

BSCKE EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF FALMER FULL SERVICE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Final Report to CUPP

Professor Peter Ambrose, HSPRC, Brighton University, March 2006

CONTEXT - THE DfES EXTENDED SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

The DfES announced in March 2003 that by 2006 at least one school in every local education authority will become an 'extended school'. The 240 extended schools to be funded under the £52 million Programme will provide services over and above delivery of the formal education curriculum. These will include childcare, health and social care, lifelong learning opportunities, family learning, parenting support, study support, sports and arts, and ICT access. 'Extended services' will enable schools to focus on their core role of raising standards for pupils. They will:

- support children's learning - for example children in need of services like speech therapy will not miss half the school day travelling to an appointment if the service can be provided on site
- help parents balance work and family life - for example flexible school based childcare can better meet parents' working needs and health care facilities on the school site are easier for families to access; and
- benefit communities - for example local residents are able to use schools resources for a wide range of adult learning, recreational and IT opportunities

In 2003 Brighton and Hove City Council designated Falmer High School as an Extended Full Service School (FSS) under the Programme.

LOCAL EVALUATION REQUIRED

The LEA was one of 25 covered in a preliminary national evaluation carried out by Newcastle University in collaboration with Brighton University (*Evaluation of the Extended Schools Pathfinder Project*, DfES Research Report RR 530, 2004). This was carried out at too early a stage to evaluate local impacts.

The LEA therefore approached CUPP and HSPRC to carry out a more detailed locally-specific evaluation focusing especially on the impacts on the local East Brighton community as the extended services gather momentum.

ORGANISATION OF THE EVALUATION UNDER THE BRIGHTON & SUSSEX COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE (BSCKE) PROGRAMME

Given the significance of the Extended Schools (ES) Programme to the development of local community capacity, and the close involvement of a number of voluntary organisations in the extended school services, it was agreed that the

evaluation should be carried out as a Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange project and in the context provided by the *Aide Memoire for the Self-evaluation of Projects* produced in November 2004

The BSCKE norm is that projects will be carried out by a part-time graduate Associate overseen by a senior Brighton University supervisor. Given the nature of this evaluation it was agreed that most of the tasks that would otherwise be assigned to an Associate should be taken on instead by a small group of, say, three parents or other local residents working part time (approximately 3-4 hours per week) during term time. These would be people who are already involved in developing the Extended School activities. It was agreed that the group would work in close co-operation with the Head Teacher, the FSS Co-ordinator, staff, other parents, children and other participating organisations and under the general guidance of the University supervisor.

It was planned that the input from the supervisor over the first three months (0.5 time from November 04 to January 05) would be given over to the establishment of a 'baseline' and to the setting up of ongoing evaluation mechanisms, such as periodic surveys and rounds of interviews, these to be managed subsequently by the parent/resident group. His input over the ensuing eleven months (0.1 time from February 05 to December 05) was to be largely supervisory and consultative.

The evaluation team was to be accountable to the Falmer Extended School (FES) Steering Group and to the BSCKE Management Group and was to report to both at agreed intervals. Although the main link is with a statutory agency (the LEA/School) much of the ES activity, and the evaluation, relates to the development in the capacity of parents and other residents and of children in Falmer High School and the feeder primary schools. In addition the evaluation project set out to provide advisory support to the wide range of extra-mural voluntary and community organisations who are delivering the extended services.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE EVALUATION

1. Given the overall philosophy of using the evaluation as an integral aid to the development of the extended activities, rather than imposing it 'from outside', it was agreed that the indicators to be used, and the survey techniques utilised, should be developed collectively following discussions with key interest groups – children, parents, staff, external organisations and the locally recruited evaluation team.
2. The first information set was to be collected, so far as was practicable, as at October 2004 so as to provide a baseline for measuring future progress.
3. Some of the indicators would be qualitative, derived from interviews with the key interest groups using where appropriate a 0-5 ranking to facilitate comparison over time. Other indicators would be numerical.

4. A key aim was that the evaluation process should achieve sustainability. It was planned that Phase 1 (up to January 2005) would require 'hands on' input from the University of Brighton supervisor. Part of this input would be to form the locally recruited evaluation team and deliver training so that the supervisor's input into Phase 2 (February to December 2005) could be much lighter. Thereafter the intention was that the evaluation team that had been formed and trained would continue with the evaluation under the general management of the School.

PLANNED OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

1. An evaluation of the impact of the Extended School activities over the first fifteen months of operation until December 2005
2. Recruitment of a team of locally recruited parents and residents to manage and run the evaluation following the end of the BSCKE funding.
3. Delivery of a progressive training programme to this group to enable the evaluation to be carried on from January 2006 onward with minimal consultancy support from the University
4. Input to the teaching and research activities of the University in the shape of 'one-off' seminars led by the supervisor in a range of courses in the social policy, community development and public health areas
5. Consultation with the Convenor and others responsible for the development of the Full Service School in Greater Hollington in Hastings about development strategies and methods of evaluation to provide the mutual benefit of cross-fertilisation of ideas and practice between the two extended schools and to aid the development of knowledge exchange in Hastings.
6. An article on the impact of the FSS activities in an appropriate publication plus other forms of dissemination as appropriate.

ACTUAL OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT (as at March 2006)

1. The evaluation process is now fully in place and separate termly surveys are being run on the three main aspects of the extended school programme – i.e. Mac's Place (a drop-in health advisory service), The Bridge (an adult learning centre attached to the school) and Study Support (a programme of activities to support students' learning). A fourth termly survey has been initiated to assess staff attitudes to the implementation of the extended services.

The Study Support survey began in the Summer Term of 2005 and the other three surveys began in the Autumn Term of 2005.

At present only preliminary results are available from the first full round of surveys run in the Autumn Term of 2005. Full results for all the surveys for the 2005/6 school year will be written up in the summer as part of the Final Report to the School.

From initial responses the Mac's Place survey showed a full usage of the services offered and a very positive response to them. The Bridge survey showed high levels of satisfaction with almost all the 30-40 courses on offer. The Study Support survey showed on the whole a positive response to the range of activities available. The Staff survey showed a high response rate and on the whole a positive engagement with the extended services programme.

2. The evaluation team is now fully formed and operational. It consists of a Team Leader (Tracy Whittle) and five other members (Victoria Young, Alison Groves, Sharon Maloney, Nicky Lock and XXXXXXXX – the latter two both 16.)
3. Four IT training sessions have been delivered to various of the team members and further informal training in survey techniques and implementation has been given. The senior Brighton University supervisor has been continually available to advise on the design and implementation of the surveys.
4. The University supervisor has drawn on the experience of running the project in a number of talks given at conferences and in advisory sessions on the CUPP research Helpdesk. He is in process of contacting a number of course convenors in the education and social policy areas of the University to offer to give talks or workshops on the evaluation.
5. A discussion has been held with Jenny Townsend, the Community Services Manager of the extended services programme offered in the Grove School in Hastings. This sharing of experiences and information was mutually beneficial.

A visit is also being arranged to meet with Romina Harris, the Co-ordinator of the extended services at Haverstock School in Camden.

6. The evaluation project will be written up as part of a chapter in the forthcoming book covering the range of CUPP activities. A paper on the project will also be given jointly by the University supervisor and the Falmer School Head to the CUPP Conference on 6/7 April. Other forms of dissemination will be considered following the Final Report on the evaluation to be submitted to the school in the summer of 2006.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND LESSONS TO BE DRAWN

1. Supervisor's inexperience in schools

The School and the LEA liaison officer (Ty Goddard) approached the University in the Autumn of 2004 with Professor Ambrose in mind as the evaluator. This was probably in view of his experience in evaluation generally and particularly in recent years in the East Brighton NDC – eb4U. It was pointed out that he had not previously worked in any primary or secondary school context but this was judged not to matter.

It could be that this inexperience was one factor in leading to somewhat over-complex survey forms (see below).

2. Overly rushed timescale for the evaluation

There was some pressure from the DfES and the LEA to get evaluations of the Extended Schools programme under way in a short timescale (which may have led the School to seek an evaluator relatively quickly). As a result there was pressure to get the evaluation surveys and other mechanisms in place rather too quickly. It would have been more helpful to have had a 'year zero' in the programme during which issues of evaluation, and other issues, could have been thought out before the programme proper started.

3. Evaluation timescale slippage

The initial timescale for the evaluation (November 2004-December 2005 with the heaviest supervisory input in the first three months) slipped for a number of reasons. The funding from BSCKE was not finally approved till the end of January 2005 and then there were a number of delays in getting the evaluation team formed and operational (see below). Fortunately the BSCKE management was able to respond very flexibly to these delays. Had there been a 'year zero' these matters would not have delayed the evaluation proper.

4. Difficulties in evaluation team formation

Initially it had been understood from the School and the LEA liaison officer that there was an active PTA and that some members could quickly be recruited to form the team. In fact despite repeated efforts, and an advertisement in the School newssheet, no one could be recruited from this source.

During the Spring of 2005 several members were recruited by word of mouth and by contact via the Bridge. One of these turned out to be an inappropriate member and another had a number of complex family and health issues to deal with.

By the summer of 2005 a team of three was in place but a number of problems hindered the operation, notably the bureaucracy involved in appointing and paying team members via the University Payroll system and the lack of an senior member to manage the team. As a result

there was a good deal of 'hands on' input from the University supervisor which required time input for a 4-6 month period well above the 0.1 level.

The team formation problem was finally solved during the Summer of 2005 when Tracy Whittle agreed to join as Team Manager. From this point on the team soon became fully operational and is now functioning well. Residual problems remain, notably the lack of any mechanism to provide 'petty cash' for the team manager to make small disbursements for small additional work or travel costs.

In retrospect it is not surprising that projects designed to have heavy dependence on involvement from local community members may find it difficult to recruit people in an area of multiple deprivation where almost everyone has some difficult family or financial issues to deal with in their lives. There is a considerable 'cultural gap' between the expectations within a university setting and those within a deprived community about the carrying out of specified actions to a specified timescale.

5. Changes of key personnel in the Extended Schools programme

Since the inception of the project late in 2004 there have been changes in almost all key participants in the extended schools programme. The LEA liaison officer left for another job and the Manager of both Mac's Place and the Bridge moved on to other situations. The replacement Manager of Mac's Place has now also resigned. The Co-ordinator of the Extended School programme itself resigned in September 2005 and the task was reorganised by the School to be undertaken partly by a new co-ordinator and partly by a senior staff member.

The outcome of all these changes is that the only two of the original participants left are the Head and the University supervisor (whose paid contract ended in February 2006).

6. Use of over-complicated language in surveys

The survey forms to be completed in the surveys of student responses were devised initially by the FSS Co-ordinator and the University supervisor. They sought to cover all the outcomes set out in the Government's document *Every Child Matters* which specified a very broad range of expected outcomes and impacts of the extended schools programme.

After using the forms in the first full iteration of the surveys in the Autumn Term of 2005 it was evident that even if the forms were completed under supervision, which was not always desirable in view of confidentiality, many of the questions were expressed in overly complex language for the age group being surveyed. Both the breadth of questioning, and the language used, may well need to be modified in

future rounds of surveying. This may well reduce the direct comparability of results from successive rounds of surveying. It seems clear that this problem could have been avoided:

- (a) if there had been a 'year zero' in which to pilot the surveys and/or
- (b) if someone from the mid-teen age group had been part of the evaluation team from the beginning and/or
- (c) there had been a less precise adherence to the full range of Government impact dimensions

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT

Despite the difficulties and setbacks discussed above the project did meet its essential aims.

An evaluation team comprised of local parents and residents, and including teenage members, is now in place. The survey forms, albeit with the need of some modification, are all operational. The required IT and survey method training has been delivered. The management of the evaluation has been taken over by the School and some funds have been transferred back to the School from the original contribution of £5,000 it made to the project. The future of the evaluation, at least until the end of the Summer Term 2006, looks to be assured.

In addition a number of valuable lessons have been learned and the project experience is to be disseminated in at least one conference paper and a book chapter.