Summary of Includem’s evidence

Includem argues that young people are ready to learn when they are emotionally stable, with positive relationships in their lives and when they are encouraged and supported to attend school regularly. Based on our experiences we would encourage the Committee to look not only at interventions within school but at the targeted, home and family wraparound support that can be provided in addition to core school support for those young people who face the greatest barriers to active engagement with education. Attendance at school is inextricably linked to attainment.

About Includem

Includem is a charity which helps some of Scotland’s most vulnerable and challenging young people to achieve positive change in their behaviour and relationships and move towards leading fulfilling lives. We are there 24/7 and believe young people are never beyond help. By achieving better results for them, we also reduce public spending in the immediate and long term.

What Includem does

Includem is a specialist provider which works through commissioned arrangements to provide services for vulnerable young people and their families in their own homes and communities. We deliver targeted, personalised services out with school hours with one to one support at evenings and weekends alongside access to a 24 hour support framework.

Our work is focused on our experience that young people are willing to engage with education only when they are emotionally stable and they have positive relationships in their lives. By working in a targeted way not just with the young people but their families we can put in place a structure around school attendance and engagement.

The attainment gap in Scotland will not reduce with more in school interventions alone. To raise attainment resources need to be invested into improving child/parent relationships, child/school relationships and parent/school relationships. Identifying and addressing the underlying causes of why young people do not engage is fundamental.

The key elements of the programme are:

- Practical support to ensure school attendance such as reinforcing bed times, getting up routines etc;
- Proactive work with parents to set boundaries and manage difficult behaviour at home;
- Supporting young people to think about communication and relationships, managing their frustration, anger, emotions etc;
• Work with parents to access help for health, housing, finance and other problems which undermine their own parenting capacity and the young person’s family and home life;
• Work with parents on their attitudes to education and responsibilities – giving them the confidence to engage with education;
• Close working with pupil support services and other agencies and linking in with each school’s attainment and inclusion policy;
• Age and stage appropriate support for the child out with school hours which develops and reinforces attendance and engagement as well as confidence, motivation and ability to participate in school work.

A case study which highlights the importance of work ‘beyond the school gates’ to improve attainment is attached at the end of this briefing. Although the young person, Kenny, is 16 the lessons from his experience are relevant to interventions with children and young people of all ages.

Specific questions asked by the Committee

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<th>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.</th>
<th>Our own experience is focused on providing tailored support outside the classroom. This is, in our view, an extremely important part of the scaffolding of support which is required for young people to engage with education and is often overlooked. We believe young people will be willing and ready to engage in their education when their personal and family circumstances are in a healthy state, and this requires a change in thinking away from ‘dividing lines’ between parts of services towards a whole system approach. Attendance at school is inextricably linked to improving levels of attainment so this must be a policy priority. Our work is completed in conjunction with schools complementing existing pupil support arrangements/approaches with appropriate information sharing across services.</th>
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<td>Whether your approaches have been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils. If so, could your methods be more embedded in the curriculum.</td>
<td>For attainment to improve we need to consider more than simply the curriculum and resources within school and think about all the other aspects in young people’s lives which contribute to their learning journey. Critical to the success of our work has been the referral process which ideally identify young people in need before the point of crisis. By getting behind previously closed doors we have been able to identify unknown problems which undermine crucial parental support for their child’s attainment. We would like to see all schools having access to this kind of service which builds on the work they are doing within the classroom.</td>
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<td>Whether the full potential of the third sector should not be seen as a ‘top up’ to services</td>
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third and private sectors in helping to improve children’s attainment and achievement is being realised. provided by schools but rather as a sector which can provide specialist, targeted provision for young people most in need. Inevitably third sector organisations are limited in the scale of their projects by the funding available to deliver them. Our own project in Dundee currently has a waiting list with many more referrals than we are able to support.

Without funding for these targeted interventions, much of the experience and expertise in the third sector will not be fully utilised.

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<th>How successful schools have been in reporting on pupils’ wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helpers deliver. Whether such achievements are valued by parents, employers and learning providers as much as formal qualifications.</th>
<th>We cannot comment directly on how schools recognise wider achievement, however we would simply echo the points above, that achievement requires engagement, and without taking steps to engage young people in education they will not complete formal qualifications or engage in the wider education process.</th>
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<td>Given the strong policy focus on the early years whether the third and private sectors have been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages.</td>
<td>We support early intervention to avert crises and provide timely support to young people. However early intervention does not always mean early years, and we can evidence effective early intervention in young people of all ages which also has a significant impact.</td>
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**What Includem believes is required to close the attainment gap**

Whilst we would welcome any additional funding for and focus on raising attainment, it is important that the implementation of this policy focuses not just on the school experience but the whole approach taken to engaging children and young people in education.

What happens to a young person when they go home is fundamental and in Includem’s 15 years of experience working with families we know that a stable family life is critical to a young person’s personal development and to their educational achievement.

The June 2014 report by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission into the ‘Lessons from London’ research concluded that whilst the importance of encouraging early achievement in primary schools is evident, “we should not completely discount the role of secondary schools in sustaining achievements into post-16 outcomes”. We would echo this conclusion and in particular we would encourage more support for young people in the crucial and oftentimes challenging transition from primary school to secondary school and for services to recognise the importance of getting transitions right.

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Finally, we would encourage the Scottish Government to **invest in measures at all ages** which will recognise and tackle the complexity and challenges of some young people who are most at risk of disengaging from education.

For further information please contact Michael Shanks, Communications and Policy Manager on 0141 427 0523 or michael.shanks@includem.co.uk.

**Case Study: Kenny’s Story**

Kenny was 16 when he was referred to Includem. He was a cause for concern for his school on account of his poor attendance (lower than 50%), frequent exclusions and a recent charge of breach of the peace in the local community.

Kenny was defeatist and unengaged. He believed he was never going to succeed at school and he had challenges at home – he was often the sole carer for his mum who had mental health problems and he had a challenging relationship with his dad. Neither of his parents offered him any encouragement to attend school.

Includem worked with Kenny to build up his confidence and to get him to think about his goals and ambitions. He worked through our cognitive toolkit, “A Better Life” and thought through all his relationships – good and bad – and what they meant to him. Through this work we supported Kenny’s mum and dad to think of ways they could engage better with him and both parents agreed to take more responsibility for his actions at home.

His negative behaviours were challenged head-on by encouraging his parents to set down boundaries. As a result of this Kenny started to get into more of a routine including thinking about homework, going to bed at reasonable times and getting up in time for school each morning. Both Kenny and his parents used our 24/7 helpline to reinforce these boundaries and to seek help before his behaviour escalated.

As his attendance at school improved we started to work constructively with the school to encourage him to become more involved in his classes and to take part in lessons. He prepared an exam timetable with our workers as part of thinking through his future plans.

After 38 weeks Kenny exited our services and he is now reengaged with education with much improved attendance and reduced late coming. He sat every exam he was enrolled in and has now attended a college interview showing his willingness to continue to engage in education beyond school. He has not picked up any further charges in the community.