Using pupil premium funding: A case study

Adrian Kneeshaw talks about his experience at Carlton Bolling school regarding the effectiveness of pupil premium strategies.

Summary

- Differentiation in pupil premium spending can be more difficult in a large school due to the difficulty of measuring the impact of funding strategies where a large number of students are involved.
- A whole-school approach should involve assessing the major needs of the pupil premium cohort, then devising major strategies to cover these general needs.
- The overall strategy you apply to spending pupil premium funding depends on how much money you receive.
- A whole-school approach should involve assessing the major needs of the pupil premium cohort, then devising major strategies to cover these general needs.

The pupil premium (PP) is a major source of funding for many schools. It is attached to students who have been eligible for free school meals at any time within the last six years. The money allocated by government is considerable, with those up to Year 6 given £1320 each and those in Years 7 to 11 given £935 each.

The impact of the PP is vastly different for different education settings. A small ‘leafy lane’ primary where just 10% of the 180 students are eligible for funding...
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Clearly, in the current financial climate of falling funding and rising costs, any extra money is valuable irrespective of where you fit on the PP funding continuum. Also, considering that the true top performers are often differentiated by fine margins, and the degree of scrutiny you come under during Ofsted inspections, it is vitally important to ensure that you have a sound PP strategy.

A whole-school approach

A whole-school approach should involve assessing the major needs of the PP cohort, then devising major strategies to cover these general needs. For example, at Carlton Bolling school, the disadvantaged students were characterised by poor levels of literacy and numeracy, barriers which would affect the rest of their studies and life beyond school. To tackle this, we initially considered contracting private tutors to teach after-school classes, but decided against this due to concerns over their quality, commitment to improvement and lack of accountability. Instead, we decided to recruit extra full-time teachers in both maths and English in order to reduce the average class size in both subjects to 15.

Some readers may be surprised at this, due to the Sutton Trust research which says that smaller class sizes don’t have an impact on pupil progress. However, from the wider reading and research we have done at the school, we knew that this depends on the style of teaching. Some studies show no benefit in having smaller class sizes when the style of teaching remains the same as when teaching a larger class. By contrast, when the style of teaching is more engaging, with the teacher working closely with students, regularly discussing and checking progress, progress accelerates. We trained staff to teach this way.

Another benefit was that the quality of marking and feedback, critical elements to

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“The overall strategy you apply to spending PP funding depends on how much money you receive.”

might receive around £25,000 in funding. By contrast, a large secondary of 1500 Year 7–11 students in an inner city area, where around half of students are classed as ‘disadvantaged’, can bring in over £700,000 this financial year.

By reading, so you could purchase an online reading subscription for them and pay for someone to come in to the school for extra reading support. Another student might be struggling with confidence and belief, so you could bring in a mentor to boost self-esteem and resilience, and encourage high expectations. This is the ideal situation for a school to be in, where it is able to differentiate its school spending to optimise the learning of its students, often under the direction of a school PP coordinator.

Problems with this differentiated approach come with increasing numbers of students. Over a certain threshold, which I would estimate between 50 and 100 students, dependent upon the crossover of provision, it becomes very difficult to coordinate the quality of individual provision effectively due to the sheer weight of numbers. The key word here is ‘quality’ – although you may be able to offer an individual programme, it is very difficult to quality assure that it is done well. When this point has been reached, a new approach adopting whole-school strategies must be employed.

Strategies for spending PP funding

The overall strategy you apply to spending PP funding depends on how much money you receive. If you have a small number of disadvantaged students it is feasible to consider allocating the £935 or £1325 directly to the specific needs of each particular student. For example, a student could be behind in their
Conclusion

Looking back, two major learning points can be taken from this experience. First, have the courage of your convictions to follow your intuition and critically challenge respected research if you are sure it will make a difference. We did and it has been of huge benefit. Second, we are often asked how we can afford to have such small classes in such challenging economic times. My answer is always the same – we couldn’t afford not to.

PP students, around 12 per class, taught by the staff best suited to their individual needs. This is a policy that, more recently, we have employed in many other faculty areas, principally the Progress 8 Bucket 2 subjects of science, MFL and humanities.

The importance of PP students is regularly communicated to staff, with class lists and pupil data sheets clearly highlighting these students.

Since bringing in this small-class-size policy three years ago, the results have been dramatic. Maths results quickly went from below average to the best in the city and are now comparable to the very best in the region, with English bringing in the best results in the school’s history this year. The benefits have also been evident in many other subject areas, with many seeing PP students outperforming non-PP students, and sixth form disadvantaged students outperforming their non-disadvantaged peers as a whole. Ofsted has also been impressed by the use of the PP funding, making specific mention of small class sizes when reporting on the rapid progress at the school.

**Conclusion**

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**Further information**


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**Toolkit**

Use the following items in the Toolkit to help you put the ideas in this article into practice:

- Checklist – Pupil premium good practice (page 22)
- Checklist – Pupil premium: Key questions for school leaders (page 23)
- Form – Pupil premium: Example planning and evaluation table (page 25)
- Worked example – Pupil premium strategy statement: Carlton Bolling School (page 26)
- Guidance – Pupil premium strategy statement: Secondary schools (available online for Premium Plus subscribers)
- Form – Pupil premium strategy statement: Secondary schools (available online for Premium Plus subscribers)

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**Adrian Kneeshaw** was appointed as headteacher of Carlton Bolling in September 2013, which was the beginning of a very challenging, interesting and immensely rewarding experience. He has a passion for education, particularly in the enablement of disadvantaged young people, ensuring that they are able to achieve their very best. Adrian is very creative in his outlook and believes in taking education forward in innovative ways.