



Using collaboration and enquiry to tackle educational inequality

The SIPP is a collaborative school improvement strategy that promotes new ways of working across classrooms, schools and local authorities to tackle educational inequality. Data and collaborative enquiry are used to innovate, test and refine new approaches to tackle the attainment gap. The Programme is a natural extension of Curriculum for Excellence and, importantly, SIPP aligns with and reinforces a number of key educational policies and programmes, including *Curriculum for Excellence*, *Teaching Scotland's Future*, the *SCEL Fellowship Programme* and *Raising Attainment for All*. All of these are underpinned by the same key concepts of co-production, professional learning and enquiry as the broader *Scottish Approach* to public service reform.

The collaborative improvement strategies and principles that underpin the SIPP reflect international educational research¹ and practice that has demonstrated that the most effective school improvements are locally owned and led by teachers and school leaders working in partnership and collaboration with like-minded professionals and stakeholders.

Core principles that underpin the SIPP are:

- Partnership working across schools and local authorities with a focus on exploring specific issues relating to educational inequity.
- The use of action research and evidence to identify key challenges, experiment with innovative practices and monitor developments.
- The creation of leadership opportunities and professional learning of staff at all levels.
- A commitment to reciprocity and mutual benefit for all involved.
- The development of arrangements to support long-term collaboration and new approaches to capacity building.
- Explicit links to strategic improvement planning in schools and local authorities.
- The involvement of a diverse range of partners including schools, local authorities, Education Scotland and other agencies.

¹ Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., Goldrick, S., West, M. (2012) *Making schools effective for all: rethinking the task*. School Leadership & Management, 32(3), pp.197-213.
Chapman, C. (2008) *Towards a framework for school-to-school networking in challenging circumstances*. Educational Research, 50 (4), pp. 403-420.
Hadfield M & Chapman C (2009) *School Based Networking for Educational Change*. Second International Handbook of Educational Change, Springer, Vol 23 (3)

The SIPP partnerships

To date the SIPP has focused on eight partnerships in different areas of Scotland during the period December 2013 to June 2015:

West Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire Councils
Angus, South Ayrshire and Edinburgh Councils
East Renfrewshire Council
Falkirk Council
Midlothian and East Lothian Councils
Glasgow and Fife Councils
South Lanarkshire Council
Inverclyde and Argyll and Bute Councils

These partnerships involve a range of stakeholders in schools, local authorities, Education Scotland, the University of Glasgow and other key partners. There is a range of projects within and across the eight SIPP partnerships. Some involve collaboration within a local authority and others involve schools from different authorities. Some involve partnerships from the same phase of schooling while others are cross phase. Some have a tight focus on teaching and learning whilst others have a wider focus involving multi-agency approaches. All have the common feature of focusing on tackling educational inequality. The projects target learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and cover a range of



themes including learning and pupil engagement, behaviour, tackling low aspirations, and promoting parental engagement. The range of enquiry methods used by partnerships includes collaborative action research, improvement science, instructional rounds and lesson study.

Key findings

1. Establishing partnership projects

The evidence from the external evaluation and partnerships' own research indicates that, overall, the

partnership initiative has had a positive impact regarding its stated objectives including:

- fostering collaborative working to tackle educational inequity;
- developing capacity at school and local authority level to effect positive change, including improving enhanced leadership opportunities at all levels;
- building teachers' knowledge, confidence and skills to challenge inequity;
- improving teachers' understanding of evaluation and practitioner enquiry; and
- increasing learners' aspirations and achievement.

2. Developing understanding of disadvantage and effective learning and teaching approaches for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds

There was a clear indication from the surveys and other evidence that partnerships have had a positive impact on teachers' understanding of disadvantage and aspects of the inequality agenda. When surveyed in June 2015, 97% of respondents suggested that SIPP activity had sharpened practitioners' focus on closing the achievement gap compared to 55% of those surveyed in June 2014.

Since the previous report there has been a notable increase in partnership members reporting being more aware of appropriate methods to use to tackle educational inequality and disadvantage. Eighty per cent of June 2015 compared with 54% of February 2014 respondents agreed that SIPP developments had increased teacher networks' capability to address inequality in education.

3. Approaches to collaboration

The SIPP initiative has facilitated greater professional dialogue, collegiality and networking across professionals involved in the partnerships. This has helped drive the work of the partnerships and led to sharing of ideas and practice relevant to the specific project aims as well as broader teaching and learning. Staff indicated that working teams, constituted to develop the various SIPP projects and activities within each partnership, were important in promoting the sharing of ideas for teaching

associated with the SIPP aims. This also helped develop new skills, including research capacity and leadership opportunities and promoted confidence and motivation among teachers. Collaborative working across the partnership has increased from 64% in the February 2014 survey to 100% in the most recent in June 2015. Evidence indicates that colleagues outwith the schools have become increasingly important as the initiative has developed.

4. Developing understanding of evaluation and leadership development opportunities

There was a high level of teacher engagement with the collaborative enquiry process. Despite varying levels of research expertise and experience, the surveys revealed an increase in teachers' understanding and use of research and enquiry in their practice, with over 90% stating that their evaluation skills had been enhanced during their involvement with SIPP. Partnerships benefited from specialist expertise to support the often complex analysis of their data to address their research questions. Teachers' responses and accounts highlighted the role of the University team in helping to develop their capacity and skills regarding collaborative enquiry. In addition, inputs from local authority personnel, particularly educational psychologists, were also valued in supporting the research capacity of partnerships. Partnerships' own project reports have demonstrated practitioners' use of a range of increasingly sophisticated enquiry approaches to assess and understand impact.

Eighty-eight per cent of respondents in the most recent survey (June 2015) indicated that their involvement with



SIPP had resulted in the creation of leadership opportunities and professional learning of staff at all levels. This compared with two-thirds of respondents (66%) reporting this in February 2014.

5. Impact on learners

There is evidence that the SIPP initiative has begun to impact on students. At the start of the Programme just under a third of respondents (31%) indicated that SIPP involvement had had a positive impact on pupil aspirations. However, by June 2015 this figure had risen to 94%. Similarly, while 34% of responses to the initial

survey in 2014 indicated that the initiative had increased achievement of participating pupils, by the latest survey in 2015 all respondents (100%) reported this. This is corroborated by empirical evidence in the partnerships' own project reports.

For example:

Impact in the West Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire SIPP has included:

Numeracy:

- Pupil attainment in problem solving has increased. Pre-and-post assessment results – increase in correct answers from 52% to 67%.
- Pupils improved their ability to: interpret questions, choose the correct operation and calculate correct answers. Scale to gauge distance travelled – increase from 40% to 68%.

Impact on literacy in primary schools:

- Mean percentage of literacy assessments increased from 46% on the pre-test to 69% on the post test.
- Increases in scores for reading understanding, reading analysis, and reading evaluation were all evident with the largest increase evident for reading evaluation.
- Improvement in pupils' confidence, perseverance and enjoyment.

Conclusion

After two years of development and implementation, the available evidence from the external evaluation and the partnerships' own research findings strongly indicates that the SIPP is now having an impact regarding its stated objectives and, importantly, on attainment and other student outcomes.

Overall the SIPP initiative has continued to promote collaborative approaches that have also positively impacted on personnel in the participating schools, local authorities and partner agencies/services. The processes involved in establishing and sustaining the partnerships have facilitated improvements in learning and teaching, assessment, joint working to tackle student needs, engagement with families, leadership and professionals' motivation.

The range of positive developments and impact demonstrates that the underlying principles for collaborative partnership working and enquiry to tackle educational inequity are sound. Indeed, progress and impact has been most evident in those partnerships that

have been able to adapt and apply the principles and core concepts underpinning the SIPP to their own context. Where there have been challenges of limited time, funds and resources, most partnership teams have worked creatively to overcome impediments and implement their plans and sustain action.

The policy and social landscape in which the SIPP is operating is changing. During the lifetime of the initiative there has been an increasing focus from Government on tackling the attainment gap, with further resources being deployed. The SIPP is well placed to continue to inform these national developments, providing examples of 'what works' and supporting this with detailed insights on why certain approaches work in particular contexts. The emerging evidence from within the SIPP, combined with the literature that underpins this approach, suggests that, with further support combined with longer-term strategic planning, the SIPP has an increasingly important role to play in supporting national efforts to combat educational inequity.

Recommendations

Our work over the first two years with the SIPP has provided evidence of the Programme's efficacy and identified areas for development, and approaches that have potential to inform change efforts across the Scottish education system. Our analysis has identified a number of issues and opportunities that have implications for policy and practice, these include:

- The previous evaluation report (Nov 2014) argued for the case for Innovation Hubs. Since then Education Scotland has established an Improvement Hub; we suggest this Hub has three key dimensions:
 1. **A curriculum dimension** focusing on what does, and does not work in closing the attainment gap in different contexts around the system. These efforts should focus on the key areas of Literacy, Numeracy, Health and Wellbeing and STEM.
 2. **A research and development dimension** to develop practitioners' capability in enquiry approaches that are informing and developing practice across the SIPP, i.e. Collaborative Action Research (CAR), Lesson Study, Improvement Science, and Instructional Rounds.

3. An evidence for improvement dimension that builds a robust evidence base underpinned by a myriad of data sources including those within the recently announced National Improvement Framework and increases expertise in the use and interpretation of improvement and contextual data.

- All three dimensions will demonstrate a strong commitment to professional learning and leadership development that articulates directly with policy developments within key agencies and policies (e.g. SCEL, RAFA and the Attainment Challenge Fund).
- Linked to the ideas outlined above, there is scope for the SIPP to inform the development of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) by aligning the three key dimensions (curriculum, research and development and evidence for improvement) to the ITE curriculum.
- One implication of the improved sophistication and capacity regarding practitioner enquiry across the partnerships has been the need for correspondingly sophisticated analysis of data. Currently there is a need for focused support to support the partnerships in further building their evaluation capability.

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