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**EVALUATION OF THE EXTENDED SCHOOLS  
PATHFINDER PROJECTS**

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Extended schools offer services to pupils, their families and local communities over and above their 'core business' of teaching the curriculum during the normal school day. As such, they have a long history in England and elsewhere, though under a range of names (village colleges, community schools, full service schools and so on). Following the Schools Plus report (DfEE 1999), there has been a series of initiatives to promote the development of such schools.

In the 2002-3 school year, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) sponsored twenty five local education authorities (LEAs) to develop extended schools pathfinder projects. Each project was free to determine the focus of its work, though particular encouragement was offered to initiatives that would lead to:

- schools that are open to pupils, families and the wider community during and beyond the school day, before and after school hours, at weekends and during school holidays;
- activities aimed particularly at vulnerable groups, in areas of deprivation and/or where services are limited;
- the promotion of community cohesion by building links between schools and the wider community;
- the provision of services to communities;
- a contribution to neighbourhood renewal; and
- a positive effect on educational standards.

This report is the outcome of an evaluation of the pathfinder initiative carried out by a team from the Universities of Manchester and Newcastle with colleagues from the University of Brighton. In the course of the evaluation, the research team visited all twenty five projects and undertook more detailed case studies of ten projects. Documentary evidence relating to each project were analysed, interviews carried out with key stakeholders (including users) and outcomes data assessed where these were available.

**What Pathfinders do**

In practice, most projects built upon previous work in this field and continued their work, using other sources of funding, after the formal end date. Many activities were targeted at pupils and were focused directly or indirectly on learning. Overall, the most common activities included breakfast clubs, after school and holiday activities for pupils, family learning, adult education, childcare and community use of school facilities. The 'full-service' school in which community services are located on the school site was less common, though many schools were working towards this.

Some of the principal features of the pathfinders were these:

- *Numbers of schools* involved in each LEA ranged from one to over twenty. The project as a whole involved a total of more than 200 schools, of which three-quarters were primary schools and a quarter secondary schools. Five special schools were also involved. In about half of the LEAs some or all participating schools were working in clusters.
- *Leadership* was located at LEA level in the sense that funding was channelled through the LEA to participating schools. In the majority of cases, the pathfinder project fed into a wider LEA (or wider local authority) strategy to develop extended schools and/or to tackle educational and social issues in their areas. Despite the importance of the LEA role, schools were active partners in steering the majority of projects and in six of them schools took the dominant role.
- Projects tended to set up dedicated *management structures*. These varied considerably but tended to be based on some mixture of an LEA co-ordinator, school co-ordinator(s), oversight by the school's senior management team and reporting to a steering group drawn from participating schools and stakeholders. In some cases, teachers and/or community link workers were employed or seconded to work on the project.
- In the majority of the projects, *funding* from the DfES initiative was combined with funding from other sources to support extended schools. The principal use of funding was to employ or release staff to manage the initiative rather than to fund particular activities. In many cases, this meant that there was little delivery of new activities in the (brief) life of the project. However, these staff were often engaged in supporting existing activities or were involved in building some kind of infrastructure to support delivery at a later date.
- Almost all projects included schools in *disadvantaged areas*. However, in some LEAs at least some of the participating schools were in more advantaged areas. Likewise,

most participating LEAs were predominantly urban, but at least five included rural schools in the project. In about a quarter of the projects, issues to do with ethnicity and/or community cohesion were significant.

The pathfinders varied in the extent to which they aimed simply to enhance what was on offer to their pupils, families and communities in the short term or bring about long-term transformations in cultures, values and conditions - though many projects aimed to do both. Transformatory goals were by definition ambitious, yet seen as necessary if extended schools were to have sustained and substantial impact. They tended to lead to the adoption of a strategic multi-agency and multi-initiative approach. This was seen as the best way to ensure strategic planning of services, effective delivery, increased resources such as staffing, funding and equipment, long-term sustainability and the regeneration of disadvantaged communities. For some pathfinders, the development of links with other agencies and the formulation of a strategic framework was the key focus of the project. This involved informing other agencies about the extended schools initiative, learning about their agendas and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

There was a high level of both variation and overlap in the activities and approaches of individual projects. As a result, it was not possible to identify distinct 'models' of extended school approaches. However, underpinning these differences was an emerging understanding of the *task* of extended schools. This task can be defined in the following terms:

*An extended school maximises the curricular learning of its pupils by promoting their overall development and by ensuring that the family and community contexts within which they live are as supportive of learning as possible.*

Similarly, all extended schools operated within a common 'territory', though they did so to different extents and in different ways. That territory can be mapped out in terms of the groups which the school seeks to benefit - children, families and/or communities - and by the domains across which it seeks to act - learning issues, social issues and/or

health issues. This simple map may be useful to extended schools in deciding where they should weight their efforts - towards their 'core business' of teaching pupils within the curriculum or towards family and community domains which have a more indirect impact on learning. In turn, this may enable them to negotiate with their partners as to how their actions and priorities fit in with those of other agencies and organisations.

### **Impacts and Outcomes**

Extended schools impacted on pupils, families and communities in a range of ways and generated positive outcomes for these groups. It was already possible to identify the following impacts and outcomes amongst others:

- For pupils, there was evidence that activities could have an impact on attainment, behaviour and attendance. In a school where the extended schools funding has been used to sustain a holiday revision scheme, there were reports of positive impacts on motivation and attainment. In another school, arts development work impacted positively on levels of attainment in arts, music and drama.
- For families, there was evidence that activities could have an impact on involvement in children's learning. In projects which offered adult education, parents reported positive effects on their perceptions of themselves as learners and on their consequent ability to act as role models for their children.
- For communities, there was evidence that activities could have an impact on community pride and involvement. In one area where the local community were involved in planning the extended school, community members reported a growing sense of self-esteem and of control over decisions which affected their lives.

Such impacts and outcomes were clear and immediate, but were necessarily limited in their scope. However, some projects and schools had more ambitious aims to make long term changes in aspirations, expectations and cultural attitudes to learning in families and communities. There were reasons to believe such outcomes might be possible. Activities which were already having immediate

impacts often formed part of a sustainable, strategic approach which might well produce more fundamental change in the longer term. These long-term outcomes are likely to be more difficult to identify and may well be attributable to other initiatives as well as to the extended school approach. Nonetheless, in some cases, projects and schools were close to being able to articulate a 'theory of change', showing how their actions would interact with other local initiatives to bring about a series of changes and ultimately generate these ambitious outcomes. Developing such a theory might be an important step for all schools and projects seeking to work on a large scale.

### **Emerging Issues and Conclusion**

Many projects experienced the sorts of teething problems that might be expected in a new initiative. However, these were being tackled vigorously by teachers and LEA officers who were 'enthusiasts' for the extended schools approach. In terms of subsequent national roll-out, however, two issues emerge from the experience of the pathfinders:

- The development of extended schools is a serious and ambitious venture. As such, it requires dedicated management structures, the deployment of co-ordinators with appropriate levels of time and expertise, a thorough process of community consultation, a willingness to invest in genuine partnerships with other agencies and an embedding of school activities in wider local strategies. It also requires the production of viable long-term plans and co-ordination of funding streams to support a long-term strategy.
- Given the ambitious nature of these developments, there are aspects of current national policies and structures which need consultation. These include the time-limited nature of additional funding, the wider context of initiative-led funding, the different priorities of agencies working with the same communities, and the failure in some cases of extended schools to engage with or be engaged by local strategies.

**The evaluation leads to a number of overall conclusions:**

- There is good reason to believe that extended schools have important positive effects and represent a good return on a relatively low level of additional funding. In order to determine their long-term effects, however, a longitudinal and wider-ranging evaluation strategy than has been possible here is needed.
- Where extended schools are more ambitious in terms of their aims, it is important that they develop dedicated leadership structures. The role of the co-ordinator is important not only in terms of attracting and co-ordinating funding but also to reduce the management burden on existing leadership teams.
- Many projects have found that the development of extended schools is an important catalyst for enhancing collaboration between education and other agencies. The key to developing partnerships seems to be a careful and sustained process of trust-building where partners seek to understand each other's aims, priorities and working methods. This is difficult given the pressures under which all agencies are working, so it is important that the process is given ample time and develops through a series of progressively more ambitious initiatives.
- Although the point of delivery for activities is the school, local authorities have a key role to play in enabling extended schools to develop. They can give a lead in encouraging schools down this route, help plan local strategies within which the work of schools is embedded, network schools with other schools and agencies, link schools to communities, provide specialist expertise and advice, give a lead on the management of funding and assist schools with the evaluation of their work. Some authorities have appointed co-ordinators to lead this work, others ask existing officers to take a lead, others again see the development of extended schools as part of wider initiatives such as the development of integrated children's and families' departments. There are clear implications for the way the role of the LEA is currently defined.
- It is particularly important that extended schools do not fall into the trap of imposing professional views of what is 'needed' on the

communities they serve. Genuine community consultation and participation are necessary but as this is difficult to achieve, many schools find it helpful to work with partners who are more experienced in this field.

- The experience of these projects suggests that in some cases it may be sensible to plan for a significant lead-in time before delivery can begin. This is particularly the case if schools have not previously been involved in extended activities or if major new initiatives are planned.

As extended school approaches become more widespread and ambitious, viewing them as time-limited and additionally-funded 'projects' may become less effective. It may be more productive to see extended activities as central to the role of every school (albeit to varying degrees) and a different funding model may need to be found to reflect this new understanding. In this case, there is the possibility of a real development in the way in which schools relate to their communities and set about educating their pupil.

#### **Additional Information**

*Copies of the full report (RR530) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.*

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