Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment - Appreciative Inquiry

Brief and Scope of the Work

Introduction

Educational disadvantage is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. Some of the key causes include:

Socioeconomic status: Socioeconomic status is one of the strongest predictors of educational attainment. Students from low-income families are more likely to experience a range of disadvantages that can negatively impact their education, such as:

- Limited access to resources: Low-income families may not be able to afford educational resources such as books, computers, or tutoring.

- Poorer health and nutrition: Children from low-income families are more likely to experience health problems and malnutrition, which can affect their ability to learn.

- Less stable home environments: Low-income families may be more likely to experience homelessness, eviction, or other forms of housing instability, which can disrupt a child's education.

Stockton-on-Tees already goes some way to showcasing why the socioeconomic gap does not always lead to poorer results. Unfortunately, the results although stronger than the majority of other North East regions, and above the national average, still demonstrate an education gap for disadvantaged students in the most socioeconomically deprived areas.

Race and ethnicity: Students from BME backgrounds are more likely to experience educational disadvantage than their white peers. This is due to a number of factors, including:

- Lack of representation: Students from BME Backgrounds may not see themselves reflected in the curriculum or in the teaching staff, which can make them feel like they don't belong in school.

While this is an area of increase, particularly in recent years with a growing refugee community as well as economic migrants filling gaps in the NHS and care system. Statistically this is still a small part of the education community and is less easy to define in terms of difference.

Gender: There are also gender gaps in educational attainment, with boys or girls outperforming the other group in certain subjects or at certain levels of education. For example, girls tend to outperform boys in reading and writing, while boys tend to outperform girls in maths and science. These gaps can be due to a number of factors, including:

- Gender stereotypes: Gender stereotypes can discourage girls from pursuing STEM fields and discourage boys from pursuing humanities fields.

- Teacher bias: Teachers may unconsciously hold biases that favour one gender over the other, which can affect their expectations of students and their teaching methods.

- Socialisation: Boys and girls are often socialised differently, which can affect their attitudes towards school and their academic performance.

While there are some excellent examples of schools creating STEM opportunities for girls or creatively tackling 'girls into maths' programmes; the divide is still marked and this will need a greater buy in from, home, school and businesses.

Special education needs and disability: Students with special education needs or disabilities are more likely to experience educational disadvantage than their peers without SEND. This is due to a number of factors, including:

- Lack of access to appropriate services: Students with SEND may not have access to the services and supports they need to succeed in school.

- Inclusion and accommodation: Schools may not be inclusive or accommodating of students with SEND, which can make it difficult for them to participate in the same activities as their peers.

- Teacher training: Teachers may not be adequately trained to identify and support students with SEND, which can lead to them falling behind in their studies.

Challenges in SEND funding mean that schools need to support more than many feel comfortable with. This leads to behaviour challenges and sometimes suspensions and exclusion. Linked to this poor attendance, often perceived by families to be anxiety, leads to poorer educational outcomes.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the project will be work collaboratively with schools and partners to explore what good practice already exists and what could still be done to support of families, establish innovative ways of working and make better use of resources through a renewed approach. The review will focus specifically on the following contributing factors:

- Attendance

- Communication

Early support will be investigated through a separative appreciative inquiry.

The review will seek to:

- Improve identification of disadvantaged, CIOC and SEN pupils
- Better understand the issues around disadvantaged, CIOC and SEN pupils' educational outcomes including at very local level
- Identify what more can be done locally to tackle these issues
- Assess how well current policies, services and interventions address the issues and identify potential gaps
- Identify the changes needed to policies, services and interventions based on best practice, national recommendations, evidence base and data
- Establish what more should be done to provide support in early years, in particular to new mothers/families
- Review the effectiveness of the strategic and local approaches in place to tackle lower disadvantaged, CIOC and SEND outcomes
- Identify how the Council can, together with its partners, collectively respond to tackle the issues identified

Methodology

An Appreciative Inquiry approach has been adopted in order to promote a positive mindset:

- valuing strengths rather than focusing on deficiencies
- identifying what is valued and effective and building on that.
- involving all the stakeholders to work together to agree solutions
- sharing the responsibility with all stakeholders for making the solutions happen

This strength-based approach values everyone and everything. AI values everyone's contribution and enables all participants to connect through identifying a shared purpose and communicating in a positive way together.

This Appreciative Inquiry has accessed a range of stakeholders across Stockton in order to capture the varying needs of the different communities.

The Appreciative Inquiry will involve the following stages:

1. Discovery

- Identify strengths: What are the strengths of the current system? What are the strengths of the students, teachers, schools and communities that are successfully closing the attainment gap?

- Identify successes: What are some examples of successful efforts to close the attainment gap? What can we learn from these successes?

- Identify opportunities: What are the opportunities to close the attainment gap in the future? What resources and supports are available to help us achieve this goal?

2. Dream

- Envision an ideal future: What would the education system look like if the attainment gap were closed? What would be the benefits for students, teachers, schools, and society as a whole?

- Create a shared vision: Bring together stakeholders from all levels of the wider education and support systems to create a shared vision for closing the attainment gap.

- Develop a plan: Develop a plan for achieving the shared vision. The plan should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

3. Design

- Identify strategies: What are the strategies that will be most effective in closing the attainment gap? What are the evidence-based practices that have been shown to be successful?

- Develop interventions: Develop interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of the students, teachers, and schools that are most affected by the attainment gap.

- Create a supportive environment: Create a supportive environment for all students, teachers, and schools. This includes providing adequate resources, creating a positive school climate, and fostering a culture of high expectations.

4. Destiny

- Implement the plan: Put the plan into action. This includes providing training and support for teachers, implementing the interventions, and monitoring progress.

- Celebrate successes: Celebrate successes along the way. This will help to maintain momentum and motivation.

- Make adjustments: Make adjustments to the plan as needed. This is an ongoing process that will require ongoing evaluation and feedback.

Additional Considerations:

- Equity: Equity should be at the forefront of all efforts to close the attainment gap. This means ensuring that all students have access to the same opportunities and resources, regardless of their background or circumstances.

- Sustainability: The interventions and strategies that are implemented should be sustainable in the long term. This means that they should be able to be maintained even with changes in leadership, funding, or other factors.

- Community engagement: Community engagement is essential to closing the attainment gap. This means involving parents, families, and community members, including the Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector, in the planning and implementation of interventions.

Attendance

School attendance plays a significant role in influencing the educational attainment gap. Research consistently demonstrates that pupils who miss more school tend to have lower academic achievement compared to their peers who attend school regularly. This holds true for students from all backgrounds, but the impact is particularly pronounced for those from disadvantaged groups.

Several factors contribute to the importance of school attendance for educational attainment. Firstly, pupils who miss school lose out on valuable learning time, potentially falling behind in their studies and facing difficulties catching up. Secondly, absenteeism can lead to disengagement from school and a loss of motivation to learn, creating a downward spiral of poor attendance and subpar academic performance. Thirdly, missing school can deprive pupils of essential social and emotional development opportunities, limiting their interactions with peers and teachers and increasing the likelihood of experiencing isolation and loneliness.

School attendance stands out as a key factor that can be effectively addressed through policy and intervention.

By enhancing school attendance, we can contribute to closing the educational attainment gap and ensuring that all pupils have the opportunity to succeed.

A series of workshops will be facilitated using an Appreciative Inquiry approach to engage internal services, partners, VCS and schools, parents and children to investigate strategies to improve school attendance and reduce the educational attainment gap through:

- Addressing Attendance Barriers: Identify and address obstacles to attendance, such as transportation, health, and family issues.

- Early Intervention: Identify pupils at risk of missing school early on and provide them with supportive services.

- Positive School Climate: Foster a welcoming and supportive school environment for all students.

- Engaging Instruction: Offer challenging and engaging learning experiences for students.

- Strong Relationships: Build strong relationships between pupils, teachers, and parents.

Communication

Recent research to understand the challenges across Stockton for our disadvantaged pupils in primary and secondary schools evidences Early Language Development and Communication are challenges which are strengthening in our schools. Both these challenges impact vocabulary development, oracy and literacy. As a result pupils may find it more difficult to articulate their feelings which can result in more challenging behaviour.

Attendance
1. **What are the barriers to attendance/reasons for absence?** 2. **How can absence be eliminated?** 3. **How can school provide a welcome and supportive school environment for pupils and their families?** 4. **How can relationships between pupils, teachers and parents be strengthened?**
Stakeholder Event
Oakwood Centre on Friday on 8 March 2024 9.30am   Coffee and registration 10.00am   Welcome from Elaine Redding (Interim Director of Children's Services) 10.05am   Anthony Douglas – Key note speech 10.20am   Presentation - Lorna Nichol – Children North East   Poverty Proofing the School Day and Beyond 10.45am   Workshops and Coffee 12.15pm   Lunch and Networking (Mentimeter interactive) 12.45pm   Presentation – Feedback from Engagement and focus on attendance (Vanessa Housley, Mandie Rowlands, Sharon Stevens) 1.30pm   Workshops and Coffee 2.45pm   Anthony Douglas – Plenary and Closing Remarks 3.00pm   Close

Communication

1. **What are the reasons for low levels of communication/ language development?**
2. **What are the impacts of low levels of communication/ language development for our students?**
3. **How can low levels of communication/ language development (oracy, vocabulary be eliminated?**
   o **In early years**
   o **In primary**
   o **In secondary**
4. **How can relationships with parent/carers, teachers, business and industry be strengthened?**

Stakeholder Event

Oakwood Centre on Friday on 22 March 2024

10.30am   Coffee and registration

11.00am   Anthony Douglas – Key note speech

11.15am   Presentation - Lorna Nichol – Children North East
                     Poverty Proofing the School Day and Beyond

11.30am   Workshops and Coffee

12.30pm   Lunch and Networking (Mentimeter interactive)

1.00pm   Presentation – Feedback from Engagement
(Vanessa Housley, Mandie Rowlands)

1.30pm   Presentation – Communication: Why it matters (Gill McCleave)

1.30pm   Workshops and Coffee

2.45pm   Anthony Douglas – Plenary and Closing Remarks

3.00pm   Close

Stakeholders

Schools – suitable reps:
  ➢ Head Teachers
  ➢ School Pastoral Teams
  ➢ Behaviour Leads
  ➢ Attendance Officers

- Lindsay Oyston – Egglescliffe Secondary
- Sue Skilcorn – Mill Lane
- Richard Henderson – Northfield
- Rob Birtwistle – Fairfield
- Chris Twiby – Crooksbarn

Anthony Douglas CBE

SEN Team
Claire Tiffany (Sharon Stevens acting up)

0-19 Service
Aishah Waithe

Virtual School
Janet Wilson

Early Help Team
Mandie Rowlands

Community Engagement
Sarah Robinson

FSOT
Haleen Ghafoor, Sophie Haste, Daniel Forest

Parent Carer Forum
Emma Zenaj
e.zenaj@parentcarerforum.co.uk

Amanda Bailey
North East Child Poverty Commissions

Children North East
Lorna Nichol/ Jenny Redford

Danielle Elsbury
Sendias

Family Hubs
Anthony Boden

Foodbanks/ Baby Banks
Clare Branson, Lauren Blommel

Youth Clubs
Mandie Rowlands

Catalyst
Jon Carling, Karen Jessup, Claire Gamble

Sarah Robinson – Engagement Team

Public Health
Sarah Bowman Abouna
Aishah Waithe

Eastern Ravens
Honeywell, Simon <Simon@easternravenstrust.org>
and see below

Thirteen Group

Matt Forest, Chief Executive

Literary Trust
rab.ferguson@literacytrust.org.uk

Alison Sutherland
DCS

Mental Health Support Team

Elisha Smith
Matthew Sampson
Nicole Wilson
Janet Wilson
Joanne Mills
Simon White
Mark White

Gill McCleave

Youth United Stockton (YUS) providers:
- CornerHouse Youth Project   Debbie Jones debbie@cornerhouseyouthproject.co.uk
- BCT Aspire   Patrick Wilson patrick.wilson@bctaspire.org.uk
- Eastern Ravens Trust   Tracey Hamilton traceyhamilton@easternravenstrust.org
- Hardwick in Partnership Maureen Hiles hardwickpartnership@hotmail.com
- Five Lamps   Nichola Storr nicholastorr@fivelamps.org.uk

Family Action. Louise Anderson louise.anderson@family-action.org.uk

The Power of Women

Library Service

Faith Groups, BME, Refugee/ Asylum Seekers

Family Action – Sarah Collins – Service Lead sarah.collins@family-action.org.uk
                    Dawn Harper – Volunteer and Community Engagement Practitioner
dawn.harper@family-action.org.uk
                    Louise Anderson - Volunteer and Community Engagement Coordinator
Louise.Anderson@family-action.org.uk

Power of Women – Claire Preston - clairepreston@powerofwomen.org.uk

Youth United Stockton Alliance:

- Cornerhouse Youth Project – Debbie Jones debbie@cornerhouseyouthproject.co.uk
- BCT Aspire Patrick Wilson patrick.wilson@bctaspire.org.uk
- Hardwick in Partnership – Maureen Hiles Hardwick In Partnership
  hardwickpartnership@hotmail.com
- Five Lamps nicholastorr@fivelamps.org.uk
- Eastern Ravens- Tracey Hamilton traceyhamilton@easternravenstrust.org

Refugee Futures – Heather Petch heather.petch@refugeefutures.org

HEP/HAF programmes – Mandie Rowlands is a good contact at SBC, or at Catalyst Rebekah Jennings rebekah.jennings@catalyststockton.org

Alison Gerrard (Assistant Headteacher at Egglescliffe Secondary School)

Other Engagement

Parent and Pupil Voice Survey – Vanessa Housley
Four primary and four secondary, including EMS

Digital Survey across schools and children's services – co-ordinated by Mandie Rowlands

Workshop with health colleagues

Parent/ Carer Forum survey – co-ordinated by Emma Zenaj

Other Engagement discussed with:
Family Hubs – Anthony Boden
Foodbanks/ Baby Banks – Clare Branson
Youth Clubs – Mandie Rowlands
YUS Patrick Wilson
Catalyst – Jon Carling
Community Engagement – Sarah Robinson
Grant Glendinning Grant.Glendinning@the-etc.ac.uk