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The Impact of Leadership and Targeted Interventions to Close the Achievement Gap of Disadvantaged Pupils: A Case Study

Feyisa Demie*
Durham University, UK

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Abstract: This research explores the impact of effective leadership and targeted interventions in closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils in primary schools. Findings suggest that the case study schools use effective school leaders and a range of targeted interventions including early intervention, small group additional teaching, one-to-one tuition, peer tutoring, parental involvement, booster class, mastery learning, pastoral care, and enrichment programmes. Each of the above success factors and intervention strategies was explored in detail in the paper. The overall conclusions of this study are that the case study schools have closed the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers through providing effective school leaders and the use of a range of effective intervention strategies. We would suggest that the case study schools' stories of how they have closed the achievement gap through providing strong school leaders and the use of targeted interventions are of local and national significance. Our research also suggests the possibilities for further research. The recommendations from the study are that there is a need to replicate and expand this research with a larger sample of the study, in order to explore in detail what works in schools.

Keywords: *Achievement gap, disadvantaged pupils, effective leadership, pupil premium, targeted interventions strategy.*

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Introduction

There is a widespread concern about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils who are entitled to free school meals and their peers. This research explores the impact of effective leadership and targeted interventions in raising attainment and closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils. For the purpose of this research the term '*disadvantaged pupils refer to those pupils from low income backgrounds who are eligible for free school meals. The merit of free school meals is that it provides a clear and comprehensive means of differentiating between two broad groups of FSM pupils and non- FSM pupils.*' (Demie, 2018c, p.6)

In the next sections that follows we look into literature reviews, methodology, and the key findings on the impact of effective leadership and targeted interventions in closing the achievement gap in schools. This is followed by discussion, conclusions and recommendations for policy makers and future research.

Literature review

Previous research shows the achievement gaps in England associated with socioeconomic status (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; Demie & Mclean, 2016, 2019; Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2008). Available research evidence in this area shows that poverty is the biggest single indicator of underachievement (DCSF, 2008, 2009; Demie, 2018c; Ofsted, 2013; Hutchinson et al., 2019). Of particular concern is that children '34% of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieving 5+A*-C GCSEs including English and maths, compared to 61% of better-off pupils. There remains a significant gap between FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils (Demie, 2019a, 2019b; Demie & Mclean, 2019). This gap is also true at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2). The Department for Education (DfE) data shows that 75% of FSM pupils reached the 'expected level' in the national tests in reading, writing, and maths average compared to 89% of non-FSM. In addition, pupils eligible for free school meals also have lower rates of progress compared to non-FSM (see DfE, 2014). There are now a number of evidence that disadvantaged pupils are underachieving. The UK and international evidence suggest that

* **Correspondence:**
Feyisa Demie, Durham University, School of Education, UK. ✉ feyisa.demie@dur.ac.uk

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disadvantaged pupils face at school a number of problems including poverty across generations, lack of parental engagement, and negative attitudes of education (Campbell, 2020; Demie, 2019a, 2019b; Demie & Mclean, 2016; Mongon & Chapman, 2008; Ofsted, 2009). Despite average overall improvements in test scores, the 'attainment gap' widens at all key stages, with pupils eligible for FSM falling behind non-FSM pupils. Other research evidence also shows family income is the key determinates for school achievement

Recently the government has also signalled its intention to tackle the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils on free school meals and their peers through the use of pupil premium funding. The pupil premium is additional funding given to schools in England to close the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Schools received £1320 for primary-aged pupils and £935 for the secondary-aged pupils in 2014/15 and £2.5 billion by the government every year to support pupil premium pupils' (DfE, 2014).

Research also shows that there are now a number of evidence that poverty can be challenged in schools serving disadvantaged communities. There are a number of these schools that have defied the association of poverty and low attainment through effective use of pupil premium for targeted intervention (Campbell, 2020; Demie & Mclean, 2016, 2019; Demie, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Mongon & Chapman, 2008; Morris & Dobson, 2020; Ofsted, 2009). For example, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2019) research revealed schools are recently raising attainment through effective use of intervention strategies such as effective feedback, metacognition, reading comprehension strategies, peer tutoring, early intervention, one-to-one tutoring, mastery learning, phonics, and small-group tuition to support disadvantaged pupils. However, another study suggests that schools are selective in what they use, and despite high impact in the EEF (2019) research, strategies such as 'Metacognition, collaborative learning was less popular amongst the school's survey for the research' (DfE, 2015, p. 51).

There is now a need to find out practical strategies for schools that make a difference to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. However, there is little research carried out to study the impact of effective leadership and targeted interventions to close the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils.

Methodology

Research Aims

This research article explores the impact of leadership and targeted interventions in closing the achievement gap by asking two research:

- What is the impact of school leadership and targeted intervention in closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers?
- Does it have any implications for policy, practice, and research?

Research Design

The research is a case study in one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse local authorities in London. Recent statistics suggest 85% of pupils belong to Black and other ethnic minority communities and 34% of the pupils are also eligible for free school meals and 47% are pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). The school's deprivation indicators are the highest percentile of free school meals (FSM) eligibility. Between 39% to 60% in the case study schools were eligible for additional pupil premium (PP) funding to support disadvantaged pupils (Demie, 2019a). As noted by previous research (see DfE, 2015; EEF, 2019; Morris & Dobson, 2020), school leaders were influenced by a number of strategies to spend pupil premium funding to tackle disadvantages in their schools.

The leadership of the case study schools also has identified the challenge for school's pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and their families face and they are using the pupil premium to tackle poverty.

A case study approach was used was carried out in selected schools to study the strategies used to raise achievement and narrow the gap. The school was selected base on criteria of the high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and good KS2 results.

To gain improve our understanding of the issues, we conducted a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews of headteachers, deputy heads, classroom teachers, EAL teachers, SENCos, teaching assistants, and learning support teachers.

Headteachers in the selected schools were asked to select at random the respondents who have closely worked in the schools on targeted interventions. In this sense, I wanted the school to take the decision of who they would select to participate as they know better individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about the impact of pupil premium and how it is used for targeted interventions. A list of participants' names was sent to me promptly via email and arrangement was then made for the interview through the school.

What is also an advantage for the research is that the researcher had worked as a school advisor for over 10 years with the case study schools and have an appropriate contact across a range of settings and with varying experiences of teaching and leadership.

The interviews were carried out during April 2018 and March 2019 and were conducted in the case study schools. It is a small-scale study designed as an in-depth scoping exercise in order to examine some of the issues in relation to the factors responsible for closing the gap in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

All ethical issues were considered during the interview. The respondents were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. The findings are discussed in the sections below.

There is now a need to find out practical strategies for schools that make a difference to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. However, there is little research carried out to study the impact of effective leadership and targeted interventions to close the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils.

In the context of this research, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data was considered of equal importance. In examining the overall impact of the use of premium it was possible to draw on Key Stage Two (KS2) results that are highly accurate. This helped to compare the performance of pupil premium or non-pupil premium pupils using comparative statistics and percentages. We have also used the Ofsted inspection data report for the schools to calculate the percentage of schools getting outstanding, good, and better grades for the case study schools involved in our study. Again, the quality of Ofsted statistical data is also of a high standard and reliable as it is based on inspection evidence of the schools.

The analysis of the qualitative data is always a challenge. The task facing me was what to do with the interview findings and responses from all the respondents in this study. A number of authors have provided useful advice on how to make sense of qualitative data. For example, Cohen et al. (2007),

> "Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for, and explaining the data; in short making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, nothing patterns, themes, categories, and regularities" p.461).

They also stated there is no single or correct way to analyse qualitative data. Most qualitative researchers analyse their own data, and we are encouraged to draw on whatever understanding of analysis we bring from our previous work. This enabled me in this case to work out my own methods for analysis and to draw on my own experience working with the schools over 15 years where I have undertaken qualitative research.

Equally, I would argue the data collected and analysed from the qualitative interviews were also reliable and valid to draw conclusions and implications. The data for this study is gathered with the understanding that the identities of people and places would remain anonymous. All names in this study have changed to codes to ensure confidentiality. I interrogated both the questions and the interviews in order to draw out conclusions and the implications. The data gathered was also confidential and I felt I entered into the relationship through the interview meeting, as I transcribed, analysed, and interpreted what had been shared by the interviews. I allowed plenty of time and energy to process and analyse the findings. As I listened to the interview many times during the analysis, it became an enjoyable activity to write the article and share the evidence with researchers and policymakers.

The qualitative data collected were also carefully checked and analysed. We have undertaken this reliability check through meticulous record-keeping, careful transcribing, respondent data validation by inviting participants to comment on the interview transcript with questions when conflicting evidence emerged from the field. I tried to present an open and honest picture of the circumstances in which this research took place. I would argue that qualitative study was best suited for the present study and it tells reliable and accurate the story and the views of teachers, school leaders on the impact of the use of effective leadership and targeted interventions to close the achievement gap. With the help of the interview and meticulous observations in schools, it becomes possible to generate reliable data which are guided by informants themselves and to arrive at more accurate and reliable interpretations that are used in this research.

Results

The first question we asked during the case study and focus group approach research was What are the key factors in closing the achievement gap? 'What are the targeted interventions that have been useful in closing the gaps?' The finding from the case study shows schools had effective leadership and also used pupil premium funding grants for targeted intervention. Teaching and learning were most of the school money used. The popular intervention strategies in the case study schools reported were 'small group additional teaching, one-to-one tuition, use of the strongest teachers to teach English and Maths for intervention groups, use of well-trained teaching assistants (TAs), booster classes, early intervention, mastery learning, pastoral care, and enrichment programmes e.g., trips to cultural venues. The evidence from the schools suggests that these targeted interventions and strong leadership have undoubtedly had an impact on closing attainment gaps for eligible pupils. These are discussed in detail below:

Providing Strong and Effective Leadership

One of the key factors that link all the case study schools' success in closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils is providing strong leadership that is outstanding. The case study schools show many of the characteristics of successful schools nationally (Demie, 2019a; Demie & Mclean, 2019; Mongon & Chapman, 2008; Ofsted, 2009). The schools recruited and kept many exceptional school leaders. These include teachers and other staff and governors. There are high expectations in all the case study schools.

Figure 1 shows that the case study schools have 'good and outstanding' leadership by the headteachers and senior management teams in terms of Ofsted criteria. Leaders are described as 'inspirational' and 'visionary with a strong moral purpose to drive pupils' achievement. There is also high-quality staff in all schools who have a great passion to raise standards. teamwork across each school and managers at all levels work towards the schools' aims to close the achievement gap. There are high expectations in all schools and no excuses culture in all schools.

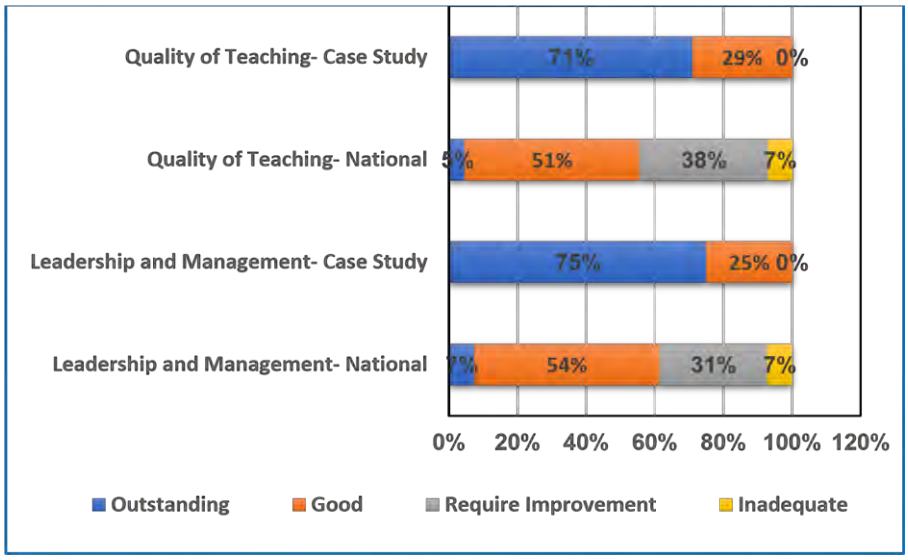

Figure 1. Ofsted Inspection Grades (Demie, 2020)

The quality of teaching in the case study schools is also good and outstanding. Teaching is supported by high-quality teachers who have a great commitment and passion to teach. There is also evidence that the school uses an inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of all the pupils whatever their background. The Ofsted evidence also shows the quality of teaching in the case study schools is outstanding (71%) compared to 5% nationally (Figure 1). The case study schools also have teachers who have high expectations of all pupils, whatever their background and they are committed to making a difference. They have no excuses approach.

Our observation in classroom and interview evidence demonstrates effective practice in key aspects such as strong and visionary leadership, quality first teaching, and a robust focus on performance data. The schools are committed to tackling the disadvantaged of their pupils and provide a 'family' ethos where every child is known and valued. No matter how large or small the school, or whether community or faith school, leaders and staff expressed a commitment to know which pupils are disadvantaged and to do all they can to see them achieve their very best. All are committed to doing their best for every child in the school. In this sense, one could argue that these schools are 'child-centred', with children come first. The school leaders are well known in the community they serve that they are committed to seeking to remove the barriers such as disadvantage and low parental aspiration by working closely with families and the community. These schools also provide good Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the development of all their staff. What is even more significant is that these school leaders are active in training and developing other leaders in the regions and the local area their serve.

The leaders of the case study schools are innovative, and they use a number of successful strategies that are described in the literature of leadership as 'inspirational' or 'transformational leadership. With the approach and methods, they unite staff in their school vision. The discussion we had during the research suggests that they have an unshakable belief that poverty is no excuse for underachievement. There were also other common characteristics of the leadership of these school leaders. These includes:

- The ability to remove barriers to pupils learning
- Valuing the diversity of pupils backgrounds and circumstances
- Monitoring pupil performance and progress by ethnicity, social background, attendance, EAL, SEN, and linguistic background.

The schools also monitor the details of learning, the pupil's work, marking, teacher assessment, quality of teaching and learning, and the progress made by individual pupils and class. Tracking pupil performance and progress is rigorous.

The outstanding feature of one case study school innovatory leadership where the headteacher has adopted different strategies and new approaches for closing achievement gaps. He explained his strategy as follows:

> *'I used best teachers out of class in EYFS, Year 1 and 2, Year 3 and 4, Year 5 and 6 for intervention groups. Our pupil premium grant children have some of the most popular teachers and therefore are envied rather than looked down on.' (Headteacher School A)*

This decision of the leadership's in the case study school to give disadvantaged pupils the best teachers has helped in the remarkable progress of their deprived pupils. Looking at the school achievement it has not also detracted from the progress made by pupils of all abilities.

Overall, we could argue that all these outstanding case study school leaders are inspirational, and they believe that all children can achieve their best, no matter what their background.

Use of pupil premium for targeted intervention

Another key strategy the case study use is targeted intervention and support through effective use of pupil premium in closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils. There is a strong commitment in the case study schools to do everything possible to remove any barriers through the targeted use of the pupil premium funding. Funding is used to pay for 'additional staff, including teachers and teaching assistants, who deliver one-to-one and small group support, typically focused on English and mathematics, after-school clubs and support for enrichment activities.'

All schools in our study used pupil premium to support deprived pupils but the work in School D was exemplary. At School D there is good and well-coordinated targeted support to all groups of pupils through the use of 'best teachers, learning mentors, teaching assistants and special educational needs coordinators. These are funded from pupil premium allocations. In this school, any additional needs were immediately addressed at whatever point a pupil entered the school. A Year 4 teacher explained how this worked in practice.

> *'Children are assessed, and we provide support for those below three times per week, it may mean a 5-minute targeted 1:1 session for those having problems focusing, catch-up sessions in small groups. I had a new child in my Year 4 class, just after summer half-term and he is now one of my focus children. I have given him an old-fashioned handwriting book because his handwriting is not joined, he doesn't seem to have had a good experience at his previous school… there's no paragraphing and he cannot write a letter… he needs 1:1 phonic support. I am hoping he will improve in paragraphing and hopefully in handwriting. (Teacher, School B)*

The school teaching assistants in supporting children and small groups in EYES and at all key stages. The role of teaching assistants is flexible.

> *'Some teaching assistants teaching phonics, number masters, taking story time with a whole class, and doing administrative tasks. Others run breakfast and after-school clubs. There is one-to-one reading support, additional high-level mathematics, small group Springboard mathematics support, English, mathematics, and revision materials for Years 5 and 6, one to one phonics support and reading intervention, staff training on outstanding teaching, the release of teachers for progress reviews sessions three times per year, and extended services including a wide range of after school clubs in the school. The pupil premium grant has enabled the school to offer one-to-one support for children that need the service and a range of curriculum-enrichment activities that have proved successful in developing children's confidence and boosting self-esteem while also improving their standard in mathematics and Year 1 phonics and KS2 outcomes.' (Headteacher, School D)*

As a result of such support, says, the headteacher,

> '*Progress by FSM pupils in all subjects exceeded expectations and attainment is within age related expectations. Additional investment in reading has also resulted in Year 1 Phonics screening check outcomes being above the national average.*' (Headteacher, School D)

In *School D* in Years 5 and 6 the headteacher pointed out that there is an extended school day in the Spring and Summer Terms which begins with breakfast at 7:45 followed by booster classes.

> *'Pupils have small group lessons in grammar, writing, mental maths, and it is also a time for 'plugging the gaps' and 'going back to basics'. From 9 am pupils in Years 5 and 6 revert to the curriculum as usual. In the school also at the end of Key Stage 2 any child not working at the expected level receives a range of extra help. For example, early morning interventions, in class in a small group with a TA, or 1:1 support tailored to individual needs. Assessments at the end of year 5 covering Year 6 SATs papers, tailored questions and gap analysis identify pupils in need of further booster classes which take place after school and a summer school led by the assistant head and the Year 6 teacher, for Year 5 pupils who need support before going into Year 6.' (Headteacher, School* D)

> '*The first three days of the summer holidays we provide booster classes for the middle to higher attaining groups in English, maths, and reasoning, to get them ready for Year 6. Then the last three days of the summer holidays we take lower attaining pupils, and we do some pre-teaching, settle them down and get them ready for the term ahead. We also did an Easter school last year, but we think that these children have had enough so we upped booster after school.' (Teacher, School D)*

The impact of the summer school booster classes is very positive as the Year 6 teacher reflects:

> *'By Year 6 they hit the ground running. I taught these children in Year 3, so I know them. Charlotte had them in Year 4 so there's lots of communication. The booster groups at the beginning of the year started with just one group but then might change as the year goes on. (Year 6 teacher, School D)*

Every opportunity is taken to fit in an extra bit of support for those pupils who need to deepen their understanding, for example, during assembly, TAs take pupils for particular interventions, while the year teacher or assistant head will take a group to give them very in-depth pre-teaching prior to the lesson.

The learning mentor works with children and parents and has very good relationships with both and she describes her role:

> *'I support Year 6 in the morning. There has been a lot of movement as many families have moved out of the area and we have some children from 'managed moves' who have come in. In the afternoon I support children with a range of difficulties, 'looked after children' ADHD, bereaved and those that need SEND support. I tend to sit with those children who want to eat with me at lunchtime. After lunch we go to the library and do quiet activities. I work with 20 children throughout the school as well as Year 6.' (Learning Mentor. School D)*

In-School the headteacher argued that pupil premium grant has also been used to offer additional curriculum enrichment programmes. These activities are based on EEF (2019) evidence which is proven in developing children's confidence, and boosting self-esteem, whilst also improving standards in mathematics and Year 1 phonics and KS2 outcomes. As a result of such targeted support and intervention:

> '*Progress by FSM pupils in all subjects exceeded expectations and attainment is within age-related expectations. By the end of Key Stage 2, the % children achieving high results in all core subjects are significantly higher than the national average.' (Headteacher, School D)*

The school also used Pupil Premium funding to subscribe to 'Mathletics'. In the view of the headteacher, this has made a difference and helped in consistently improving standards in mathematics. There was also an additional investment in reading using pupil premium funding. This has also resulted in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check outcomes being above the national average. Use of pupil premium fund has also helped Key Stage 2 outcomes of disadvantaged pupils to outperform their peers nationally in reading, writing, and mathematics.

The case study school D also believes strongly that learning extends well beyond the classroom. To meet this challenge, the school was using enrichment programmes as part of targeted interventions.

> *'The School has been able to offer innovative curriculum enrichment activities as a result of pupil premium funding. These activities have is proven based on research evidence that they help to raise academic attainment, developing children's confidence, and boosting aspirations for disadvantaged children. The school developed high-quality partnerships with public and private organizations to develop the school co-curricular opportunities. In the word of the headteacher this include annual performances at The Royal Opera House with the Royal Ballet, mathematics masterclasses with the Royal Institution, staging of Shakespeare plays at the Peacock Theatre or pupil exhibitions at the Tate Modern. The school choir has participated in singing at the Royal Albert Hall. Year 5 has been engaged in writing and performing a play at the Polka Theatre. These initiatives were supported by pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils in the school.' (Headteacher, School D)*

A similar early intervention approach was also taken in school B. In school B the key success factor is using pupil premium funding for early intervention. This school is committed to continuing observation and formative assessment. Teachers used data to monitor their pupil's strengths and to identify areas of development need and tackle underachievement.

In school B, the assessment of pupils within their first week in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) identifies knowledge and understanding of letter sounds, letter names, colour, shapes, and number. The EYFS Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) explains the early intervention practice in school B as follows:

> *'We carry these assessments out with individual children and from that we identify the groups I will work with. I had five children in my group, one had never been to nursery and two had EAL. The three little boys formed a group, and I took them once a week for 20 minutes. We did a pattern project within maths, and we did a lot on speech and language, and I encouraged them to support each other. They are now due to reach Early Learning Goal (ELG) in maths and one will do this in literacy, communication and language'....*

Increasing the children's confidence in communication is key, as the HLTA makes clear:

> *'The fundamental thing is to get their confidence up and once they get that they grow in everything. They will want to be challenged and even if that's too great for them, even if they get it wrong, they can learn from that'. We get good feedback from parents. I remember going on a home visit and saw a very nervous child and a worried mum. It's lovely to read her comments now she is so happy. In EYFS you are supporting a nervous parent as well as a child.' (HLTA, School B)*

In the school B individual progress is almost always at least good and frequently outstanding at all key stages. In this school, there are pupil mobility issues and about a significant number of pupils join the school later than their peers. The school quickly puts support for mobile pupils that at risk to improve their rates of progress and raise attainment. As a result of such support using pupil premium funding, mobile pupils are able to catch up rapidly.

The school has a large number of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Support for an EAL is criteria to improve their English Proficiency and to access the curriculum. Pupil premium funding was used to support EAL pupils. This has resulted in EA to progress comparable to that of others. ss from their starting points. Special Educational needs and disadvantaged pupils, including the ablest disadvantaged, make similar progress to other pupils in writing because teachers provide targeted support to meet their specific needs.

Teachers from Year 3 and Year 6 describe the progress that disadvantaged children have made as part of our early intervention using pupil premium funding:

> Year 3: *'A boy with very low levels in maths, reading and with moderate learning difficulties had daily phonics in a group, extra reading each week and TA support for maths and English. I had many meetings with his mum and would chat with her informally. As result of early intervention, has helped and he has made a rapid progress in reading, writing and maths' (Teacher, School B)*

The Year 6 teacher gave an example of a pupil's progress in her class:

> *'He had lots of problems with maths – number bonds to 100 not a good understanding of number. We used the booster approach, and he is also in a trained HLTA booster group. He had difficulty with behaviour and attendance. The new maths mastery approach has made a big impact and Saturday morning booster classes are very effective.' (Teacher, School B)*

In School A they have also used small group tuition to support two to five pupils together in school A. As argued by EEF (2019)

> '*This arrangement enables the teacher to focus exclusively on a small number of learners, usually in a separate classroom or working area. Intensive tuition in small groups is often provided to support lower attaining learners or those who are falling behind*.

For example, school A used the strongest teachers to deliver targeted intervention for a small group of disadvantaged pupils. The evidence of this support showed its' effectiveness, with the pupils making excellent progress, with many achieving above national expectations at KS2:

> *'I took my strongest teachers out of class in each phase teams EYES, Year 1 and 2, Year 3 and 4 and Year 5 and 6 and each picking up intervention groups.'* (Headteacher School A)
>
> *'Use of best teachers has helped SEN, Black Caribbean and other disadvantaged pupils in the intervention groups who were at level 3 or below to achieve the expected standard or above at end of KS2'* (Headteacher School A)

There is a willingness among the teaching staff to do more to support groups of students to achieve their potential and staff give generously of their time. Many booster classes in the case study primary schools run during the spring half-term break, Easter holidays, and May half-term, and Maths and English teachers volunteer to run them. After school boosters begin in the autumn term and continue until the spring term although it is up to departments to decide how they target various groups:

> *'We have been encouraging staff leading in English and maths subjects to have a particular group and then to move on to another group. Maths has weekly booster days, but it is up to them how they target them. The whole class is getting extra revision to cover what they haven't been taught.' (Deputy Head, School A)*

At School A the school deploys a good classroom teacher using pupil premium

> *'Disadvantaged pupils were taught in focused teaching groups by the well qualified and experienced teacher which effectively met pupils' needs. This strategy made a real difference to the achievement of pupils. In addition, as the first priority at School is quality first teaching, the headteacher explains that all teachers know which pupils are eligible for pupil premium grant and have their own in-class tracking systems which include looked after children, EAL, SEN pupils. Pupils' progress is closely monitored termly at pupil progress meetings, led by the Deputy's head, with the SENCo and the class teacher. Within these meetings, the views of phase leaders about how children are progressing are also considered and an evaluation is made of what has worked and what hasn't. Evidence on the*

impact of interventions is monitored and the results are shared with parents, staff, and the governing body.' (Deputy Head, School A)

There is a willingness among the teaching staff to do more to support groups of students to achieve their potential and staff give generously of their time. Many booster classes in the case study primary schools run during the spring half-term break, Easter holidays, and May half-term, and Maths and English teachers volunteer to run them. After school boosters begin in the autumn term and continue until the spring term although it is up to departments to decide how they target various groups:

The headteacher further commented with regard to subject specific interventions:

> *'We consider what research tell us. The Sutton Trust tool kit is used to identify key approaches that come within our resources and what would work for us. Marking of children's books is a priority. Our marking is manageable, and teachers mark extremely well. Formative assessment is outstanding. Our TAs are actively involved in making observations of pupils' learning and recording them on post-its, which gives teachers feedback within the lesson.' (School A)*
>
> *'In the knowledge that children's grasp of language and literacy skills during early years is fundamental to accessing the curriculum and making good progress. The school uses a plethora of literacy and mathematics interventions targeted mainly at pupils in Reception classes and Years 1 and 2. Key Stage 1 is a particularly difficult phase for children in receipt of FSM and consequently there is a strong emphasis on the development of social skills and communication skills in the Reception Class. Structured phonics teaching by a specialist read-write teacher, supported by two well-trained TAs is very effective in improving literacy outcomes at Key Stage 1 and is eliminating risk factors for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Headteacher School A)*
>
> *'The school has implemented other innovative and successful interventions, for example the 'Learning Line' which enables children to express themselves when struggling and to articulate how best they might find a way to move forward with their learning, as well as to recognise how much progress they have made within the lesson. Peer-tutoring, where older children in Years 5 & 6 teach younger pupils has been introduced. This builds greater self-esteem and is a great confidence booster for both the 'pupil-teacher' and the 'learner'. Headteacher School A)*

We asked similar question at School C. In response to the question, 'how has the school's targeted support contributed to the school's closing the achievement gap?' The headteacher commented that the schools use effective feedback, Mastery learning, early intervention, and enrichment activities to support disadvantaged pupils.

> *'We have developed a whole school approach towards effective feedback which includes marking progress, formative marking that requires a pupil to respond to the teacher and evidence improvement.'*
>
> *'We have high expectations for our pupils. This includes a drive towards the mastery curriculum, with specific mastery activities and questions prepared and used as a targeted resource for able pupils. Older pupils are familiar with the term 'greater depth' and in their preparation for end of KS2 assessments, target the sorts of scores that will enable them to achieve it.' (Headteacher)*
>
> '*As a school we believe in intervention rather than remediation'. From their earliest days in school, our staff are working hard to provide our pupils with the exposure to English they need, supporting them in terms of developing their oral response to questions, or their confidence to share ideas or experiences to their peers and with adults. These opportunities develop and, from year 1, they take part in whole class presentations to the rest of the school and to their parents and show remarkable pride and progress in their levels of competency'. (Headteacher)*
>
> *'We provide our pupils with at least an opportunity each half-term to take part in an educational visit which will give many of them the chance to see somewhere they would otherwise not get to see. These sorts of days, along with the work we do to support their understanding of British values and democracy, help us to nurture our pupils as young Muslims growing up as young Londoners.* (Headteacher)

The case study schools also use pupil premium grants in extending a range of extra-curriculum activities including visits to historical places, museum, and rural England and abroad. In addition, the schools offer a wealth of diverse and engaging enrichment activities to pupils at every stage of their education, from academic enrichment activities to sport and arts clubs, the school's enrichment activities promote fun, teamwork, and a commitment to learning and self-improvement. As a result, pupil premium pupils make good progress as other pupils at the school.

One crucial aspect, with the above-targeted intervention in schools it will not be effective without the quality of leadership. As argued above the headteachers are key in success. This is confirmed in talking to school staff and pupils during our research that the headteachers were responsible for creating the ethos of the school in tackling the disadvantaged, exercising strong pedagogical leadership, and ensuring the success of targeted interventions.

The empirical evidences in this research also show the case study schools challenge the relationship between poverty and low incomes. They enable disadvantaged children to succeed. As part of our research questions, we have asked leaders: *'How has the school's targeted support contributed to the school closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged*

pupils? The evidence provided during our research overall confirms that as a result of effective use of targeted interventions the school makes outstanding progress academically achieving consistently well above national average and making better progress than nationally for disadvantaged pupils. Table 1 shows the impressive performance of pupil premium (PP) pupils.

Table 1. KS2 Performance of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in the primary case study schools-%

School	**Background**	**Pupils reaching the expected standards in Reading, Writing, and Maths Combined at KS2 -%**			
	Pupil Premium %	**ALL**	**PP**	**non-PP**	**GAP**
School A	39%	88%	86%	90%	-4
School B	41%	54%	56%	52%	+3
School C	39%	93%	95%	90%	+5
School D	60%	66%	73%	43%	+30
National Gap-all		**64%**	**51%**	**70%**	**-19**

Source: DfE (2019) and Demie and Mclean (2019)

In the primary schools that receive pupil premium funding, disadvantaged pupils make outstanding progress. It is particularly noticeable that it has helped in accelerating the progress in English and mathematics as the fund is used to support a small group of pupils. The schools also use intervention and support strategies such as effective booster class, one to one tuition, best teachers for English and maths intervention groups, mastery learning, early intervention, Enrichment activities e.g., trips, improving behaviour and attendance programme, use of well-trained teaching assistants and parental involvement initiatives. As a result of the funding and targeted intervention the gap between their attainment of pupil premium and that of other groups in school is closing rapidly. This is confirmed by table 1 data which shows the school are closed or narrowing the gap (see Table 1)

We would argue that the schools are effective in closing any gaps through targeted interventions. School leaders have established a detailed programme of support, activities, and additional resources for disadvantaged pupils as outlined above. They closely monitor how effective each has been using data to ensure that learning gaps are closing effectively. It is clear from our observation and evidence provided by the school that school leaders address equality of opportunities to ensure all pupils achieve their potential, whatever their background. As a result of the use of pupil premium for targeted interventions, there is a significant improvement in the performance of disadvantaged students. The empirical data shows they have closed the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils their peers. It also shows they prove that disadvantages can be tackled at the school level and should not also be seen as a barrier to achievement.

We would argue the findings of our study are in the line with recent EEF (2019) research that suggested using peer tutoring, early intervention, one to one tutoring, small group tuition, and mastery learning and phonics as interventions strategies is effective and can deliver about 4-5 months additional child progress (see EEF, 2019). These interventions strategies are very popular in the schools and are used effectively to close the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. However, our study also suggests that schools are selective in what they use in terms of intervention strategies. Despite EEF (2019) evidence for high impact (delivering 6-8 months additional progress), strategies such as metacognition, collaborative learning were less popular in the case study schools, and schools has not mentioned during our research.

Discussions

The substantial body of research into how to close the achievement of disadvantaged pupils has offered a valuable background and useful insight for improvement. Researchers in the field of school improvement has now recognised that much of the difference in outcome is due to the social background of the children and their socio-economic situation (Clifton & Cook, 2012; Demie, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Demie, 2019a, 2019b; Gorard, 2018; Mortimore & Whitty, 1997; Ofsted, 2009, 2013). This research is building on previous studies that show the difference in attainment e between disadvantaged pupils and their peers and explores the impact of effective school leadership and targeted intervention strategies in raising attainment and closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils in schools. The findings from this study provide important and original insights into schools intervention strategies to support deprived pupils.

One of the main reasons for outstanding performance in the schools and closing the gap in is strong leadership on equality and diversity. There is evidence from our observation and research the school leaders have developed effective strategies that supported all pupils. Examples included:

- high-quality teaching and learning, supported by strong CPD culture
- high-quality pupil-level tracking and assessment for monitoring children progress and attainment
- use of inclusive and positive school culture, underpinned by values and moral purpose that all pupils including disadvantaged can succeed against the odds.

The second key factor is the effective strategies and targeted intervention using the pupil premium to close the achievement gap. In the case study schools, there were proven strategies that school leaders and schools used to support disadvantaged pupils. These strategies were benefiting all pupils, including those eligible for FSM, EAL, SEN, and include:

- early intervention
- targeted learning interventions
- one-to-one support and other catch-up provision
- rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the impact of targeted interventions

Early identification of pupils' needs is a key feature of the case study schools at whatever stage pupils enter the school. Apart from assessing pupils' learning/language needs, these schools have an 'open door' approach and links with parents are maintained at all levels. Key people in developing a partnership with parents, apart from senior leaders, SENDCo's, and class teachers, are learning mentors and teaching assistants who generally come from the local community and are able to break down any barriers and establish the confidence and trust of parents. It takes time and effort to build parents' confidence and schools develop their own approaches. What they have in common is a core belief in mutual responsibility and trust.

The continuing assessment in detail of pupils' progress is an important factor in the case study schools' success. The schools draw on a wide range of evidence to monitor the progress of individual pupils and of groups. Half-termly pupil progress meetings are held usually involving a senior leader, SENDCo, and class teacher to discuss the progress of each pupil and the next steps required. Teachers and pupils know their targets. They are able to measure pupils' progress and attainment regularly to review the effectiveness of any intervention using pupil premium funding. Schools help the children to know their targets and areas need to do to improve.

Numerous examples were given of intervention strategies used by primary schools, for example, early morning interventions, in class in a small group with a TA, or 1:1 support tailored to individual needs. Tailored questions and gap analysis is used for Assessments at the end of Year 5 covering Year 6 SATs papers, to identify pupils in need of further booster classes. This takes place after school and a summer school led by an Assistant Head and a Year 6 teacher, for Year 5 pupils who need support before going into Year 6. Summer schools take place during the first three days and the last three days of the summer holidays.

Every opportunity is taken to fit in an extra bit of support for those pupils who need to deepen their understanding, for example, during assemblies TAs take pupils for particular interventions, or a class teacher or Assistant Head will take a group to give them very in-depth pre-teaching prior to the lesson. Teaching assistants are very well trained and equipped to teach phonics and early maths lessons.

There is a willingness among the teaching staff to beyond expectation to support groups of students to achieve their very best and staff give generously of their time. They run during the spring half-term break, Easter holidays, and May half-term booster classes. We have seen also Maths and English teachers volunteering to run them.

The case study schools not only monitor performance and progress, and they also give pupils the opportunity to take responsibility and to achieve in all subject areas and activities. There is a lot of enrichment activities on offer to build the social and cultural capital especially for pupils who wouldn't otherwise have these opportunities.

The above findings on the effectiveness of leadership and targeted interventions in the case study schools to close the achievement gap of disadvantaged pupils are in line with other studies (EEF 2019). For example, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF 2019) research into 'what worked and what failed' in school improvement revealed a number of similar effective school-based interventions and targeted support that has had an impact in raising achievement. A number of teachers and school leaders are now using what works EEF (Demie, 2019a) research evidence including providing excellent school leadership and outstanding teaching; effective targeted learning interventions, one-to-one support, use of the strongest teachers to teach English, and Maths for intervention groups, use of well-trained teaching assistants (TAs), booster classes, early intervention, mastery learning, EAL support, pastoral care, and enrichment programmes e.g. trips to cultural venues (see for details Demie, 2019; Demie & Mclean, 2019). It has been argued that Pupil premium funding is used to target and support these intervention programmes. This is effectively monitored in the schools to ensure they are having a real impact on raising standards. Overall, the findings from EEF research (2019) and the survey of headteachers and teachers (see Demie, 2019a) were positive, and schools feel that the evidence was useful for their school improvement and self-evaluation. It has helped schools to identify underachieving groups and to target interventions and support to ensure improvement. These evidences are also similar to our findings above.

Conclusions

There is a wealth of evidence that targeted interventions work well in schools. The pupil premium funding that is nationally available to support disadvantaged pupils is precisely targeted with clear intervention strategies to support teaching and learning. As a result, the gap in attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers are not only closing rapidly but, in some cases, doing better than non-pupil premium.

The evidence from this research also suggests that there was much in common in what the case study schools use to support disadvantaged pupils. The findings suggest that the case study schools use a range of targeted interventions and support including early intervention, small group additional teaching, one-to-one tuition, booster class, mastery learning, and enrichment programmes. All school provides high-quality targeted support and intervention through effective use of class teachers, teaching assistants, and HLTAS to support disadvantaged children, EAL pupils, or individuals. Best teachers were also used to teach maths and English in intervention groups.

Finally, we would argue that the case study schools' stories in tackling the disadvantaged and closing the achievement gap are of local and national significance. The lessons from these schools provide an example of good practice for the school improvement practitioners and national policymakers to address this issue of disadvantaged pupils and educational inequality. The report demonstrates a good example of how to tackle the link between poverty and low achievement in particular in areas of challenging circumstances. The approach and strategies used by the case study schools can be used elsewhere. The strategies such as providing strong leadership that is committed to equality and diversity, use of data to monitor, and track children's performance and progress, identify groups that are at risk of underachieving and using proven targeted support and interventions to close the achievement can be explicated in other schools.

Recommendations

Our research also suggests the possibilities for further research to address the weakness of this study. Our research methodological approach is based on a case study interview on a small scale. However, a number of researchers argue that this approach is useful for obtaining detailed in-depth information about the views, opinions of respondents, and group feelings. To address the weakness of this study there is a need for further research to replicate and expand with larger national studies to study the success factors to tackle disadvantaged and educational inequality. Meanwhile, however, this research evidence offers a regularly replicated model of research that shows indisputably what works

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