

# getting in early:

primary schools and early  
intervention

Edited by Jean Gross





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In particular, the Foundation supports four distinct groups within this broad umbrella of 'disadvantage': refugees, young offenders, children and young people who have been in care, and children and young people with literacy difficulties.

# getting in early: primary schools and early intervention

Edited by Jean Gross

This timely monograph follows the recent report by the Smith Institute and The Centre for Social Justice, *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens* (September 2008). With the support of Every Child a Chance Trust and the KPMG Foundation, it offers further evidence of how early intervention, followed through from pre-school years to primary school years, can break the intergenerational cycle of under achievement and multiple deprivation. As with the first report, this collaboration offers a cross-party perspective and reaches across a range of professions and disciplines.

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## Introduction 1

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP, Chairman of the Centre for Social Justice and Conservative MP for Chingford and Woodford Green

*I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.*  
Michelangelo

In writing an introduction to this pamphlet about making the most of children's primary school years and intervening where necessary to help all children fulfil their potential, I feel as if I have come full circle. The first publication in this series of collaborative projects (in which the Centre for Social Justice is partnering the Smith Institute) was written to highlight a key truth that seized me when chairing the Social Justice Policy Group: the need to intervene as early as possible in order to break the circle of disadvantage in a child's life.

The Social Justice Policy Group's two major publications, *Breakdown Britain* and *Breakthrough Britain*, looked at five intersecting pathways to poverty: educational failure, family breakdown, serious personal debt, addiction and economic dependency. (They also emphasised the serious partnering role the voluntary sector can and must play in tackling the root causes of disadvantage.) One of the key threads running through both reports was the extent to which children's life chances tend to be tightly prescribed by the circumstances into which they are born.

When writing our educational failure sections, this became especially apparent. *Breakdown Britain* stated that: "Our poorest children suffer disproportionately because their families have little choice but to accept the pitfalls of the current system." Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to fail academically than their peers, with the knock-on effect that 73% of young offenders describe their academic attainment as nil.

When committing ourselves to actual policy recommendations, in the final report *Breakthrough Britain*, our research impressed upon us the need for early intervention and support for children and families both at pre-school level and at primary school, as "disadvantaged children need to have a love of learning fostered within them from as early an age as possible so they can build academic skills alongside vital practical and social skills".

One contributor to this pamphlet starkly illustrates the extremely high intergenerational persistence of difficulties in basic skills: in one study 60% of children in the lowest

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reading attainment group at age 10 had parents with low literacy levels, while only 2% had parents with high literacy scores.<sup>1</sup>

Our consideration of educational failure drew us back into the families to which school-children return every day – they spend only 15% of their time in school – as family background, cultural factors and material needs are the most significant influences upon their educational outcomes. It also drew us back in time, to look at the way the child had been shaped before ever setting foot in a school playground, and we concluded that helping parents before they were even engaged in *nursery*-stage education could significantly improve children's potential to attain. But this insight does not discount the role that formal education can and must play in tackling disadvantage.

As Jean Gross states in chapter one:

*... the early school years ... represents the last critical window of opportunity in which change is possible. Research on how to tackle the early signs of antisocial behaviour through parenting programmes ... shows that intervention when children are between four and eight years old will have the greatest effect. Evidence on effective ways of addressing the literacy and numeracy problems often associated with social deprivation ... shows that remedial action at 11 is too late.*

What came through repeatedly in our research was the importance of involving the family when seizing these opportunities. We came across a visionary social worker, Simon Langley, jointly employed by an innovative council in Milton Keynes and a federation of 18 schools, 16 of which are primary schools. His brief is to work to the Every Child Matters agenda, specifically at very early intervention levels, and he has been freed to work in a wholly preventive way with parents. It is easy to overlook the radical nature of this approach – social workers we consulted with described the hunger they had to work further upstream and to pre-empt the results of dysfunction they could see in the families they served, but workloads and a working culture dictated that problems had to be full-blown before they could be tackled.

Simon Langley makes a distinction between early labelling and early intervention, saying:

*... professionals see a "problem", put in resources to deal with it, but often the problem has been assessed in a time limited window, in a context divorced from the other systems (wider family, community, social life etc) and the resulting labelling can escalate*

<sup>1</sup> Moser, C A *Fresh Start: Improving Literacy & Numeracy* (Department for Education & Employment, 1999)

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*professionals' negative view of the family and cause a snowballing effect of unmerited intervention.*

He is a champion of universal provision, projects that build social capital, a sense of community and belonging around schools, so that parents from across the spectrum are genuinely enabled to feel part of the social fabric. He uses FAST (Families and Schools Together™) programmes to change the learning climate. These programmes (such as Care for the Family's 21st Century Parent) connect parents to their schools and communities by promoting voluntary participation and community service, guide parents in building personal success assets in their children, build skills in parents themselves and change attitudes.

The universal nature of the programmes offered means that all parents are invited (home visits help to explain that these are not just for the problem families), the actual programmes are facilitated by the school social worker but parent-led, and they aim to build solid partnerships between parents and teachers and between parents and parents. The effect on communities of the social capital generated is hard to measure but easy to discern, as disadvantaged families are getting support in the most fundamental ways – they describe a sense of belonging, less social isolation (50% of all calls to Parentline Plus are made by parents who feel isolated), and feelings of greater self-worth and significance. Crucially, he says, they are not being taken down a single-track road of targeted improvement.

Simon Langley is realistic; he knows he will still have to refer some families to other services. Courses that get the full spectrum of parents together will not solve everything, but they do decrease troubled families' sense of stigma and failure and make them much more receptive to targeted help if needed. A genuinely preventive approach – early intervention in the truest sense – recognises that it is within a child's family that much of the "carving of the marble" takes place. Education has a huge role to play here, not least in maintaining gains achieved by pre-school intervention, and in narrowing attainment gaps.

But we have to bear in mind that the most underachieving group is white children from disadvantaged backgrounds – fewer than 20% of disadvantaged white boys attain five A\*-C grades at GCSE. Certain ethnic minorities, including Indian and Chinese children, perform notably better than the rest of the population. As one study referred to in this volume states, white British children are:

*... particularly vulnerable to low socio-economic class, mothers with no educational qualifications, relative poverty, living in single parent households, rented housing or*

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*deprived neighbourhoods. These factors impact negatively on attainment within all ethnic groups, but seem to be associated with disproportionately low attainment among white British.*<sup>2</sup>

In *Breakdown Britain* we quoted the (then) Department for Education & Skills, which said:

*Differences in social mobility between ethnic groups (especially Chinese and Indian) show that some minority ethnic groups are more likely to be upwardly mobile than their white counterparts – in part due to parental aspirations, support and the value placed on education.*<sup>3</sup>

Hence my feeling of having come full circle: the Social Justice Policy Group emphasised the need to treat educational failure as just one pathway to poverty and the importance of intervening early. Helping families at the earliest stages of children's lives has to be complemented by engaging them meaningfully in the early years of children's education – in a way that will root them, in the longer term, into the learning community that every school can and should aspire to be.

<sup>2</sup> Strand S, *Minority Ethnic Pupils in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England* (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education & Skills *Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps* (2006)

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## Introduction 2

Graham Allen MP, Chair of One Nottingham and Labour MP for Nottingham North

*So I resolved many years ago that it was my obligation to break the cycle – that if I could be anything in life I would be a good father to my girls, that if I could give them anything I would give them that rock – that foundation – on which to build their lives, and that would be the greatest gift I could offer.*

Barack Obama

The day in September 2008 that Iain Duncan Smith and I launched our publication *Early Intervention* was the day that Lehman Brothers went belly up. The global economic crisis will have a profound impact on early intervention, just as it will in every other field. However, rather than be an excuse to postpone activity, it should be seen as an opportunity to grasp new possibilities for both the higher levels of effectiveness and the lower levels of public expenditure, which early intervention can deliver. In a period when money is ever tighter, the profligate funding of late intervention is neither good value for money nor an effective public policy.

The early measures taken by governments across the world to combat the recession and the global financial crisis illustrate that serious policy reappraisal as well as massive amounts of public money can be found at quite short notice – in just one day in October, the UK government guaranteed a minimum of £250 billion in support to the finance sector. Such sums dwarf the relatively small amounts of money needed to make early intervention work. They have the added advantage of being a massive investment in the future.

Government and society can take a stake that pays for itself time and again in reduced teen pregnancies, higher educational attainment, less antisocial behaviour and criminality, and better literacy levels. Later contributors underline how tiny amounts of money can, for example, bring literacy to an adequate level and save large multiples of money, which are required over a lifetime if reading difficulties are neglected. The banking collapse was quick and dramatic; the social consequences of not intervening early, while often barely perceptible, are just as certain and even more expensive. Young people who cannot read books can cost as much as banks who cannot balance them.

The economic crisis has also made it apparent that the announcement of the end of politics and of political philosophy has been premature. There is no value-free, non-political middle ground which has superseded the need for old-fashioned concepts such as equality of opportunity. When a neo-con President nationalises US banks, clearly a

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whole raft of ideological certainties, especially about social intervention, have to be ditched. Society can no more be a free-for-all than can the market.

Early intervention may lack the drama of the banking bail out, but it is equally necessary and equally revolutionary. Addressing a series of individual symptoms is no longer an adequate response to thousands of our young people leaving school illiterate, pregnant, unqualified, unaspirational and underachieving. It requires a coherent early intervention strategy applied across parties and across generations.

Early intervention covers a raft of policies around the 0-18 age range designed to break the intergenerational cycle of deprivation and underachievement. Many of the themes outlined in the previous publication in this series, *Early Intervention*, are central to the primary school phase. The foundation of this approach is to promote social and emotional capability in our young people. Only with this firm foundation can they go further with their language skills and academic attainment, including literacy and numeracy.

Those basic social and emotional capabilities may be common in many parts of the country; however, in constituencies like my own, sub-optimal parenting means those skills are lacking and need to be made good by public policy. For example, One Nottingham (our local strategic partnership) has developed a package of interventions that do this both in volume terms (for every child in our city) and against four key targets (where specific assistance is needed for individuals or groups). Once we have given the social and emotional competences to everyone in our educational system, and built the basic academic capabilities on top of that, we will require a much smaller safety net for remedial activities – which, while massively expensive, are only ever partially effective.

Another concept relevant to primary level, which was floated in our first *Early Intervention* publication, was that children should only start school when they are ready, rather than when they reach some arbitrary age. Children in the UK arrive at school at the age of five from a massive spectrum of capabilities. It is cruel to the point of inhumanity to force the five-year-old who is not ready into school so that they are doomed to a lifetime of failure. It is so much more effective to have that young person take another year to be properly tutored and be able to gain educationally on every single day of the subsequent 11 years at school. Variants of this system are used in many parts of the world. It needs to be instituted in the UK so that we can turn out successful learners, rather than administer a tidy educational bureaucracy.

Early intervention often has to be funded by institutions that themselves reap no immediate benefit, and this is made evident in later chapters. For example, primary

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schools may be expected to bear the costs of specialist Reading Recovery teaching, yet get none of the recognition or benefits from that, since these benefits occur later in the system. By devising effective partnerships, tangible benefits can be shared so that all those who actually make the early investment can reap rewards from it later.

We must also remove the unintended and perverse disincentives that come with Western democracy's most over-centralised state. For example, primary schools can be better off having lower standards from which they can recover, rather than starting with higher standards. Similarly, those children furthest from an arbitrary level get less attention than those close to it who carry "brownie-point" potential.

Good parenting is the start and end of all these developments, which is why the extended title of our last publication was *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*. Our ambition is to create the good parents of the next generation from the young people now going through our nursery and school system. We are hoping to create a virtuous circle, so that those children grow up to pass on the good values and effective parenting that will in turn make their children capable citizens.

However, installing smoke alarms does not mean we can stop fighting fires, and there are a large number of young people who meanwhile undertake remedial programmes. Reading Recovery is an example of such a programme. Nottingham now has a teacher-leader who is busy training 24 Reading Recovery teachers in Nottingham schools. Over the year, 140 to 190 of the most deprived children in the city will be rescued from literacy failure, with many more to come in future years as the number of trained teachers grows.

The Reading Recovery programme, comprising 12-20 weeks of one-to-one teaching for six-year-olds, leads to eight out of 10 returning to average levels of reading which are sustained thereafter. The key is professional teaching on a one-to-one basis – this makes the sort of help that middle-class parents pay for whenever their children are not achieving into the norm for all our children.

Finally, teaching of social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) is being introduced throughout all primary schools in the UK. It has to be continued at secondary school. The recent government proposal that life skills teaching for 11- to 16-year-olds will be made much more coherent and a central part of the national curriculum must be enacted. This is a priority for One Nottingham over the coming year and, well ahead of any legislation, we are already talking to head teachers and government ministers about how to free up sufficient curriculum time and reduce the inhibiting day-to-day pressures placed on heads, so that this curriculum can be implemented in September 2009.

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Giving every child the foundation of social and emotional capability throughout their school life – which, sadly, many do not bring to school at present because of poor parenting levels – is the key to tackling so many of the symptoms of underachievement. There can be no question that, if children are properly equipped emotionally and socially, they will be able to master the basic skills to which each of our distinguished contributors refer. In that way, all children will have the personal competences to make the best of their potential.

These social and emotional skills are the greatest gifts that parents and schools can give to our young people to create the good parents, great kids, better citizens of tomorrow. It is a small but essential investment, which in this age of financial profligacy we cannot afford to miss.

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## Introduction 3

David Laws MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and Liberal Democrat MP for Yeovil

*Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine ... It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given that separates one person from another.*

Nelson Mandela

The reality of opportunity for every child must be one of our greatest aspirations. However, an increasing body of evidence from academics and think tanks has shown us that it is far from being one of the hallmarks of our own society. The intergenerational cycle of poverty condemns thousands of children to a life without the chance to succeed, which the majority take for granted.

This important collection of essays surveys this problem, and offers solutions in the area where they can have the most profound effect. By the time children are in their teens, it is usually too late. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that the higher-education participation gap between the most deprived and least deprived is just 1% for boys and 2.1% for girls with similar attainment levels. Their report showed that educational disadvantage had already set in by age 11, before secondary school.<sup>1</sup>

This point is picked up by Jean Gross in the opening chapter. Picking up from the previous booklet in this series, which demonstrated the necessity of pre-school intervention to break cycles of disadvantage, she lays out the grounds for greater intervention at early school age. Primary school, she argues, represents the last chance to make a real difference.

The statistics revealed in Charlotte Leslie and Chris Skidmore's analysis in the final chapter corroborate her assessment. By going beyond the traditional measure of outcomes at GCSE, to look more closely at early education, they show where the real problems lie. Some of this is truly shocking: that 16% of pupils make no progress at all in maths between the ages of seven and 11, and 40% leave primary school without gaining the expected level in the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Unsurprisingly, it is the poorest areas that are the worst hit. Sixty percent of the poorest children – those entitled to free school meals – have not reached the standards expected by the end of primary school.

<sup>1</sup> Chowdry, H et al *Widening Participation in Higher Education: Analysis using Linked Administrative Data* (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2008)

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The reasons for this are complex, but not unfathomable. Gross rightly points out that league tables and national attainment targets have had the side effect of encouraging schools to concentrate on pupils near key stage level boundaries, to the detriment of those below (and possibly of those above). She also criticises the government's targeting of funding, and calls for earmarked funding for interventions with a stronger accountability framework.

A pupil premium, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, works along these lines, linking funding to the needs of individual pupils, such as deprivation or the speech, language and communication needs described in chapter two. It would allow schools to choose how to spend the additional funds to meet the needs of all their pupils. Accountability for spending would come from a combination of governors, Ofsted, parents and the local authority.

Schools could use the extra funding from the pupil premium for schemes such as those explored in chapter three. Every year around 23,000 children are leaving primary school with very low skills in both literacy and numeracy. Various forms of intervention can address this, such as intensive one-on-one tuition, or extra classes at evenings or weekends.

Even without the pupil premium, funding needs a comprehensive review to ensure that every school receives a fair share. There is clear evidence that small class sizes in the earliest years of school can make a huge difference to children's education. Money should be directed to reduce class sizes for five- to seven-year-olds towards private school levels. Smaller classes would help ensure that no child is allowed to fall behind in the basic skills.

It is also important to remember, as Professor Katherine Weare suggests in her chapter, that early education is not just about literacy and numeracy, but also about developing children's social and emotional skills. Good-quality early education can lead to improved behaviour and influence children's attitudes towards school and learning, cutting down on the number of problems teachers must tackle in the later years. The government's recent announcement of personal, social, health and economic education for younger children was a welcome advance. Properly trained teachers would allow children to develop into more aware teenagers and adults, who are better able to work together and make good decisions for themselves.

There are, though, limits on what schooling alone can achieve. Professor Frances Gardner is right when she says in her chapter that the cycle of disadvantage cannot be broken

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without helping parents to bring up their children. Families in 21st-century Britain come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, and all need proper support. The effects of poor parenting are profound, both on school behaviour and later in life.

As Dr Lee Elliot-Major and the Sutton Trust have shown, the level of family support for young children directly affects their later educational achievement. Children from low-income families who perform well in cognitive tests at age two have already been overtaken by their peers from better-off families by age six to seven. This statistic, perhaps more than any other, underlines the need for early intervention. We need to ensure that good-quality support is in place, and that entitlements such as the 12.5 hours a week of pre-school education are actually taken up by parents on lower incomes. Such support should not be framed in an overly prescriptive curriculum, but provided by professionals who know how to give every child the best start in life.

The challenge is great. The solutions are neither simple, nor are they short-term. The essays that follow detail not just the problem, or the urgency of the need for action, but also serious policy suggestions. Breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty will take a concentrated and co-ordinated effort, but it is not out of reach. The essays in this collection make an important contribution to charting the course for action.

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Chapter 1

# Why we need to target four- to eight-year-olds

Jean Gross, Director of the Every Child a Chance Trust

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## Why we need to target four- to eight-year-olds

*Are you going to treat a man as he is or as he might be? Morality requires that you should treat him as might be, as he has it in him to become; business on the other hand requires that you treat him as he is. Raising what he is to what he might be is the work of education.*

William Temple

This booklet is about creating a society in which where you have come from need not dictate where you are going. It is about what we can do to make a difference in children's primary school years – typically the Cinderella of an education system where too much money goes on troubled teenage children and relatively little on the critical years between five and 11, when children learn how to behave and learn how to learn.

### Why focus on the primary school years?

The first booklet in this series, *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*, focused on an early intervention strategy aimed at breaking the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage through interventions in early childhood – infancy and the pre-school years. It also indicated that such a strategy would not of itself be enough to break the cycle and suggested a need for follow-on work with older children.

What is the evidence for such a need? Why is it not enough to get small children "school-ready" and then leave it to the normal educative process to make sure that disadvantaged children keep up with their peers?

First, early school-age intervention provides a second chance to level the playing field. Interventions in the primary school years can make up for a poor pre-school start. Feinstein and Bynner,<sup>1</sup> for example, in their survey of a cohort of children born in 1970, found that children who were poor performers at the age of five, but managed to become high performers by the age of 10, were as successful in adulthood (looking at factors such as educational success, wage levels and criminality) as if they had never been under-performing at age five. And for some intergenerational issues – such as the risk of getting involved in crime – middle childhood is actually the age at which intervention strategies are thought to be most effective.<sup>2</sup>

1 Feinstein, I and Bynner, J "Mobility in Pupils' Cognitive Attainment During School Life" in *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* no 20 (2004)

2 Farrington, D "Childhood Risk Factors and Risk-focused Prevention" in *Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

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Second, early school-age interventions serve to maintain any gains achieved by pre-school intervention. A number of recent studies<sup>3</sup> have provided evidence of the need for continuous interventions throughout early schooling among the most disadvantaged and at-risk children, if early academic and social gains are not to fade and children are to grow up as proactive and confident citizens.

However excellent the support provided for their language and social development in the early years, children face new cognitive challenges when they are taught to read, write and handle numbers. If they succeed, they will see themselves as learners and school as relevant to their goals. If they fail, and live in areas of high social deprivation, they receive confirmation that, as with most of their acquaintance, education is to be endured rather than enjoyed.

Third, we know that just leaving things to the normal schooling process is not enough. What schools do now is actually widening the social class attainment gap, rather than narrowing it. Years of government spending weighted significantly towards schools serving socially disadvantaged areas have often done no more than help more advantaged children in those schools do better than they did before. The attainment gap between schools serving poorer and richer communities has narrowed significantly; the attainment gap between individuals eligible or not eligible for free school meals has narrowed less – and widens progressively over the school years. Figure 1 shows how at each key stage students on free school meals fall behind others within their peer group.

The widening gap is a particular feature of white British children – more so than for children from ethnic-minority groups. The educational attainment of this group is ...

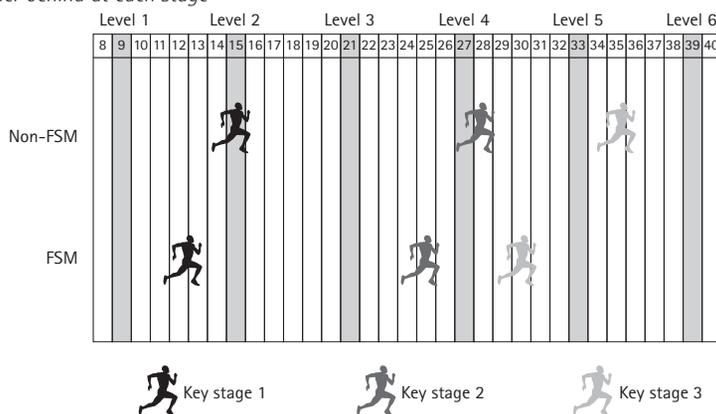
*... particularly vulnerable to low socio-economic class, mothers with no educational qualifications, relative poverty, living in single parent households, rented housing or deprived neighbourhoods. These factors impact negatively on attainment within all ethnic groups, but seem to be associated with disproportionately low attainment among white British.*<sup>4</sup>

3 Alakeson, V *Too Much, Too Late: Life Chances & Spending on Education & Training* (Social Market Foundation, 2005); Wood, C and Caulier-Grice, J *Fade or Flourish* (Social Market Foundation, 2006); Utting, D et al *Interventions for Children at Risk of Developing Antisocial Personality Disorder* (Policy Research Bureau, 2007)

4 Strand, S *Minority Ethnic Pupils in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England* (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008)

**Figure 1: Relative achievement of children on free school meals**

*Cohort mean average point scores at key stages one to three show poorer pupils falling further behind at each stage*



Source: Narrowing social class attainment gaps (DfES, 2006)

A final reason for providing help in the early school years is that this period represents the last critical window of opportunity in which change is possible. Research on how to tackle the early signs of antisocial behaviour through parenting programmes, described in chapter five of this monograph, shows that intervention when children are between four and eight years old will have the greatest effect.

Evidence on effective ways of addressing the literacy and numeracy problems often associated with social deprivation, reviewed in chapter three, shows that remedial action at age 11 is too late. Remedial action even at eight, nine or 10 is too late – given that a child failing to achieve the nationally expected standard at age seven in reading, writing and maths has an almost zero chance of later getting five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared with a 46% chance for a seven-year-old achieving the standard in all three areas and 10% for one achieving it in just one area.

### Targeting school-aged children

Schools are in an ideal position to help children overcome accidents of birth, yet are the most difficult sector to reach in any strategy for breaking the cycle of disadvantage and increasing social mobility. They tend to prioritise spending on children who with just a little help can reach nationally expected attainment levels, in order to raise overall standards quickly in their school – the key Ofsted and league table indicator. As chapter seven in this monograph documents, this leaves behind a resistant “tail” of hard-to-teach children and hard-to-reach families.

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This government has already targeted large amounts of funding to tackle disadvantage in school-aged children – for example, through programmes such as Excellence in Cities, On Track and the Children’s Fund. There is little substantive evidence that this has had a significant effect on the hardest-to-reach children.

Local areas have, on the whole, not invested in evidence-based intervention programmes. The Children’s Fund gave rise to a large number of local projects, designed in the light of local enthusiasms but insufficiently focused on the few things that will really make a difference. While Excellence in Cities provided local areas with guidance on evidence-based early preventive interventions, most schools chose reactive and less well-evidenced options such as employing teaching assistants or attaching learning mentors to older children struggling with behaviour or attendance.

#### **A case in point – what happened to On Track**

On Track was a Home Office initiative operating in 23 high-deprivation areas of England and Wales. It was inspired by the successful US Fast Track programme aimed at children aged four to 12 and their families. Like Fast Track, it aimed to reduce the incidence of youth crime and antisocial behaviour.

Each area received in the order of £400,000 per year between 1999 and 2006. Government provided broad guidance on the types of intervention that might be developed, and exhorted local areas to use schemes that had an evidence base behind them. In practice, few took this advice.

Most of the services provided were invented locally, ranging from drop-ins for parents to training children in massage. A comprehensive evaluation<sup>5</sup> noted that “there was not one standardised On Track model or service ... rather there were 23 different interpretations of the original brief ... and hundreds of kinds of different services contained within the projects”.

Results were very mixed. There were improvements at the level of perceptions (for example, parents’ self-assessed levels of coping) but remarkably little impact on child behaviours such as antisocial behaviour, offending, truancy and poor performance at school – in contrast with the more prescriptive but still locally managed Fast Track scheme, where evidence of impact on academic attainment and behaviour problems was very strong.

5 Ghate, D, Asmussen, K, Tian, Y and Hauari, H *On Track Phase Two National Evaluation* (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008)

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Just providing funding to tackle social disadvantage has not so far proved successful in tackling the hardest-to-reach children and families. This leaves two options:

- strengthening the accountability framework by setting targets for schools, for example to reduce the attainment gap between children eligible for free school meals and those who are not eligible, to increase the social or "soft" skills of poorer children and to reduce numbers exhibiting antisocial behaviour; or
- earmarking funding not only for schools serving poorer areas but for a specific menu of interventions that work.

The first option would mean developing systems that are not now in place, to measure children's social and emotional competences. Tools are available but would add to teachers' workload and risk increasing the bureaucratic burden. There is also little political appetite for adding new targets to the public services' accountability framework.

The second option would require policy makers to provide stronger guidance to schools than they might wish to, and stronger encouragement to use approved and rated programmes, be they provided by the third sector or by innovative players from the public or private sectors. Serious thought needs to be given to how well a policy of giving schools freedom to spend on initiatives of their own choice has worked in the past or will work in the future for the most disadvantaged children. A parallel could be drawn with the National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines provided in the health service. We do not leave it up to doctors to decide what medication and interventions they prescribe, but have a robust system for guiding their choices.

One possibility then is to deploy the "pupil premium" for poorer children that has been discussed by some politicians, for earmarked programmes based on research evidence on what works in helping vulnerable children and young people break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage, and avoid social exclusion.

### **The big hitters**

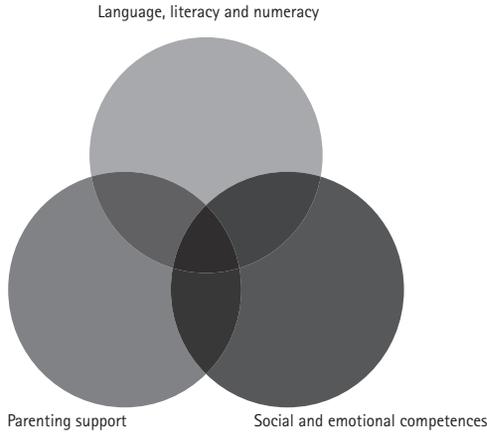
Most of the educational effort aimed at narrowing gaps in the past 10 years has gone on school improvement – seeking to improve the quality of teaching, the physical environment, and school ethos in schools serving disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Laudable in intent, it is a strategy that is yielding decreasing returns. It has led to all sorts of top-down prescriptive directives about how teachers should teach and how head teachers should run schools. And as we have seen, it never got to those most in need.

Now is the time to think about a much simpler strategy – moving from the indirect

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approaches that rely on improving the quality of classroom teaching to direct approaches using high-reliability strategies for at-risk groups. We need to find the big hitters – the five or six things that offer certainty in breaking the link between who a child's parents are and what life chances that child has – and invest as heavily in them as the first monograph in this series of pamphlets suggested we do in support for those aged up to five.

**Figure 2: The three key protective factors that increase the likelihood of positive life outcomes**



Research shows that high attainment at school, good social competences and positive parenting are the three key protective factors that increase the likelihood of positive life outcomes by boosting children's resilience. It is here that we will find our big hitters – in approaches that simultaneously target home, school and community – working at the level of the child's family relationships, social relationships and academic success.

"Simultaneously" is a key word here. Lifting children out of negative life chances means making sure we attend to "the range of obstacles that hold children back, rather than single issue interventions":<sup>6</sup> Risk for these children is cumulative. One risk factor reinforces another, leading to increasingly restricted outcomes in adult life.<sup>7</sup> Poor parenting, which leaves children parked for hours in front of the television, leads to limited communication skills, which in turn lead to behavioural problems, which provoke harsh and hostile parenting. Limited language skills in turn lead to literacy problems, which lead to behavioural problems. And so it goes on.

6 Kendall, S, Straw, S, Jones, M, Springate, I and Grayson, H *Narrowing the Gap: Outcomes for Vulnerable Groups* (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2008)

7 Bynner, J *Risks & Outcomes of Social Exclusion: Insights from Longitudinal Data* (Institute of Education, 2003)

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Happily, just as risk is cumulative, so are the factors that help lift children out of the cycle. For example, parental involvement in a child's learning is strongly positively influenced by the child's level of attainment. The higher the level of attainment, the more parents get involved, creating a self-reinforcing cycle.<sup>8</sup>

### **Family relationships**

Parental interest in a child's education is the single most powerful predictor of achievement at age 16. There is a 24% difference in achievement between those with low and those with high parental interest.<sup>9</sup> And we know that in the primary age range the influence of different levels of parental involvement (across all social classes and all ethnic groups) is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools.<sup>10</sup>

Change in children is possible. Change in parents is possible too. Research has shown that in parenting "it's not who you are, it's what you do that counts". Even where families live in poverty, children can achieve well where parents are helped to be responsive to their children and committed to their education.

In chapter four, Professor Frances Gardner reviews what we know about how to make this happen in relation to children's behaviour. There is equally much research-based knowledge on how to make it happen in relation to their learning. The evidence suggests that effective parenting programmes need to include:

- basic "skills" input on how to promote children's learning, how to set clear and consistent boundaries for children, how to reward appropriate behaviour with praise, how to use "time out" when children behave inappropriately;
- adjunct training in problem solving, communication and self-control which is designed to help parents cope more successfully with negative life stresses and marital conflict, and without which there may not be great benefits from the skills programmes;
- work that fosters supportive networks for the parents, by basing group parent training work in the community, with parents each having a buddy within the group for mutual support, for example; and
- promoting parents' involvement with schools and with the community – for example, "homework" assignments that give parents examples of questions they might ask teachers and ways in which they might share their knowledge of their child with teachers.

8 Desforges, C and Abouchaar, A *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support Et Family Education on Pupil Achievements Et Adjustment* (Department for Education Et Skills, 2003)

9 Feinstein, L and Symons, J *Attainment in Secondary School*, Oxford economic papers no 51 (Oxford University Press, 1998)

10 Desforges and Abouchaar, op cit

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## **Social relationships**

Work on parenting skills and family relationships needs to run in parallel with work that will help the child with social skills – getting on with others, communication, social problem solving, negotiation, conflict resolution, managing anger and anxiety. Good social and emotional skills like these are becoming increasingly important in the modern world: essential to learning, valued by employers, and necessary in sticking to goals and staying out of trouble.

Such skills are closely linked to social mobility. It has been shown that whereas cognitive variables account for 20% of intergenerational persistence of disadvantage, social and emotional skills account for a further 10%.<sup>11</sup> As labour markets have changed, good social and emotional skills have increased their importance as a determinant of life chances by a factor of 33.

In chapter four, Professor Katherine Weare reminds us why these soft skills are so vital for disadvantaged children and how they can be promoted in the primary school years.

## **Success in school**

Spoken language is the foundation of success in school. As chapter two makes clear, all academic school subjects require children to have a rich vocabulary and an ability to manipulate ideas through complex language structures. Yet in a poor household a child will hear 500 different words a day while in a rich household they will hear 1,500. Head teachers speak of increasing numbers of children who hear little language at home beyond the "daily grunt". As a result, it is estimated that one in 10 children start school unable to talk in sentences or understand simple instructions. Poor language skills in turn impair the acquisition of literacy and numeracy.

Recent studies suggest that significant literacy and/or numeracy difficulties are found in between 50% and 76% of children who are permanently excluded from school, and in 60% of the population of special schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, as well as occurring in 50–60% of the prison population. Some 45% of looked-after children in one local authority could not read or write at age seven.

The most successful strategy for combating antisocial behaviour linked to social disadvantage is, therefore, likely to be preventing the early language, literacy and numeracy failure that is strongly linked to social disadvantage. Better basic skills will in turn contribute to an improved chance of gaining qualifications. Chapters two and three describe the strategies that work in this area.

<sup>11</sup> Blanden, J et al *Accounting for Intergenerational Income Persistence: Non-cognitive Skills, Ability & Education* (Centre for the Economics of Education, 2006)

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## **Conclusion**

The chapters that follow focus in turn on the three key areas that can effect change in disadvantaged children – language, literacy and numeracy skills, social relationships and family relationships. There is also a chapter on another fundamental element in the mix – raising aspirations, so that once early intervention programmes have given children the skills they need, they and their families have a sense of just how far those skills can take them. Finally, we look ahead to the secondary school years and examine the evidence that shows how, without early intervention, a significant number of young people will fall out of the system, achieving not even the most basic qualifications after all their years in school.

Each author examines in turn the rationale for expenditure on their focus area in breaking the cycle of disadvantage, what schemes work, and what the barriers are to their use. Make no mistake: the barriers are considerable. Every chapter shows the long-term savings that will result from an early intervention strategy focusing on primary school years, but realising these will require the same kind of long-term vision from politicians advocated in the first monograph in this series. This is well nigh impossible to achieve in a political climate where, in the words of a leading chief constable speaking recently about social breakdown, "there is no appetite for solutions that have no visible return and no patience for any which will not bear immediate political fruit".

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## Chapter 2

# How speech, language and communication are linked to social disadvantage

John Bercow MP, Conservative MP for Buckingham,  
Virginia Beardshaw, Chief Executive of I CAN, and  
Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of Communications at I CAN

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## How speech, language and communication are linked to social disadvantage

*For far too long communication has been elbowed aside by policy makers focused on other parts of the child development agenda.*

John Bercow<sup>1</sup>

Communication is at the core of all social interaction. The ability to communicate, to speak and express ourselves, to understand what we are being asked to do, to enjoy a richness of language that enables us to describe our hopes and fears – these are the foundation skills for life. Most parents await their child's first words anxiously and they assume that speech and language will "just happen" as part of a child's growth and development. Yet, for some children, it does not.

In some parts of the UK, upwards of 50% of children are starting at their primary school without the speech, language and communication skills that they need in order to learn, achieve, make friends and interact with the world around them.<sup>2</sup> This is a problem for them, and it is an unexpected challenge for the school, which all too often is ill equipped to meet it.

There is clear evidence that poor speech, language and communication skills are both a cause and an effect of social disadvantage.<sup>3</sup> This chapter explores the reasons for this link and considers the interventions and approaches necessary to support these children into primary schools – crucial given that early identification and intervention can help ensure that these potentially transient and addressable difficulties do not become persistent, lifelong challenges.

### **What are the factors influencing speech, language and communication skills?**

There are a significant number of children for whom particular speech, language and communication needs arise from impairments and disability. There is no evidence that such needs are linked to social disadvantage, although the challenges to support a child with complex and persistent needs can certainly be compounded by it.

The identification of and provision for these children – as many as three in every

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1 Bercow, J *A Review of Services for Children & Young People with Speech, Language & Communication Needs*, the Bercow report (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008)

2 Locke, A, Ginsborg, J and Peers, I "Development and Disadvantage: Implications for Early Years" in *International Journal of Communication & Language Disorders* vol 27, no 1 (2002)

3 Cross, M *Language & Social Exclusion*, I CAN Talk series issue 4 (I CAN, 2007)

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classroom with mild and moderate needs and a significant number needing specialist interventions – have been considered in a recent independent review<sup>4</sup> and, while many of the interventions outlined in this chapter would support this group of children, children whose speech, language and communication needs are linked to impairment or disability are not the focus of this essay.

Instead we explore the series of multiple and overlapping factors that appear to explain the apparent correlation between social disadvantage and inadequate language skills and consider the approaches that may support what in some parts of the country can be as many as 84%<sup>5</sup> of children who struggle with speech and language, potentially as a direct result of social and environmental factors.

The key factors affecting children's speech, language and communication skills are:

- language input;
- quality of early interactions;
- active cultivation by parents; and
- multigenerational transmission.

### Language input

The amount of language that children hear is important; the more they hear, the more time their parents spend talking with them and the more words to which they are exposed, the more words they will use. What adults say to children is also important – children seem to develop strong language skills where their parents ask open-ended questions, invite children to elaborate, and focus on topics of interest to the child. Where children do not benefit from frequent input of high quality, they are at a notable disadvantage.

### Quality of early interactions

Just hearing language is not enough to help children be effective communicators. What is much more relevant is the quality of interaction a child experiences. Babies and children need their emotions and attempts to communicate to be responded to in a positive way in order to help them to learn. These kinds of responsive early interactions, which underpin healthy attachment, are important for the development of thinking, language and emotional literacy skills. Sadly, the reverse is also true, and children who do not have strong early attachments are at significant risk of disadvantage as regards language, thinking and behaviour.

4 Bercow, op cit

5 [www.stokespeaksout.co.uk](http://www.stokespeaksout.co.uk)

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In essence, the early interactions that a child experiences affect the rest of his or her development. As a child grows, co-operative interactions, as well as conversations about how people feel and how that affects what they do, are important in learning social communication skills. Where this is not possible, either because of a lack of time and energy or because of a directive manner and authoritarian parenting style, there may be effects on a child's language development.

### **Active cultivation by parents**

Parents' involvement has a major effect on children's learning, especially in the early years, and on their success at school. Middle-class families tend actively to "cultivate" their children and to teach them language, reasoning and negotiation skills, which other children may lack. A seminal study looking at the language environments of different homes found that while the average child hears 1,500 words per hour, professional children are exposed to 2,100 words per hour but children with parents on benefits hear only 600 words per hour.<sup>6</sup>

However, some would argue that active cultivation can have negative effects, because it can lead to too great a focus on "teaching" and not enough on interacting and playing. What parents do, rather than who they are, makes a difference.<sup>7</sup> Activities such as reading with a child and creating regular opportunities to play with friends lead to better outcomes for children, intellectually, socially and behaviourally.

Studies suggest that parents who have not themselves experienced a responsive, language-rich environment, who did not achieve at school and who perhaps have poor literacy are not in a good position to provide positive communication opportunities for their children. This may be because such parents do not necessarily know about communication development or how best to encourage it.

### **The cost of poor communication – to individuals and to society**

We know that speech, language and communication skills have an impact on literacy and wider attainment. A child who cannot speak a sentence will be doubly challenged when reading or writing a sentence. Recent analysis of results at age five shows that the best predictor of attainment at age seven is communication, language and literacy skills. Conversely, children with speech, language and communication needs struggle to access the curriculum and attain.

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6 Hart, B and Risley, TR *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Brookes, 1995)

7 Sylva, K et al *The EPPE Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period*, Department for Education & Skills research brief RBX15-03 (Department for Education & Skills, 2003)

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Looking more widely than academic attainment, each of the Every Child Matters outcomes relies upon effective speech, language and communication skills. Economic success, community contribution, and health and well-being all have proven links to the ability to understand and express feelings, needs and opinions. Indeed, in America the rising number of children with speech, language and communication needs is considered a public health challenge.

As well as the effects on literacy and attainment, emotional and social development can be affected by language difficulties. Poor communication is also a risk factor for mental health problems. Not surprisingly, low self-esteem, bullying and behavioural problems are all linked with communication difficulties; a recent study showed that 60-90% of juvenile offenders have poor language skills.<sup>8</sup> Finding a job in a world where communication and social communication skills, as well as academic achievement, are prized can also be a challenge for someone without these attainments.

I CAN's *Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication* considers the emerging evidence of the growing importance of addressing impoverished language. Without adequate communication skills, children run an increased risk of ending up NEET (not in education, employment and training at aged 16-18). Each child who becomes NEET costs £97,000. Using these figures, we can estimate that the poor speech and language skills of the 2006 national cohort of five-year-olds could cost nearly £4 billion over their lifetime if left unaddressed. The current primary school cohort could cost £26 billion.

#### The cost of "James"

A study by the Audit Commission in 2004<sup>9</sup> developed a case study of a fictional 16-year-old, "James", to illustrate the financial cost of not intervening to support speech, language and other educational and social needs at an early age.

Actual interventions and estimated costs gave a figure of £153,687. This included two custodial terms in secure units before the age of 16. The cost of providing speech and language support and an educational psychologist from the age of five to 15 was £42,243.

Assuming that the "crime route" was avoided, a saving of £111,444 in criminal justice costs is made through early diagnosis of learning difficulties and intervention to address them.

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8 Bryan, K, Freer, J and Furlong, C "Language and Communication Difficulties in Juvenile Offenders" in *International Journal of Communication & Language Disorders* vol 42 (2007)

9 *Youth Justice 2004: A Review of the Reformed Youth Justice System* (Audit Commission, 2004)

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## **How can we build effective speech, language and communication skills in the primary school?**

Given that language is a developmental process, with skills building on previous learning and neurological development, the argument for early intervention is clear. Addressing speech, language and communication needs before the age of five can help to prevent needs becoming intractable. While support post-primary age will always be helpful, and the dearth of speech, language and communication services at secondary level is a national disgrace, evidence points to the benefits of early intervention and the dangers of its absence.

A strategy to improve speech, language and communication, particularly among the most disadvantaged families, requires a four-pronged approach:

- improving language models and skills of parents to support early communication;
- developing curriculums for early years and at primary school with an increased focus on the full range of speech, language and communication skills;
- skilling the workforce to deliver both an improved universal offer and to support those who need additional help; and
- adopting evidence-based models to create language-rich environments and to deliver appropriate targeted services.

### **Work with parents**

Work within Sure Start, the voluntary programme Home Start and cross-agency local initiatives such as Stoke Speaks Out<sup>10</sup> has done much to start developing the skills of parents to support their children's speech, language and communication development.

Initiatives within school-age programmes are more limited, reflecting the wider challenges that schools face in facilitating parent engagement. Early work with I CAN's *Communication Cookbook*<sup>11</sup> at both foundation stage and key stage one has demonstrated the value of developing resources around speech and language that can be used by parents to help prepare children for school and are used by both teachers in the classroom and families at home to reinforce learning. The cookbook demystifies communication development for parents and for the children's workforce, boiling it down to five essential ingredients that everyone can understand: attention and listening, vocabulary, building sentences, telling stories and conversations.

<sup>10</sup> [www.stokespeaksout.co.uk](http://www.stokespeaksout.co.uk)

<sup>11</sup> [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

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Similar success has been seen with the Basic Skills Agency's Talk to Me project.

### **Developing appropriate curriculums**

A continued and increased focus on speech, language and communication within curriculums remains a priority. While this focus is present in both the early years foundation stage and the Primary National Strategy, there is no cause for complacency and there are two grounds for concern.

First, it is not clear that current standards and targets are based on best available evidence. Secondly, although designed to be cross-curricular, speaking and listening programmes are not strongly entrenched or mainstreamed across the curriculum but instead are often narrowly compartmentalised within the teaching of literacy. In an assessment-driven culture, the relative under-importance placed on speech and language is a big problem, and decisive action is needed to ratchet the subject up the list of priorities.

### **Developing the workforce**

The development of the workforce is essential. Too many teachers, particularly those entering the profession at postgraduate level, have limited child development knowledge, and surveys demonstrate a continuing lack of confidence in supporting and including children who find speech and language hard.

The Department for Children, Schools & Families' Inclusion Development Programme provides a welcome starting point for raising awareness of speech, language and communication needs. While it is a programme focused on special educational needs and disability, much of its content could be applied to support those with poor language skills resulting from environmental factors. In addition, the Communication Trust's Speech, Language and Communication Framework provides clarity on the skills required by the entire workforce, and attention might usefully be applied to exploring further how these skills can be embedded within whole-school professional development programmes.

### **Models of intervention**

The recent Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists' position paper on supporting children's communication needs in integrated services emphasises the need for models of intervention that look at enhancing a child's communication environment as well as directly remediating more *persistent* difficulties. A communication-supportive environment at pre-school level and the primary school will enhance a child's language at this crucial developmental stage and minimise the effects of *transient* communication difficulties.

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Alongside this, there are resources such as the Tower Hamlets Targets and Activities Project, which provide further ideas for activities to encourage language development at different levels. I CAN's innovative web-based product *Targeting Talk* helps school staff to describe children's language skills by breaking down speaking and listening targets still further into detailed small steps focused on pupils' expressive, receptive and social use of language. It also includes a reference bank of successful classroom strategies to promote speaking and listening skills, as does Bradford's Talk Across the Curriculum.

Programmes such as Somerset Total Communication, I CAN's Primary Talk programme and Swindon Local Education Authority's Speech and Language Friendly School guidelines provide useful descriptors for communication-supportive learning environments. They also offer frameworks for early identification and support for children with more *persistent* disordered language and, of note, can be delivered at a relatively low cost per head. I CAN, for example, estimates the cost of delivering Primary Talk at around £9,000 a school.

Programmes such as Anne Locke's One Step at a Time – which is being piloted in South Wales and Stoke-on-Trent – focus on developing conversation, listening, narrative and discussion at foundation stage, key stage one and key stage two. There is evidence that interventions such as Becky Shanks' and Judith Carey's Speaking and Listening Through Narrative, which use small groups to develop children's language, can result in significant improvements in children's ability to understand and tell stories as well as improved classroom listening and attention.

## **Conclusion**

The ability to communicate is the key life skill of the 21st century. Yet the inability to do so is both more widespread than many realise and a serious challenge to decision makers and professionals alike. Speech and language problems are the most common form of developmental delay in children, affecting 10 times as many children as autism and three times as many as dyslexia.

These problems cannot be ignored or conveniently dismissed as "something that will pass with time". Left unaddressed, they are inclined to worsen, damaging children's attainment, threatening their well-being and piling up costly problems for the state as a vicious cycle of intergenerational disadvantage takes root. There are some excellent communication programmes and we have highlighted them in this chapter, but provision is extremely patchy and the stark reality is that too many children have suffered too much for too long with too little done to help them.

What there is not – but what there needs to be – is an explicit commitment to the

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delivery by children's services across the country of the requisite support to children in early and primary years. As a matter of urgency, the following messages must be heard and heeded.

Speech and language are just as important as literacy and numeracy. Information about good communication skills and the means to assess them is a prerequisite of improvement, and that information must be disseminated to parents and professionals alike.

Early identification and intervention are the most valuable weapons in the struggle to stop problems becoming endemic and to put children on the path of normal communication development. They should be writ large in the priorities of children's commissioners and service providers everywhere.

A continuum of services designed around the family is needed. Just as it must include provision for those with the most severe problems, so it must include provision of communication-rich environments for all children in order to defuse the time bomb of inadequate communication skills passing from one generation to the next. Such communication environments demand a major up-skilling of the children's workforce, which must be taken forward without delay.

Joint working between health and educational professionals is crucial. Operating in separate silos produces misunderstandings, causes divisions and can be bewildering or infuriating to parents. A renewed drive is required to ensure shared understandings between professionals and the development of collaborative working at strategic and operational levels alike.

While encouraging local innovation, we need to extend early years' targets for language to older children, work towards a national indicator of speech, language and communication and strive to ensure that all children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, wherever they live, receive a high-quality service.

The pursuit of improved speech, language and communication should be driven by a number of considerations. First, it is right in itself to do whatever we can to help those who suffer from the invisible disability of deficient communication skills. As long ago as 1910, Winston Churchill said that "the mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country". If that is true, it is true in triplicate of our attitude to, and provision for, communication-impaired children and young people.

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Second, we must be motivated by national self-interest. Tackling this country's speech, language and communication problem is right on so many fronts – it is right for the sake of fairness, right for educational progress, right for social inclusion, right for employment generation, right for safeguarding mental health, right for reducing offending and right for our commercial advantage in an age in which a job for life is a relic of the past and the premium placed upon communication skills in today's knowledge economy is greater than ever.

Finally, for far too long communication has been elbowed aside by policy makers focused on other parts of the children's agenda. Yet language development is inextricably bound up with that wider agenda of aspiration, opportunity and social harmony. Our challenge is to catapult speech, language and communication from the back of decision makers' minds to the front and to keep the subject there. The ability to communicate is not an optional extra. It is a vital piece of equipment for citizenship, fundamental to our humanity and central to the quest to improve life chances in the 21st century.

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Chapter 3

# The need for a focus on literacy and numeracy

Jean Gross, Director of the Every Child a Chance Trust

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## The need for a focus on literacy and numeracy

*In the first three years of school, educators have their one and only chance to upset the correlation between intelligence measures, social class and literacy progress, or between initial progress and later progress.*

Dame Marie Clay

This chapter highlights the need to include a focus on literacy and numeracy in any early intervention strategy aimed at tackling social disadvantage. It argues that children with poor literacy and numeracy skills are on a certain track to one of the five pathways to poverty described in Iain Duncan Smith's introduction to this publication – educational failure. It also provides evidence on the long-term downstream savings to the public purse resulting from investment in this area, which in the long term will fund upstream costs many times over.

### Typical trajectories

#### Adam

Adam was brought up on a troubled local authority housing estate with endemically high unemployment levels. Neither his parents nor members of his extended family were in work while he was at school. There were no books at home and opportunities for language development were restricted. His parents wanted the best for him, but did not see education as particularly important.

Adam attended nursery class and started "big school" with enthusiasm when he was just four. He tried hard, but by the end of his second year he had made almost no progress with reading. By the time he was seven he was well behind his peers and had come to feel, as had his parents before him, that school was not a place where he could succeed. Over the course of the next few years his behaviour in class became increasingly troublesome. He had help in a group, and by the end of his primary years had made some progress in literacy but was still well behind his peers.

At secondary school he was placed in lower sets, fell into bad company and ended up in a pupil referral unit for pupils at risk of exclusion. He began to offend and had support from a mentor who encouraged him to enrol on college vocational courses. By now, however, his offending had become serious. He dropped out of college and a few months later began the first of several spells in prison.

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## Kim

Kim, the youngest of five children, loved school and always tried her best but from the beginning struggled with some aspects of learning. Her home environment was warm and loving but her everyday experiences were limited; at seven, she had never travelled outside the immediate area she lived in.

She read reasonably well but was not good at thinking of things to write about, or at maths – she could not seem to understand the number system or remember the simplest number facts. She had help in class from a teaching assistant who sat with the lowest-attaining group, but her problems persisted right through her primary school years.

The transition to secondary school proved a major trauma for her, and her attendance began to slip. She did badly in exams and left school with few qualifications. For a year she worked in retail, until she became pregnant and later married in her early 20s. Soon after that came a bout of serious depression, and separation from her husband. Kim did not return to work and brought up the couple's three children on state benefits.

### **The social consequences of language, literacy and numeracy failure**

Each year, 8% of children leave primary school with very low literacy and or/numeracy skills (achieving below level 3 in national curriculum terms, with literacy or mathematics skills at or below those of the average seven-year-old). These annual numbers – around 23,000 children a year with very low levels of both literacy and numeracy, 15,000 with very low literacy only and 12,000 with very low numeracy only – have remained more or less static over the past 10 years.

While those just below the average have benefited from a relentless focus on increasing the percentage hitting national targets (national curriculum level 4) at the age of 11, those at the very tail end of the distribution curve have not shown equal benefits. As Adam's and Kim's stories demonstrate, the social consequences to the individual and society are profound. Children like these (and the children they in turn will parent) make up a high proportion of the dysfunctional core that has been described in earlier chapters. The difficulties they experience reverberate through the system, making heavy demands on education, welfare and health budgets.

We know, for example, that there is a significant link between poor literacy or numeracy and antisocial behaviour. More than half of pupils permanently excluded from school fall into the lowest 2% of the population for literacy and/or numeracy attainment.<sup>1</sup> Pupils

1 Gross, J and McChrystal, M "The Protection of a Statement? Permanent Exclusions and the SEN Code of Practice" in *Educational Psychology in Practice* vol 17, no 4 (2001)

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who enter secondary school with very low literacy skills have an exclusion rate five times that of pupils entering at average levels, and are four times more likely to truant. Pupils with very poor numeracy (but average literacy) carry twice the risk of exclusion and over twice the risk of truancy.<sup>2</sup> After controlling for other relevant factors (poverty, family environment, poor educational experiences, early signs of behaviour problems), poor literacy scores are a significant predictor of the number of times males are arrested over their life course; for women, poor numeracy is the significant predictor.<sup>3</sup>

Physical and mental health in adulthood, too, are linked to poor basic skills; those who were poor readers at age 10 have been shown to be more likely than good readers with similarly high levels of early social disadvantage to smoke and drink heavily, to be obese and (for women) to be depressed.<sup>4</sup>

Labour market outcomes are equally affected. Adults with very low literacy and numeracy skills are, for example, up to eight times more likely to live in a household where both partners are out of paid employment than are those with good basic skills.<sup>5</sup> Finally, inter-generational persistence of difficulties in basic skills is extremely high. One study found that 60% of children in the lowest reading attainment group at age 10 had parents with low literacy levels, while only 2% had parents with high literacy scores.<sup>6</sup>

Good early skills, by contrast, have been shown to be a significant predictor of the probability of escape from a disadvantaged background. Data from a 2002 report by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development) shows that children from the lowest socioeconomic strata who read for pleasure outperform those in the highest who do not. Blanden<sup>7</sup> sought to explore the characteristics of children from poor backgrounds who buck the trend and go on to achieve economic well-being as adults. She compared a range of test scores (general cognitive ability, reading, maths and shape copying) at ages five and 10 by adult poverty status. Those who avoided poverty later in life had in early life performed better on all the measures, but particularly large differences were found for vocabulary at age five and the reading test at age 10.

2 Data supplied by Department for Children, Schools & Families' Research & Statistics Division

3 Parsons, S and Bynner, J *Does Numeracy Matter More?* (National Research & Development Centre for Adult Literacy & Numeracy, 2005)

4 Parsons, S and Bynner, J *Basic Skills & Social Exclusion* (Basic Skills Agency, 2002)

5 Parsons and Bynner, op cit (2005)

6 Research at City University, in Moser, C *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy & Numeracy* (Department for Education & Employment, 1999)

7 Blanden, J *Bucking the Trend*, working paper no 31 (Department for Work & Pensions, 2006)

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## What can be done?

Disadvantaged children with poor basic skills, such as Adam and Kim, do not need to fail. Effective early intervention schemes can lift them, and others like them, out of failure – and keep them there. The Numbers Count programme, for example, which provides 12 weeks of one-to-one teaching for seven-year-olds with numeracy difficulties from a highly trained specialist teacher, has been shown to lift 83% of the children involved back to average levels for their age, in the poorest areas of London.

In the Every Child a Reader programme, Reading Recovery teaching provides similar intensive short-term help for six-year-olds who have made no progress with reading and writing. Eight out of 10 children are returned to the levels expected for their age at exit from the programme.<sup>8</sup> A recently published follow-up study over two years<sup>9</sup> showed that those taught (the lowest-achieving 5% nationally) outperformed the national average in their assessment at the end of key stage one, with 86% achieving the reading levels expected for their age, compared with 84% of all children in the national cohort, and 57% in a comparison group who did not receive Reading Recovery. Similar results were achieved for writing.

These are remarkable outcomes, reinforcing the opportunities provided by early intervention to tackle the endemically low achievement of poor children. As the researchers conclude:

*Even those children in deprived social and economic, inner-city environments, who had made no start into literacy after a year or more in school, can catch up if the right help comes early enough. With access to Reading Recovery this is demonstrably an attainable goal.*

What these programmes do is offer disadvantaged children what middle-class parents will arrange for their children if they are falling behind – access to one-to-one teaching from a qualified expert. Note that middle-class parents do not go out and find a teaching assistant to work with the child; they want a specialist teacher. Note too that middle-class parents want and expect the tutors they hire to make sure their children catch up completely with their peers – not just make a modicum of progress.

We need to make it possible for children from poorer families to have the same kind of opportunities. We cannot be satisfied, or allow schools to be satisfied, with the kind of

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8 KPMG Foundation *Every Child A Reader: Results of the Second Year* (2007)

9 Burroughs-Lange, S *Comparison of Literacy Progress of Young Children in London Schools: A Reading Recovery Follow-up Study* (Institute of Education, 2008)

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help they now provide – just because teaching assistants are cheaper than teachers, and group help cheaper than one-to-one teaching.

What we need to do is make it possible for children from poorer families to access the kind of help that transforms not only their literacy or numeracy skills but also their attitudes to learning. Reading Recovery and Numbers Count are about showing children how to solve their own problems rather than depend on others to solve them. They promote a belief that what you can do can make a difference. It is this "internal locus of control" that we now know is a crucial factor in determining adult life chances.

### How children are helped by Reading Recovery

Children coming into Reading Recovery are often passive, waiting for answers to be given to them. In their lessons they are praised for independence, and helped to notice the strategies they have used to tackle problems, using phrases like the following:

*Are you a superstar or not? Show me all the times you were stuck and you sorted it.*

*I'll tell you what you did that I particularly liked – you solved that problem – when you got to this word ("can") you first said "can't", then you changed it to "can".*

*You chopped up the word into its sounds and put it back together, didn't you?*

This quickly changes children's attitudes. Jo's favourite words used to be: "I can't do that." After a few Reading Recovery lessons, he successfully reassembled a cut-up sentence. "Did I do that?" he exclaimed in surprise. "I'm like the big boys, I am!"

Shannon is a little girl who before Reading Recovery was very passive and dependent. Her mother used to carry her into school. She would never put her hand up in class and when assessed for Reading Recovery said: "I don't know these words. Other people in my class do." Recently, when she was asked to run an errand in school, she was heard to say, "I hope it won't take too long ... I've got to get back to my writing."

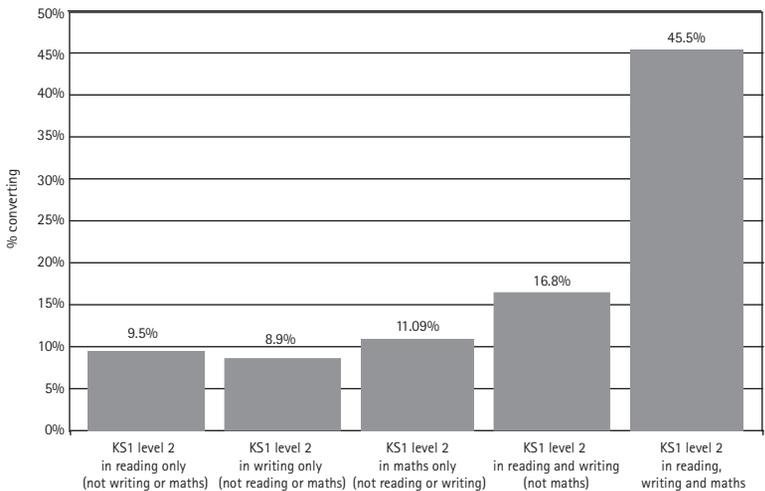
Programmes like Reading Recovery and Numbers Count need to be provided early on in primary school, after children have had a good shot at learning basic skills through effective whole-class teaching, but before they have experienced years of failure and developed negative attitudes to learning.

Reading Recovery is targeted at children who have had a year of formal education. In England this means at the age of six; if – as many advocate – there should be a change

to a later start to formal learning, as in Wales, it would be positioned a year later. But intervening after a year of formal education, whenever that may be, is more cost-effective than waiting until children are older. Then the gap is wider and it takes more time to get children back to the level of their peers. Reading Recovery is successful in up to 20 weeks. It has been estimated that “at age eight it would take a year to 18 months of a similarly intensive programme to bring the attainment of the bottom 20% up to average”.<sup>10</sup>

Intervention needs to be provided across reading, writing and mathematics, if the chances of success in education are to be maximised. As figure 1 illustrates, good performance in *both* numeracy and literacy at the age of seven (achieving the nationally expected level 2 standard) is the best indicator of achievement at GCSEs. Doing well at the age of seven is even more predictive for children of parents with lower levels of education than it is for other groups – particularly in maths.<sup>11</sup> It does not make sense to focus on *either* numeracy *or* literacy; an early intervention strategy needs to tackle both, and also the oral language skills that underpin the ability to comprehend text, to write well, and to understand and use mathematical language.

**Figure 1: Good performance in both literacy and numeracy at age seven as a predictor of GCSE results**  
*Percentage getting five A\*-C grades including English and maths*



10 Alakeson, V *Too Much, Too Late: Life Chances & Spending on Education & Training* (Social Market Foundation, 2005); Wood, C and Caulier-Grice, J *Fade or Flourish* (Social Market Foundation, 2006)

11 Duckworth, K *What Role for the Three Rs? Progress & Attainment during Primary School* (Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, 2007)

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Such intervention programmes also need to be highly individualised. Effective whole-class teaching (for example, of speaking and listening skills and of synthetic phonics) is essential if we are to ensure that expensive additional help is targeted at the right pupils – those who have in-built difficulties rather than those who are just casualties of poor initial teaching. Even the very best universal teaching, however, leaves a stubborn core of pupils whose complex needs and social circumstances mean they will not learn to read, write and count in a class setting<sup>12</sup> but do respond very rapidly to a short period of tailored, one-to-one teaching.

### **Barriers in the system**

The benefits of early literacy and numeracy intervention are clear, but until very recently schools were nevertheless not providing it, or were providing it only patchily. As ever, the reasons for this are primarily economic. Intervention that works for these children with complex difficulties has to be intensive. It has to enable them to make at least four times the "normal" rate of progress, over a short period. This requires a high level of training and skill on the part of the teacher, and a high degree of personalisation.

This is expensive at the point of delivery, for example costing a school approximately £15,000 to £20,000 a year (a half-time teaching post) to implement for each of literacy and numeracy. The later return on this investment, in terms of savings to the Treasury on the costs of crime, ill health and unemployment, are significant; a report commissioned by the KPMG Foundation<sup>13</sup> estimates returns as £11–£16 for every pound spent on Reading Recovery. And between £12 and £19 is returned for every pound spent on effective early numeracy intervention.<sup>14</sup> As a nation we spent £7 billion in 2003/04 on education and training for the low-skilled. Within education budgets alone, we know that a secondary school will have to spend more on special needs, truancy and behaviour support for pupils entering with very low literacy or numeracy levels than the costs of early intervention in key stage one.

None of these long-term potential savings, however, are experienced by the primary school, which has to find around £2,500 per child per intervention. The gains made by small numbers of high-cost, high-risk children may fall below the radar of aggregate school performance data. The school has to work, moreover, within an accountability framework that until recently has incentivised the system to focus resources on pupils

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12 MacKay, T *Achieving the Vision: The Final Research Report of the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative* (West Dunbartonshire Council, 2007); personal communication from Christopher Jolly, managing director of Jolly Learning (Jolly Phonics)

13 KPMG Foundation *The Long-term Costs of Literacy Difficulties* (2008, 2nd edition, in press)

14 Every Child A Chance Trust *The Long-term Costs of Numeracy Difficulties* (in press, 2008)

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who are marginally (rather than substantially) below the national targets, and still provides no incentives for achieving pupil progress before the age of seven – indeed, rather the reverse, since schools are rewarded for achieving high “value added” scores over the course of key stage two, which are harder to achieve if pupils leave key stage one with high attainment.

A particular factor affecting early intervention is the mobility of the child population. Teachers and head teachers often see children leave their school part way through their high-funded intervention programmes, so that the school does not reap the benefit of its investment in its overall results. As one head teacher said:

*We had two girls on Reading Recovery – twins. Their house was petrol-bombed and they were moved to Wales – all that money was wasted.*

Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising that schools tend to choose low-cost, low-intensity literacy and numeracy interventions that, although effective for some pupils, do not work for the very lowest attaining.<sup>15</sup> They would like to use higher-impact interventions: for example, a *Times Educational Supplement* survey in 2005 found that half the primary school teachers responding regarded the reintroduction of Reading Recovery programmes as their top investment priority.

Schools are willing to part-fund the costs from their own budgets, moreover, as long as some external funding is available to match their contribution – for example, from local regeneration budgets. Once such funding ceases, however, schools are not usually able to sustain the programmes.

The clearest evidence of this was provided in the 1990s, when a Conservative government brought Reading Recovery to the UK and funded it for three years, expecting that after this pump-priming period schools would pick up the costs themselves. This did not in general prove to be the case. Unless the accountability system is radically revised to favour outcomes for the lowest-achieving pupils, a safety net of external earmarked funding, from either national or local government, is likely to be needed for the most vulnerable.

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15 Hatcher, P et al “Efficacy of Small Group Reading Intervention for Beginning Readers with Reading-delay: A Randomised Controlled Trial” in *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* no 47 (2006); Hurry, J *Intervention Strategies to Support Children with Difficulties in Literacy during Key Stage 1: Review of Research* (Institute of Education, 2000); Torgesen, J et al *National Assessment of Title I: Interim Report Volume II: Closing the Reading Gap* (2006)

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## Changing the system

In 2005 the Every Child A Reader programme was established to explore some of the barriers to effective early literacy intervention. The three-year, £10 million scheme was funded by a partnership of businesses and charitable trusts, with matched funding from government. Interestingly, the initial impetus for the programme – as in the Colorado programmes described in the first monograph in this series – came from philanthropically motivated business people (in this case the KPMG Foundation), working in partnership with academics, local authorities and schools.

From the beginning, the aim was to unlock sustainable and long-term investment. In this aim the initiative has been successful, with the programme quickly growing from 60 to 500 schools, and securing a commitment from government to a national roll-out in England in 2008-11, reaching 30,000 children a year with Reading Recovery by the end of that period. A similar business- and charitable-led coalition is now involved in the Every Child Counts parallel early intervention programme for numeracy, this time with government as the major funder and committing in advance to a national roll-out of the Numbers Count teaching scheme if the initiative is successful.

The lesson to be learned from these programmes is that it is possible to put in place upstream investment in early intervention, in order to prevent downstream costs, given an external impetus from bodies that are able to look beyond short political time frames, given the energy and enterprise resulting from partnership between public, private and third sectors – and given a sound, quantitative evidence base for the intervention proposed.

Programmes such as Every Child A Reader and Every Child Counts, however, have an inherent fragility. Charities and the business sector can provide an initial impetus, but are not positioned to provide an early intervention system with sufficient reach and sustainability to guarantee entitlement for all at-risk children, wherever they happen to go to school. This has to be the business of government, both national and local. But once government in any shape is in the driving seat, effective programmes run the risk of bureaucratisation, losing energy once schools perceive them as top-down directives.

Work is now under way with the Every Child A Reader and Every Child Counts business partners to explore the possibilities of maintaining a part-private, part-public system that involves local businesses in investing in their community primary schools, topping up established government funding for early intervention and linking it to employee volunteering. If this works, it could provide a powerful model for the future.

A final challenge for policy makers is securing an alignment between early intervention in

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language, literacy and numeracy and intervention that addresses wider children's issues. Early evidence from Every Child A Reader and Every Child Counts suggests that the effectiveness of both programmes (in terms of success rate, throughput and long-term maintenance of children's gains) could be substantially enhanced by simultaneous access, for those children who need it, to those other evidence-based early interventions referred to in this booklet which tackle other common side effects of social disadvantage – behavioural difficulties, poor school attendance and lack of parental support for learning.

Effective interventions of this nature, such as parenting and school-home support programmes, are already (patchily) used in the early primary years, but nowhere has there been a sustained attempt to bring them together with language, literacy and numeracy measures. If this were to be tested in target communities where a small number of primary schools feed into a single secondary school and the population mobility is relatively low, it would be possible to track the effects over time, both for at-risk individuals and on the communities they live in. Again, such an exercise could generate a scalable model for wider application by national and local government, on a "spend to save" basis.

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Chapter 4

# Developing social and emotional skills in schools to help combat disadvantage

Professor Katherine Weare, Emeritus Professor at the University of Southampton

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## Developing social and emotional skills in schools to help combat disadvantage

*We need children who learn how to communicate their feelings, interact successfully with others, resolve conflicts peacefully, control their anger and negotiate their way through the many complex relationships in their lives, today and tomorrow.*

Reva Klein<sup>1</sup>

Social and emotional skills are the skills of making positive relationships with other people, of understanding and managing ourselves and our own emotions, thoughts and behaviour, and of understanding and responding effectively to the emotions and behaviour of others.

Social and emotional skills are now known to be as important as intellectual skills in shaping personal, educational and career success. Employers repeatedly complain that new recruits may be technically skilled but lack the social and emotional skills they need to relate to others in teamwork situations, communicate effectively and motivate and manage themselves. This is particularly true for those from deprived backgrounds.

This chapter outlines the need to include a concern with emotional and social skills in any early intervention strategy to tackle the cycle of social disadvantage. It argues that children with poor emotional and social skills are more likely to experience all kinds of failure, but that there is a good deal we can do to rectify the situation, particularly through schools.

### Acquiring social and emotional skills

Social and emotional skills are, for most young children, learned initially through the experience of growing up in a stable family and community, where people treat one another with warmth and respect, with parents who have time to play and interact with their children, where discipline is calm and consistent, where rules and boundaries are positive and realistic and expectations are high.

The vital capacities these well-nurtured children begin to learn include both personal and interpersonal skills:

- *self-understanding*, having a positive and accurate sense of yourself, acknowledging your own strengths as well as recognising your responsibility towards others, and being realistic about your limitations;

<sup>1</sup> Klein, R. *Defying Disaffection* (Trentham Books, 2000)

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- *understanding and managing feelings*, such as knowing how to soothe yourself when you are troubled or angry, cheer yourself up when you are sad, and tolerate some degree of frustration;
  - *motivation*, showing optimism, persistence and resilience in the face of difficulties, planning and setting goals;
  - *social skills* of communication, getting along with others, solving social problems, and standing up for yourself; and
  - *empathy*, being able to see the world from other people's point of view, understand and enjoy differences, and pay attention and listen to others.

### **Social and emotional skills and deprivation – a vicious cycle**

Acquiring social and emotional skills does not happen automatically; on the contrary, this development is strongly shaped, even at the level of the neural pathways of the brain, by the child's environment.<sup>2</sup> Helping children acquire these skills is likely to be difficult for parents living in deprived circumstances. The kind of good parenting that encourages sound development is not of course confined to the better-off in society, nor are well-heeled parents always good ones, by any means. However, it is true to say that a disadvantaged background is highly likely to make positive parenting more difficult.

Poor social and emotional skills are not only risk factors for deprivation, making it hard for people to pull themselves out of their problems, but also in turn are caused by the experience of deprivation – it is a vicious circle. Parents in deprived conditions may find it difficult to give the positive attention that is needed to build attachments with their children. They may feel alienated from a child they did not want, be depressed by their circumstances or not be functioning socially and emotionally because of drugs or alcohol. The effect of this lack of attachment is disastrous for the child's emotional, social, cognitive and physical development.<sup>3</sup>

Disadvantage directly affects the development of self-efficacy. Many disadvantaged parents and carers start out as parents feeling depressed and hopeless, with an image of themselves as failures. The stress of poverty and poor housing, often as a single parent, living in run-down and violent neighbourhoods, adds to this feeling of worthlessness and of having no ability to control events. It is not then surprising that teenagers who grow up in poverty are more likely to feel they are failures or that they are "useless". Parents

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2 Denham, SA, and Weissberg, RP "Social-Emotional Learning in Early Childhood: What We Know and Where to Go from Here" in Chesebrough, E, King, P, Gullotta, TP and Bloom, M (eds) *A Blueprint for the Promotion of Prosocial Behavior in Early Childhood* (Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004) (<http://www.casel.org/downloads/SELEarlychildhood.pdf>)

3 Barlow, J and Underdown, A "Attachment and Infant Development" in Jackson, C, Hill, K and Lewis, P (eds) *Child & Adolescent Mental Health Today: A Handbook* (Ashford Press/Young Minds, 2008)

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from more disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly unlikely to be able to help their children manage their feelings in calm, positive, rational ways. They are likely to use punitive, inconsistent and aggressive approaches to discipline, based on shouting, slapping and even violence.<sup>4</sup> They are also more likely to be isolated, seldom venturing outside the immediate vicinity. The children will thus find it difficult to develop social skills. Social relationships in the crowded and chaotic contexts of deprived homes and neighbourhoods are often at best strained, and at worst abusive and violent. In these straitened conditions, people find it hard to experience a sense of empathy or concern for others; they are too busy surviving.

### **Social and emotional skills can be developed by schools**

The picture for some children in deprived areas may be bleak, but there is hope. Chapter five in this monograph describes what can be done if we invest in programmes that tackle parenting difficulties. But evidence is also emerging, from evaluations of the rapidly growing number of social and emotional learning programmes across the world, that it is possible to work directly with children themselves to make a difference to their social and emotional skills once they reach school, including developing the skills of children who start off from a very low base.

In the US there are possibly thousands of social and emotional education programmes – by no means all effective, but they include a few big hitters that systematic reviews using rigorous evaluation criteria have shown to be highly effective. The majority of these target deprived areas and communities.

In the UK a wide range of specific interventions and approaches have been tried. Some schools and local authorities have been using successful US models, such as Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, Second Step, Penn Resiliency, and the Dino Dinosaur Curriculum. Other authorities, such as Southampton and Cumbria, have been using programmes they devised themselves.

In an attempt to consolidate work in this area and provide clear entitlement for all pupils, over the last five years government has involved practitioners in developing explicit programmes for England that cover the full age range, under the description “social and emotional aspects of learning” (SEAL). SEAL teaching is based on a careful review of the evidence for what makes programmes effective. The primary SEAL programme (ages four to 11) is now reasonably well established and evaluations are showing some encouraging

4 Webster-Stratton, C and Hammond, M “Conduct Problems and Level of Social Competence in Head Start Children: Prevalence, Pervasiveness, and Associated Risk Factors” in *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review* vol 1, no 2 (1998), pp101-124 (<http://www.springerlink.com/content/104849/?p=783c80bb0c3a4263ac9a317ef1cc77d3&pi=0>)

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results, including clear effects on behaviour and learning.<sup>5</sup>

Reviews of programmes, including SEAL, are creating a convincing evidence base on the impact of all these programmes, using the most rigorous and exacting methods, including controlled trials.<sup>6</sup> There is growing evidence that social and emotional learning can result in gains such as: better behaviour and attendance; reduced violence and crime; lower levels of stress and anxiety; higher morale, performance and retention of staff; and a more positive school ethos.

For example, a UK review of universal (whole school) approaches found 17 that stood up to its rigorous criteria.<sup>7</sup> These programmes reduced aggression, depression, and commonly accepted risk factors associated with the cycle of deprivation, such as impulsiveness and antisocial behaviour, and developed the competences that promote emotional and social well-being, such as co-operation, resilience, a sense of optimism, empathy and a positive and realistic self-concept.

Schools are finding that a welcome side effect of work on social and emotional learning is its ability to enhance academic learning. Some well-known programmes in the US have been shown to have demonstrable and measurable effects on attainments of all pupils in reading, non-verbal reasoning, problem solving and planning, languages, learning-to-learn skills and maths.<sup>8</sup>

## Key features

A SEAL "lesson" in a primary school might involve learning about:

- *working together* – children working in groups to design and make a welcome pack of information they can give to any new person joining the school for the first time;

5 Hallam, S, Rhamie, J and Shaw, J *Evaluation of the Primary Behaviour & Attendance Pilot* (University of London/Department for Education & Skills, 2006)

6 Weare, K and Gray, G *What Works in Developing Children's Emotional & Social Competence & Wellbeing?* (University of Southampton/Department for Education & Skills, 2003) (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR456.pdf>); Greenberg, MT, Weissberg, RP, O'Brien, MU, Zins, JE, Fredericks, L, Resnik, H and Elias, MJ "Enhancing School-based Prevention and Youth Development through Coordinated Social, Emotional and Academic Learning" in *American Psychologist* vol 58, no 6/7 (2003), pp466-474 (<http://www.case.org/downloads/AmericanPsychologist2003.pdf>); Collaborative for Academic, Social & Emotional Learning *The Benefits of School-based Social & Emotional Learning Programs: Highlights from a Forthcoming CASEL Report* (2007) (<http://www.case.org/downloads/metaanalysisum.pdf>); Wells, J, Barlow, J and Stewart-Brown, S "A Systematic Review of Universal Approaches to Mental Health Promotion in Schools" in *Health Education* vol 103, no 4 (2003), pp197-220

7 Wells, Barlow and Stewart-Brown, op cit

8 Zins, JE, Weissberg, RP, Wang, MC and Walberg, H *Building Academic Success on Social & Emotional Learning* (Teachers College of Columbia, 2004)

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- *sticking at things that take effort and perseverance* – children setting themselves a simple goal or target, and learning how to break it down into small steps they can tackle one at a time;
  - *how to control themselves when they are angry* – children using an image of a firework, a lighted fuse and a bucket of water to help them understand how anger works. They listen to an Angry Arthur story and practise some simple steps they can take to calm themselves down;
  - *bullying* – a class planning and conducting a survey to find out the places in the school building or grounds where children in the school feel vulnerable to bullying, and using computer software to present their findings as a map; and
  - *getting on together* – children exploring name calling by ranking the names children often call each other from most to least hurtful, enabling them to hear directly how others feel when they are called names.

Dedicated sessions like these need to be set in a whole-school environment that gives children the opportunity to see skills modelled consistently by adults, and to apply and practise their learning. Reviews have shown that the kinds of school environment that promote emotional and social skills balance four key features: relationships, participation, autonomy and clarity.<sup>9</sup>

Warm *relationships* place the emotional well-being of all school members at the heart of the educational process. Everyone has a genuine sense of belonging, and feels valued, listened to and respected. There is zero tolerance not just of bullying and violence but also of sarcasm and belittling. Linked with this is a sense of genuine *participation* – a feeling of engagement and ownership by all, and the fostering of genuine partnerships between pupils, staff, parents, the community, outside agencies, and education and mental health agencies.

The school ethos needs to encourage a sense of *autonomy* – independence, self-determination, reflection, critical thinking and self-control. Pupils and staff are empowered to make real choices, and have appropriate levels of genuine decision making and responsibility. To achieve all this also demands *clarity* about discipline, rules and boundaries. Behaviour and actions have real-life, known rewards and consequences, both positive and negative.

Involving parents is essential – several major reviews of emotional and social education programmes in the US<sup>10</sup> showed that programmes which actively involve parents, the local

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9 Weare, K. *Promoting Mental, Emotional & Social Health: A Whole School Approach* (Routledge, 2000)

10 Catalano, RF, Berglund, L, Ryan, AM, Lonczak, HS, Hawkins, J "Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Finding on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programmes" in *Prevention & Treatment* vol 5, no 1 (2002); Durlak, J and Wells, A "Primary Prevention Mental Health Programs for Children and Adolescents: A Meta-analytic Review" in *American Journal of Community Psychology* vol 25, no 2 (1997), pp115–152

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community and key local agencies are more likely to have an effect on student learning and behaviour. SEAL, for example has produced materials to support parents which have proved very useful.

### **Providing social and emotional education for all**

It is important that work on social and emotional skills is not just targeted at those with problems, but that there is a basic entitlement for all. There is strong evidence that this has a preventive function to avoid the onset of problems or reduce their severity or longevity, and that it provides a context which helps to meet the needs of those with problems more effectively than does targeting alone. There are several reasons why this should be the case.

Emotional, behavioural and social problems are extremely widespread – they are by no means minority problems. The same risk and protective factors predict more or less the whole range of problems in children and adolescents, from teenage pregnancy to school failure.

Constructing the climate and procedures makes it less likely that children will have problems in the first place, and enables schools to spot any problems early and deal with them before they become ingrained. The more people there are in the school who are emotionally and socially competent, the easier it will be to help those with more acute problems.

It is reassuring to know that universal programmes are far from being a waste of time for pupils with higher levels of social and emotional abilities – the evidence is clear that everyone in a school can benefit from having their emotional and social skills enhanced.<sup>11</sup>

### **Plus effective targeting**

There are children – often from more deprived backgrounds – who, by virtue of compromised development and the presence of risk processes or the absence of resilience, require additional support.

The key to successful targeted work with these children is making sure that the extra help they are receiving is congruent with the work across the whole school, so they get "more

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<sup>11</sup> Weare and Gray, op cit; Collaborative for Academic, Social & Emotional Learning, op cit; Zins, Weissberg, Wang and Walberg, op cit; Weare, K *Developing the Emotionally Literate School* (Sage, 2006)

<sup>12</sup> Rutter, M, Hagel, A and Giller, H *Anti-social Behaviour & Young People* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

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but not different".<sup>12</sup> They will need careful assessment of their needs and a well-constructed programme to support them. Teaching assistants may be helpful to support their learning in mainstream class, and withdrawal into some small group (or even one-to-one) work may also be indicated, although schools need to be careful not to let pupils reinforce one another's poor behaviour in a small group. Having clear contracts with children and parents, and using coaching and buddying, can help.

## **Barriers**

Work on social and emotional learning is subject to a great deal of demonising and stereotyping, sometimes by schools, more often in the media and by some academics who are small in number but highly vocal.<sup>13</sup> It is sometimes presented as at best a waste of time and at worst a conspiracy to brainwash the nation's youth into conformity, undermine the nation's backbone and meddle with children's psyches by turning teachers into therapists.

These criticisms are unfounded in relation to the kind of work recommended here, being based on a concept of social and emotional learning that is not represented by effective programmes, including SEAL, nor true of the targeted approaches to mental health currently being developed – all of which are highly evidence-based. The criticisms are often mischievous, but they can be very damaging and undermining of a valuable but still embryonic development that is only just starting to take hold in the UK.

Another key barrier to developing children's social and emotional skills is simply lack of investment. Government funding so far, though welcome, has been a fraction of that poured into helping schools meet literacy and numeracy targets. Large sums go to "catch-up" classes in these areas, but nothing similar to children who need extra help to catch up with social and emotional learning. Initial teacher training largely ignores the subject. There is funding via the Learning & Skills Council for family literacy and numeracy, but not for family SEAL. Schools also need financial support to train staff to expert level, and to network with other schools to improve practice.

Some local authorities have shown what can be done with extra investment. They recognise that investing upstream in social and emotional learning in childhood will produce substantial savings in the downstream costs of providing services to the damaged and disaffected. The city of Nottingham, for example, invested £850,000 of regeneration

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13 Ecclestone, K and Hayes, D *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* (Routledge, 2009) (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/search-handle-url/202-1036397-3610259?%5Fencoding=UTF8&search-type=ss&index=books-uk&field-author=Kathryn%20Ecclestone>)

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money to enable leading practice primary schools to develop high levels of staff expertise and provide direct help to partner primaries. The outcome has been an exemplary implementation with a profound effect on a generation of children.

### **Conclusion**

Increasingly, we are recognising that emotional and social capacities are at the heart of positive human development and effective social groups and communities, and we are helping people to harness their emotional and social skills to improve their life chances and relationships with others.

However, some deprived groups are being left outside this mainstream movement, hampered by poor emotional and social skills. It is vital then that we include emotional and social skills learning in our attempts to address social disadvantage and deprivation, as without it all our efforts to improve the future of all our children, and create a more equitable society, will lack heart and foundation.

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Chapter 5

# Effective parenting interventions – breaking the cycle of disadvantage by helping troubled families

Professor Frances Gardner, Professor of Child and Family Psychology in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of Oxford

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## Effective parenting interventions – breaking the cycle of disadvantage by helping troubled families

*Recent MORI polls show that 35% of children say their parents do not make them feel loved and cared for.*

Findings from recent MORI studies (2006)

Natasha is a single parent. She feels she cannot manage her son Josh, who is four and seems to fight over everything she wants him to do. Often she feels like giving up, and is becoming quite depressed. Josh reminds her of his father, who left when Josh was a baby, and has been in and out of prison. The health visitor, when visiting the home, reports that his mother ignores Josh until he becomes annoying and destructive to get her attention. He is allowed to wander and play in the streets on his own with older kids, and sometimes his mother does not know where he is. Josh attended a good nursery school, but there were no parenting programmes available to help his mother.

Upon reaching primary school, Josh has poor concentration and is disruptive in class. He continues to have difficulties in school over the years, and truants with friends from age 13 onwards. He leaves school at 16 without a job or GCSEs. At age 17 he is convicted for a serious assault on a neighbour, following an argument.

Jackie lives on the same large housing estate as Natasha, and tells her own story:

*I'm a single parent – I have Kevin who is six and Sally who is nine; both me and Sally feel controlled by Kevin, who rules the house with his aggressive and boisterous behaviour; he hardly ever does what he is told; he has awful tantrums, like when I try to get him to go to bed, or turn off the telly. He swears, kicks, bites and spits.*

*I was at the end of my tether when my health visitor suggested a referral to a parenting class [Incredible Years programme, in the voluntary sector]. I wanted to get me back in charge; I wanted help and support to turn things around.*

*The programme was great – I wanted to hear ideas from other parents, and to feel I wasn't the only one with these problems. I learned how to relate better to Kevin, how to have fun with him again. It gave me strategies and confidence to discipline him better. I've stopped wanting to hit him. His teachers say his behaviour and concentration have improved in school.*

### The importance of parenting

Poor parenting is strongly linked to a multitude of problems for children: delinquency,

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drug use, school failure, family violence, abuse of children, poor mental and physical health, and continuing social disadvantage for children as they grow up.<sup>1</sup> Good parenting is linked to school success and healthy, positive adjustment.<sup>2</sup>

Poor parenting – especially in the context of family stress and disadvantage – is one of the key reasons why some children develop behaviour problems, and why these problems persist. The good news is that teaching parenting skills is also one of the best ways we know both for preventing these problems from occurring, and for improving them after they have become troublesome. And the evidence base for this is exceptionally strong.

### **Why does problem behaviour matter?**

In many ways, this is obvious: problem behaviour (often termed “antisocial” or “disruptive” behaviour or “conduct problems”) is costly and troublesome for society. Both the human cost to families, peers, schools and communities, and the public cost to our systems of education, criminal justice and healthcare, are enormous.<sup>3</sup>

One study showed, for example, that by age 28, antisocial 10-year-olds in London had incurred costs to public services that were *10 times greater* than the costs for other children.<sup>4</sup> The costs were high to every system of public service, but especially the justice system, education and social services residential care. It is easy to see how prevention of antisocial behaviour in childhood could result in large cost savings, over many years.

Less obviously, problem behaviour, even in young children, tends to persist across the life course; children showing early problem behaviour are at higher risk of later being

1 Loeber, R and Stouthamer-Loeber, M “Family Factors as Correlates and Predictors of Juvenile Conduct Problems and Delinquency” in Tonry, M and Morris, N (eds) *Crime & Justice: A Review of Research* vol 7 (University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp29-149; Stewart-Brown, S, Fletcher, L and Wadsworth, M “Parent-child Relationships and Health Problems in Adulthood in Three UK National Birth Cohort Studies” in *European Journal of Public Health* no 15 (2005), pp640-646; Farrington, D, Sutton, C and Utting, D (eds) *Support from the Start: Working with Young Children & their Families to Reduce the Risks of Crime & Antisocial Behaviour* (Department for Education & Skills, 2004)

2 Farrington, Sutton and Utting, op cit; Dretzke, J, Frew, E, Davenport, C, Barlow, J, Stewart-Brown, S, Sandercock, J, Bayliss, S, Raftery, J, Hyde, C and Taylor, R “The Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness of Parent Training/Education Programmes for the Treatment of Conduct Disorder, including Oppositional Defiant Disorder, in Children” in *Health Technology Assessment* no 9 (2005); Gardner, F, Burton, J and Klimes, I “Randomised Controlled Trial of a Parenting Intervention in the Voluntary Sector for Reducing Child Conduct Problems: Outcomes and Mechanisms of Change” in *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* no 47 (2006), pp1,123-1,132; Hutchings, J, Bywater, T, Daley, D, Gardner, F, Whitaker, C, Jones, K, Eames, C and Edwards, RT “Parenting Intervention in Sure Start Services for Children at Risk of Developing Conduct Disorder: Pragmatic Randomised Controlled Trial” in *BMJ* no 334 (2007), pp678-685

3 Farrington, Sutton and Utting, op cit; Scott, S, Knapp, M, Henderson, J and Maughan, B “Financial Cost of Social Exclusion: Follow Up Study of Antisocial Children into Adulthood” in *BMJ* no 323 (2001), pp191-198

4 Scott, Knapp, Henderson and Maughan, op cit

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delinquents.<sup>5</sup> This is illustrated by a population-based study in New Zealand,<sup>6</sup> which found that children showing severe antisocial behaviour at age seven were *20 times* as likely to participate in criminal behaviour by age 26. A British study<sup>7</sup> found that even three-year-olds who are troublesome have a 50% chance of showing marked behaviour problems five years later.

Not only is problem behaviour stable across the life course, it also affects the next generation. There is compelling evidence from intergenerational studies showing that problem behaviour is one of the key ways in which disadvantage is transmitted across generations. For example, in a recent study in Oregon,<sup>8</sup> boys who experienced harsh parenting were more likely to become delinquent, more likely to become teen fathers, and more likely to engage in partner violence. In fact, this combination of harsh parenting and teen problem behaviour was the biggest predictor of the boys engaging in family violence in the next generation, over and above factors like poverty or poor education. In a UK longitudinal study of Camberwell boys,<sup>9</sup> having a criminally convicted father by the age of 10 was the biggest predictor of boys' teenage delinquency.

### **How serious is the problem?**

The problems that result from poor parenting are common and have been on the increase in recent decades; there have been steep rises in antisocial behaviour, poor mental health and drug use. Collishaw and colleagues found a doubling of the rate of adolescent conduct problems, from 7% to 15% of the population, and a near-doubling of depression and anxiety, in the UK birth cohort data.<sup>10</sup> Other societal changes – including the rising divorce rate, parental stress and working patterns, and increasing consumerism – all conspire to make the job of parenting more difficult, especially for those living in the most impoverished and broken communities. On the good side, as we will see, a great deal is known about how to change parenting and hence child problem behaviour.<sup>11</sup>

### **What really works in changing parenting and child outcomes**

The hopeful message is that there is very strong and rigorous evidence to show we can

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5 Farrington, Sutton and Utting, op cit

6 Fergusson, D, Horwood, L and Ridder, E "Show Me a Child at Seven: The Consequences of Conduct Problems in Childhood for Psychosocial Functioning in Adulthood" in *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* no 46 (2005), pp837-849

7 Richman, M, Stevenson, J and Graham, PJ *Pre-school to School: A Behavioral Study* (Academic Press, 1982)

8 Capaldi, DM and Clark, S "Prospective Family Predictors of Aggression toward Female Partners for At-risk Young Men" in *Developmental Psychology* no 34 (1998), pp1,175-1,188

9 Farrington, DP and Welsh, BC "Saving Children from a Life of Crime: Early Risk Factors & Effective Interventions (Oxford University Press, 2007)

10 Collishaw, S, Maughan, B and Goodman, R "Time Trends in Adolescent Mental Health" in *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* no 45 (2004), pp1,350-1,362

11 Farrington, Sutton and Utting, op cit; Dretzke, Frew, Davenport, Barlow, Stewart-Brown, Sandercock, Bayliss, Raftery, Hyde and Taylor, op cit

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change parenting and improve child outcomes, even in very disadvantaged families with entrenched problems. This message is based on data from over 100 randomised controlled trials, conducted in the UK<sup>12</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Systematic reviews of these trials demonstrate the effectiveness of well-structured parenting interventions for improving parenting skills, for reducing child problem behaviour and for improving maternal mental health.<sup>14</sup> Most of the proven interventions are based on cognitive-behavioural principles, and many employ well-known programmes with well-established dissemination mechanisms, such as Carolyn Webster-Stratton's Incredible Years, and Matt Sanders' Triple P.

To be most effective, intervention needs to be *early*. We are all creatures of habit; for both parents and children, the longer we practise patterns of interacting together, the more difficult these are to change. Furthermore, if a parent experiences their child as hard to manage over a prolonged period of time, they may come to develop negative attitudes towards the child, and a sense of hopelessness about change.

It may also be important to capitalise on developmental transitions – for example, for parents it is a big change when their baby becomes a mobile, assertive and risk-taking toddler; or for the child, it is a significant move from home into nursery or primary school. Often these are times when parents perceive new challenges in parenting, and therefore seek help and information; they may also be more receptive to input from preventive services. For all these reasons, early intervention is preferable to late.<sup>15</sup>

Importantly, there is a long history in Britain of using these interventions, and there are several British randomised controlled trials showing that these programmes work in UK services – in the voluntary sector, in multiple Sure Start services, in clinics, in primary schools, and on the telephone.<sup>16</sup>

12 Gardner, Burton and Klimes, op cit; Hutchings, Bywater, Daley, Gardner, Whitaker, Jones, Eames and Edwards, op cit; Scott, S, Spender, O, Doolan, M, Jacobs, B and Aspland, H "Multicentre Controlled Trial of Parenting Groups for Childhood Antisocial Behavior in Clinical Practice" in *BMJ* no 323 (2001), pp194-203

13 Webster-Stratton, C "Preventing Conduct Problems in Head Start Children: Strengthening Parenting Competencies" in *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology* no 66 (1998), pp715-730; Sanders, MR, Markie-Dadds, C, Tully, LA and Bor, W "The Triple P Positive Parenting Program: A Comparison of Enhanced, Standard, and Self-directed Behavioral Family Intervention for Parents of Children with Early Onset Conduct Problems" in *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology* no 68 (2000), pp624-640

14 Farrington, Sutton and Utting, op cit; Dretzke, Frew, Davenport, Barlow, Stewart-Brown, Sandercock, Bayliss, Raftery, Hyde and Taylor, op cit; Barlow, J, Coren, E and Stewart-Brown, SSB "Parent-training Programmes for Improving Maternal Psychosocial Health" in *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* no 4 (2003)

15 Farrington, Sutton and Utting, op cit

16 Gardner, Burton and Klimes, op cit; Hutchings, Bywater, Daley, Gardner, Whitaker, Jones, Eames and Edwards, op cit; Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs and Aspland, op cit; Scott, S, O'Connor, T and Furth, A *What Makes Parenting Programmes Work in Disadvantaged Areas?* The PALS Trial (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006); Sutton, C "Parent Training by Telephone: A Partial Replication" in *Behavioural & Cognitive Psychotherapy* no 23 (1995), pp1-24

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Three British randomised trials have shown clear effectiveness of the Incredible Years parenting programme in community settings, compared with waiting-list control groups, who were offered the intervention six months later.

One trial<sup>17</sup> was based in a voluntary-sector organisation dedicated to offering parenting programmes to vulnerable families experiencing severe problems with parenting, child maltreatment and behavioural problems. The intervention was offered in six community sites serving large housing estates and other low-income neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. Families of two- to nine-year-olds showing problem behaviour were referred by health visitors, social workers, teachers and GPs. Parents attended a 14-week programme in local church halls and community centres. Childcare and food were provided to facilitate attendance.

The results showed marked improvements in child problem behaviour and parenting skills – not only according to the parents' reports, but also by the ratings of independent observers who assessed parent-child interactions in the home. Parent satisfaction was very high, and all these gains were maintained at 18-month follow-up. A second British trial was also based in real-life family services, this time across multiple Sure Start agencies serving low-income neighbourhoods in North Wales,<sup>18</sup> one of the poorest regions in the UK and the EU. This time the programme was based on "high risk" prevention: pre-school children in Sure Start areas were screened by health visitors; parents of those showing early signs of problem behaviour were invited to take part in the 12-week programme.

Again, results showed improvements in both parenting skills and child problem behaviour, by parents' and observers' reports, and these gains were maintained over two years. Mothers' depression also improved – vital for ensuring maintenance of gains. Reducing depression also helps women to a better life in other realms that are crucial for their children, such as employment, housing and adult relationships.

Together with a third trial in inner-city London clinics carried out by Stephen Scott and his colleagues,<sup>19</sup> these evaluations show that well-structured parenting programmes can work to change patterns of behaviour for a range of troubled families, when delivered by well-trained staff from a wide range of backgrounds – including social workers, nursery staff and health visitors.

17 Gardner, Burton and Klimes, *op cit*

18 Hutchings, Bywater, Daley, Gardner, Whitaker, Jones, Eames and Edwards, *op cit*

19 Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs and Aspland, *op cit*

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## Can these programmes reach the hardest to reach?

If they are done well, using a high-quality programme, delivered with fidelity, the message is very encouraging. Gardner and colleagues in North Wales in 2008<sup>20</sup> found that the poorest and most troubled Sure Start families who enrolled in their parenting programmes did as well, or even better, than better-off families.

There is some evidence about ethnic-minority groups in the UK: Stephen Scott found the same programme to be effective in community clinics with multi-ethnic families in south London.<sup>21</sup> There is a good deal of US data suggesting that these programme are applicable for families from ethnic minorities: one study<sup>22</sup> found that the Incredible Years programme was equally effective and acceptable for parents and children in a large sample of white, compared with black, Asian and Hispanic, families in the US.

There is still, however, always a risk that parenting support may not reach those who need it most. We know from the first Sure Start evaluation<sup>23</sup> that services – even when conveniently located within low-income neighbourhoods – often find it easier to recruit and engage families who are better-off socially and financially.

Judy Hutchings<sup>24</sup> describes clearly how parenting interventions in North Wales Sure Start succeeded on this front. First they needed to have a workable recruitment strategy, targeting the right families, and using existing local provision. For this they used health visitors, trained to offer brief screening for behavioural difficulties. Second, to ensure families could afford to attend, they offered transport, food and a crèche, as well as locations and times of day to suit local families. It is likely these factors explain why good programmes can be as effective, or more so, with the most troubled families.<sup>25</sup>

In order to reach marginalised families, we need to pay attention to the user-friendliness of our facilities and our approaches to parents. However, in so doing we must not lose sight of the importance of the quality of delivery of the programme itself. Only through high-quality training and continuing supervision will the programme be delivered in the

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20 Gardner, F, Hutchings, J and Bywater, T "Who Benefits and How Does It Work? Moderators and Mediators of Outcomes in a Randomised Trial of Parenting Interventions in Multiple 'Sure Start' Services" (under review, 2008)

21 Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs and Aspland, op cit

22 Reid, MJ, Webster-Stratton, C and Beauchaine, T "Parent Training in Head Start: A Comparison of Program Response among African-American, Asian-American, Caucasian, and Hispanic Mothers" in *Prevention Science* no 2 (2001), pp209-227

23 Belsky, J, Melhuish, E, Barnes, J, Leyland, AH and Romaniuk, H "Effects of Sure Start Local Programmes on Children and Families: Early Findings from a Quasi-experimental, Cross-sectional Study" in *BMJ* no 332 (2006), pp1,476-1,478

24 Hutchings, J, Bywater, T and Daley, D "Early Prevention of Conduct Disorder: How and Why Did the North and Mid-Wales Sure Start Study Work?" in *Journal of Children's Services* no 2 (2007), pp4-15

25 Hutchings, J, Lane, E and Gardner, F "Making Evidence-based Intervention Work" in Farrington, Sutton and Utting, op cit

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ways that we know to be effective.<sup>26</sup> If the programme is not adhered to, it may become an unfocused discussion session, which will not help improve child and family outcomes.

### **Costs and benefits**

The costs of effective programmes are modest compared with the huge cost of antisocial behaviour outlined earlier. For example, health economists costed the Incredible Years programme in North Wales Sure Start at £1,300 per child,<sup>27</sup> concluding that "this parenting programme involves modest costs and demonstrates strong clinical effect, suggesting it would represent good value for money for public spending".

A promising possibility for enhancing cost-effectiveness is that some families may be well suited to briefer, low-cost version of these interventions – provided we can show that they work. Triple P has developed media-based versions of its programme which are delivered using parent booklets and worksheets, with the principles brought to life through well-chosen video material. Recently this programme has also been delivered and evaluated<sup>28</sup> via a six-episode national television series in England – ITV's *Driving Mum and Dad Mad*.

A systematic review<sup>29</sup> for the Cochrane Collaboration of randomised trials of brief booklet and video interventions showed they were effective in reducing child problem behaviour. In some cases, effect sizes were smaller than with conventional face-to-face interventions. However, they have great potential for widespread dissemination of parenting skills, reaching far larger numbers of families. And this makes these worthy of further testing in disadvantaged populations.

### **What should local and national government be doing?**

The Welsh Assembly government, after seeing the results of the North Wales Sure Start trial,<sup>30</sup> has funded training and supervision of staff from all 22 of its local authorities to implement the Incredible Years programme widely in children's services – such as in schools, nurseries and Sure Start centres. This is a good example of how politicians, policy makers and multiple local agencies can work together to make a difference.

26 Ibid

27 Edwards, RT, Ceilleachair, A, Bywater, T, Hughes, DA and Hutchings, J "Parenting Programme for Parents of Children at Risk of Developing Conduct Disorder: Cost Effectiveness Analysis" in *BMJ* no 334 (2007), pp682-682

28 Sanders, MR, Calam, R, Durand, M, Liversidge, T and Carmont, S "Does Self-directed and Web-based Support for Parents Enhance the Effects of Viewing a Reality Television Series Based on the Triple P Positive Parenting Program?" in *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* no 49 (2008), pp924-932

29 Montgomery, P, Bjornstad, G and Dennis, J "Media-based Behavioural Treatments for Behavioural Problems in Children" in *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* no 1 (2006)

30 Hutchings, Bywater, Daley, Gardner, Whitaker, Jones, Eames and Edwards, op cit; Hutchings, Bywater, and Daley, op cit; Edwards, Ceilleachair, Bywater, Hughes and Hutchings, op cit

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The message from rigorous real-life trials is clear: there are many effective parenting interventions, based on relevant evidence from randomised controlled trials. These need to be disseminated widely among staff who work with parents, so they can reach parents who are most vulnerable. They need to be delivered at times and in ways that parents want. Staff need high-quality training and supervision, fully backed by managerial support, in order to do this. Further trials of effectiveness are needed to make sure the interventions work when taken to scale, or when they are used for universal prevention.

Many of these vital activities are being carried out by the Parenting Academy in England. And individual local authorities – such as the London Borough of Hackney – are developing coherent parenting strategies, funded through regeneration grants. However, the fact still remains that provision on the ground is patchy, and that huge amounts of public money are spent on untested interventions. This is wasteful and unnecessary in a field where we have so much evidence. One reason for this is that many practitioners and policy makers are not aware of the strength of this evidence base – which is stronger than in any other area of child and family policy. When we know this much, then we owe it to vulnerable children, and to taxpayers, to give families the best.

#### Key features of effective parenting programmes

Learning processes:

- are structured around key social learning principles and activities;
- are based on practice and rehearsal of new skills, especially home practice;
- use discussion and demonstration of how parents' feelings and behaviour influence children; and
- involve a collaborative approach as vital – therapist and parents negotiate goals and methods, based on parents' own needs and problems.

Learning content – parents learn strategies to:

- build positive relationships through play;
- encourage good behaviour;
- set clear rules and expectations;
- discourage problem behaviour;
- avoid harsh punishment; and
- manage their own stress over parenting.

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Chapter 6

# Educational mobility, attitudes and aspirations during the primary school years

Dr Lee Elliot Major, Research Director at the Sutton Trust

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## **Educational mobility, attitudes and aspirations during the primary school years**

*Parents from the higher social classes are twice as likely to believe their child will go on to achieve a university degree, compared with parents from the lower social classes.*

Sutton Trust and Treasury research, January 2007

Right now, in primary schools up and down the country, the children of the millennium will be emulating the same upward and downward paths of educational mobility that have set the future life trajectories of children for generation upon generation. Those children from low-income backgrounds who performed so well in tests at age two are, by age six or seven, overtaken in the rankings by previously less able children from higher-income families. In modern times at least, it has always been this way.

These patterns of inequality were shocking enough when revealed for children born in 1970 – a generation ago. But we now know that the same trends are being played out by today's generation of youngsters. Research commissioned by the Sutton Trust on the millennium cohort showed that these patterns have not changed in 30 years: parental background, not individual talent, is the dominant force driving children's outcomes today. The rising and falling academic fortunes of well-off and poor children during the early years remains one of the clearest and most compelling findings showing how low educational and social mobility manifests itself in modern Britain.

While hugely depressing, these findings at least helped to demolish one of the major misconceptions trotted out to defend flat-lining social mobility in Britain. Some have argued that low mobility simply highlights the natural accrual of ability among those in the top echelons of society. Merit has accumulated through generations and generations of good genes and upbringing – so goes the theory, at least. Is it that surprising, or unfair, that the offspring of high-earning parents themselves go on to do so well in life?

The tragic story of fledgling talent that shines brightly but fades by the time children are barely getting familiarised with primary school illuminates just how crucial the family and home surroundings are in shaping and developing talent. Environment matters. And anyway, if genes did explain nearly everything, why is it the case that in all other advanced countries, the background of parents does not matter as much in predicting their children's achievements in adulthood as it does in the UK?

What can be done during the primary school years to arrest these seemingly unstoppable forces that drive educational inequalities so early in life? Needless to say, there will not be

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one magical solution, but a cocktail of policies and interventions working together that have the potential to reduce the class achievement gap. Ideally, these should also connect well with pre-school and post-primary policies that will not be discussed here.

Here I will focus on a few interventions that the Sutton Trust believes are showing real promise in changing the attitudes and aspirations of children aged five to 11 and of their parents. These are delivered alongside a range of initiatives aimed directly at raising attainment or basic skills.

Three principles underpin these interventions. The first is that we need to recognise that different strategies are required to engage with children and families facing the particular challenges of living in poverty. The second is that we must aim to involve parents wherever possible and practical in primary education. The third is that it is never too early to plant the seeds of future higher-education possibilities in the minds of children. While these may not seem controversial ideas, they are far from embedded in current practice in schools.

### **Targeting disadvantaged pupils**

The Sutton Trust has welcomed proposals recently published by the government that would for the first time set statutory targets for local authorities on the attainment of children in receipt of free school meals. Eligibility for free school meals has become the standard (if not totally reliable) way to distinguish children from poor backgrounds; however, the government has up to now shied away from specific targeting of these pupils, for fear of stigmatising children from poor households.

Targets are one thing; what about actual interventions? One scheme that may help is a programme called A Framework for Understanding Poverty (FW4UP), used widely by schools in the United States but relatively unknown and unproven in the UK. The Sutton Trust has, with Reading local authority, recently supported a pilot training scheme for teachers that is based on the programme.

At the heart of the FW4UP framework is an attempt to make explicit the hidden rules used by the different classes. It suggests that class-based misunderstandings arise in schools, where middle-class teachers are often teaching poor pupils. The scheme enables teachers to understand the habits, beliefs and behaviours that exist in many poor families – so they can recognise the obstacles that such children face. Poor pupils, meanwhile, learn the hidden rules of the middle class to succeed in school. These may include how to speak in a more formal style, or how to reduce impulsive behaviour (particularly physical retaliation).

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The framework is not without its critics, lambasted by academics as being insufficiently informed by research evidence about poverty, and seen by many as oversimplifying the causes of poverty and low achievement. But teachers involved in the training reported an "Aha!" experience – a shift in understanding. Many said it confirmed what was known intuitively already from years of teaching. The framework was seen by some teachers as an empowering force to legitimise the strategies they already deploy to teach classes of pupils from a range of backgrounds.

Discussions are now under way to develop ways of combining these insights with existing government resources already available to schools, to provide practical ways of improving the learning of those children from poor backgrounds. It is early days, but some believe that this approach could be used to improve language development during the first years of primary school – the critical phase providing the platform for learning in later years. A major challenge, however, for the programme will be to avoid negative stereotypes of working-class culture, or value judgments about those living in poverty.

### **Engaging parents**

Another traditional no-go area for government policy is parenting. In the last year or so the government has unveiled a series of well-intentioned schemes to boost school links with parents and the home environment. Yet one wonders whether one day, in the not so distant future, these will be looked upon as the first crude and tentative attempts to address what is, after all, the core education challenge. (Saying all this, we should all remain acutely conscious of not laying all of society's ills at the gates of primary schools, or telling parents how to bring up their children.)

Depending on which school-effectiveness study you refer to, factors outside the school account for 80% or more of the eventual outcomes for children. But the key question in many ways for the Sutton Trust is what factors contribute to the gaps in achievement between the poorest children and their middle-class counterparts. Put simply, the smaller this gap, the more educational mobility there will be.

A recent analysis of children now growing up in the US found that parenting style and the home learning environment explain between a third and a half of the early attainment gap between children from low-income and higher-income families. And there is little reason to suggest that the same factors will not be similarly important in explaining the attainment gap among UK children.

Professor Jane Waldfogel of Columbia University, who presented the findings at the Sutton Trust's recent New York summit on social mobility, says that good parenting style

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is about maternal or paternal sensitivity – warmth and nurturing – but also responsiveness to the particular needs of a child: knowing when the child needs attention and when to be left alone, for instance. Waldfoegel believes that good parenting can be learned and advocates the expansion of proven parenting programmes.

But what about schools themselves? There are a number of simple things that primary schools can do to strengthen what have been termed "home-school links" – recruiting parents on various bodies in the school and in supporting the work of teachers and classroom support staff. A particular area of concern for the Sutton Trust is ensuring that parents are involved in activities to make pupils fully aware at the end of primary school of the higher-education options open to them later in life.

This may seem a young age to talk about university, but research has indicated that children from poorer backgrounds think about higher education at a much later stage than their wealthier counterparts, for whom university was always a given in their family. Moreover, choices made early on during secondary school – subjects and types of qualifications studied, for example – have profound impacts on the range of options later on.

In a report commissioned by the government's National Council for Educational Excellence, the Sutton Trust has now proposed that every primary school should be required to devote a minimum amount of time to university aspiration raising and access work. This would include general information about university and the requirements of certain types of careers, at least one visit to a university campus, and – critically – activities that involve parents. The trust is also developing a package specifically for parents, to inform them about later higher-education options for their children.

### **Raising aspirations early**

At the same time we recognise that, for many children from disadvantaged backgrounds, help from parents to broaden educational horizons is, to put it mildly, an unlikely prospect. In many ways, these children are on their own. How can they be supported?

One of the trailblazers in this area has been the Into University project in west London, which the Sutton Trust helped to develop. The project, initially based at the St Clement & St James Community Centre in Notting Hill, offers the sort of academic and pastoral support that children with middle-class parents take for granted. The scheme provides out-of-school support for children from age seven upwards, building confidence, motivation and self-esteem, and raising aspirations to go on to university.

Into University collaborates with local universities to run open days, while undergraduate

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students visit the centre to mentor children. Focus weeks, bringing together children of all ages to work on a single project, culminates in a visit to a university where the children receive their "degree certificates". The scheme has recently been established in Brent and Lambeth as well, with an aim to have 11 new centres opened by 2015, creating an Into University network throughout deprived areas of London.

The Sutton Trust meanwhile has also supported the Children's University, which offers those enrichment activities – visiting theatres, museums, sports centres, libraries and the like – that can be just as important as school lessons in nurturing the development of young children. Activities for children in the age range from seven to 14 in deprived areas take the form of modules, covering the arts, sports, sciences and humanities, and are delivered after school, at weekends or during holidays. The Children's University is expanding its work with an aim to be a truly national organisation in the next few years.

### **Conclusion**

All these schemes may just help to change the direction of travel for some of those children now on downward paths of educational and social mobility. Any young talent that is nurtured rather than lost is not only a great success for that individual but also a boon for society as whole, generating both economic and social benefits. At the same time, no one should underestimate the extent of the struggle ahead if we are to break the intergenerational cycle of educational inequality that manifests itself so clearly during the primary school years.

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Chapter 7

# Tomorrow begins today – bridging the gap between the fortunate and the forgotten

Charlotte Leslie, Editor of *Crossbow* and of the Bow Group's *Invisible Nation* series, and Chris Skidmore, Former Chairman of the Bow Group

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## Tomorrow begins today – bridging the gap between the fortunate and the forgotten

*Some 16% of pupils do not make any progress at all in maths between the ages of seven and 11 ... more than a fifth of 14-year-old pupils eligible for free school meals have a reading age of nine ... or below.*

Pupils who started school in 1997, aged four, took their GCSEs this year. The results? In 2008 over half of all pupils did not obtain five good GCSEs including English and maths. Vast numbers of these pupils did not even come close: 137,000 did not gain a single C grade this year; 76,000 of these, or one in eight pupils overall, did not gain anything more than an E grade at GCSE.

And this is only a fraction of the picture. We reveal the educational black holes that still exist in this country, and the enormous gulf that still tragically divides privilege from poverty in neighbourhoods that geographically may sometimes be just yards apart. Ultimately, we trace this inequity back to its beginnings, where life chances are won or lost – the primary school.

First, it is worth shining a light on the true nature and extent of the challenge that faces us. It is a misconception to believe that the long tail of underachievement in our schools is limited to the 638 schools that have been identified and labelled as “failing” – there are forgotten pockets that remain ignored and unrecognised: recent analysis has shown that there are “black spot” areas in the country where just 3% of pupils gain five good GCSEs.

And despite a decade of talking about the mission to reduce the gap between rich and poor, the correlation between such extreme levels of educational failure and poverty remains stark: only a quarter of pupils in the 10% most deprived areas are gaining five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared with almost 70% in the 10% least deprived areas; and, at ward level, between 1997 and 2006 the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs of any grade has actually fallen in 695 areas across the country.<sup>1</sup> The divide between the fortunate and the forgotten remains as severe as it has ever been.

Looking at the reasons for this, it becomes clear that educational failure today is a symptom of educational neglect that stems from far back in a pupil's earliest years at primary school over the past decade. Research has shown how a child's mind is being moulded from the moment it is born. We now know how from 22 months of age the

<sup>1</sup> Skidmore, C, Cuff, N and Leslie, C *Invisible Children* (Bow Group, 2007)

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divergent paths of the richest and poorest pupils begin to set and how several years later the mould has begun to cement – shaped by primary schools and primary school teachers across the country.

Statistically speaking, the pervasive link between achievement at primary school and achievement at GCSE is well established. Over 70% of pupils who reached level 4 in key stage two tests in 1998 obtained five good GCSEs in 2003. By contrast, of pupils who did not reach the accepted benchmark at the end of primary school, just 14% went on to obtain five good GCSEs. And, worryingly, even today, 40% of pupils leave primary school without gaining the expected level in the three Rs. From what we know, their primary school start has already severely damaged their chances of educational fulfilment before they reach their 11th birthday. Put bluntly, we know that primary school is where life chances are forged or lost.

It seems clear that any government looking to raise its game on the OECD tables, any local authority, or any school, hoping to climb the national league tables, and ultimately any parent concerned for a child's future attainment, should look to primary school as the arena in which a child's success is determined. And yet the policy focus of governments to date has been to place the greatest emphasis simply on the outcome of a pupil's educational achievement: GCSE grades. This has caused its own problems as schools chase ever higher places on league tables, but it has also helped hide the single greatest influence on the GCSE grades upon which all the focus rests: the performance of primary schools across the country today.

While the national media – and the government – focus upon the number of secondary schools that are classed as failing, little attention has been paid to primary schools that should be considered in the same terms. A massive 4,651 primary schools have been judged "satisfactory" by Ofsted – a label that has been branded by the head of Ofsted as meaning "not good enough".

In 3,655 primary schools less than 50% of pupils achieve level 4+ in reading, writing and mathematics.<sup>2</sup> Additional analysis shows that in 3,400 primary schools, more than 30% of pupils do not reach the basic level in maths; in 567 primary schools, fewer than half of pupils reach this level. Translating this to a child's school-lifetime, consider this: at key stages one and two, some 16% of pupils do not make any progress at all in maths between the ages of seven and 11. Mathematically speaking, that's four years of part of the most fertile stage of their development more or less wasted.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/ja/cm/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080402/text/80402w0019.htm#08040272001943>

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There is an urgent need to redirect the policy focus, because the situation shows no sign of righting itself. And it is the poorest areas that have taken the brunt of the decline in standards. Some 60% of 11-year-old pupils eligible for free school meals taking their key stage two tests do not obtain the accepted level in the three Rs. Indeed, since 1997, the percentage of pupils achieving the accepted level in maths has fallen back in one in eight wards.

This has meant that the attainment gap between the most disadvantaged and the most affluent pupils has grown ever wider. In 39 local authorities, the gap in achievement at key stage two maths between pupils that are entitled to free school meals and those that are not has increased or frozen; these include the most deprived local authorities on the index of deprivation: Liverpool, Hackney, Tower Hamlets.

But it is not just in test results that the problems are apparent. It is not surprising that depressed test results correspond with increased behavioural problems. Truancy is rising in primary schools; this year the number of persistent absentees in primaries has risen from just under 74,000 to over 81,000. The link between primary school truancy and achievement is a strong one: in schools where pupils average fewer than 7.5 days' absence a year, 88% of pupils reach level 4 in key stage two maths. But this drops to just 62% in schools where average absence is more than 15 days.<sup>3</sup>

Once again, deprivation appears to be a major factor. Recent figures have shown that 44% of persistent truants in primary schools are free school meals pupils.<sup>4</sup> The problem is the same for exclusions at primary school. Pupils from primary schools in the poorest 10% of social areas (based upon the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) are nine times more likely to receive a fixed-period exclusion than those in the highest 10%.<sup>5</sup>

If there is any national challenge, it must involve recognition that to improve standards in all our schools we must start by improving standards in the thousands of primary schools that are letting pupils down almost before the race begins. All pupils must be able to meet the minimum standard of reading by the time they leave, aged 11. For if they have not learned to read, they will not be able to read to learn.

This year alone, 226,783 pupils did not reach the government's expected level in reading, writing and arithmetic. This persistent toleration of failure at such an early stage in a pupil's school career must end. Eradicating primary school illiteracy and meeting this challenge head on must be our primary focus, because by the time these pupils reach

3 <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolattendance/truancysweeps/index.cfm>

4 <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080421/text/8021w0061.htm>

5 Table 19 at: [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000793/SFR14\\_2008TablesAdditional24July.xls](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000793/SFR14_2008TablesAdditional24July.xls)

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secondary school the widening gap of educational failure between the poorest and richest pupils has become deeply entrenched, and as pupils progress it only becomes more pronounced.

Following the same group of pupils through each stage at school reveals the nature of how the fortunate pull away from the forgotten. In 2002, at the end of key stage two (aged 11), the attainment gap between 11-year-olds who were and who were not eligible for free school meals in reaching the expected level was 26 points for English, 16 points for maths and 10 points for science.<sup>6</sup> In 2005, for the same pupils aged 14, this gap had grown to 27 points for English, 27 points for maths and 30 points for science.<sup>7</sup> And in 2007, by the time pupils came to take GCSEs, only 21.1% of pupils eligible for free school meals gained five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared with 49% of other pupils – a gap of nearly 28%.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, the rate of persistent truancy and exclusion among boys, and the most disadvantaged in particular, takes a remarkable rise. In secondary school, persistent absentees account for 22.2% of all absences. Persistent absentees resident in the 10% most deprived areas account for 5.2% of all absences, compared with those resident in the 10% least deprived areas, who account for just 0.7%. By the time pupils come to sit their GCSEs, 11% of all pupils are barely at school. And beneath the official figures are always the “invisible” children; those who do not actually appear on the school rolls, those who simply disappear from the official figures, estimated by the Bow Group to be around 7,000 pupils each year.<sup>9</sup>

The result is a vicious circle of ever further educational disengagement, between the crucial ages of 11 and 14, trapping the most disadvantaged. Just 37% of pupils eligible for free school meals aged 14 gained the accepted level – level 5 at key stage three – in the three Rs. Shockingly, with 65,100 pupils (around one in 10) obtaining the same score or worse in English at key stage three, it is incredible that still more than a fifth (21%) of 14-year-old pupils eligible for free school meals have a reading age of nine (level 3) or below.

Again, it is the poorest who are hit hardest in this vicious cycle. Among the poorest pupils, no fewer than a quarter are excluded from school. Per 100 pupils eligible for free school meals, the number of pupils given an exclusion actually increased from 23% to 24.75% in the past year. Overall, pupils eligible for free school meals account for 30% (around

6 Hansard, 29 January 2008; key stage two results. The expected level, according to the government, is level 4. See: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080129/text/80129w0015.htm>

7 See tables 83–85 at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000671/index.shtml>. The expected level is level 5.

8 See table 17 at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000759/index.shtml>

9 Skidmore, Cuff and Leslie, op cit

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100,000) of all fixed-period exclusions – despite making up less than 14% of the school population. Since 2003/04 the number of pupils suspended more than once in a single year has increased by 24% – up by 17,140 – while the number of pupils suspended 10 times or more has rocketed from 310 in 2003/04 to 830 in 2006/07.

These figures suggest that we risk sleepwalking into a discipline and behaviour crisis in many schools. Little wonder, then, that pupil referral units – where children are generally sent when schools cannot cope with them – are experiencing rocketing populations. The number of pupils being educated in these institutions has more than doubled since 1997, from 7,740 to a new high of 16,010 in 2008.

An alarming percentage of this population rise in pupil referral units is accounted for by children with special educational needs. Ofsted has described pupil referral units as the “least appropriate” settings for pupils diagnosed as having special educational needs, yet 67% of pupils in these units have such needs. This rise coincides with the closure of special schools, the number of which has, for the first time, dipped below a thousand, resulting in 9,000 fewer special school places.<sup>10</sup>

Can it be any wonder that children who have left primary school at 11 unable to read properly will not be able to cope with sitting in lessons they have not been given the reading ability to understand? Thousands of children who have been kicked out of the mainstream education system into pupil referral units have special educational needs – but for many, their special need was to be taught to read and count properly at the most important stage in their development.

The sheer size of the pupil referral unit population, the rising epidemic of truancy and suspensions, and the massive rate of exclusions from pupil referral units themselves – at a massive 55% of the population of these units – suggests that despite the best of intentions, not every child has mattered: or, at least, they have not mattered as much as a headline statistic of rising attainment of five A\*-C grades at GCSE.

These children have been let down badly. In the vital race to make up for lost time for this secondary school generation, we must not forget why they are facing the challenges they are today. Every child does matter – and that includes the class of 2015. Their GCSE results are possibly being determined in primary schools today. If we are serious about narrowing the gap between the educational chances of rich and poor, the fortunate and the forgotten, we must focus on improving our primary schools. Tomorrow begins today.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie, C and Skidmore, C *SEN: The Truth about Inclusion* (Bow Group, 2008)

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# Conclusions

- Graham Allen MP, Chair of One Nottingham and Labour MP for Nottingham North
- John Bercow MP, Conservative MP for Buckingham
- Jean Gross, Director of the Every Child a Chance Trust

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## **Conclusion 1: the case for localism**

Graham Allen MP, Chair of One Nottingham and Labour MP  
for Nottingham North

*Were we directed from Washington when to sow, and when to reap, we should soon want bread.*  
Thomas Jefferson, 1826

This important collaboration between the Smith Institute and the Centre for Social Justice has taken as its theme the importance of intervention in the primary years to break the cycle of social disadvantage by developing children's ability to communicate, their literacy and numeracy skills, their social and emotional skills, and their aspirations. The authors have made the strongest possible case for primary years intervention in order to pre-empt massive problems in later life.

In my educationally underachieving constituency, I see daily evidence of the need for urgent action, ranging from the secondary school head teacher who told me that 95% of young people arrive at his school with a reading age below 11, to having the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Western Europe. We have seen from a number of distinguished contributors how important it is that early intervention is taken on from the under-fives into the vital primary years. I look forward to our next volume being about early intervention in the secondary years in order to complete the virtuous 0-18 intergenerational cycle.

We are attempting to apply these ideas practically in Nottingham, investing in a dozen blueprint interventions, starting with the family/nurse partnership of intensive health visiting and nursing for every single mother who needs it, continuing through Sure Start and children's centres that help children with impoverished spoken language, children who cannot read or write or understand numbers, on to parents who need help through parenting programmes such as Incredible Years and children who need teaching in social and emotional aspects of learning throughout their whole school life.

In the primary age group, school is of course important and everything that can be done at school should be done. However, as Dr Lee Elliot-Major of the Sutton Trust points out, factors outside school account for at least 80% of children's outcomes. Hence, preparing our children to be effective parents in later life is the greatest investment that society can make in itself and its future.

At the heart of this effort is the creation of good parents. Of course, we must bring forward appropriate remedies to help today's poor parents, as Professor Frances Gardner of the University of Oxford eloquently underscored. However, it is incumbent upon those

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of us who aspire to govern to make sure we are putting in place the policies to create the good parents of tomorrow long before they even have their first child.

In effect, we need not only to teach age-appropriate parenting skills for teenagers and those at primary level, but also to see today's toddlers and babies as the parents of the future who require the full set of social and emotional skills, which will ultimately be relevant to raising children of their own. Most of us do this already in our own families, and we need to help ensure it is done in every family. Good parenting must be a central and sustained social value in the UK and not some "nice to have" add-on loitering at the softer end of policing policy.

Where these life skills are absent, especially in an emotionally deprived area like my constituency, they have to be rigorously taught and tested. They are at least as important as anything else on the curriculum, including literacy and numeracy – indeed, they are the prerequisite of all such attainment. However, if in areas like mine they are to be taught effectively, then head teachers and their staff have to be given the space and encouragement to do so. Secondary school heads more than anyone realise the fundamental problems that need to be addressed. Yet all too often head teachers in challenging areas are the ones being most compelled to address the priorities of the centre, ahead of those of the locality.

In my experience, central priorities invariably address the symptoms of failure – for example, by aiming to increase achievement of five A\*-C grades at GCSE – rather than its causes. The only excuse for our highly centralised politics would be that it can deliver and set out a long-term strategy, fund it and stick with it. After 30 years trying centrally imposed initiatives, we must conclude that the evidence base for success is exceptionally thin. Were central government "help" to be a One Nottingham project, we would have pulled its funding many years ago.

Excellent innovations have taken place in this field: some because of the incredible hard work of government ministers and national and local officials; others because of the liberation and release that was given to our political system by the creation of the devolved assembly in Wales and the parliament in Scotland. One day soon we will optimise the creativity elsewhere outside Whitehall and free up the English regions and innovative local councils such as Nottingham to produce handcrafted early intervention answers to their specific local problems. It will become more evident that driving local objectives by centrally devised targets and well-meaning short-term goals actually undermines sustainable progress.

Of course, there will always be a need for immediate programmes to help deliver early relief, but patch and mend is not a strategy. The economic crisis will mean that the centre may – despite itself – have to look at long-term financing and independent local

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delivery as ways forward. One Nottingham, despite being hamstrung by poor funding and carrying a deadweight of central targeting, plan making, strategising and visioning, has none the less pulled together local partners that have performed miracles in pioneering Nottingham as "Early Intervention City". Yet even here, without a broader nationally agreed strategy, outposts like this require a massive daily renewal of energy to ensure that the default position does not swim back over all the progress made.

Jean Gross rightly pointed out in an earlier chapter that some local initiatives have not worked. Unfortunately, the 1,000 local flowers bloomed in very low-quality soil. For them to continue to thrive, they have to be part of a comprehensive strategy drawn from a small group of successful, evidence-based interventions funded for long-term change and not short-term box ticking. If there were instant remedies, they would have been implemented long ago. The responsibility of central government, especially in our highly centralised political culture, is to lay out a platform for the long term and stick with it, even when the electoral cycle and a vociferous media demand instant returns.

Without a broad political and social consensus, it will be impossible to sustain the long-term policies that can break the intergenerational cycle of deprivation and underachievement.

That is why Iain Duncan Smith and I, having authored *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens* with the warm wishes of all parties, are now pursuing the promise made in our publication to try to build an all-party consensus around early intervention. We do not pretend that this will eliminate all differences, but we should be looking for the 95% that we can agree upon on early intervention, rather than the 5% where we disagree.

We took our message to the Labour and Conservative party conferences. By the time this publication is printed, Iain and I will have met with the leaders of the three main political parties as part of our effort to ensure that early intervention is in all party manifestos at the next election.

Most of our seven key proposals for government, found at the conclusion of *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*, are echoed again in this volume. We are both aware of the political positioning that goes on in British politics. However, we are equally conscious that unless we take the risks necessary to build a consensus then vital policies can come and go with the tides of electoral fortune. Making a decent society for all our children is too important for that.

As the contributions from people of all parties and of none have made clear, we are all in this together.

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## **Conclusion 2: the case for centralism**

John Bercow MP, Conservative MP for Buckingham

The religion of localism has taken hold of all the major political parties, and the more fundamentalist versions of it threaten to prove not the salvation but the opium of the people. Let us begin by looking at the two variants of the localist creed.

First, there is the brand of localism that is driven by a belief in the capacity of "choice" to deliver satisfaction to the consumers of public services. This approach stipulates that if you give parents and patients a choice of school or hospital, with money following the child or patient, poor schools or hospitals will have to improve to attract funds or face closure if they fail to improve.

The problem with this approach is that it seeks to apply the principles of the private sector, which lives or dies by them, to the public sector, which can do no such thing. The reality is that, in the public sector, schools cannot go bust. Moreover, there is no catalyst in the form of an impatient shareholder to force a change of leadership with any urgency. Real markets work. Artificial markets do not.

Second, there is the direct democracy version of localism. This theory stipulates that local residents should elect those responsible for organising local services: primary care trusts in health, and local authorities in education. If they do well, the argument goes, we can re-elect them. If they do badly, we turf them out at the subsequent election.

This simplistic approach contains at least two obvious flaws. One is that authorities, unencumbered by centrally imposed duties, will march to the populist tune, seeking to cater to majority concerns and neglecting those of vulnerable but important minorities – such as children with special educational needs or people requiring mental health services. The other flaw in the argument is that minorities, if upset that their needs remain unmet, cannot kick out the unresponsive local authority because they do not have the electoral muscle to do so.

In short, the market and direct democracy versions of localism highlighted above will simply fail to serve those who require a guarantee of early intervention to overcome disadvantage and to fulfil their potential.

Of course, it is easy enough to see why people complain about central government – it works too slowly, it imposes bureaucratic burdens of form filling, and it sometimes does not understand that different communities have different problems requiring different

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solutions. Similarly, it is easy enough to see why people favour local solutions – they can often be devised and implemented more quickly, they are less bureaucratic and they can be tailored to local circumstances.

These arguments are all sound – however, they are not arguments for removing central government from the scene altogether, but rather for defining its role carefully and ensuring that there is a complementary partnership with the localities. If a service is to receive some funding from government, it will both have to be, and potentially benefit from being, the subject of some government rules, guidance or framework. If we accept that this is both commonplace and proper across the public service piece, the argument for a pure go-it-alone localism promptly collapses.

Nowhere is the argument that central government must have a seat at the table more starkly illustrated than in the field of children's services. Where the service straddles the divide between health and education providers, the centre has to set some ground rules if sheer anarchy, and the accompanying postcode lottery, are to be avoided.

Take speech and language services. Primary responsibility lies with the local NHS, but the special educational needs code of practice makes clear that where the NHS fails to provide the service, ultimate "responsibility" for securing and funding speech and language therapy for pupils with special needs falls to the local authority. The point here is not that this arrangement is perfect, but that parliament has rightly taken a view on the subject. Speech, language and communication services necessarily involve education and health providers alike.

Effective joint commissioning is required to cater to the needs of children and young people. Both local authorities and primary care trusts must commit to such commissioning. Both must devote resources to it. Both must work to identify outcomes and the means to deliver them. Yet in all too many areas of the country, neither the local authority nor the primary care trust is kick starting the process and, realistically, they will do so only if the law, guidance or funding arrangement developed by central government obliges or incentivises them to do so. It might be bossy, entail the imposition of targets and constrain the discretion of local agencies, but it will very probably be a bossiness, target or constraint that parents of children waiting for vital therapy will heartily welcome.

Take the still more serious case of a person afflicted by a condition such as cerebral palsy, who needs a communication aid in order to express his or her hopes, fears, wishes or needs. From 2002 until 2006, the Communication Aids Project provided £5 million per annum of ring-fenced funding for expert assessment, communication equipment and

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training for school-aged children. It was always designed as a short-term programme and ministers hoped that local authorities would then create viable local or regional models of provision. They have not done so, almost certainly because there was not a critical mass of local parents or professionals demanding that such provision should be a priority for hard-pressed budgets with other strong claims upon them.

About 15 local authorities have service-level agreements with the specialist communication centres in order to meet the needs of those who depend upon communication aids. Most authorities have no such agreements and no dedicated funding for communication aids. It is not a commissioning priority, and parents who want funding for communication equipment have to wage Kafkaesque battles to obtain it. Once again, ring-fenced funding and an element of central prescription in the form of minimum standards or a core offer would not go amiss.

In truth, we should cease to behave as though there is a great intellectual battle between centrifugal and centripetal forces in which one must emerge as victor and the other as vanquished. The reality is more prosaic. We need both – central guidance and funding accompanied by local know-how and initiative. In other words, what we need is a partnership. Such a partnership, like almost any other, will involve tensions, prove fractious and require some give and take. Yet the partnership must survive and prosper, because our children need both partners and the partners need each other.

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## Conclusion 3

Jean Gross, Director of the Every Child a Chance Trust

Once upon a time, a man was standing on a bridge. As he looked down, he saw a body floating in the water beneath him. He rushed down and managed to pull the body out and resuscitate the person. Next day the same thing happened ... and this time not just one body, but many. He shouted for help, and soon there were four or five people helping him pull the bodies out and get them breathing again.

Yet still the bodies kept coming, and being pulled out. There were too many to cope with. "Go down the river and get more help," said the people to the man. He set off, but then stopped. "No," he said, "I'm not going to fetch more help to fish them out. I'm going to go upstream to find the b... who is pushing them in."

This monograph, like its predecessor *Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*, has shown us how we can go upstream and tackle at source the problems of our most difficult and fractured communities. It has made the case for tackling those problems in children's primary school years, as well as in the pre-school period. There may be differing views about how to implement an early intervention policy - how much should be centrally determined, and how much left to local choice. But there is total agreement that such a policy is necessary. Solutions are within our grasp.

Imagine that every £1 spent on the academies programme was matched by £1 spent in the primary schools feeding into an academy - on structured language programmes, on Reading Recovery, on the Numbers Count programme, on the teaching of social and emotional skills, on school-home support workers and on parenting groups. Such a system would pay for itself within five years in savings to academy budgets for special needs, behaviour and truancy. It would pay for itself many times over as the children involved grow to adulthood. So far, so obvious - but this kind of investment is not happening now.

Politicians can make it happen. In *Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens* all parties were asked consider seven simple commitments as they develop their election manifestos. We repeat them here.

### 1. The manifesto framework

We request that a clear commitment to pursue an early intervention strategy should be made in parties' election manifestos and that the party leaders should all make an unequivocal public commitment to the intergenerational change that early intervention needs.

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## 2. A research base

We request a commitment that a future UK government commission a long-term study comparing the development of cohorts of children with and without early intervention to inform the policy as it develops.

## 3. A national policy assessment centre

We ask for a pledge to create a national policy assessment centre to assess early intervention policies in the UK and to recommend the most robust and sustainable.

## 4. Local government

We request that the Local Government Association, in co-operation with central government, should host an early intervention leaders' network within the UK.

## 5. The comprehensive spending review

To help place early intervention at the heart of the public policy debate, we ask each party leader to commit to theming their first comprehensive spending review, the UK's three-year spending plan, "Early Intervention CSR", so that steps can be taken now to initiate serious financial reorientation and investment alongside the serious Treasury research and planning that always precede a CSR.

## 6. Local early intervention vision for each area

We request that central government asks every local council and/or local strategic partnership to produce a short early intervention vision for their area, learning from best available practice.

## 7. A Treasury study

We urge a modestly funded, multi-departmental study, led by the Treasury and Cabinet Office research, to devise a new form of financial instrument to fund early intervention sustainably by releasing for use now some of the massive future savings that will be generated long term.

These requests are modest and practical. The consequences are potentially transformational. We urge politicians, both local and national, to embrace the evidence-based early intervention programmes that are the only sure way to give every child a chance to succeed in life – no matter what their circumstances.

