

Evaluation of the Full Service Extended Schools Initiative, Second Year: Thematic Papers

Executive Summary

Introduction

These thematic papers present selected findings from the second year (school year 2004-5) of the national evaluation of Full Service Extended Schools (FSES), part of the Government's overall vision for all schools to offer a core set of extended activities by 2010. The FSES initiative seeks to support the development in every local authority (LA) area of one or more schools which provide a comprehensive range of services on a single site, including access to health services, adult learning and community activities as well as study support and 8am to 6pm wrap-around childcare.

The FSES initiative specifies the range of services to be provided on the school site and introduces a particular emphasis on the co-location of services provided by other, non-educational agencies. By so doing, it takes further a series of developments in extended schools which began in 2001, but which themselves build on a long history of community-oriented schooling in this country. In the first year, 61 projects were funded at between £93,000 and £162,000 per annum, decreasing annually for a further two years. Most projects comprised individual primary, secondary or special FSESs, though some included more than one school. All were located in Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) areas. In the second year, these were joined by 45 schools (25 in BIP areas and 20 from non-BIP areas). These schools were funded at a similar level to the year 1 schools. They were more likely to include clusters of schools than was the case in year 1.

Key findings

- There is good evidence that FSESs can have significant positive effects on children, adults and families. They can also be associated with benefits for schools in terms of improvements on performance measures (such as student attainment and exclusion rates) and increased intake numbers.
- All schools joining the initiative in the second year expected FSESs to lead to raised levels of student achievement in the long term, and were developing their provision with this in mind.
- On the basis of the evidence so far available there is every reason to persevere with the implementation and development of extended provision.
- Schools joining the initiative in the second year were likely to adopt strategic approaches and engage in high levels of collaboration with a range of partners.
- FSESs placed childcare high on their agendas, but prioritised those aspects which corresponded most closely to what they saw as the purposes of their full service extended provision as a whole.
- FSESs were able to take individuals and families through processes of change which re-engaged them with learning and had significant impacts on their life chances.
- It was not clear that the positive outcomes from FSES work were sufficiently widespread to transform whole communities, nor did the benefits for schools materialise in every case.

- FSESs experienced tensions between their long term approaches and the more immediate demands of the attainment agenda.
- Some schools experienced problems in engaging their key partners. There were also problems for FSESs in securing the sustainability of their provision, and, in some cases, making appropriate transport arrangements for users.
- The exchange of information between projects is likely to be important to overcoming practical problems.
- There is also work to do in finding ways of engaging the most vulnerable and marginalised people, deciding what it is realistic for the school to achieve alone and in partnership, finding ways of seeing local people as active partners, and reconciling the long-term aims of the FSES with the continuing need for raised pupil attainment.

Evaluation aims and methods

The evaluation of FSESs is taking place over the three years for which the initiative is funded. It aims to:

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

The evaluation is achieving these aims through a multi-strand approach. Activities, process issues and early outcomes are mapped through interviews with school, local authority and partner organisation personnel in a sample of projects that joined the initiative at different points in time. A similar exercise is being undertaken with a sample of schools that are comparable to FSESs in important respects, but are not part of the initiative. In addition, the provision of childcare is mapped in this way through a specific evaluation strand. Outcomes are evaluated in three ways:

- through an analysis of school performance data across all FSES projects;
- through a cost-benefit analysis of a sample of projects; and
- through a ‘theory of change’ evaluation in a sample of projects.

This last aspect involves working with projects to articulate their understanding of how their actions will bring about changes for pupils, families and communities. Evidence is then sought as to whether the changes on the ground match those predicted by this theory.

The thematic papers presented here summarise interim findings from the mapping work with 11 projects that joined the initiative in its second year, the childcare study with 5 projects that joined in year one and 3 from year two, and theory of change work with 12 projects, all of which joined the initiative in its first year.

Findings

Outcomes from FSESs

There is anecdotal evidence from the mapping exercise and childcare study, and much more robust evidence from the theory of change work, that FSESs can have significant positive effects on children, adults and families. Specifically, there is initial evidence that FSES approaches can be associated with benefits for schools in terms of improvements on

performance measures (such as student attainment and exclusion rates) and increased intake numbers.

The theories of change held by FSES leaders tend to focus on the role of schools in engaging with children, families and community members, overcoming the ‘barriers to learning’ which they experience, developing their commitment to learning and their sense of themselves as learners, and generating outcomes in terms of attainment, accreditation and better prospects in the labour market. Their expectation is that these processes will transform cultural aspirations and expectations across communities.

The evidence so far gathered tends to validate these theories in important ways. It shows that FSES provision can indeed take individuals and families through processes of change which re-engage them with learning and have significant impacts on their life chances. Relatively large numbers of children and adults may experience benefits from FSES provision. However, it is less certain at this stage that the changes and outcomes are sufficiently widespread to transform whole communities, or that the benefits for schools materialise in every case. Because of the way that they think about and respond to local needs, the different foci of provision in different FSESs also mean that it is not possible to identify different models of FSES provision which offer alternative ways of pursuing similar aims.

Developments in the characteristics of FSESs

Without exception, projects joining the initiative in its second year regarded the delivery of FSES provision to be a precursor to raised levels of student achievement. However, FSES leaders believed this would not happen in the short term. Most hoped to achieve this by putting support mechanisms in place to help tackle ‘barriers to learning’ and by introducing or developing pupil engagement strategies aimed at raising levels of aspirations, motivation and self-esteem. FSES leaders also recognized the potential for FSESs to meet the holistic needs of children and those of families and the wider community.

While strategic and collaborative approaches were found in FSESs joining in year 1, these were somewhat more likely to be found in projects joining in year 2. The importance of clear management structures within the project was recognised and the work of school- and/or local authority-based co-ordinators was seen as key to this.

Project leaders saw the importance of embedding their work within the framework provided by the Every Child Matters agenda, and sought to co-ordinate it with local developments – notably, of Sure Start Children’s Centres and Children’s Trusts – and with the work of other agencies and organisations. Consultation with service users was seen as essential. Second year projects were more likely than those from the first year to comprise clusters of schools, and there were examples of projects in special schools and located in rural areas.

Although project leaders believed that FSES provision would ultimately impact on attainment, some tensions were evident between the short-term and tightly-focused demands of the attainment agenda and the longer-term and more-wide ranging approach of their family and community agenda. Likewise, although some projects achieved high levels of collaboration with other agencies and organisations, others reported difficulties in engaging all key partners. There were also concerns about the sustainability of provision once DfES

funding ends, though strategies to address this were being developed. For projects in rural areas and for special schools, inadequate transport was seen as a barrier to user access.

Childcare in FSESs

The evidence gathered so far suggests that FSESs place childcare, broadly defined, high on their agendas, and that a range of provisions has developed as a result of the FSES initiative. This means that the 8am-6pm goal is close to being reached, either on the school site or within the wider community of school clusters, Children's Centres and other private providers.

All the schools visited offered some form of care before school, after school and in the holidays, though there were gaps in times of availability and age ranges catered for. Extending provision from 5-6pm was a problem for some, as was continuous childcare in the holidays. There were some gaps in provision for very young children and for older children. Childcare for pre-schoolers was seen as presenting few advantages for most schools serving the 11+ age group, though primary schools seem to find such on-site care easier to provide.

Schools faced a range of challenges in providing childcare. Finding appropriate and attractive provision for the 11+ age range and ensuring sustainability were both especially problematic. The particular form childcare took in different schools was dependent on how the school understood its core educational role and the purposes of its FSES provision. This was reflected in a tendency to develop those aspects of provision which met its own perceived needs and by a relative absence of consultation with users and others. In the light of this, some schools found the term 'childcare' confusing and problematic. Some secondary schools did not see themselves as providing childcare but instead focused on study support or 'enrichment' activities and did not feel engaged by the Government's childcare agenda. However, for others, childcare and study support were part of the school agenda, as being for the benefit of children, parents and the community and as such was seen as central to the extended schools initiative.

Issues for development

It is clear that FSESs can be established successfully, and can generate positive outcomes for children and adults, with benefits for the schools themselves. On the basis of the evidence so far available, then, there is every reason to persevere with the implementation and development of extended provision.

Some FSESs face practical challenges in terms of cementing partnerships with other agencies and organisations, ensuring the sustainability of their provision, and, in some cases, ensuring that there are adequate transport links to enable local people to access provision. There are also issues around the development of comprehensive childcare provision. These challenges should not be underestimated, though the diversity of FSESs means that problems for one FSES have sometimes been solved by other FSESs elsewhere. The exchange of information, facilitated by The Extended Schools Support Service, may be particularly helpful in this respect.

More significant are the challenges FSESs face in clarifying what they hope to achieve, how they expect to achieve it, how their work relates to that of other child, family and community

agencies, and how their aims relate to the issues faced by local people. Addressing these challenges may involve:

- finding ways of engaging the most vulnerable and marginalised people as well as those who are easier to reach;
- deciding what it is realistic for the school to achieve alone, and how those achievements might be multiplied through the sorts of strategic and partnership approaches that are increasingly in evidence;
- finding ways of understanding the underlying issues facing communities, while seeing local people as active partners in addressing those issues; and reconciling the long-term aims of the FSES with the continuing need for raised pupil attainment.