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## EVALUATION OF THE FULL SERVICE EXTENDED SCHOOLS PROJECT: END OF FIRST YEAR REPORT

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### The Full Service Extended Schools Initiative

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the first year (school year 2003-4) of the full service extended schools (FSES) initiative, part of the Government's overall vision for all schools to offer a core set of extended activities by 2010. This initiative seeks to support the development in every local authority (LA) area of one or more schools which provide a comprehensive range of services on a single site, including access to health services, adult learning and community activities as well as study support and 8am to 6pm childcare. In the first year, 61 projects were funded, all of them in Behaviour Improvement Programme areas. The findings below are based on fieldwork in 22 projects.

### Key Findings

- Local authorities and schools were seeing the full service extended schools (FSES) initiative as an opportunity to rethink the role of schools in relation to pupils, families and communities. In particular, it offered a means of addressing some of the out-of-school difficulties faced by pupils.
- FSESs were interpreting their brief in different ways. Although all full service extended schools are similar, no two are identical.
- There was considerable anecdotal evidence of positive outcomes from FSESs. These included examples of raised attainment, increased pupil engagement with learning, and growing trust and support between families and schools. However, none of this yet amounts to robust evidence of "effectiveness" at this early stage of the evaluation.
- Multi-agency working was bringing benefits in terms of co-ordinated approaches to vulnerable children and their families. However, experiences in attempting to develop multi-agency work were mixed.
- Most FSESs believed that there were potentially significant benefits for children, families and communities arising from childcare provision.
- When managed properly, the full service approach could free heads and teachers to concentrate on their core business. However, it could also impose strains on members of school leadership teams.
- In many cases, the development of FSESs was one of a range of current initiatives that were brought together into a wider strategic approach at both school and local authority level. Sometimes, however, these initiatives were seen as conflicting.
- Schools and local authorities were positive about the potential of the Government's Every Child Matters agenda and Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners creating a strategic framework. However, there were also some concerns about the overall coherence of Government policy and the short-term nature of funding on which FSESs depend.
- Most FSESs focused on their own concerns and imperatives, though there was some evidence of meaningful consultation with local communities.
- FSESs were able to articulate coherent 'theories of change', setting out how their actions will bring about desired changes for children, families and communities. These theories indicated optimism about the capacity of schools to make a real difference to the people they serve.

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## Background

The FSES initiative specifies the range of services to be provided on the school site and introduces a particular emphasis on the co-location of services provided by other, non-educational agencies. By so doing, it takes further a series of developments in extended schooling which began in 2001. However, it also builds on a wide range of full service and extended activities which were already present in some schools before the initiative was launched as well as drawing on the experience of similar initiatives in other countries. Above all, it takes into a new phase a history of community and community-oriented schooling in this country which reaches back over many decades.

In this first year, 61 projects were funded at between £93,000 and £162,000 per annum, decreasing annually for a further two years. Most projects comprised individual primary, secondary or special FSEs, though some included more than one school.

## Evaluation Aims and Methods

The evaluation of FSEs will extend over the three years for which the initiative is funded. It aims to:

- identify and characterise the activities undertaken by participating schools.
- identify the processes underpinning these activities.
- identify the impacts of activities.
- identify the outcomes of activities.

The evaluation will achieve these aims by mapping activities and process issues in a sample of FSES projects and working on a more detailed outcomes evaluation of a smaller case study sample. This will involve working with projects to articulate their 'theory of change' for how they plan to make a difference for pupils, families and communities and seeking evidence as to whether the changes on the ground match those predicted by this theory. In addition, school performance data will be analysed and a separate study will be made of childcare provision. A cost-benefit analysis of FSES provision is also planned.

In the first year, 22 projects were included in the mapping work and childcare study, of which 12 were selected for case study. A scoping study to consider the feasibility of a full cost-benefit analysis was undertaken. At this stage, data were principally collected in the form of school and local authority plans, and interviews with school leaders, LA officers and staff of partner organisations, with some interviews with pupils, parents and community members.

## Findings

### The Characteristics of FSEs

The FSES projects we studied were characterised by activity and diversity. There were some common features across schools, partly because the original DfES specification had set out areas where they were expected to develop provision. They also tended to share a broad rationale around the need to address the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage on children's learning and, more generally, on family and community well-being. They tended to be developing dedicated management structures which involved school leaders but did not rely entirely on the energies of the head teacher. Compared to their counterparts in previous extended schools initiatives, they were more strategically-oriented, better linked to other initiatives and able to work with a wider range of other agencies.

On the other hand, the FSEs were also very diverse at the level of detail. There were, for instance, considerable variations in the precise activities they undertook, the ways in which they managed those activities, the relationships between FSES and local authority, and the ways in which funding was managed.

### Emerging challenges and possibilities

The FSES agenda was energising for schools, local authorities and their partner organisations. In many cases, it was one of a range of initiatives that were running concurrently. Local authorities were often simultaneously engaged in one or more of a range of: developing extended schools across the authority as a whole, creating a coherent programme of early

years provision, establishing children's trusts, merging services in response to the Children Act 2004, or regenerating disadvantaged areas. At the same time, schools were themselves involved in a wide range of initiatives - not least the Behaviour Improvement Programme and Excellence in Cities initiatives. The common response was for these initiatives to be brought together into a wider strategic approach at both school and local authority level. Sometimes, however, these initiatives were seen as conflicting.

FSEs saw some aspects of Government policy - notably, the Children Act 2004 and the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners - as providing a strategic framework within which their own work could unfold. However, they were less certain about the coherence between these and other aspects of national policy, not least in terms of the relationship between a focused standards agenda and a wider community agenda. They were also concerned about the short-term nature of the funding on which their work had to depend.

Head teachers were crucial to the success of FSEs but benefited from good local authority support, strong working arrangements with partner organisations, and the creation of dedicated structures for managing FSE provision, including the designation of a full service co-ordinator. Where these things were in place, heads and teachers could find themselves more able than previously to focus on their 'core business' of teaching and learning. Where they were not in place, the management of the FSE provision could impose additional strains.

Multi-agency working brought benefits in terms of co-ordinated approaches to vulnerable children and their families, common assessment procedures and better targeting of resources. However, effective working could be difficult to achieve because of the other demands on partners and their established working practices. It might therefore require a considerable investment of time and energy.

Childcare was seen as similarly beneficial in terms of impacts on children's learning, more positive relationships between schools and

families, and support for parents in accessing services and in finding and maintaining employment. The development of provision required a strategic approach, the development of partnerships, and a high level of support from the local authority and others in the childcare field. Even so, it created some stresses for schools and might not always be met with enthusiasm either by local families or by potential partners.

FSEs tended to focus on the priorities of heads and governors, which might or might not be identical with those of local communities. Some FSEs consulted with and involved pupils, families and community members. However, not all had yet developed robust mechanisms for these purposes, or for monitoring outcomes.

### **Outcomes from FSEs**

There was considerable anecdotal evidence of positive outcomes from full service extended schools. These include examples of raised attainment, increased pupil engagement with learning and growing trust and support between families and schools. There were indications that full service provision might potentially intervene to break established cycles of disadvantage in some cases. None of this yet amounts to robust evidence of 'effectiveness' (however defined) but it suggests that longer-term and more wide-ranging outcomes may indeed be possible. It is possible that the benefits of these outcomes (calculated in terms of returns to society) will outweigh the costs.

Schools were able to differing extents to articulate coherent 'theories of change', setting out how their actions will bring about desired changes for children and young people, their families and communities. These theories indicated optimism about the capacity of schools to make a real difference to the people they serve. It is too early to say how these theories will work out in practice, but it is not entirely clear whether schools have the capacity to bring about some of the more ambitious changes they envisage.

## Questions for development

At this early stage of their development, FSESS show considerable promise as a means of delivering important outcomes for children, families and communities. However, they are also characterised by some tensions and ambiguities. The following questions may be important for leaders of FSES initiatives to consider as they take this work forward:

### Some questions for full service extended schools

#### *Aims of the school*

- \* What does the school aim to achieve through its full service extended approach?
- \* What is the balance between different aims, such as overcoming barriers to learning, changing local cultures and school stabilisation?
- \* What is the balance between dealing with presenting problems and bringing about fundamental change?
- \* What is the balance between targeting groups and individuals for 'quick wins' and targeting those in greatest need?
- \* How do these aims relate to the 'core business' of enhancing learning?
- \* Over what time scale can these aims be achieved?

#### *School and community*

- \* How feasible is the notion of bringing about cultural change in local communities? Does the school have the capacity to generate changes of this kind?
- \* How does any proposed change in local cultures interact with the material conditions under which local people live, in terms, for instance, of housing, employment opportunities, street crime, transport and so on?
- \* How will the school avoid an exclusively deficit view of the children and adults on whose behalf it is supposed to be

working?

- \* If school stabilisation is an aim, how will the school balance institutional advantage with service to pupils, families and communities?
- \* How are community voices heard in the governance of the initiative?

#### *School and local authority*

- \* Where does leadership of the initiative lie?
- \* Is the local authority's role to facilitate the school's agenda or enlist it in a strategy formulated beyond the school?

## Additional Information

*Copies of the full report (RR680) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.*

*Cheques should be made payable to "DfES Priced Publications".*

*Copies of this Research Brief (RB680) are available free of charge from the above address (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at [www.dfes.gov.uk/research/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/)*

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