

## APPG on Social Mobility – Session Two – Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018, Committee room 15

This session is the second session in the APPG's inquiry into the regional attainment gap. It sought to examine what made the London Challenge so successful and the legacy it has left, as well as exploring the outcomes of similar initiatives that have been set up in other parts of the country, and the impact that they have had on closing the attainment gap.

### APPG Officers in attendance

- Justin Madders MP (Chair)
- Baroness Claire Tyler (Co-chair)
- Lucy Powell MP
- Siobhain McDonagh MP
- Stephen Timms MP

### Speaker presentations

#### Welcome and introductions

Justin Madders introduced the regional attainment gap as the topic for inquiry for the APPG in this upcoming Parliamentary session. He gave some background on the current inquiry, outlining what was discussed at the previous session regarding a broad overview of the attainment gap. Justin said that the APPG was keen to hear about best practice and that this session would focus on both the London Challenge, and variations of the challenge in different parts of the country.

He then welcomed the first panellist to kick off the presentations.

#### Dame Sue John, Challenge Partners

- Sue was involved in the London Challenge from the beginning in 2003 and said that getting involved in the London Challenge was good for the school she was working in, as well as allowing her to see what was happening in other schools across the borough.
- Sue argued that the leadership of the London Challenge was important in bringing together the politicians, civil servants and practitioners and that the importance of this should not be undermined.
- She said that the London Challenge was led by practitioners for practitioners.
- Sue set out the three aims of the London Challenge: to raise standards, to create more good and outstanding schools, and to help close the gaps that already exist which meant the solutions would be different depending on what school it was being implemented in.
- It was initially a top down initiative from the Government which was funded by the Department for Education. Advisers were given a remit to challenge the five key boroughs to improve schools and there were originally 70 key to success schools.
- The London Challenge was about good knowledge mobilisation and transfer between schools.
- After three to four years, most of the schools had improved by either moving out of special measures or reaching the floor standard.
- Initially the Challenge was focused on the most vulnerable schools, with a language of hope and ambition and there was a real shift in culture which Sue says was important but is not written about.

- When the Challenge advisers went into schools they focused on leadership and pedagogy - these interventions made up a part of a wider series of initiatives going on in schools, all cross borough.
- The three areas which the Challenge did not focus on so much was curriculum, post 16 education and harnessing the power of universities.
- It was a pan London approach which provided scale.
- There was a theory of action where the good school would help the struggling school which would create an upward convergence of improvement.
- The aim was to always create sustainable improvement, along with a coaching model for sustainability.
- In order to mobilise knowledge there was a need for the four capitals below:
  - Knowledge in the system that needed capturing and moving it between schools
  - Social capital, people having the right skills to do this
  - Organisational capital with strong project management that works at pace (London Challenge was a delivery unit)
  - Political capital with the politicians being on board and creating capacity
- Place was an extremely important element of the Challenge and the sense of community was very important.
- Results improved dramatically, as did Ofsted ratings and London schools still have the best results. However the Challenge only lasted the cycle of a secondary school student.
- Leaders were given legitimacy by their peers, schools chose to take part in the Challenge and heads and staff were agile.
- Sue wondered with interventions now, whether MATs and teaching schools have the capacity and agility to provide effective support – especially given the retention and recruitment issue.
- Sue explained that Challenge Partners is part of the legacy of the Challenge with the organisation being practitioner led, seeking collaborative partnerships.
- The education landscape is very different to what it was like when the London Challenge was put in place. Government is now looking at areas rather than regions.
- Interventions need a hard edge challenge as well as support.
- There needs to be more moral capital across regions with local leaders ‘owning’ the problem.
- There has to be an alignment between where schools are and where they want to be.
- Needs to be collaborative partnerships, knowledge is in the schools but difficult to share but by doing so the money remains in the system.
- There is a need to lead and manage systemic innovation and ensure there is constant support, stick to the approach not constantly changing for interventions to be successful.
- There is a mobile teaching population in London which is both good and bad. And there were other key initiatives which sat alongside the London Challenge such as worker housing– no silver bullet.
- Education alone cannot increase social mobility but it is part of the solution.
- Sue argued that there is a need to use both public and private sector partnerships in order to replicate what happened in London.

#### Dr Tim Coulson, Norwich Opportunity Area Partnership Board

- London challenge stands out as the preeminent school improvement intervention.
- Tim argued that it built on the other thing that were happening at the time such as the primary national strategy which sat alongside the Challenge.
- Tim said that when we talk about areas of educational difficulty, the same areas keep coming up and that before the London Challenge and Opportunity Areas, there were educational action zones. Tim worked in Lambeth but said that the idea now that help would be directed to anywhere in London seems unthinkable. This shows the difference that we see in London schools compared to what we see elsewhere.

- The Challenge was about a school improvement but now the focus has shifted to numeracy, literacy etc which has left the legacy of sustainable good schools that can ride the ups and downs of national policy changes.
- It built on the strengths in the system with support going to those leaders who 'had done it before' and had a good record of success.
- He then went on to talk about the work that was taking place in Norwich. He argued that the delivery plan is a good one and shows that social mobility is very poor in Norwich. The analysis showed that there were four areas that the plan would focus on:
  - Early language
  - Professional development for teachers particularly in literacy and numeracy (in both primary and secondary schools)
  - Focus on exclusions
  - Supporting secondary schools and students to the world of work.
- Employers were very enthusiastic as they found it difficult to interact with schools in a way that was helpful to both parties.
- There are some very good schools in Norwich, and this is similar to the schools in London. The schools in London that were good were drawn on to help those schools that were struggling.
- Tim gave the example of a primary head teacher who had been in a school which required improvement and after 14 years was rated as good, and then as outstanding. Tim argued that there was something about the longevity of this headteacher, and his knowledge of what the local community required and building his team which is the model that is required in other schools.
- Norwich doesn't have the same mobility of staff or employment market.
- Tim is hopeful that the Challenge can be replicated but said it depends on how much backing it gets. There is no magic answer and therefore to replicate the benefits of the London Challenge is the determination.
- Schools can help increase social mobility but they need support from others, e.g. employers
- There are lots of initiatives out there that are looking to improve maths, literacy etc but London Challenge showed it was the schools that needed improving.
- Tim said that the question for them is what is the leverage of the opportunity areas? One more thing to listen to or the most important thing that they should be listening too with further structures to be put in place?

#### Simon Faull, Somerset Challenge

- Simon explained that Somerset is 334<sup>th</sup> in the country for social mobility.
- The Challenge ran from Feb 2014 to August 2017 and it was very much a bottom up approach which has both opportunities and challenges.
- It was headteacher led and was a partnership between 40 middle and secondary schools. There was a focus later on primary schools which focused on raising standards and closing gaps. It was inclusive with all schools being able to join.
- The Challenge was set up because there were a number of years of stagnating GCSE results, poor Ofsted inspections and poor relationships with headteachers, leaving schools isolated and needing to come together.
- There was a lot of pressure from Ofsted and DfE - a lot of challenges and not a lot of support.
- The idea was 'to do something', rather than 'waiting for something to be done to them'.
- The Somerset Challenge was given some funding, about £200,000 a year from the local authority and about £150,000 from schools.
- They looked to see what had worked in other areas. They were given help from Mulberry School in Tower Hamlets where the headteacher had grown up in Somerset and so understood the Somerset context. She challenged the local heads in a way that worked for the Somerset schools.
- Sense of place was very strong and it was crucial.

- Geography is an issue with it being a very big area with a lot of distance between schools, and some very small schools.
- There was virtually no school improvement infrastructure, half a teaching school, no NLE and 1 and half school improvement team in the local authority.
- There was a need to grow capacity locally quickly and everyone did everything voluntarily which created some difficulties in terms of pace. The RSC thought it would not make a difference as there were no levers to make people do anything.
- The impact is that there was a considerable increase in collaboration between headteachers and other staff locally and nationally, and that was the key thing that happened.
- Everyone is involved in some sort of peer review and school review programme. And every school was funded to be a member of a school improvement network. Every school had a partner that challenged them and worked with them.
- There has been a big increase in professional development with over 400 applicants for 15 courses. There is an aspiring headteacher programme with 12 graduates that have come back to speak to new cohorts.
- There is a common inset day which is used for subject specific training.
- Roughly 10% fewer young people go to university in Somerset than the rest of the country.
- Retention is less of an issue as once teachers come to Somerset they tend to stay. However getting them to come in the first place is more of an issue.
- In terms of outcomes, causality is difficult to prove. However, 9,000 more students are going to good or outstanding schools. It was 65% to 95.2% which moved Somerset up to 26<sup>th</sup> in terms of local area rankings. 4<sup>th</sup> most improved area in the country and in the 29<sup>th</sup> percentile in terms of achievement.
- Schools have since fallen back in 2017 and this raises questions about the sustainability of the interventions.
- Whilst funding has ceased, headteachers are still working but there are questions around how sustainable that is.
- Professional development is still happening and there is a research school designated in the area which Simon attributes to the challenge. There is also the work of the Somerset Opportunity area and there is more local capacity - 5 teaching schools and 10 NLEs.
- Simon believes that the London Challenge can be replicated if there is political will to do so.
- Issue that sometimes the local areas can be very local and could be broadened to bring schools in from just outside.
- Simon argued that sense of place is important and there should be ownership which makes a huge amount of difference. Should be support for lots of different partnership models.
- Sub regional improvement boards not doing the right job and are too far removed.
- SSIF and TLIF very bureaucratic with money just moving around. They need some rationalisation and the accountability of Ofsted needs to be looked at.
- There needs to be an incentive for areas to work together collaboratively.

#### Patsy Kane, Education and Leadership Trust

- Places evolve and change, and cultures that are there do not stay there forever.
- Manchester is very ambitious as a regional economy but is in the top ten nationally for disadvantage.
- There are lots of different kinds of schools but lots of collaboration there. Manchester University has social responsibility and is supporting the local community as one of its core priorities. Part of that is encouraging university staff to become governors of local schools.
- Primary schools have improved but less so in comparison to secondary schools. The fragility of keeping the status of schools means that although high school heads are supportive, more needs to be done in terms of collaboration.

- High school heads meet monthly and although that is supportive, it is not collaborative in terms of sharing best practice.
- Have set up the Manchester Schools Alliance which heads choose to buy into. This runs several kinds of meetings for different members of staff and is important for sharing practice. But there is not enough peer review, with some people being quite worried about it.
- The Manchester Challenge was set up in a very challenging community and was very supportive for headteachers, as well as being very student outcome focused.
- There is no co-ordinated offer to schools across Manchester which is most likely leading to inefficiencies and cross over.
- Patsy then went on to speak about the academy trust chain and how two schools are in the top 10% nationally and one is in the bottom 10% nationally but is on its improvement journey.
- They are working across the chain to ensure that standards and values are very clear, including producing induction documents and processes.
- The chain has high quality external partners and is working with Manchester Business School at the university which allows students to become familiar with the university by going to events and feeling comfortable in that environment. Also working with the Manchester United Foundation.
- The role of young people is very important in the Trust with lots of work on student leadership and how they can create a culture of achievement, as well as providing essential life skills through activities such as presenting on parents evenings. Patsy said that more schools should allow students to lead.
- There have been many years of strengthening middle leadership but now looking to focus on high and top leaders. Lots of headteachers now leaving perhaps because they don't have the support that they should have had.
- Difficult to reach out to some schools and frustrating that they are unwilling to accept partnerships.
- She argued that there needs to be greater coordination of the teaching schools offer.
- SSIF focusing on bigger projects and needs to look more at local projects within the local context.
- She argued that there needs to be more collective approaches to school improvement and collaboration, and more support for heads in a challenging context.
- There is a need for funding in Manchester to be matched at the same level that London schools receive.
- There is a need for sustainable workloads which would allow teachers to fully engage with what would help students as well as with recruitment and retention.
- Patsy argued that flexible working is a huge issue facing schools now.
- She also argued that there needs to be more businesses connecting with schools.

### Question and Answer session

**Lucy Powell MP asked whether early years was part of the London Challenge given that children tend to enter London schools with a higher level of development than elsewhere?**

Dame Sue John said that the focus on early years came much later under the Primary Director. She said that there was a big emphasis on Key Stage Two attainment but the focus on early years came much later. Sue said that she doesn't think that they paid enough attention on early years and post 16. Lucy said that it was then perhaps a by-product of the Challenge and Sue said some of it was due to other initiatives working in those areas.

**Lucy then asked about the opportunity areas and the fact that they might be too small – she welcomed reflections on the size and scale of the areas from the panel.**

Dr Coulson suggested that he thought the size of a London borough (55 schools) was about right for school improvement, drawing on his own experiences in Camden. The schools are close enough together and can be well managed. He then moved on to discussing scale and said that it depended on the focus of improvement and once you knew what that was, you could then decide on the best size for scale. On Norfolk, he argued that the geography is quite different and therefore distance is an issue.

Dame Sue John argued that wider areas were needed as otherwise there was a danger of 'moving round mediocrity'. She drew on her experiences during the London Challenge and the fact that although schools in Hounslow felt very much on the outskirts in terms of the geography, it also allowed the sharing of best practice between Feltham and Barking and Dagenham.

Simon Faull said that a wider remit was also better. He said that half of the teachers involved in the Somerset Challenge were from just one school. A wider range would allow for greater capacity and make the project more effective.

Patsy Kane argued that the geographical size works well in Manchester, especially with the improved infrastructure links, creating a sense of place.

**Justin said that was sensing that there was something in having a sense of place. He asked whether it should be created top down or bottom up?**

Tim argued that it was a bit of both and would depend on the place itself, drawing on his experience in Essex where a sense of place didn't necessarily include the whole of Essex.

Sue talked about a need for a three pronged approach – being true to your values, true to your locality and then working with the wider environment so that they don't get trapped locally.

Simon argued that you can have both depending on the areas. It depends on the individual circumstances and a bit of both is needed for it to work.

**Baroness Tyler asked about the barriers to collaboration that Patsy had mentioned in her presentation.**

Patsy suggested that some of it was a lack of trust, and that a culture of trust has been implemented in the academy chain that Patsy is working in. Patsy argued that sometimes teachers were worried about their jobs if they got something wrong and that what was needed was a high trust environment. She said that some people did not want to be accountable to their peers and that is a real loss to the system. Colleagues should realise that they are there to support each other as well as challenge each other.

#### Questions from the audience

**A question was asked regarding what preventative measures could be taken right at the beginning instead of needing interventions later on.**

**What could opportunity areas do where there is no university and how universities can get involved in that agenda?**

**A question was asked about money for widening participation to be put in the hands of schools so that they get buy in for some of the interventions.**

Sue argued that there needs to be more attention paid to early years as what happens early on in a young person's education can affect what happens later on and the negative impact of poor early years education is difficult to reverse.

Sue also said that some of the universities do not know what to do with their widening access budgets and schools may be better placed in terms of spending some of that money. She said that it was a question of

targeting students who had that potential to go to university but it was also about raising the attainment, tenacity and resilience of those students so that they are university ready when they go. She did say that some schools have very good links with universities that are doing lots of important work in this area.

Tim said that the role of the university is very important in Norwich and is giving a lot of support to the opportunity area. The preventative measures that are taking place in Norwich apart from a focus on language and vocabulary and collaboration for a purpose, is meeting the challenge of behaviourally challenged children who are really struggling. Alternative provision is not strong enough and the Norwich Opportunity Area is looking at ensuring that a Charter of Inclusion is put together that is not just about taking ownership of their own school but for the education of all children in the area.

Sue argued that some issues in this area are due to undiagnosed SEN issues and that more work needs to be done on this aspect of education.

In relation to universities, Simon brought up the issue of young people going away and leaving the area that they have grown up in. He argued that universities need to do more to keep young people in their local areas. Prevention is also an issue but schools in Somerset are collecting data to see what is happening in schools. He said that early years should be a big focus and that in Somerset there was an issue with both with quality and with access – transport is not available to get to the provision and so young people end up in schools without any early years education.

Patsy said that young people in her schools focused on resilience, oracy, learning and vocabulary. They are taught that challenge is good, as is feeling uncomfortable. She argued that these are skills that students need in order to gain the higher grades at GCSE, especially vocabulary and the ability to articulate well. She also said debating is a good way of developing confidence but also a form of cooperative learning where students can build on each others ideas. Apprenticeship routes are also important and have opened up opportunities for some young people by offering routes to degree level work.

**A question was about the role of local youth services and how they could be mobilised.**

Patsy argued that there is potential for them to do a lot but with fewer resources, schools are losing out from not having a good youth service to help develop young people and keep them positive. She argued that the NCS is playing a positive role through the experience that it offers.

Tim said that youth services are important and that in Norwich they have been listening to young people's view on what kind of services they want to see. There are a number of young peoples charities who are helping and who want to be more involved – Tim said that it posed a question about the link between schools and schools improvement and statutory services and those which are not.

Sue said that her concern is that some schools have a lot of offers but that there are a lot of schools that are isolated who do not know about these offers or how to follow through offers to access these opportunities. Some schools get better and better and others are not accessing what exists in the system.

**A question was asked about how academy trusts raise the attainment of disadvantaged young people and how their role fits into the wider initiatives such as opportunity areas etc also trying to improve attainment.**

Simon said that the academy chains in Somerset are very small and some are doing well but there are not that many big chains in the local area.

Sue argued that the MATs that are working with the Challenge are small MATs and that do not have the capacity to put school improvement in place and bigger MATs should share best practice.

Tim said that whilst London outperforms all other areas, the Eastern region is doing well and he said that part of this was down to some of the Trusts in the area who focused on the real improvement of children rather than just turning the school into a good school. He said that it was important to get a sense of what works for disadvantaged child vs what works in the structure of the system. He said focusing on those children who are disadvantaged is easier the larger the MAT is. It is difficult to find what works for disadvantaged young people in smaller settings with teachers finding it difficult, and in Norwich schools are pulling the sum of everything that is happening to see whether it is making a difference. He argued you can be part of more than one thing as a school.

Patsy argued that the MAT system is too variable and that the system has not been thought through.

Justin Madders thanked the panellists for their contributions, summing up by saying that collaboration, community and commitment were the three themes he had drawn out of the session today, and closed the meeting.