

Progress map summary



Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

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Narrowing the gap in outcomes for young children through effective practices in the early years

Key research messages

- Poverty is a key risk factor to outcomes for young children, and affects certain ethnic groups disproportionately.
- Young children in poverty have poorer general health and more specific health problems than their peers, and more admissions to A&E departments.
- Poorer families report feeling unsafe where they live.
- Mothers' education influences children's learning, but all family homes which support children's early years learning can counteract the effects of disadvantage.
- English as an additional language is associated with lower attainment and poor social relationships in the early years, but it does not appear to affect longer-term outcomes.
- High-quality early learning has a major and lasting positive impact on all children, but especially poor children.

The evidence from the review highlights strategies that work:

- boost the home learning environment by providing culturally sensitive outreach and family support
- support young children and their families during transition to early learning provision and then into mainstream school
- provide effective focus on language and literacy development, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with English as an additional language.

This progress map summary includes key research findings from the C4EO knowledge review. The knowledge review assessed the evidence available about the impact of disadvantage on outcomes for children in the early years and the approaches that are effective in reducing educational disadvantage and promoting positive outcomes. It considered Every Child Matters outcomes for children living in poverty, including those from minority ethnic groups and children with English as an additional language.

The review considered children from birth to seven years and focused on evidence since 2000. It included both research and national data. A total of 465 items of literature were identified and considered for inclusion in this review. The next stage of the review will draw on examples of validated practice from children's services.

Implications from the research for local service improvement

The evidence is clear that implementing well-focused and sustained system-level strategies for remediating child and family poverty will significantly improve the range of ECM outcomes for young children.

Strengthen outreach – given the critical role of home learning, it is crucial to work to improve this environment. This should include developing professional capacity for outreach work, to increase understanding of home environments and improve communication between early years practitioners and families, especially those in poverty and from minority groups.

Target interventions – to ensure that children from the most disadvantaged and poor families take up early years places, and to provide the language and

literacy support that can improve outcomes for children at risk of low attainment.

Provide sufficient opportunities for, and train early years professionals in, ‘sustained shared thinking’. This is a key educational technique in helping young children to learn. It involves adults interacting with children and extending their thinking, for example by asking open-ended questions.

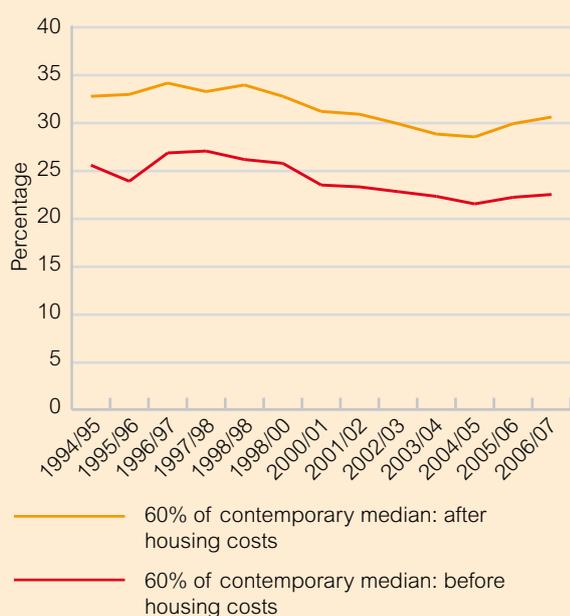
Early years professionals will continue to benefit from training to work with children whose first language is not English.

Bilingual staff have a valuable role in providing support for children with English as an additional language, given appropriate leadership and training.

High-quality provision – the evidence also shows that early years practitioners are effective when they tailor the curriculum to meet individual needs, allow children to initiate much of their own learning, and provide a balance between education and care.

Ensure that there is strong leadership in curriculum and planning, high staff qualifications, low turnover and opportunities for professional development. All these are characteristics of effective early years provision.

Figure 1. Trends in the proportion of children in poverty, 1994/95–2006/07



Source: Brewer et al 2008¹

Challenge questions

These challenge questions recognise the complex systems that children’s services oversee:

- **integrated governance** – coordinated and compatible oversight and authority
- **integrated strategy** – coordinated and compatible plans of action
- **integrated processes** – putting coordinated and compatible plans into action
- **frontline delivery** – the direct work that services provide.

Integrated governance

- What is being done to tackle poverty and reduce its associated risks for young children?
- How will you build the delivery systems that emerge from your partnerships, and supporting processes and financial arrangements (for example to improve outreach and home learning)?
- How much of your early years provision has appropriately qualified staff, strong leadership and access to training?
- How can childminders be involved in providing high quality learning environments?

‘How much of your early years provision has appropriately qualified staff, strong leadership and access to training?’

Integrated strategy

- Have you got the partnerships in place to:
 - share information and identify data gaps?
 - deliver effective outreach?
 - improve and foster the home learning environment?
 - consult with children and parents especially those living in poverty?

- involve children, young people and parents in the design/commissioning of services?

Integrated processes

- Do you know:
 - how many children are living in poverty in your area?
 - what proportion is from a minority ethnic group?
 - what proportion has English as a second language?
- Have you got the partnerships in place to find this out?
- What are you doing to ensure that frontline staff and their managers understand the links between child poverty, attainment and ethnicity and their role in achieving positive outcomes?

Frontline delivery

- How do you:
 - train outreach staff and early learning staff to work with children and parents who have English as an additional language?
 - develop and use methods aimed at improving communication and sustaining relationships between home and school?
 - encourage childminders to support the home learning environment?
- Does your practice:
 - include sustained shared thinking activities between adults and children?
 - spend the majority of time on activities initiated by the child?
 - provide learning for particular groups and individuals, for example children who do not speak English at home?
- Does your early learning provision focus sufficiently on children's social and emotional development?
- What language and literacy initiatives are available to support children at risk of low achievement?

Impact on outcomes

- How will you know that the steps you have taken (to strengthen early years provision) are having an impact on achievement for children living in poverty in your local area?
- Have you asked children and parents whether services are making a difference to them?
- Have you put measures in place to determine the contribution your services are making to children's achievements and wellbeing?

What is the issue and why it is important?

Early years settings across the maintained and private, voluntary and independent sectors, in both urban and rural locations, are now working with children and families from a wide range of backgrounds including differences in culture, class, lifestyle, language, religion and nationality. This raises a range of issues for practitioners, including:

'Have you asked children and parents whether services are making a difference to them?'

- the development of knowledge and understanding about the children they will be working with
- the ability to deal positively with difference
- how to make settings more accessible for families both physically and emotionally.

Strands of current policy and practice development that relate directly to this priority include the development of support for children with English as an additional language, support for outreach skills, and the quality improvement programme.

Early years settings that work positively with difference and welcome and retain these often excluded families can ultimately contribute to community cohesion and to narrowing the gap for children. Work on improved systems of data collection will be particularly central in this work, as will the availability of resources and training for local authorities to support practitioners in creating settings in which all young children feel they belong.

What does the research show?

What matters most for child outcomes?

There is a very clear link between child achievement and poverty and **economic wellbeing**. The gap in attainment for these children begins very early on and they continue to make slower progress through the early years. Children living in poverty also

‘Poverty affects certain groups of children disproportionately’

have poorer outcomes in other areas, including health, self-confidence and social skills.

Poverty affects certain groups of children disproportionately. Certain minority ethnic groups are more likely to live in poverty than the population in general. Almost two thirds of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children, and more than half of black non-Caribbean children, were living in poverty in 2006/07. Recent years have seen a rise in the numbers of children living in poverty. **The policy commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020 through systemic reform is therefore of primary importance for improving young children’s life chances.**

The types of learning activities children are able to do at home with their families (such as singing, reading stories, drawing and painting) are critical for child outcomes in the early years. What parents do to help their young children learn and **achieve** can therefore reduce the damaging influences of poverty on children’s life chances. **The evidence therefore supports initiatives aimed at improving the home learning environment for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.**

What works in improving outcomes?

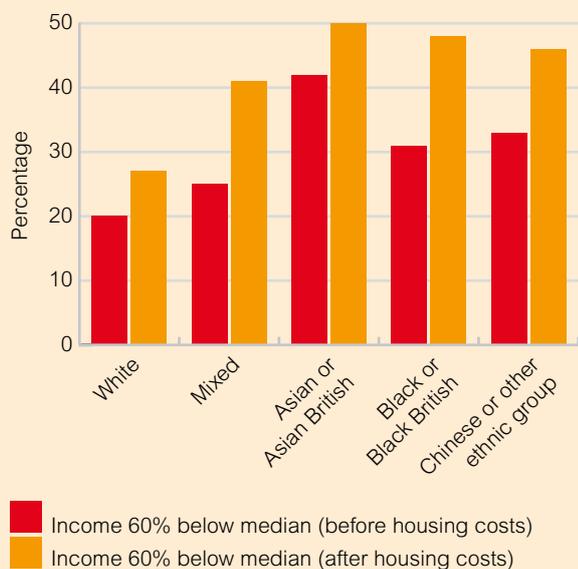
Effective early years provision emphasises both education and care and focuses on the needs of particular individuals and groups.

Strategies and procedures that help children to make a positive transition to early years provision gives them a good start in learning, **achievement** and social development. Children from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds (including children with English as an additional language) may benefit from stronger links between their home and early years provision to ensure positive experiences in the early years.

These links could be strengthened through developing professional capacity to strengthen links between home and early years provision, increase participation and facilitate the transition process for children. **Resources could be used for outreach work to minority groups by trained professionals designed to strengthen understanding of home environments and improve communication between early years practitioners and families from minority groups.**

Children who have English as an additional language face particular communication challenges. Communication problems can lead to frustration and poorer relationships with teachers and other children. Effective interventions help these children to make progress and catch up on English language skills. This also has positive implications for social and behavioural outcomes. Bilingual staff can provide support, but this needs leadership and continuing professional

Figure 2. Risk of being in poverty by ethnicity in 2006/07, United Kingdom



Source: *Households below average income 2006/07* (Adams et al 2008)

development. **Early years professionals could benefit from training to work with children whose first language is not English.**

Effective early years provision also enable children to spend two thirds of their time in child-initiated activities. Pedagogical approaches that allow children to take charge of their own learning are linked to good outcomes and effective practice. Disadvantaged children benefit from support to make progress with language and literacy. **Early years practitioners are effective when they tailor the curriculum to meet individual needs and provide culturally relevant learning opportunities. Early years staff are effective when they encourage children to**

‘Children clearly benefit from being given opportunities to develop socially and emotionally as well as academically’

initiate their own learning, work with children’s real-life experiences and provide positive adult–child interactions for ‘sustained shared thinking’.

Less evidence was found by the team for certain child

outcomes, such as how much they **enjoy** their lives and how much they **make a positive contribution** to society. However, children clearly benefit from being given opportunities to develop socially and emotionally as well as academically; very disadvantaged children especially benefit from these opportunities.

Views of key stakeholders

These views are drawn from the C4EO progress map resources section, to provide a perspective on the views of parents and young children.

There is limited information on the views of parents on effective practice in the early years to narrow the gap for disadvantaged children, and almost no published information on the perspectives of young children. This may be because early childhood is commonly understood as a time when children are not yet able or mature enough to make their

views known and acted upon – although the establishment of the National Children’s Bureau’s Young Children’s Voices Network means that things are changing.

Where information does exist currently, parents highlight:

- relevant and accessible money, debt and benefits advice should be available
- early education is an important preparation for school, hence can contribute to narrowing the gap
- the value of mixing with other children and the promotion of social skills.

‘Parents, carers and children judge the accessibility and quality of a service by the way that the staff relate to them’

Where information exists on the views of young children, they identify the following things as important to their sense of identity and understanding of learning, although they may use different words to describe these:

- respect for their routines and culture, celebrating all religious and seasonal festivals and recognising all sorts of different food
- giving them a voice and allowing them to contribute to their own learning process
- creative and collaborative learning environments that allow them to bring their cultural understanding to bear through play.

Parents, carers and children judge the accessibility and quality of a service by the way that the staff relate to them. This has implications for recruitment, training and continuing professional development for staff who will work with children and families, particularly those from a disadvantaged background and with English as an additional language.

Further reading

Adams, N., Johnson, G., Matejic, P., Toufexis, N. and Whatley, J. (eds) (2008) *Households below average income: an analysis of the income distribution 1994/95–2006/07*, London: Department for Work and Pensions (available at www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai.asp , accessed 24 November).

Brewer, M., Muriel, A., Phillips, D. and Sibuet, L. (2008) *Poverty and inequality in the UK: 2008*. IFS Commentary No. 105. London: IFS.

Clarke, A. and Statham, J. (2005) 'Listening to young children: experts in their own lives', *Adoption and fostering*, 29(1), pp. 45–56.

Coghlan, M., Bergeron, C., White, K., Sharp, C., Morris, M., and Rutt, S. (2009) *Narrowing the gap for young children through effective practices in the early years*: London, C4EO (available at www.c4eo.org.uk)

Reid, P. and Banks, D. (2008) *Perspectives on the early years services: qualitative research with service users*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Springate, I., Atkinson, M., Straw, S., Lamont, E. and Grayson, H. (2008) *Narrowing the gap in outcomes: early years (0–5 years)*, Slough: NFER (available at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/downloadable/NtGreportearlyyears.pdf.)

What is a progress map summary?

The progress map (a web-based tool) is being developed by C4EO to provide easy, interactive access to the best available knowledge for children's services. Printed progress map summaries include key research findings from the C4EO knowledge review, challenges for children's services and key stakeholders' views. This is version 1 on this topic; there will be two more progress map summaries as knowledge (particularly from practice) develops during the course of C4EO's work on the early years theme. The progress maps and knowledge reviews can be found at www.c4eo.org.uk

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO)

Funded by the DCSF, C4EO has been established to help transform outcomes for children, young people and their families. It will do this by identifying and coordinating local, regional and national evidence of 'what works' to create a single and comprehensive picture of effective practice. To find out more and to look at our resources, please visit www.c4eo.org.uk