# Chapter 12 – Children from low income families

This chapter explores:

- What we mean by low income and poverty and how poverty is defined.
- Who are the families on low income in the UK today, addressing some of the myths attached to those living in poverty;
- What is the impact on children's well-being, development and learning when living on low income or in poverty;
- What the research suggests about supporting children from low income families;
- The attainment gap between children from poor backgrounds and their peers;
- The pupil premium and how schools have used the extra funding to raise attainment
- Key aspects of good practice and what schools can do to enable all children regardless of income to achieve.

## What do we mean by low income and poverty?

Although low income and poverty are not quite interchangeable terms, they are nonetheless often used synonymously and it would be difficult to discuss one without defining the other. So what do we mean when we talk about poverty? Is it just about a family or an individual's lack of money or could it also be about people's inability to achieve wellbeing in the society they live in? If income is the measure we use to define status on the one hand and quality of living standards on the other, it is important then to define these terms also.

**Absolute Poverty**

It is in 1995 during the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen that the United Nations first adopted a definition of absolute poverty.  One hundred and seventeen countries agreed that absolute poverty was characterised by the severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information (UN report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 6-12 March 1995). These absolute measures are the minimum subsistence standards, in other words having enough income to cover minimum living standards. However, these measures tend to hide the real extent of poverty, as it does not include a broader aspect of the life quality individuals are able to achieve within their society. Extreme or absolute poverty is understood as living with under 1 USD a day, the poverty line

rule of thumb measure adopted by the World Bank in 1990. This amount was increased in 2009 to 1.25 USD and again in 2015 to 1.90 USD (Hickel, 2015).

**Relative Poverty**

Relative poverty is based on contemporary norms and social standards which change over time (Lansley & Mack, 2015). The official measure of relative poverty in the UK is when a household income falls below 60% of median income (Seymour, 2009).  Median income is accepted as accounting for the total income, including all benefits but minus direct taxes. These measures are accepted and used internationally to allow for comparisons between countries and for the study of trends over time. In 2013-14 the median income in the UK was approximately £21900 per year (HM Revenue and Customs, 2016) and 60% of this is £13140 per year. Hence, any households falling below this income would be considered in relative poverty. Poor people lack sufficient wealth to meet life's necessities or comforts and are unable to live in a manner that is considered acceptable in a society.

There are issues with this definition of relative poverty as it does not take housing costs, debt repayments, or changes in the cost of living etc. into account and in effect it is likely to give a much lower poverty count than in reality (Lansley & Mack, 2015). Income is important as it determines people's living standards but it is an arbitrary measure. Living standards are referred to as a "*households' level of access to goods, services and recreational activities »* (no author, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, PostNote, 2015, p1). In other words, living standards are not exclusively about wealth in monetary terms, but include notions of how comfortably people are able to live and participate in their society. Hence, it is argued that looking in depth in to people's standards of living / way of life will provide a better answer to the question "how poor is too poor?" (Lansley & Mack, 2015, p12).

**The Capability Approach**

This concept was developed by Armatya Sen (1979), an Indian economist and philosopher who became Nobel laureate in Economics in 1998. The Capability Approach was subsequently developed further by Martha Nussbaum, an American feminist philosopher and ethicist. The main premise of the framework is that wellbeing is not just a matter of resources. Freedom, rights, choices and values individuals have determine what they are able to be or do, and hence the life they are able to live.

This approach is not an explanatory theory; it does not explain poverty, inequality or well-being. However, it is a notion that helps conceptualise these ideas and assists in describing poverty, inequality, quality of life or social change. It is in effect a framework which evaluates the lives of individuals. The focus of this approach is on individuals' beings and doings, which Sen calls functionings, and the opportunities they have in achieving those beings and doings, which he refers to as capabilities.

**Examples of Beings:** being well fed or not, live in a warm house or not, being educated or illiterate, having a social support network or being part of a gang, being healthy or depressed etc.

**Examples of Doings:** caring for child, travelling, voting, heating a house, giving money to charity.

Capabilities are understood within this framework as individuals' real freedoms and opportunities to achieve these functionings.  Being poor seriously curtails people's capabilities, that is their ability and opportunity to achieve a quality of life without shame, and arguably leads to social exclusion.

**The Consensual Method**

The notion of the consensual method started with a television programme in 1983: Breadline Britain. Subsequent studies were carried out in 1990, 1999 and 2012 (Lansley & Mack, 2015). It is based on the idea of consensus and on society's perception of contemporary needs at the time. Members of the public [1] across the UK were gathered in small representative focus groups and made a consensual decision regarding the minimum standards of living in contemporary society today. They devised a list of items and activities deemed a necessity to achieve minimum living standards and allow for inclusion and participation in society. They also listed items and activities that were desirable but not a deemed a necessity.  These necessities have altered over the last three decades, some have been taken out and others added in order to reflect the changes in society. Gordon et al. (2013) listed a number of items and activities which are broadly representative of living

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[1] – Necessities of life survey: 1447 adults 16+ in Britain and 1015 in NI surveyed between May and June 2012; Living standards survey: 4205 household in Britain, 988 households in NI surveyed between march and December 2012

standards. These necessities go from the most basic such as food, shelter and warmth to societal activities such as dining out, going to the cinema or visiting relatives.

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**Activity 1**

The Breadline Britain (2015) report made adjustments to the list of necessities to reflect changes in living standards since 1999. The members of the public who took part in the selection compiled two lists. The first combined 25 items or activities which were deemed absolute necessities for all adults in contemporary Britain. The second was targeted at children and again contained 25 items or activities deemed necessities for all children.

Poverty is not just about lack of income. It is about the consequences of this lack of income, which translates in not being able to participate fully in society and more often than not it means the poor are effectively socially excluded.

Think about what the bare necessities required in today's society are to allow for full participation as valued members of said society. From a sociological view point, social participation means people's ability to be involved directly or indirectly in the economic, social, cultural and political processes which affect their live. Make two lists: one for adult and one for children. Compare with the Breadline Britain (2015) survey's own lists of necessities at the end of this chapter.

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**Redefining Poverty**

In 2012, the coalition government commissioned the Centre for Social Justice, an 'independent' think-tank established by Ian Duncan Smith who at the time was the DWP secretary, to have a rethink about how poverty should be defined. The think tank published the "Rethinking Child Poverty" paper (2012) which laid out the basis for the subsequent Measuring Child Poverty (2012) document. The main premise for a redefinition of poverty can be clearly construed from the following quote:

"The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is clear that in order to construct a measure of poverty that is both accurate and useful, it is vital that the main drivers of poverty – family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependency and worklessness, addiction and serious personal debt – are made the priority for measurement. (p1)"

Poverty was now to be measured by people's behaviour and characteristics and not their circumstances (DWP, 2013). The DWP survey sets out criteria to measure child poverty in the UK and that these criteria *"should be widely accepted by the public as being a fair representation of those children growing up in poverty"* (p2). These characteristics included: having parents addicted to drugs and alcohol, living in a local area which is not safe, growing up in a household with unmanageable debts, experiencing family breakdown, going to a failing school, or having parents lacking qualifications or skills for employment. It could be argued that the aim of this redefining was to downgrade the importance of income and living standards by focusing on parenting skills, health, drug and alcohol addiction and family stability. The Conservative's argument was that poverty is caused by individual's failings and therefore being or becoming poor is a personal choice lying in people's lack of social and personal responsibility. This notion was made clear by the then Secretary of State for Work and Pension: *'the nature of the life you lead and the choices that you make have a significant bearing on whether you live in poverty'* (Centre for Social Justice,2009, p4). However, earlier this year when he was faced with huge opposition from other political parties, church groups and poverty campaigners, Mr Duncan-Smith abandoned the project and the current system of defining relative poverty by measure of median income threshold is being maintained for the foreseeable future(Allen, 2016).

**Activity 2**
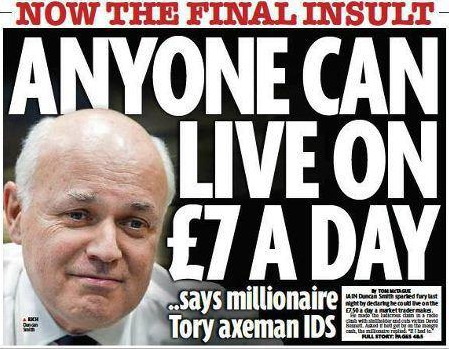
There are many examples such as these types of headlines and articles in the British press. On reading, note down the words used to describe a particular section of society. What is being implied here? What is the perception of people claiming benefits?

## Who are the families on low income?

Activity 2 highlights how a dominant discourse is created and maintained. Discourse denotes how people think and communicate about different subjects or people and it becomes dominant discourse when the notions about any subjects or people are the accepted norms within a given culture or society. The language used, whether in speech or in writing, is a reflection of the ideologies of those who have the most power in society (Foucault,2002).

The dominant discourse about poor people and benefits claimants is expressed in the press in the use of words such as "scroungers" or "work skivers" draining the public purse whilst living on far too generous benefits. There is unfortunately a large part of the British media perpetuating this myth. One could further argue that this may be politically and ideologically motivated, a way for the general public to accept and ignore the consequences of the measures of austerity put in place since the coalition government gained power in 2010.

The reality is in fact quite different. Over half of poor households in the UK have at least one person in employment. Those households where there are sick or disabled relatives or a carer looking after the family will also have someone in employment (Lansley and Mack, 2015). The Breadline Britain Survey (Lansley and Mack, 2015) found that the most significant shift in poverty statistics in the last three decades has been the increase in the number of households in work living in deprivation.

Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK (PSEUK) published a final report on child poverty and social exclusion in 2014. Although findings did outline a significant association between

worklessness and poverty, the report also clearly highlighted that the majority of children living in poverty came from a household with at least some paid work (65%). Where at least one adult was in full time work, nearly half of the children in these households were living in poverty.  Although the majority of poor children in the UK live in a household with two or more adults, the PSE 2014 findings further indicate that it is children in single parent families who may be at a greater risk of living in poverty.

When it comes to ethnicity and poverty, Lansley and Mack (2015) report no change in over a decade. Black or Black British, Pakistani and Bangladeshi households were more likely to be at risk of living in poverty (56% and 42% respectively). These findings are very much similar to the PSE 2014 report, which also highlighted that across all poverty measures, the greatest number of poor children were White British.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's latest report's (2016) findings on poverty and destitution in the UK supports the Breadline Britain report (2015).  Necessities include the most basics of needs: the ability to afford food and shelter as well as staying warm and dry and clean.  At some point during 2015, 1.25 million of people, 79% born in the UK, were destitute, including 325,000 children. As this is considering the more extreme end of the poverty spectrum (i.e. destitution), it is likely that when including families struggling on low income numbers are much higher than these figures.

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**Scenario 1**

Angel and her twin sister Georgia live with both their parents and baby sister in B&B accommodation and have had to change school 3 times over the past academic year. When Angel's father was made redundant the family lost their home and thus began the journey of a life in temporary accommodations.  The family was moved from one London borough to another and it has been difficult for Mum and Dad to find temporary work, even occasionally. Recently, their father has been offered a 0 hour contract, however there is not enough income for the family to afford a rented home or enough food to feed everyone properly. Mum and Dad often do without so that the children have something to eat and the family is clearly struggling to afford the most basics of necessities. The children's latest school is very keen on the use of ICT for parents to get more involved and for the children to complete their homework. The precariousness of the family's living situation means that the children do not own a computer or have access to the internet. Angel and Georgia are regularly being told off by their teacher for not completing their weekly homework. They are

both too ashamed to explain why they are not able to do their work.

**Activity 3**

What could your educational setting in this case do as far as good practice is concerned? Moreover, what can be done about digital poverty? How does your setting bridge the digital divide?

The Children's Commission on Poverty report (2014) highlighted that in their survey nearly a third of the children who lived in poverty had fallen behind on their homework due to the fact that they did not have a computer or internet access at home. These children were often met with disbelief by teachers and thought of as trying to get out of completing their work. Children reported feeling shame and embarassment at having to disclose their lack of access to information and communication technologies (ICT). Schools' answer is usually to set up lunch time or after school homework clubs, however these were often seen as the poor kids homework clubs. Moreover, these children were missing out on other more exciting extra curricular activities organised by the schools. The report clearly highlighted that reducing the impact of poverty was not only about providing support, but more importantly teachers needed to develop their understanding of how poverty affects children and young people's lives and the stigma that is attached to it.

## What is the impact on children's well-being, development and learning when living on low income ore poverty?

### Shame

The effects of poverty are well researched by psychologists and there is clear evidence to suggest that people who live in deprived circumstances suffer significant psychological problems. The group Psychologists Against Austerity (PAF) published a briefing paper highlighting how austerity policies are having a real, measureable impact on mental health. To experience humiliation and shame, fear and distrust, instability and insecurity, isolation and loneliness, feelings of being trapped or powerless increase the likelihood of mental health problems (PAF, 2015).

Shame is a self-conscious and social emotion. When people feel disempowered and lack agency, they become highly critical of their abilities to cope financially, when they are in fact showing enormous efforts in managing scarce resources. For parents, these feelings only instil a sense of failure in their ability to care for their children.

Furthermore, Chase and Walker (2012) describe shame as a co-construction: the combination of how individuals judge their own inabilities on the one hand and on the other the anticipated judging of others who may demonstrate verbally or symbolically their own sense of social and moral superiority. There is a long history of qualitative studies which highlight the overwhelming feelings of shame and helplessness that are experienced by poor people and that these feelings have consistently been associated with chronic depression (Yongmie, 2013).

**Social Exclusion and Isolation**

Lister (2013) describes the psychological pain experienced by people living in poverty with the following words: *"disrespect, humiliation and an assault on dignity and self-esteem; shame and stigma; and also powerlessness, lack of voice, and denial of full human rights and diminished citizenship"* (p112). Moreover, it is the concept of the other or "othering" (Lister, 2013) which seems to give society permission to treat the poor as not only different but inferior, establishing and maintaining social distance, in other words excluding and isolating a vast number of adults, families and children.

Pemberton et al. (2014) highlighted the stigma attached to low income households through a pervasive and dominant discourse of portraying a distorted view of life on low income disseminated through the media. This discourse not only stereotypes individuals but to some extent institutionalises the poor. The poor are viewed with suspicions and their morals are evaluated: the single mothers, the sick or disabled, the young offenders, etc., all gathered under the same pejorative umbrella of benefits claimants. The same report also outlines the disrespect that people on low income receive throughout their daily lives, with participants in the survey offering numerous examples of verbal abuse and bullying when accessing services or sometimes directly experienced in their children's schools.

**Health and Well-Being**

There is consistent evidence in the body of literature about the wide range of negative outcomes associated with living in poverty.  These outcomes relate to children's physical health, cognitive and language development, attainment in education and academic achievement.  There is also increasing data which support that poverty is a causal influence on the mental, emotional and behavioural health of children. (Yoshikawa, Aber and Beardslee, 2012).

The effects of poverty are cumulative and do not occur in a vacuum or in isolation. Children's academic achievement or lack of it for example is multifaceted and a number of factors can be accounted for educational attainment: from family history  - the mother educational background for example - to genetics. However, there is mounting evidence of increased rates of depression in low socio-economic-status (SES) households. Furthermore, depressed parents and marital conflicts are related to higher rates of disorganized attachment in early childhood (Yoshikawa, Aber and Beardslee, 2012).

Research by Akee et al. (2010) is often cited in support of the causal link between poverty and children's overall well-being and educational attainment. The researchers investigated the impact of an increase in income to American Indian households (the opening of a Casino on a reservation allowed for profits to be distributed equally to all American Indian families). They found that an increase in income translated to sustained decrease in behavioural problems in children, as well as raised educational attainment.  There were also substantially less record of minor offenses and arrests by age 16 and an increase in the number of young people finishing the equivalent of secondary schooling.

Further evidence was highlighted in Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) report The Spirit Level. This book examined outcomes in education, mental and physical health, life expectancy and obesity across wealthy societies. The authors argue that it is not just about how affluent a society is but it is the inequalities in the distribution of resources which impact the most on the above-mentioned. The societies with the largest gaps in income between the 20% richest and the 20% poorest have the worst outcomes. The highest gaps were found in Singapore, the USA, Portugal and the UK. The lowest gaps were located in Japan, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) concluded that in a more egalitarian society, there is better social cohesion, trust, involvement in community life and lower level of violence.

## Supporting children from low income families

In 2016, the Child Poverty Action Group updated and published the following figures : 3.9 million children in the UK lived in poverty - 28% of all UK children – or to make this a more concrete, visual and meaningful figure it is the equivalent of 9 children in every class of 30 who are living in poverty today. This figure is established on a median income base line and although it is the usual way for poverty researchers to come up with numbers, it is only a rough estimate as was discussed earlier in the chapter. Due to recent changes in tax and benefits, the IMF estimates this number to rise to 4.6 million by 2020.

In a systematic review examining possible causation of households financial resources on to children's outcomes, Cooper and Stewart (2013) published compelling evidence – gathered from 34 studies worldwide – denoting clear indications that « *money makes a difference to children's outcomes* » (p5). Most of the evidence gathered suggested that lack of money had a direct impact on children's cognitive development and school achievement. This was followed closely by social and behavioural development. Published under the umbrella of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the authors posit that an increase in households' incomes would bring substantial reductions in differences in children's outcomes between the low income and others. It would not however completely eliminate that gap. Cooper and Stewart (2013) went further as to suggest that a £7000 increase in income in households with children on Free School Meal (FSM) would halve the attainment gap in KS2 SATs (between FSM and non FSM children).

On behalf of JFR, Connelly, Sullivan and Jerrim (2014) published a comprehensive review of educational attainment in Primary and Secondary schools in the UK. The authors made a number of conclusions :

- The level and / or experience of parental education was in itself a strong predictor of chidlren's educational attainment.

- Economic, cultural and social capital had a direct impact on educational inequalities.

- The socio-economic gap in educational attainment was greater than the ethnic or gender gap.

- Socio-economic disadvantage was equally damaging for children of both gender.

- Educational inequalities start in the pre-school years and continue to grow through primary and secondary schooling.

**Attainment Gap**

According to figures published by the DfE (2015), the UK has one of the largest performance gap between pupils from more and less disadvantaged backgrounds among all OECD countries. Although the attainment gap at KS2 level 4 or above has narrowed in the last couple of years from 19% to 16%.  However, whilst there is an association between low educational attainment and being poor, low income is not the only cause of social inequalities in educational outcomes (Connelly et al. 2014). Sociologists such as Bourdieu (1977) would argue that social class differences in attainment can be explained with reference to three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural.

Financial resources do matter as was highlighted earlier in this chapter (Cooper and Stewart, 2013), not only in the sense that money can buy private schooling or tutors, but well off parents have the ability to afford housing in a catchment area with good public funded schools (Ireson and Rushforth, 2004). Economic capital can have a direct impact on the quality of children and young people's environment: having one's own room to study or access to a computer and the internet for instance.

What Bourdieu (1977) refers to as social capital can be best described as the relationships between people in families, schools and communities (Connelly et al. 2014), a network of social connections which may explain the realities of social inequalities. In an education context, people on low income could be at a social capital disadvantage, for example working long hours may leave parents little time to connect or get involved with the school or school activities.

Prieur and Savage (2013) explain that the notion of cultural capital was developed originally as a tool to explain that children's successful educational attainment depended on the level of their parents' education and Connelly et al. (2014) made this their first conclusion from their report as highlighted above.  The main idea is that capitalist society reproduces itself and its power is maintained through the transmission of culture. Culture is acquired consciously or not over a number of years, first through socialisation within the family and then schooling (speech pronunciation or appreciation of the arts for example) (Madigan, 2002;  Ball, 2004). Bourdieu (1977) argues that children from what is seen as higher social

classes start with an advantage because their families are well off and free from economic worries. They are more likely to possess books or have access to music tuitions for instance. Working class children are taught in schools with the values of the dominant classes which are embodied in the education system and the school curriculum. Dominant classes maintain their power because their children already possess the cultural capital demanded in schools.

**A Deficit Model?**

Deficit theory in education refers to pupils differing from the norm, whether it is through disability or special learning needs, ethnicity, language and culture, and as such these pupils are considered deficient. The process of education will correct these perceived deficiencies. Gorski (2008) highlights the myths of the culture of poverty or the belief that poor people share *"a consistent and observable "culture""* (p32). The author cites numerous studies which concluded that there was no such thing as a culture of poverty and differences in behaviour and value systems were just as great between poor or wealthy people. Gorski goes on to explain that the concept is a construction based on stereotypes that have become unquestioned facts. Myths such as: poor people lack motivation and work ethics, poor parents are not involved in their children's education and learning, being poor also means you are more likely to be a drug or alcohol addict and poor people are "*linguistically deficient*" (p33). For Dudley-Marling (2007) it is cultural and linguistic differences which are constructed as deficiencies needed to be fixed and disadvantaged pupils are made to learn the appropriate and correct cultural and linguistic practices of the middle-classes. The author further argues that the deficit approach aims to mould poor children to the image of the dominant middle class.

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**Scenario 2**

Angel and Georgia will both be attending a local secondary school for the first time in the new academic year. Their living situation is still precarious and there has not been any money for going away on holiday over the summer break. Now both Angel and Georgia's parents are worried about the cost of their girls transitioning to secondary school. The exact and prescriptive requirements of their new school uniforms are an expense that the parents can ill afford. The emblazoned blazers and school sweaters, book bags and PE kits can only be purchased from one specialist supplier. Angel and Georgia's parents are unable to get a crisis loan and will have to cut back on other necessities, such as food or heating, in order to

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be able to afford the girls' uniforms.

DfE (2013) non-statutory guidance on school uniforms policy makes clear that cost and value for money should be the highest priority consideration when schools set out their uniform policy. The guidance suggests that school uniforms should be available for purchase in supermarkets or other good value shops. The Children's Commission on Poverty's inquiry "At what cost: Exposing the impact of poverty on school life" (2014) reported that on average families spent £800 a year on school cost. The commission found that more than two-thirds of parents struggle with school costs and the three main items parents worried about providing for their children whilst in full time education were school uniforms, other extra-curricular activities such as school trips and school meals. Children are aware their parents struggle to afford these items and this has led many to feeling of shame and embarrassment and more than a quarter of children taking part in the inquiry stated they had been bullied as a result.

When it comes to school materials and trips, again government guidelines are clear that schools cannot charge for any materials (books, instruments or other equipment) relating to the teaching of the national curriculum during or outside school hours and with regards to school trips, schools should not exclude pupils if parents are unwilling or unable to pay and if this is the case children must still be given an equal chance to participate to the visit (DfE, 2014). Schools can ask for voluntary contributions but must make clear there is no obligation to contribute.

However, the commission found that there are schools which charge for many materials, adding to the financial burden of struggling and disadvantaged families. The inquiry found that children from less well off backgrounds were avoiding certain subjects due to the costs of materials, specialised equipment or trips associated with these courses ( 1 in 6 of all children, rising to 30% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds).

The inquiry also found that many schools did not make clear to parents when asking for contributions to school activities that these were not compulsory. In the study, 37% of all children stated they had missed a school trip due to the cost, rising to 67% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Sometimes the trips are mandatory and part of the curriculum (a visit to a museum or an art exhibition for example). This affects children from less well off families' ability to participate fully in their education as well as missing out on the social

aspect of school visits / trips. Poor children are in effect excluded from full participation as citizens in our society.

**Activity 4**

1) The school governing body is responsible for setting up uniform policy. What is your school governing body's policy? Is the DfE guidance taken into account regarding cost and value for money?

2) What is your school policy on charging for some educational materials and school trips? Again, does the school adhere to the DfE guidelines?

3) Is your school aware of the financial barriers that may curtail their pupils from full participation?

## The Pupil Premium

In April 2011, the coalition government introduced the Pupil Premium in order to tackle the performance gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers and to increase social mobility (DFE,2015). The pupil premium is added funding given to publicly funded schools according to the number of its disadvantaged pupils. Pupils who had been registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the previous 6 years or who had been in care for 6 months or more are counted in the allocation of the pupil premium (OFSTED, 2014). The schools can use the funding in the best interests of all its eligible pupils. In 2013-14 the premium was £953 per academic year for each primary pupil and £900 per secondary student.

**Activity 5**

Investigate how your school spends its pupil premium.

**How schools use the pupil premium funding**

DfE (2013) surveyed schools in England to investigate how the extra funding was being spent and found that the majority of schools (primary, secondary, pupil referral units and special

schools) were aiming to support all disadvantaged pupils, with a minority of schools targeting specific groups of individual pupils whom were not making good progress. Schools provided a range of support including one-to-one tutoring or small group teaching, additional staff such as teaching assistants, learning mentors or family support workers, help with school trips, parental support, out of hours activities, or provision of material and resources.

In 2015 the Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) published recommendations for the next steps with the pupil premium. The EEF 2015 survey found that 76% of school teachers thought the premium had allowed schools to target resources to raise attainment to a great or to some extent and the use of early intervention schemes has seen a significant increase from 16% in 2012 to 31% in 2015. Because the premium was only introduced in 2011, there is still little research and thus evidence on the effectiveness the extra funding has had in bridging the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Current data shows that in primary schools, the gap in attainment has been narrowed but in secondary schools the data is inconclusive. The percentage point gap  for pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C GCSE  including English and Maths was nearly the same between 2011/12 and 2013/14, 27.2% and 27.4% respectively (EEF, 2015). It will be interesting to see if the gains made by the practice of early interventions in primary settings will carry over when this generation of children reach secondary schools.

## Key Aspects of good practice

Improving the outcome of educational attainment for children from low income families has been on the political agenda of all main stream parties for decades. Successive educational policies and changes in curriculum provision have still not changed the status quo: children and young people from disadvantaged background are still lagging behind their peers. OECD (2012) report is clear and unequivocal about this issue, the reality is that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are at higher risk of low performance.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by the Department for education to investigate what schools across the country were doing to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils and when successful in this task what set of common features could be drawn from this (DfE, 2015). The study found that no single intervention led to success. The strategies that schools found most effective were focused

on teaching and learning strategies including paired or small group teaching, improved feedback and one-to-one tuition. In secondary schools, the use of meta-cognitive learning (helping pupils to learn how to learn) as well as independent and peer learning strategies were found to be related to success in raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Schools that had started interventions early were also the most successful in bridging the attainment gap.

The lower performing schools were also found to have common characteristics with regards to disadvantaged pupil education attainment. Schools with higher levels of absence, lower proportion of disadvantaged children, larger year groups, higher proportions of children with special educational needs, higher proportions of white British ethnic backgrounds and rural schools were all associated with lower performance among disadvantaged pupils. There were also some localised UK regions associated with low performance compared with schools in London or the North East, namely in the South East, South West, the East of England and the North West.

Lewis and Demie (2015) also identified similar key good practice in their schools case study. These strategies included strong leadership and an inclusive curriculum meeting the needs of working class pupils. They also found that engaging parents and breaking the cycle of low aspiration contributed to the schools's success in narrowing the attainment gap. Of interest also, the authors found that the most successful schools were led by headteachers with white working class roots who had a strong commitments to the issues of white working class communities. Demie and McLean (2015) suggest that factors which assist in successfully closing the gap include strong leadership, high quality teaching and learning strategies, inclusive curriculum, effective use of data, one-to-one support and the use of the best teachers in interventions. These findings support what Ofsted (2014) had identified in that the schools showing the most improvement were committed to closing the attainment gap and had robust tracking systems of their pupils' learning needs.

## Conclusion

This chapter attempted to explore some of the issues faced by children who live on low income and its subsequent impact on their educational attainment. It is clear that the effects of poverty reach further than the school gates. There is a need for educational practitioners to appreciate the far reaching consequences of living in poverty as well as to understand

why socio-economic disadvantage impacts on learning. There is a lot that schools can do to raise the attainment of low income family children but to achieve social justice in education will certainly remain dependent on the allocation of state funding where it is needed (Lupton and Hempel-Jorgensen, 2012) and the pupil premium funding will need to be maintained.

Social mobility may possibly increase through educational attainment, however, poverty levels are the result of structural inequalities in economy and society and this cannot be addressed by only reforming schools (Connelly et al. 2014).  The achievement gap between children on low income and their peers also raises questions with regard to the cultural elements of schools and the curriculum. If schools in disadvantaged areas have been successful in raising attainment, the research shows than an inclusive curriculum was part of the solution. This would suggest that schools need to be flexible and listening in to the needs not only of their pupils but also of the wider community they serve.

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