

Child of the North APPG: Education Meeting Evidence Session

17 May 2023

Attendees:

- Mary Robinson MP (Chair)
- Emma Lewell-Buck MP (Co-Chair)
- Kim Johnson MP
- Rachael Maskell MP
- Mary Foy MP
- Judith Blake, Baroness Blake of Leeds
- Professor Mark Mon-Williams, University of Leeds
- Dr Megan Wood, University of Leeds and Born in Bradford Study #
- James Lauder, Assistant Vice Principal, Dixons Trinity Academy, Bradford
- Maryam, Alumni, Dixons Trinity Academy, Bradford
- Rebecca Natton (Emma Lewell-Buck's Office)
- Alexis Darby (Health Equity North)
- Professor Kate Pickett (University of York via Zoom)
- Professor David Taylor-Robinson (University of Liverpool via Zoom)
- Hannah Davies (Health Equity North via Zoom)

Apologies:

- Mary Glendon MP
- Catherine McKinnell MP,
- Sharon Hodgson MP
- Liz Twist MP
Bishop of Durham

Meeting Minutes

Update on the 'Child Poverty and Cost of Living Crisis' report campaign plan actions from Hannah Davies and Alexis Darby.

There was a large amount of media coverage from the report with 270 pieces of media coverage, being viewed over 13 million times. It is evident that the issues raised are being recognised across the entire UK.

Actions completed:

- Meetings set up with the relevant ministers and reports distributed.
- Selection of oral questions generated for each recommendation.
- Written questions produced, specifically around increasing child benefit and free school meals.
- The profile of the campaign was raised further after the Westminster Hall debate on 3 May 2023.
- Working with Sustain and the Food Foundation to build advocacy around our school meal recommendations. Alexis will progress with booking a room with Rachael Maskell MP's office for a launch event regarding research from young people in Yorkshire re: FSM.

- Child of the North report along with the recent report has been sent to the main political parties to begin to influence manifestos before the General Election next year.

Evidence Session

Professor David Taylor-Robinson, University of Liverpool

- The disproportionate investment between the North and South has led to increased health inequalities such as childhood obesity and infant mortality.
- Instead of being “equal”, we need to be “equitable” and reinvest where the need is greatest.
- Northern schools are currently at a disadvantage because of the current system, whereas London schools benefit much more.
- Government should prioritise spending and support to the schools at the most disadvantage where academic outcomes are the poorest.

Professor Mark Mon-Williams, University of Leeds

- Teachers became frontline troops during the pandemic and were left largely responsible for addressing the inequalities that were heightened as a result of the pandemic
- Children are waiting way too long for their needs to be met (e.g., assessments, interventions etc.) even though all the evidence suggests that early support is key.
- This also creates economic disaster as problems snowball over time as well as impacting social services, the criminal justice system, and health services.
- Schools are the most appropriate place for intervention as here they are the least expensive but most effective.
- We need to take a whole system approach to connect the services and Research & Development of our Universities to change public service delivery.
- In Bradford, we are able to explore the intersections between public services by using connected data, now these insights need to be put into practice with the backing from political leadership.
- We already have examples of how data-driven, whole-system approaches can change policy – providing children with free glasses to be worn in schools by bringing in optometrists, creating healthier schools with the use of clean air technology, and identifying children at risk of Autism and SEND at school entry.
- The Child of the North aims to ensure that every area in the North of England undertakes a similar whole-system, data-driven approach to address the structural inequalities faced by society.

Dr Megan Wood, Born in Bradford

- Early identification = early intervention. This will prevent more detrimental consequences from occurring further down the line.
- Existing statutory assessments such as the EYFSP (a measure of school readiness) can be used to identify need.
- Lack of school readiness can indicate children who have grown up in a disadvantaged environment and have not had their needs met, have an underlying neurodevelopmental condition, or a combination of these.
- We have used the EYFSP (teacher-reported assessment completed in Reception) to suggest that those who perform less well are at elevated risk of having SEN, poor academic achievement, Autism, persistent absenteeism, and even becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) at 16-18 years.
- We are using this research as the basis for the development of the “Electronic Developmental Profiling Tool” which can be used by teachers to identify need across development.

- We highlight the opportunity for Government to use connected data to coordinate public service delivery.

James Lauder, Assistant Vice Principal, Dixons Trinity Academy, Bradford

- London schools are achieving a third of a grade higher at GCSE compared to schools in Yorkshire – reflecting the similar findings presented by Professor Taylor-Robinson.
- We are experiencing a mental health crisis and have the data to support this which is having a detrimental impact across a range of outcomes.
- For example, we have found a change in the attributes of our students post-pandemic. Students are struggling much more in school with mental health and particularly attachment issues. As a result, we are noticing a much greater level of need for our students and this is reflected in their attendance too
- Many students now have needs beyond our “mainstream specialism”. While previously, these children would be in AP schools, they are now remaining in mainstream and we have to adapt our practices to ensure they are getting the support they need.
- As a Trust, we want to address these issues and ensure our young people are given a voice.
- We conducted a listening exercise involving over ten thousand young people to gain their opinions on what are the main priorities in the city of Bradford – the top three were the cost of living crisis, mental health, and anti-racism.
- From this feedback, we can make changes by engaging with other services and knitting together the fragmentation – one example has been the presence of a family support worker from the NHS in school
- By doing so, we are incorporating mental health support within our schools and encouraging the connection between health and education services
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Maryam, Alumni, Dixons Trinity Academy, Bradford

- The pandemic deepened the disparities between the North and the South and this was a constant narrative that young people were hearing – we were being told that schools in the North were “failing students”.
- The Pandemic not only had a negative impact on mental health and time away from school, but made exams and university applications even more strained.
- In particular, the Pandemic was isolating for young people and had a negative impact on our mental health and social skills – many students had “lost their spark” when returning to school after Lockdown.
- While there has been a lot of work done recently on improving mental health, it is still largely taboo in South Asian communities. Many young people therefore face stigma and are ashamed to seek the support they need.
- In addition, more deprived students were at an even greater detriment as a result of Lockdown due to lack of technology and resources. These young people did not have what they needed to complete the work or access learning resources online.
- I am proud to be from Bradford but I feel marginalised and stigmatised as a result of being from the North. There are a lot of stereotypes associated with crime and deprivation and this has a negative impact on our mental health and self-esteem.

Questions and discussion from MPs

Judith Blake, Baroness Blake of Leeds

A big thank you to Maryam for sharing her experience. Funding is a huge issue and this is key to our next report. I’m concerned that sharing data is a problem and it shouldn’t be – why is that? Directors

and leaders of children's services need to have responsibility for every child and work under one banner – what can we do so every area has the same opportunities?

Kim Johnson MP

Mark to say to you that the level of connectivity and early diagnoses is important. How are schools supporting those children that need support, I have heard of high levels of exclusions. I'd be keen to talk to David Taylor-Robinson about how we can tackle the attainment gap that is wider, in my view due to COVID 19 and austerity. Sure Start was a great leveler before it was scrapped.

Mary Foy MP

The pandemic highlighted inequalities, the government has slashed public services and now it is unimaginable. Funding for schools is an issue and currently we have sticking plasters. We know children need a good start and that we need to address the wider determinants of health. We need to highlight this to government and we need policy change.

Rachael Maskell MP

Thank you for the presentations and we would all like to receive copies if possible. The Born in Bradford study shows these inequalities are baked in and early starts are crucial – we need to get in early. With regards to autism if the school is the hub then funding needs to map on to this. Housing gives a multiple disadvantage and is a major factor of driving inequalities.

Emma Lewell-Buck MP

Thank you to all the speakers today and especially to Maryam. Every child matters was the agenda of the previous government, and we need to look at that. Now we have the data and evidence, we need to apply it to drive policy change.

ENDS