Educational attainment gap – role of the third and private sector.

Response from FCA Scotland.

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the scale of the third and private sectors’ involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement, and the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities;

Our perception over a long number of years spent working in schools is that the provision of support from the Third Sector into schools remains still localised and ad hoc, and variable across primary and high schools. Whilst this remains the picture then it will fall to the substantive content of the curriculum delivered by the teaching staff to seek to improve achievement and attainment, if by that we mean examination results.

If we consider attainment and achievement in a wider context then all of us who have witnessed competent third sector delivery and involvement will testify to the power and positivity of this type of intervention. Not only can delivery of this kind enhance and deepen understanding it will often allow for involvement, achievement and credit from children who would not normally be the most prominent or involved if based only on academic ability.

Time pressures on school managers and teaching staff to deliver the formal curriculum will limit the involvement of the Third Sector particularly in high schools as external examinations and placement in league tables continues to define success. Conflict will often add additional stresses for young people who miss timetabled lessons whilst receiving support elsewhere.

whether their approaches have been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils. If so, whether their methods could be more embedded in the curriculum

There is clear evidence that both the attendance and attainment of looked after children who are accommodated is substantially ahead of those children who remain looked after at home (LA).

There remains a gap in the academic attainment of LAAC against the whole school cohort although this shows small signs of closing. Early intervention should hopefully continue that trend.

Where it is clear YP are unable to engage with formal education at National Assessment level it is important that they have access to a vocational, amended curriculum or other alternatives to education. This is an important area for third and private sector providers.

Within each different group eg LAAC, looked after at home, not Looked after - there are YP with different attitudes to education. We offer our S4-6 pupils extra 1x1 subject support though not all take it up. Those who do evidence better academic outcomes. It is possible to target individual
pupils with individual support rather than more generic programmes aimed at all LAAC or all pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds as these are not always homogenous groups.

Third sector would appear to play a greater part in the delivery of achievement as opposed to attainment if we regard ‘attainment’ as exam results and progress through levels. There is research (G Connelly) which evidences that those pupils who engaged in activities outside of school were also more likely to achieve academically.

The methods and content used by the Third Sector to engage young people are as varied as methods and content found within the mainstream curriculum currently being delivered by teaching staff. There is not one single method which would hold the magic key for successful mainstream curriculum delivery. In fact the randomness of the input, deviation from the normal routine, and exposure to outsiders in the school will often engage young people and allow for more relaxed participation.

There appears to be a spread and level of involvement which is not quantifiable nor is it subject to an audit. Involvement appears to rely rather on the individual school and that will depend in turn on the culture and social mix of the school, the local environment and economy, parental involvement and staffing levels in the school, and links and ties with external agencies.

\[\text{whether the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children’s attainment and achievement is being realised}\]

Finance will continue to be a problem here. Young people who become accommodated in a fostering environment where adequate supports are put in place evidence greater placement stability and better education outcomes. Attainment and achievement are not the exclusive gift of schools – they have a part to play. But the greater part is played by the home, peer group and social background. The third/private sector can be better placed to operate (Team Parenting) around the child and in circumstances where the ‘achievement/attainment’ gap is at its most noticeable. Schools work hard to engage parents but will admit that it remains difficult to engage the parents of the most disadvantaged – and teachers, by and large and by workload, remained rooted in schools. More needs to be done to work with the most disadvantaged in a supportive, holistic and, if necessary, home and community based model.

\[\text{how successful schools have been in reporting on pupils’ wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helps to deliver. Whether such achievements are valued by parents, employers and learning providers as much as formal qualifications; -}\]

There is still a need for greater emphasis on ‘wider achievement’ and if the third sector has a significant role in this then the full potential of the third/private sector is probably not being realised.

We do not recall seeing a ‘Wider achievements’ section in either primary or secondary reports. There are occasional mentions of contribution to assembly or singing in the choir but reporting on
exam results or academic performance to date is overwhelmingly the emphasis in secondary. In the primary sector CfE allows more emphasis on skills based learning but clear acknowledgement of ‘wider achievement’ is lost.

I feel schools value wider achievement and teachers understand its importance but there remains cultural blocks to how this information is gathered, stored and evidenced to others. 20 years ago there was great investment in the National Record of Achievement (commonly known as the wine list) but these initiatives have not stood the test of time. All pupils need to be supported and encouraged to engage in ‘outdoor learning/extra curricula activity/hobbies/clubs etc’ where lifeskills are honed, confidence, well-being and health raised, and academic attainment positively affected.

We have a system which has examinations squarely embedded at it’s core and to that end we must support our young people in achieving the best they can in that system.

At the same time we need to realise that in the real world values and qualities which make our society what it is and what we aspire to as members of that society will contain elements of knowledge and experience found outwith the confines of the examination system.

The Third Sector can assist greatly in providing access to that part of the curriculum, but only in conjunction with the ethos of the school itself. That ethos will mirror and reflect the community which the school serves. If a school seeks at all levels to support the widest breadth of achievement and attainment then third sector involvement will go hand in hand with the daily running of the school and will not be seen as marginalised or offering a second tier opportunity. If on the other hand Third Sector involvement is paid lip service to then it is likely that such opportunities will not be given chance to develop fully within the school.