not well used by families. This is likely to be the result of a combination of factors, including the fact that the advice was not being offered on the school site, but it demonstrated that the ongoing promotion of the advice throughout the school term by the key contacts at each school was critical for the success of the service. Another example of a service that was promoted to families, but was not particularly well used, was a local Hub Kitchen that offered meals for families over the summer holidays. Again, despite promotion by the school in the final weeks of the summer term, not many families used this service. In response, during the Autumn term the co-ordinators of the Hub Kitchen are spending time at the school breakfast club to publicise the service to families and ensure that they are a 'familiar face' to parents, and it is hoped that this will encourage parents to use the service in the future. Other strategies used by the key contacts across the different schools included posters and leaflets around the school building, leaflet drops in children's bags, and including information in newsletters and emails to parents and carers. A multi-pronged approach is necessary to ensure parents and carers are aware of the activities and support that is provided by the school.

The importance of promoting and delivering activities in a non-stigmatising way

As part of the research project that pre-dated this pilot we highlighted the value of a 'universal targeted approach'. Whilst the focus of this work in schools is providing support to families on a low income, and therefore playing a role in tackling child poverty, it is important that activities are not delivered in a way that is stigmatising.

For example, restricting activities to children on free school meals or using other measures to target families 'in poverty'. There are many problems with this approach, firstly they often miss their target group (particularly in London, where there are high rates of in-work poverty – the vast majority of these families are not eligible for free school meals). Secondly, they are stigmatising and therefore they often aren't well used by children and families who may not want to publicise the fact they are struggling financially. This was borne out by feedback from families at more than one school in the pilot. The welfare rights sessions were promoted initially with the CPAG logo which contains the word 'poverty' and parents reported that this had deterred them from accessing advice. The pilot adapted the promotion of the advice accordingly but it demonstrates how powerful stigma can be.

A universal targeted approach requires that activities are open to all, and promoted with an enrichment focus (e.g. activities, community), rather than a deficit (e.g. hunger, poverty) focus, but means that they can still be targeted towards families on a low income. Often this requires schools to spend time promoting some activities to all families and others to families 'behind the scenes' e.g. via a family worker or another trusted professional. A universal targeted approach also has the added benefit of being inclusive and ensuring children from a range of backgrounds spend time together which can be beneficial for all children.

Parental engagement is an important foundation for delivering successful extended schools activities

A key lesson from the pilot was that parental engagement is an essential component for schools looking to improve their extended schools programme and ensure families on a low income benefit from these activities. In short, if a school has good parental engagement, the activities and support it provides for families on a low income are much more likely to be well used by parents. Conversely, if schools have poor parental engagement it is often of little importance if the activities or support services are accessible or of a high quality, as they are much less likely to be used by children and families. Trust is an essential part of this: if parents feel that they trust their school, they are much more likely to reach out to the school for support in times of need. The development of a schools-based Parent Champions programme was a response to the need to improve parental engagement in some of the schools involved in the project. It is hoped that by training parents to become volunteer Parent Champions they can act as a bridge between the school and the parent community which will help to improve trust and engagement. It is the first time that a schools-based Parent Champion model has been tested and it will take time to develop it to its full potential.

Lessons for scale-up: in many schools work needs to take place to improve parental engagement, before extended schools activities can be successfully delivered. Any scale-up work with schools must reflect this, and allow time to develop this important foundation. The parent champion model may prove to be a positive means of engagement with parents but requires further testing.

Welfare rights advice:

It is worth noting that many of the lessons learnt from delivering welfare rights advice in schools could apply to other co-located services, e.g. immigration advice or employability advice in schools.

The importance of well supported welfare rights advice

Learning from our project demonstrates that locating welfare rights advice within a school relies on certain supports being in place to make sure that the adviser is able to fulfil their role effectively and, crucially, provide high quality advice to parents and carers. It is important that the adviser is supported as an integral part of the school's offer to families, with a key contact at the school who can support with logistical arrangements (e.g. meeting space, booking appointments etc.) and time to build relationships with other members of staff where possible. This helps to ensure that staff are aware of the service and can play a role in publicising the service to parents and making referrals. It also helps for the adviser to become a 'familiar face' within the school which can help to reassure parents that it is a trusted service. This relies on sessions being frequent (see below).

Lessons for scale-up: for welfare rights advice to be successful in schools, clear agreement with schools about what is required to support the advice (logistics, booking appointments etc.) as well as a commitment from both schools and the service provider to build positive working relationships is essential.

Welfare rights advice as part of a wider programme of extended school activities

The learning from our project suggests that welfare rights advice in schools is most successful in schools where a well-developed package of extended schools activities already exists. For example, the two schools that were involved in the previous research project and have established programmes of activities, as well as good levels of parental engagement in their school, were able to fill appointments at a higher rate than other schools. This demonstrates that it is important that the welfare rights advice (or any other element of an extended schools programme) is not seen in isolation; developing a wide range of activities and supports for families is mutually

reinforcing, helping to build trust and engagement with parents at the same time which in turn influences take up of these activities.

The importance of delivering weekly advice rather than fortnightly or less frequent sessions

The pilot project did not have the staff resources to locate weekly advice in all schools, instead some schools received weekly and others fortnightly advice sessions. It was clear by the end of the delivery period that the advice had been easier to embed within schools that received weekly advice sessions. Weekly sessions meant schools (and crucially parents) were clear on when advice would be available and which day (rather than trying to remember if it was the right week) which helped with filling appointments. It also gave the welfare rights more time at the school to familiarise themselves with the school environment and build relationships with the staff team which is essential for any co-located service. In contrast, fortnightly advice did not provide enough sessions for the advice to feel properly established within schools. This was made worse by the short timeframe of the project (some schools received as little as 4 sessions over the autumn term). However, even over a longer period fortnightly advice is likely to have significant disadvantages (more difficult to establish relationships, harder for staff and parents to remember when advice is being delivered).

Locating welfare rights advice in the same geographical area

The two welfare rights advisers who delivered the advice worked across schools in two and sometimes three boroughs as part of this project. This was not an ideal arrangement, as it meant a significant amount of time was lost to travel, as well as restricting how flexible they could be with parents (e.g. offering appointments on a different day or time of the week) as they were working in different parts of London on any given day. Locating a welfare rights adviser across schools in the same geographical area (the same borough, or ideally the same ward within a borough) would make the service easier to deliver by minimising travel time and would make the service more flexible to the needs of parents and carers. In addition, it would allow the adviser to get to know that local area and crucially the local support services that are available, which helps with making referrals for issues that are out of scope.

Lessons for scale-up: if this service was to be delivered across a larger number of schools, consider working with schools in the same location (e.g. one borough, or one or two wards of a borough) rather than schools across a number of different boroughs.

Funding advice over a longer period

The project has demonstrated how welfare rights advice in schools can be successful, resulting in financial gains for families on low incomes, and reaching families who are less likely to seek advice elsewhere. However, like the development of any new service, it takes time to properly embed advice within schools, and ideally this work would be funded over longer period of time to allow adequate establishment time. Advice was delivered in five schools from July – December 2019 and in the remaining six schools from October – December 2019, both of which are short timeframes to establish a successful service. In addition, a longer period of service delivery would allow for continuity of advice (and crucially adviser) with long term case work, for example benefit appeals which can take from six months to a year to get a hearing date. At the end of the advice being delivered in schools (the last date of advice was the 13 December) there were a number of outstanding matters and these clients will be required to engage with another advice service at a later date or whenever they require further advice. Steps were taken to ensure these clients were referred into local advice services, however, there is no way of knowing if they will access another advice service when it is needed. Another drawback was that in the schools that received short term advice (October-December) the adviser was limited in how much case work they could take on,

because they would be unable to resolve the matter in the short time period.

Lessons for scale-up: funding for any future welfare rights advice in schools should be provided over a longer time period (a minimum of one full school year).

Local advice agencies may be best placed to deliver welfare rights advice in schools

The advice that was provided in schools as part of this pilot was provided by the CPAG welfare rights team. There were many benefits to this; CPAG has a highly skilled welfare rights team with a number of specialist workers who provide second tier welfare rights advice, consequently the welfare rights workers involved in this project were able to deal with a number of complex cases that may have been outside of the remit of a more generalist welfare rights advice service. They also received the support of the welfare rights team, which is crucial in a role such as this where advisers are largely working alone which has the potential to be quite isolating. However, as outlined above, the welfare rights workers faced other challenges involved in delivering advice across a number of different locations in London. A local welfare rights advice service, delivered by the local authority or a local voluntary sector provider, may be better placed to deliver welfare rights advice in schools as they would benefit from their knowledge of the local area, they may also have established links into other services for issues that are out of scope, and may work in services that offer a range of support services for families and children (e.g. employability advice, debt advice). This can help with providing a holistic service to parents and carers.

Lessons for scale-up: local advice agencies (statutory or voluntary) who have knowledge of the local area and local support services may be best placed to provide welfare rights advice in schools; any future funding for welfare rights advice in schools should target these organisations.

Sharing the learning and ensuring impact:

The value of bringing schools together

As part of the project we convened three Practice Network meetings with the key contact for each school in attendance. These meetings were an opportunity for the schools to come together to share learning and best practice as the project progressed. The meetings were valuable on a number of levels.

- They were useful for the project team to synthesise the learning across the schools and identify key themes, and to hear from a variety of schools in relation to the issues they face.
- School contacts reported that they found the meetings useful and reassuring as they sometimes felt quite isolated in this role, as the only family worker in their school for example. Unlike teachers, who have more opportunities to come together with other teaching colleagues, family workers and others in pastoral care roles rarely get the opportunity to spend time with colleagues who are based in equivalent roles in other schools.
- Schools attending the meeting shared best practice examples which were then utilised by other schools; for example one family worker talked about how she had contacted local businesses to get some in-kind support for running some extended school activities over the holidays, and another family worker took this idea to her local area and started approaching local businesses. This has grown into schools working together at a cluster level to deliver a comprehensive programme of activities over the holidays, and successfully applying to a local funder (John Lyons) to help deliver the programme.
- In some cases, the meetings energised contacts at the school and made them more engaged with the project and what their school could do to support low income families.

At the final Practice Network meeting schools requested that meetings should carry on in some form, which is a clear sign of how useful the schools find them, given the other competing demands on their time.

Lessons for scale-up: any project to scale up this work with schools should include a forum to bring schools together to share learning and best practice. In addition, there may be value in co-ordinating a one off conference or event to bring a larger number of practitioners together from across London schools (including pastoral care leads and senior leadership) and other key strategic partners (local authorities, voluntary sector) involved in delivering extended school activities.

The importance of strategic oversight to ensure impact

To ensure this work with schools is achieving the aim of providing support to children and families on a low income and helping to tackle child poverty, some strategic oversight is needed to keep this work on track. Schools that are committed to developing their extended schools activities can often have more of a positive impact on children and families if their work is joined up with other organisations that are working on a similar agenda. For example, The London Mayor's Early Years Hubs are currently being piloted in Wandsworth and Merton, Newham and Barnet and the aim of these Hubs is to improve access to and the quality of early education for London's less advantaged families.⁷

The Hubs bring together different agencies that are playing a role in achieving this shared aim. For schools that are committed to tackling child poverty and supporting families on low incomes, coming together with other organisations that are also committed to this agenda has the potential to increase the impact of this work and make it more effective. The question is how this strategic oversight can best be provided, and by whom. Local authorities are an obvious candidate but some careful thought should be given to what form this should take. It may not be necessary (or even preferred) to establish something new, there may be existing forums where the work of schools to tackle child poverty (via extended schools activities) can be integrated into existing forums or networks.

Recognising the constraints of the external environment

Schools require resources to develop the support that they provide to families on a low income and to help tackle child poverty. They need dedicated staff time, and they need resources to deliver extended schools activities, both of which can be difficult to find when there is increasing pressure on school budgets. In the absence of ring-fenced central government funding for extended schools programmes, any attempts to deliver this work at scale will need to reflect the reality of the current funding environment.

Lessons for scale up: the GLA, local authorities, and other bodies with an interest in extended schools programmes (including CPAG) should continue to advocate for adequate funding from central government to develop extended schools programmes across schools nationally and on a consistent basis.

¹ M Haddad, H Lambie-Mumford and L Sims, *Extended Schools*, Child Poverty Action Group, 2018

² H Carpenter and others, *Extended Services Evaluation: end of year one report*, Department for Education, 2010

³ C Cummings and others, *Evaluation of Full Services Extended Schools Initiative: final report*, Department for Education and Skills, 2007

⁴ O Diss and M Jarvie, *Unfinished Business: where next for extended schools?*, Child Poverty Action Group, 2016

⁵ H Carpenter and others, *Extended Services in Practice: a summary of evaluation evidence for headteachers*, Department for Education, 2011

⁶ K Cooper and K Stewart, *Does Money Affect Children's Outcomes?* An update, CASE paper 203 Centre for Analysis and Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, July 2017

⁷ Greater London Authority, *Early Years Hubs*, 2019