



Department
for Education

The Impact of the Summer Schools Programme on Pupils

Research Brief

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Introduction

This report forms part of an independent evaluation of the first year of the Department for Education's Summer Schools programme for disadvantaged pupils. The main purpose of this initiative is to help those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and pupils looked after continuously for more than six months by the local authority (LAC)¹ to make a successful transition from primary to secondary school. A total of 1,776² Summer Schools were held across England between July and September 2012.

This summary sets out the key findings of a survey of 21,065 Year 7 pupils from secondary schools across England, which aimed to explore pupils' feelings towards starting secondary school and the difference made by attending a Summer School. The pupil survey sample included a group of schools that ran a Summer School for disadvantaged pupils, known as 'treatment schools' (n=347), as well as a group of schools who were not involved in the Summer Schools programme known as 'comparison schools' (n=114). This enabled the research team to consider what difference attending a Summer School made to pupils' responses. 11,383 pupils from comparison schools responded to the survey compared to 9,682 pupils from treatment schools.

Key Findings

Key findings from the survey focused on pupils' attitudes on starting secondary school and the relationship between attitude scores and attending a Summer School.

Pupils' attitudes to starting Year 7

- Most pupils (61 per cent) were worried about transferring to secondary school. However, the overwhelming majority of pupils (91 per cent) said they felt welcomed by their new school when they started Year 7. The majority of pupils made friends (89 per cent) and got to know their teachers quickly (87 per cent) when they started secondary school.
- Just over half of pupils (58 per cent) said it was hard to find their way around their new school. Disadvantaged pupils were more likely to report difficulties finding their way around than their non-disadvantaged peers. There were no other notable differences between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils' attitudes to starting Year 7.

¹ Henceforth, these two groups are referred to as disadvantaged pupils. All other pupils are termed non-disadvantaged for the purposes of this research.

² This figure has recently been updated by the Department and therefore no longer corresponds to figures cited in cited in previous NFER reports relating to this evaluation.

Attending a Summer School

- 83 per cent of the responding pupils who were invited to a Summer School actually took part. 41 per cent of the responding pupils who attended a Summer School were disadvantaged. It should be noted that this is lower than the Summer School attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils based on findings from the school survey conducted as part of this evaluation (see Martin *et al.*, 2013).
- Pupils from Asian backgrounds and pupils with EAL who were invited to a Summer School were significantly less likely to attend.
- Pupils' views of Summer School were very positive: 90 per cent of pupils were pleased to be invited to a Summer School run by their secondary school. Most pupils who attended a Summer School had fun, made new friends and said they felt more confident about starting secondary school.
- A multilevel analysis revealed two statistically significant differences among the attitudes of pupils with different background characteristics who attended Summer Schools. Pupils who lived in more deprived areas (as determined by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, IDACI) rated their enjoyment and satisfaction of Summer Schools more highly. Boys tended to give lower ratings of their Summer Schools than girls.

Influences on pupils' confidence, school readiness and socialisation

- Certain pupil characteristics were associated with significantly higher or lower confidence, school readiness and socialisation scores. In particular, pupils from Black ethnic backgrounds had more positive attitudes. Pupils eligible for FSM, those eligible for FSM in the years prior to Year 6³ and pupils with SEN had lower scores. Boys had higher confidence and socialisation scores but lower scores for school readiness.
- Controlling for the influence of other factors, compared to pupils with similar characteristics who did not attend a Summer School⁴, confidence scores were statistically significantly higher for pupils who attended Summer Schools and higher still for pupils with FSM who attended Summer Schools.
- Controlling for the influence of other factors, school readiness scores were significantly higher for pupils who attended Summer Schools and higher still for both pupils with FSM who attended Summer Schools and pupils who were LAC and attended Summer Schools.
- Controlling for the influence of other factors, socialisation scores were significantly higher for pupils who attended Summer Schools and higher still for pupils with FSM who attended Summer Schools.

³ Known as the 'Ever6' measure.

⁴As part of the Department's Summer Schools programme for disadvantaged pupils.

- However, attending a Summer School explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in pupils' attitude scores.
- Pupils who said they enjoyed their Summer School had significantly higher scores for confidence, school readiness and socialisation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The pupil survey found a number of relationships between school and pupil characteristics and pupils' attitude scores. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (especially those eligible for FSM) had significantly lower levels of confidence, socialisation and school readiness. Attending a Summer School was related to more positive attitudes (for confidence, socialisation and school readiness); however, these should be viewed as 'associations' rather than causal links due to the limitations of the study design.

The study findings are broadly supportive of the Summer School programme and are consistent with a small positive effect on transition to secondary school, especially for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The findings of the pupil survey suggest the following points for consideration by schools and policymakers:

- The Department and schools should continue to track the outcomes of pupils attending Summer Schools in order to measure the impact of the programme on their attainment in the longer term.
- There was a lower take up of Summer School places among pupils from Asian backgrounds and those with EAL (as identified by matching survey responses to pupil characteristics identified in the NPD). This may indicate a need for schools to consider how best to encourage take up among these pupils and their families.
- Boys appear to be less positive in their enjoyment of Summer Schools. It may therefore be worthwhile for schools to consider enhancing the appeal of their Summer School to boys.
- While pupils with SEN are not specifically targeted by the Summer Schools programme, this study suggests that schools and policymakers should recognise the particular difficulties these pupils face at transition and their need for targeted support.

Background

In September 2011, the Department announced that, as part of the Pupil Premium, £50 million would be made available for a Summer Schools programme for disadvantaged pupils in 2012. Each participating secondary school in England was funded £250 per eligible child per week for programme activities (up to a maximum of two weeks). Schools were free to design their programme based on the needs of their incoming Year 7 cohort. Although there was a clear expectation that the funding should be used to provide summer activities for disadvantaged pupils, schools could offer places to other children if they did not need to spend the full amount on disadvantaged pupils, or if a disadvantaged pupil turned down a planned place. In March 2013, the Department announced the launch of the Summer Schools 2013 programme⁵ and the extension of the eligibility criteria to include pupils eligible for FSM in the past six years (Ever6), publicly funded Ever6, and FSM and LAC pupils in independent special schools.

Methodology

The Department commissioned the NFER and Ecorys to undertake an independent evaluation of the first year of its Summer Schools programme in June 2012.

In order to explore the impact of Summer Schools on pupils specifically, the NFER carried out a survey of Year 7 pupils from a sample of 1,500 schools which participated in the Summer Schools initiative (participation in the programme was voluntary). The survey was also sent to a sample of 530 non-participating schools which formed a comparison group to help assess if the programme was making a difference. A short online survey was administered to pupils from September to November 2012. Pupils were asked 18 questions on confidence and attitudes to school. Summer School attendees were asked a further eight questions about their Summer School.

Both treatment and comparison schools were asked to target the survey specifically at disadvantaged Year 7 pupils where possible, but they were permitted to include other Year 7 pupils if they wished to do so. Treatment schools were also asked, where possible, to target pupils who had attended the Summer School. Survey data gathered from pupils was matched to the National Pupil Database (NPD) in order to identify pupils as disadvantaged (i.e. eligible for FSM or LAC) for the purposes of analysis. The study also obtained information from NPD on other variables of interest, such as pupils' ethnicity, whether they had English as an Additional Language (EAL) and whether they had Special Educational Needs (SEN). For both groups of schools, a larger number of non-disadvantaged pupils responded. Of the 9,682 pupils from treatment schools, 5,881 actually attended a Summer School and of these 2,386 pupils were disadvantaged.

⁵ <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/premium/summer/a00216636/summer-schools-programme>

Previous phases of the Summer Schools evaluation included a survey of 1,597 schools who participated programme and 10 qualitative case studies involving pupils, teachers, parents and carers. The findings have been published separately in a technical overview report⁶, a key findings summary for schools⁷, and a ‘top tips’ guide for schools focusing on effective Summer School practice⁸.

⁶ <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR271A>

⁷ <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR271B>

⁸ http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/e/essp%20top%20tips%20for%20summer%20schools%20v7_online.pdf



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