

Eight things to consider when planning your Pupil Premium strategy.

Avoid oversimplifications, generalisations and assumptions. Any strategy that is not rooted in a deep understanding of the needs of pupils as individuals risks a 'Supermarket Sweep' approach. Evidence of need should be based on diagnostic assessment (pastoral and academic), on teacher voice, on pupil voice, on discussions with families and our understanding of our communities and the challenges they face. It should also be rooted in a sharp look in the mirror (not mirror on the wall) about the quality of the classroom experiences for our disadvantaged pupils. This is especially important for our low prior attainers.

Labelling children as 'low ability' rather than by their current attainment risks setting limits on what pupils can achieve. Our belief in innate 'ability' can negatively impact on pupils' intrinsic motivation in learning. It can unconsciously lead to lower expectations. Ability labels are not benign. All too often, we are ability labelling based on pupils' access to social, cultural and financial capital in their early years. And pupils quickly work out where they sit in hierarchies. Labels such as SEND, Pupil Premium and EAL tell us very little about pupils. I think there is a strong argument for teachers to NOT know who is eligible for the Pupil Premium. But it is most important that they know about their learning and pastoral needs.

Who is getting to talk and develop their oral language in your classrooms? Is it the pupils well developed oral language? Do pupils with strong oral language gravitate towards each other? Do these pupils dominate and take over in talk partner work? Are some pupils left out? Or is classroom talk structured to develop language through peer questioning and the assignment of roles? Remember that many pupils start their school with a language gap. But (often), those that do not develop their language through social interactions and reading that fall further backwards. The issue may well be language gap combined with a social interaction gap that is a key driver for educational underperformance from EYFS to KS4.

What impact is feedback having on pupils' learning? Teacher feedback matters to our most disadvantaged pupils. Feedback is a highly relational transaction. Feedback is critical element of improvement for our least successful learners. These pupils are often least well placed to take on board feedback because of a lack of self-confidence, perceptions of themselves as learners and inconsistent relationships. Sometimes we expect pupils to be able to do things that adults can't. Taking on board feedback with things we struggle with is HARD. See feedback through the lens of your least successful learners. Successful learners Hoover up feedback. Feedback can be a gap widener if we are not careful.

Remember the joy of tests. Many pupils from fortunate backgrounds live lives full of financial, social and cultural capital. And they are often being tested. And experiencing the highs and lows of that testing experience in equal measure. Whether being tested on the gymnastics beam, the swimming pool, in social interactions or through games, through risk, through general knowledge tests in the

car. Children who are tested frequently learn the benefits of testing and learn what to do to maximise their chances of success. They also learn to not give up when they are not successful first time. They develop strategies to overcome challenges. They develop self-confidence and they learn to harness stress. They learn to take on board feedback. Life is more challenging for our time poor and materially poor families on low incomes. They may experience insecure employment, housing, relationships, poor health and more. Clearly, pupils from the least fortunate backgrounds are tested every day too, often overcoming extraordinary challenges to come to school in the morning. But they do not necessarily experience the positive emotions and joy of overcoming those tests. They are challenges, rather than tests that improve learning. They create stress, rather than reduce it.

Focus on what's in the schools' gift. Otherwise we end up chasing the wind. We have far greater control over the quality of reading instruction in our classrooms than we have over the amount that pupils are reading at home. And if we teach pupils to read effectively, they are more likely to read at home! Providing books to read at home for the least fortunate pupils is not enough.

Individual incentives are unlikely to provide sustained improvements in attendance. 100% attendance certificates are not inclusive and are likely to be a gap widener. Commit to evidence when tackling the attendance gap.

And finally...

Life through a lens: Consider every decision – from teacher professional development to after school clubs to school trips to homework to post holiday writing - through the lens of your most disadvantaged pupils. Put accountability to out disadvantaged pupils and their families first.

Marc Rowland

NB this article contains some generalisations about pupils from both more fortunate backgrounds and those from less fortunate backgrounds. These have not been caveated in every case.