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THE ROLE OF ENRICHMENT IN SCHOOL ABSENCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Executive Summary

This executive summary outlines the learning from the literature review set within the framework of the research questions. The review included a broad sweep of literature, journal articles, policy, research reports and evaluations concerned with school attendance and enrichment activities. The search phrases initially used were linked directly to the research questions such as school attendance/enrichment, school attendance/non-formal learning and school attendance/ extra-curricular activities. These phrases were extended after the initial scoping stage as minimal resources emerged. Broader phrases were adopted such as school/extra-curricular activities to seek data linked to the relationship between school attendance and enrichment activities.

Over 500 resources were reviewed with 75 being considered most useful. Despite extensive research there is a lack of data that makes the links between secondary school attendance and pupils taking part in enrichment activities in England. This led to a reappraisal of the review. There may be smaller scale localised initiatives in England that are responding to the present attendance crisis, but these do not seem readily available. Despite this the review is inclusive of qualitative and quantitative data from the United Kingdom with some additional international elements to contribute to our knowledge set within the research questions.

There are significant reports supporting the development of softer skills through engagement with enrichment activities and these have been used to construct a response to the research questions. Hence suggestions for further lines of inquiry are made that may provide deeper understandings of the relationship between the secondary school curriculum offer and pupils accessing enrichment activities and potential in response to the present attendance crisis.

An initial scoping exercise indicated that enrichment activities are provided in three different formats:

- where schools provide enrichment activities to pupils as part of their curriculum offer
- where schools partner with external agencies that provide additional enrichment opportunities
- a diversity of organisations that deliver enrichment activities within communities as standalone entities,

The above demonstrates the diverse and complex nature of this area of education which crosses the boundaries between formal and Non-Formal Learning (NFL).

Research Question 1: What evidence is there of the link between enrichment and attendance?

No substantial contemporary evidence of a relationship between pupils engaging in enrichment activities and their levels of school attendance was found despite intensive research. However, a consensus shared among the school workforce, DfE, further education sector, youth workers, a diversity of enrichment activity providers and parents is that these

activities assist young people with their personal, social and emotional development as they move towards adulthood. Further understandings have surfaced of how enrichment activities also help with formal learning and the softer skills employers view as essential.

The recent pandemic had an adverse influence on young people's academic development and their experience of isolation from their peers in social and school settings has added to mental health concerns. Health professionals and school leaders currently portray the influence of the pandemic on young people's social, emotional and personal development as of crisis status. Bringing these dispersed voices together, it would seem reasonable to consider the view that engagement with enrichment activities whether in school or through school partnership work with providers in the community or via young people engaging independently in activities such as sport or music will through improving confidence and other aspects of personal development contribute to young people's success in terms of formal schooling.

Research Question 2: How is enrichment activity being used to promote attendance?

Minimal contemporary evidence exists of enrichment activities directly promoting school attendance at national or local level. However, the trend from 2006 to 2016 prior to the pandemic was of a significant improvement in school attendance. This was at a time when the government first instigated the extension of the school day through the introduction of local partnerships to provide broader activities on school sites coupled with the development of localised community-based multi-disciplinary partnerships.

These Extended Schools (ES) acted as a universal implementation platform for the Every Child Matters policy involving a much wider remit than schools were used to. It would appear reasonable to state that ES partnerships contributed to improved attendance post 2006. However, in 2010 English schools were directed to refocus upon outstanding teaching in the classroom, some continued with localised partnerships but many concentrated upon responding to school performance set within narrower measures.

The Department for Education (DfE) started testing out the development of enrichment activities in schools through the Essential Life Skills (ELS) initiative across 2018-2019 alongside the existing requirements regarding the personal development curriculum. They focused upon disadvantaged communities and recognised the gap in skills and employability prior to the pandemic. The aim of this piloting was to promote social mobility in Opportunities Areas to address the inequality of experiences by groups of young people.

More recently, post pandemic, DfE and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) jointly financed Enrichment Partnership Pilots (EPP) to take forward the enrichment agenda linked to 'levelling up' community opportunities. The evaluation of the EPP intervention will be published in 2025.

There are common themes that run throughout the ELS review which indicate there is a discernible link between access to enrichment activities and the positioning of families and schools. Several other reports identify how social disadvantage mirrors the relationship

between poverty and school attendance. The Sutton Trust's research concluded young people living in poorer households have less access to enrichment activities when compared to those living in wealthier households with families where higher education qualifications are the norm. They identify the decade of austerity when public services such as youth work reduced dramatically contributing to this position. The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)(2021) also highlight the loss of interventions such as the ES initiative (2005-2010), and the theme of working together in preventative ways that the previous Labour government experimented with.

The National Youth Agency (NYA), National Citizenship Service (NCS), Sutton Trust, DfE and further education colleges reports identified in this review indicate that some form of redress is required to assist young people living in poorer communities to access enrichment activities.

The CSJ call for an entitlement for all young people coupled with a reconsideration of the existing English state school curriculum offer to include extended days and the forging of a provider market for agencies to supply enrichment activities to schools. Additionally, the CSJ echo the Labour government of 2024 recent move to introduce multi-agency teams into schools to build a holistic understanding of young people framed within their family and community setting. The relationship between access to enrichment activities and poverty raises a key question as all reports suggest enrichment equips young people with improved life chances, that making these activities more readily available in disadvantaged communities may assist return young people to regular schooling.

Research Question 3: What is the (potential) impact of enrichment activities on attendance?

Extrapolating the learning from this literature review, including the above correlation between access to enrichment activities and family income and the benefits outlined in improving young people's personal development in its broadest sense, it would seem highly likely that enrichment activities could be successfully applied to improve school attendance.

Strong evidence is identified within the literature review that regardless of social background, engagement with enrichment activities helps build softer skills such as confidence, resilience, relationships and general social and emotional health. It was noted that across 2005 to 2010 the ES initiative as well as providing breakfast and after school clubs leaving parents free to work, that parents were also invited into schools to learn alongside their young people and take part in enrichment activities often free of charge.

Drawing on the identification of the relationship between disadvantaged families and their young people and persistent absence from school, it would seem appropriate that piloting enrichment partnerships in schools with high levels of absenteeism would be a logical step towards re-engaging young people in formal education. This is already the case where young people are being educated in Alternative Provision (AP) with the aim to return them to secondary mainstream education. This intervention, should it be implemented, would require qualitative and quantitative evaluations to more deeply understand the relationship between these two elements of education and its future potential. DfE (2023) statistics infer that 1.6 million pupils fall into the category of persistent absence with 24.9% of these from families

entitled to Free School Meals (FSM). Although DfE provisional statistics for 2024 predict that absenteeism will fall slightly, amongst the most disadvantaged families it is anticipated to remain at a similar level to that of the previous academic year.

English state school performance has been measured through narrow indicators of learning as opposed to the schooling systems highlighted in this review from around other parts of the UK, Europe and the USA. The CSJ (2024) report calls for a rethink of the lost relationship between schools in England and families and suggests access to enrichment activities can combat the impact of social disadvantage. They propose a similar intervention to that of Pupil Premium would entail extra funding allocated to schools for pupils on FSM be made available as an entitlement. They further recommend government should work to rebuild the partnership between parents and schools which reflects the key theme in DfE's (2024) response to the attendance crisis.

The Relationship Between Formal and Non-Formal Learning

A reappraisal of the English school curriculum offer would seem reasonable in view of the calls from the diverse voices outlined in this review. Their views are set within the present crisis in attendance and the associated concerns around pupil wellbeing and personal development. A constant theme that runs through this review is the relationship between formal learning – that is the school curriculum and NFL. Education is a continuum fostered through multiple and diverse relationships and interactions throughout an individual's life. Learning in the school classroom is extremely important to young people's future, however there are other significant influences that contribute or inhibit their potential. Understanding how formal and NFL interconnect would benefit all young people and seem to be the overarching learning that has emerged from this review.

Areas to consider for further research

There are many qualitative accounts of the value of young people participating in enrichment activities. But a direct link to attendance does not appear to presently exist despite the commonly held belief that enrichment activities add value to formal education. This review considers how formal education is more readily measured when compared to NFL. Research in this area to better understand and recognise the value and interrelationships between formal and NFL would seem to be an appropriate way forward set within a holistic conceptualised framework. Eraut (2000) attempts to consider this question in relation to professional development and learning in the workplace. The findings demonstrate the complexity of issues associated with identifying and understanding the impact of NFL. Similarly, Werquin (2010) grapples with this issue. Most recently the University of Leeds (2024) is seeking through research to understand the importance of the different forms of learning in the context of youth empowerment.

Almost all the research concerning the influence of enrichment activities is general in nature with little link to attendance and is dominated by professional voices as opposed to those of young people. This represents a significant gap in knowledge and requires redressing.

This review frequently refers to the issue of inequality expressed through other's research. Reports regarding England and enrichment activities view access to these activities through

the lens of social positioning. Further research would seem to be essential in terms of diversity such as gender, disability and ethnicity alongside that of poverty.

The Role of Enrichment in School Absence: a literature review

Introduction

This literature review responds to the following research questions:

- What evidence is there of the link between enrichment and attendance?
- How is enrichment activity being used to promote attendance?
- What is the (potential) impact of enrichment activities on attendance?

An initial scoping exercise indicated that enrichment activities are provided in three different formats:

- where schools provide enrichment activities to pupils as part of their curriculum offer
- where schools partner with external agencies that provide additional enrichment opportunities
- a diversity of organisations that deliver enrichment activities within communities as standalone entities

A brief outline of the methodology adopted to construct this review is followed by defining our understanding of enrichment. Unfortunately, minimal evidence has emerged through this review of a direct correlation between promoting attendance in English secondary schools through engagement with enrichment activities. However, there are universal understandings shared among schools, a diversity of agencies and parents that enrichment activities support young people's personal development and promotes academic learning. This perception is held despite the lack of quantitative data.

Almost all data that emerged through this review is based upon anecdotal accounts. Hence, to better understand the factors that have led to the present attendance crisis and how enrichment activities might be used to alleviate the present situation, the review concentrates on two areas:

- the context contributing to the present position of young people in post pandemic England
- formal learning, personal development and enrichment activities and their relationship with English schooling

As research progressed it became apparent that in broader settings which aim to support pupils' return to school, such as Alternative Provision (AP), enrichment activities form the central tool used to successfully transition them into formal learning. Additionally, the post 16 further education sector values these activities which support the reintegration of young

people into formal education. Hence following the review of factors contributing to the attendance crisis and how enrichment may mitigate these, an additional section reviews enrichment activities in broader settings than school.

The review of data collected will then be used to put forward a case in response to the research questions and conclude with recommendations for further research areas that may assist in constructing deeper insights into the value of enrichment activities in improving school attendance.

Methodology

A semi-systematic approach is central to the construction of this literature review. It is inclusive of texts in the public domain, through Leeds Beckett University library portal and interlibrary loans. Search terms were initially selected that linked directly to the research questions such as school attendance/engagement enrichment and schooling / extra-curricular activities.

Due to minimal availability of data the search was developed organically using more diverse phrases to ensure the broadest possible sweep of potential secondary data that could support the development of case studies and the Theory of Change stages of the wider research project. Over 500 documents were assessed with 75 considered to offer some insights into the research questions. There may be isolated examples in the UK of work on school attendance and enrichment activities, however, due to the present nature of English schooling with its diverse governance structures examples were not readily found.

The approach included:

- a mixed methods design utilising qualitative and quantitative data sources
- a review of research papers, policy and broader publications primarily concerning the UK, but also inclusive of some international dimensions
- the correlation, where appropriate, of themes through engagement with theory to gain deeper insights and attempt to ascertain the underlying features that explain them

Enrichment: a definition and understanding the broad areas of learning it encompasses

The report Enrichment and Education Recovery (2021) was followed by research commissioned by the National Citizen Service Trust (NCS) and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) (Education and Enrichment Final Report, 2024). Both reports present the case for closer working with schools through Non-Formal Learning (NFL). The 2024 report considers enrichment in the context of young people in the UK as:

- Enrichment and NFL activities (referred to in schools as extra-curricular activities) are those designed to support a young person's social, personal and educational development and skills. Enrichment and NFL can take place outside of compulsory

educational provision and be adapted to a variety of settings. They incorporate a range of activities, but the primary objective is to support a young person's development.

- Enrichment and NFL activities can include but are not limited to: positive activities, programmes and clubs including sports, arts, debating and public speaking; cultural trips and exchanges; outdoor learning; adventures away from home; extended access to curriculum subject matter (e.g. university laboratories for students studying science, technology, engineering and maths [STEM] subjects); open-access youth clubs; targeted advocacy and support from a trusted adult; volunteering and social action; and employability and life skills training.

The rapid literature review concluded (2024) there is a strong connection between NFL, common definitions of enrichment and the principles and mechanisms/outcomes associated with youth work. This literature review is set within a differing context with a focus upon understanding the relationship between enrichment activities and improving school attendance.

Enrichment activities describe a very broad range of NFL activities such as sports, music, arts, cultural trips etc and overlaps with learning opportunities provided by the English state funded school system. Matsangos (2011) suggests enrichment has become a label formally attached to extra-curricular activities and is considered as additional to formal learning and not integral. Bernstein (2000) distinguishes between visible and invisible learning. The English state school system, often referred to as the progressive approach, is dominated by visible learning. Whereas the invisible approach to learning reflects activities such as enrichment including NFL and extra-curricular activities.

The invisible approach to learning is problematic when viewed through an accountability lens as to how to assess the outcomes of such programmes. This tension between formal learning such as that undertaken within schools and those strands which influence the remainder of a young person's lived experience through enrichment, NFL or extra-curricular activities is one which requires exploration.

This review is set within an understanding that all learning is equally valued echoing Moss's (2016) conceptualisation of education, education-in-its-broader-sense. Hence it embraces a young person-centred approach as opposed to an organisational or silo orientated professional approach.

Theme 1: Contextualising the current positioning of young people in a post pandemic world

Research was undertaken from the earliest days of the pandemic outlining its impact upon children, young people and families. The government's immediate response to the loss of schooling through 'lockdowns' was to focus entirely on the educational attainment of young people. More recent research has identified the wider impact of the pandemic on young people with an emphasis on their personal development and wellbeing. The Nuffield

Foundation in collaboration with Nottingham Trent University (2023) highlighted the effect of the pandemic on primary aged children's attainment, their wellbeing and inclusive of the effects of factors such as household poverty. Buchanan et al. (2023) study discussed the significant issue of how 'absence-of-schooling-as-normal' resulted from the lockdowns and that family's perspective on schooling changed. Young people missed being part of something bigger than themselves in a setting which offered socialisation, structure and purpose.

The emotional health and wellbeing of young people prior to the pandemic was in decline and the closure of schools has significantly added to this. Harmey and Moss (2021) conclude that wellbeing should be a governmental focus as well as attainment and is key to helping children and their communities to recover. Hefferon et al. (2021) offer additional insights stating the pandemic can be conceived as a systemic shock to the wider determinants of child health, with impacts on family functioning and income, access to healthcare and education. More recent investigations conducted by Jackson and Haslewood (2024) has through research with teachers, parents and pupils revealed young people have experienced a significant decline in the interest in learning alongside their happiness in relation to their school experience. The Centre for Young Lives (2024) publication identifies the current cost of living crisis as of further detriment to young people's social and emotional development and compounding the crisis in school absenteeism.

Young people's absenteeism from school and the enrichment agenda should be considered within this broader context resulting from the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic as the previous government's response was based purely on academic learning.

School attendance: pre and post Covid

The Department for Education (DfE) (DfE, 2023) categorise school attendance using the following criteria:

- pupils that have missed more than 10% of school sessions are considered persistently absent
- pupils who have missed more than 50% of school sessions are referred to as severely absent.

Trends in school attendance

DfE statistics demonstrate the trends in pupil attendance in English schools during the period 2006 to 2016. Secondary school absences fell from 7.9% to 5.2% and then rose steadily across 2017 to 2019 to 5.5%. A similar storyline emerges as regards persistent absence with a dramatic fall from 24.9% in 2006 to 13.6% in 2016 followed by a steady rise to 13.9% in 2019. Those pupils on free school meals (FSM) experienced far higher levels of absence in both categories when compared to young people not entitled to FSM.

Following the disruption to education caused by the lockdowns across 2020-21 DfE data illustrates the concerning rise in absence from school reaching 7.4% and persistent absence

to 21.2%. The latter equates to 1.6 million pupils persistently absent. The unverified estimated rates for 2023-24 show absence have fallen slightly to 7.2% but remain higher in secondary education at 9.1%, while persistent absence rose to 26.7%. That equates to one in five young people in the state system.

Deeper analysis of 2022/23 statistics reveals 36.5% of pupils eligible for FSM were persistently absent compared with 15.6% of pupils that were not eligible. In response DfE have issued new guidance to schools and parents with the aim to improve school attendance.

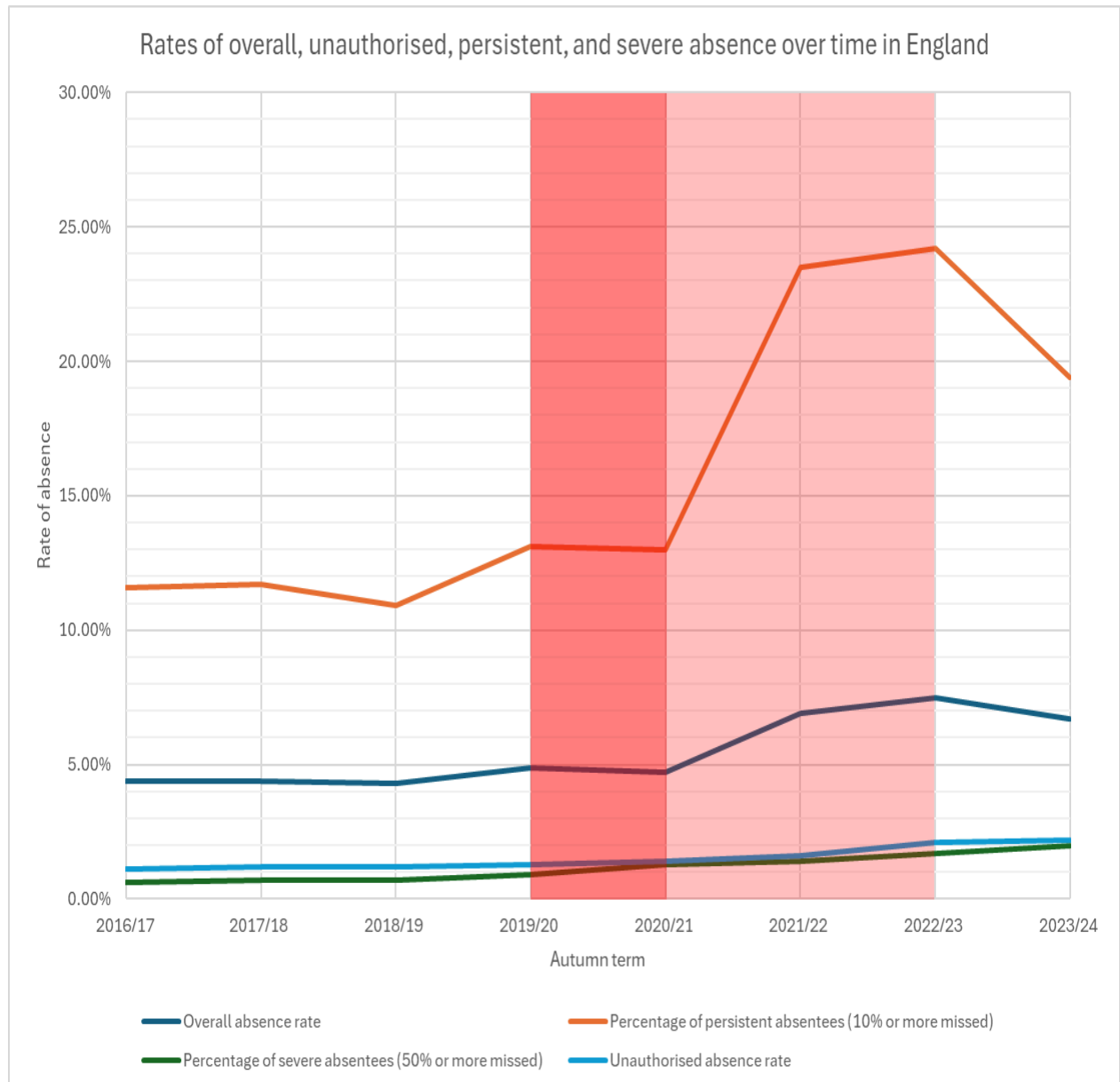


Figure1: Rates of overall, unauthorised, persistent, and severe absence in England

- Schools closed due to Covid-19 pandemic
- Schools open but continued disruption of Covid-19 pandemic

The Education Committee: Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils

The Education Committee (2023) conducted a comprehensive inquiry into 'Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils'. Their remit was broad and highlighted the disproportionate level of persistent absenteeism of children and young people from families living in poverty.

They examined food and enrichment-based interventions and its potential impact upon improving attendance. Holiday clubs and sports-based interventions were considered to have significant impact, although data was not available. The School of Hard Knocks provided data that through attending their programmes school attendance improved by 20 to 25 %. This is significant in terms of the impact of enrichment-based interventions. A recommendation was made by the committee to examine more deeply the link between sport interventions and improved attendance.

A further area of inquiry examined the impact of youth services upon school attendance with the NYA stating that when pupils volunteer to undertake youth work orientated activities their school attendance improves. The role of the detached youth workers on streets and around parks was highlighted as providing the opportunity for conversations with young people to discuss what is going on in their lives and provide effective support which included returning to school.

Attendance is an issue for all pupils, but it is having a more severe impact on those living in poverty. Accounts were provided of youth work/enrichment activities that can assist young people return to school. However presently too many young people are missing out on education and the opportunities which flow from schooling.

Schooling: a story of shifting perspectives

State schooling in England

The pandemic, school closures, teacher-based assessments and the shifting perspective of parent and school relationships has opened a debate about the nature of schooling with the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)(2024) claiming that the family and school relationship in England is broken.

There is a rich history of schools engaging in wider activities than academic learning prior to the establishment of the current centrally controlled English education system. The Plowden Report (CACHE, 1967) placed emphasis on the home-school relationship and wider engagement with agencies in communities schools served. The Labour government (1997–2010) experimented with a range of policy initiatives adopting the principles of Plowden. Piper (2006) informs how the government reviewed the role of schools leading to the publication of the Extended Schools policy (ES) (DfES,2005). By 2010 all state schools in England provided an ES core offer shaped by community need. This core offer included:

- high quality 'wraparound' childcare provided on the school site or through other local providers, available 8am–6pm all year round
- a varied menu of activities such as homework clubs and study support, sport (at least two hours a week beyond the school day for those who want it), music tuition, dance and drama, arts and crafts, special interest clubs such as chess and first aid courses, visits to museums and galleries, learning a foreign language, volunteering, business and enterprise activities
- parenting support including information sessions for parents at key transition points, parenting programmes run with the support of other children's services and family learning sessions to allow children to learn with their parents
- swift and easy referral to a wide range of specialist support services such as speech therapy, child and adolescent mental health services, family support services, intensive behaviour support, and sexual health services.
- providing wider community access to ICT, sports and arts facilities, including adult learning

Cummings et al. (2011) researched the development of this initiative across 2005 to 2011 and concluded that the policy enabled school leaders to participate with other community-based organisations and forge partnerships to deliver a comprehensive range of enrichment activities for pupils and the wider community. Schools were also free to form new relationships with other schools that resulted in radical moves such as 'through schools' (4 to 16/18 years of age) and on-site Children's Centres. The coalition government of 2010 directed schools to focus upon teaching in the classroom and disregard broader social issues which led to the role of schools diminishing over the decade (Martin, 2016). The present government in its first days in office proposes widening the scope of schools through the establishment of multi-professional hubs. This seems to indicate that a review of the present narrow positioning of English schooling could be underway in response to the attendance crisis. The next section will briefly provide insights into differing approaches to schooling available on our doorstep.

State funded schooling in other countries across the UK

Unlike England, where most schools are named academies and are managed by Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), Welsh schools are managed by local authorities. These community schools place the family central to their mission according to Estyn (2020) and include:

- The role of schools in working with partners to build community leadership and resilience
- The importance of family learning, particularly programmes which will help parents develop their confidence to support their children with learning at home

- The value of co-located services organised from a school hub that enables families and residents to access a range of support in an accessible place, close to their homes
- The benefits of strategic collaboration and shared ownership of community and school strategies
- Leadership that understands the challenges faced by their community.

Scotland has a similar history of community schools with extended days and working with partner schools and services in their community. The school system in Northern Ireland is governed locally and delivered through a community model. These schools target parents and key influencers of children to facilitate uplifted levels of parental involvement, to support children's learning needs and improve educational and social outcomes. In terms of attendance, which is central to this review of literature, it was reported that engagement as well as other measures increased dramatically due to targeting parents and schools working with other agencies (Department for Education N.I., 2023).

It is difficult to compare attendance data sets across these countries due to differing eligibility criteria such as FSM; However, when considering the principles of a flexible curriculum offer inclusive of substantial engagement with enrichment activities and a holistic approach to children, the USA's approach demonstrates improved attendance.

International models of schooling

The United States of America (USA) community school movement takes an integrated view of academic learning, youth development, family support, health, social services and community development which leads to improved pupil learning, stronger families and healthier communities. The curriculum is inclusive of enrichment activities.

In May 2024 the Biden administration held a national summit in response to the rate of persistent absenteeism in the USA. It is notable that while absence from school is deemed high, it remains far lower than in England. The principles that drive community schools are considered central to tackling pupil attendance. The report (USA Dept of Education, 2024) cites examples such as Buena Vista Horace Mann Community School that reduced chronic absenteeism by eight percent from 2021-22 to 2022-23. The Coalition for Community Schools (2003) promotes five conditions for every child to succeed:

- The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for pupils
- Pupils are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school
- The basic physical, mental, and emotional needs of young people and their families are recognised and addressed
- There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff

- Community engagement, together with school efforts, promote a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and that connects pupils to a broader learning community.

Little and Jahromi (2019:1) build on the growing role of community schooling by describing how they embrace partnership working inclusive of a diverse curriculum:

‘are replacing a patchwork of fragmented service providers with a cohesive team that includes public agencies, service providers, businesses, funders and schools, expanded learning systems help pupils feel more connected to school, build confidence in their abilities as learners, make connections with caring adults, and give families a much needed entry point for finding quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities [the later inclusive of enrichment activities]’

Children’s education in Scandinavia has its foundation in the early years with an emphasis upon play (Moss, 2015). Children commence formal schooling at the age of 6 to 7. Finish schools are supported by multi-disciplinary welfare teams which Crehan (2016) states involves teachers understanding the underlying causes of barriers to learning. This flexibility combined with a holistic approach to pupils empowers teachers to deliver a bespoke curriculum to young people that is set within the context of their individual positioning. It creates a safe and healthy environment for pupils to develop while reducing the risk of social exclusion.

Finland has been a high performing school system for over twenty years (Morgan, 2014). The OECD (2024) considers good education, and skills are important requisites in terms of quality of life and finding employment. In Finland, 91% of adults aged 25-64 successfully complete upper secondary education, higher than the OECD average of 79%.

Summary

England is facing a crisis in school attendance with young people living in the most disadvantaged communities significantly missing out. The government's initial response to the pandemic was based upon academic learning. We have discovered that there are much deeper issues young people face resulting from school closures and isolation from their peers. Differing models of schools are evident in the western world that consider young people’s lived experience and are inclusive of enrichment activities within their curriculum. The USA’s community schools appear to provide some answers to the relationship between poverty and poor attendance. This is through providing a flexible curriculum offer including the integration of enrichment activities combined with holistic understandings of their pupils. Finland takes a similar bespoke approach to their young people and families.

Theme 2: The English School System, Personal Development and Enrichment Activities

Schools, personal development and recent enrichment piloting activities

The National Curriculum, attainment measures and Ofsted inspections dominate schooling in England. However, the Guidance to School Inspection Handbook (2024) requires inspectors to observe personal development and enrichment activities that take place within school. Further to this across 2018 and 2019 the DfE experimented with the enrichment agenda through the Essential Life Skills (ELS) programme. The initiative enabled children and young people aged 5-18 years old to participate in regular extra-curricular activities. The programme was delivered across twelve Opportunity Areas (OAs) where social mobility was viewed as low level. The projects were designed to promote the development of life skills, such as teamwork and resilience, building on a growing body of evidence that links such skills with improved educational, labour market and wellbeing outcomes.

Schools and other organisations delivered a variety of activities to support the development of life skills. Evidence suggests that the intended outcomes of the ELS programme, particularly those with more immediate effects on participating young people were achieved to a significant extent. The evaluation timeframe meant that longer-term impact around attainment and social mobility were harder to assess reliably, though the indications of impact tended to be positive.

The learning from this initiative included:

- It developed a range of valuable life skills, putting young people in a better position to progress in education, achieve qualifications, and succeed in the labour market
- Evaluations of the programme shows that extracurricular provision can promote a range of specific benefits including enhanced confidence, resilience, relationships, and social and emotional intelligence
- Engagement with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring that those who historically may not have had the opportunity to partake and benefit from such participation
- Extra-curricular activities promoted outcomes within communities, for example from delivering activities across different schools to promote integration and help build a sense of community
- New partnerships were formed, and teachers were better equipped to deliver similar activities in future
- Insights from young people and parents/carers help to evidence and illustrate the positive impact of such activities
- It was noted that co-production between partner agencies and young people was an important consideration.

The ELS programme was a positive intervention and welcomed by schools, colleges, external providers and young people. Young people enjoyed and benefited from the activities on offer. The programme provided learning for any future wider roll out of extra-curricular support provision.

The Enrichment Partnerships Pilot (EPP) is a second initiative underway jointly funded by the DfE and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)(2023 to 2025) and involves 200 secondary schools in Education Investment Areas (EIA) in England. The pilot aims to test a system change approach to improve the enrichment offer based upon schools and understand whether greater coordination locally can enhance school enrichment offers and remove barriers to participation, create efficiencies such as reducing the burden on school resources and unlock existing funding and provision. The National Foundation for Educational Research evaluation of this piloting activity is to report in April 2025.

Equality issues and enrichment activities

The Social Mobility Commission: An Unequal Playing Field (2019) report considered the significance of extra-curricular activities within contemporary debates concerning social mobility. It assessed evidence as to how extra-curricular activities impact upon secondary school pupils. The report brings together previous research, the analysis of three nationally representative secondary datasets, and primary data collected from over 100 young people and parents across four different English localities.

The key findings included:

- Extra-curricular activities are important to young people and result in a range of positive outcomes. They are important in predicting intentions to remain in education after compulsory schooling and extend their social networks; and provide them with new skills and abilities
- Opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities are unequally distributed. The most marginalised groups in society have less access. Additionally, some activities are gender based. Participation in different types of activities also differs for ethnic groups, for example, around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes, compared to 28% of British Indian, and 20% of White British youth. Sport is the only activity that has a nearly equal rate of participation across different ethnic groups
- Employers in the UK labour market increasingly demand soft skills which may be developed via extra-curricular activities
- An association between the level of soft skills and intergenerational social mobility.

The report recommends the following investments should be considered:

- Introduce a national extra-curricular bursary scheme
- Provide funding to develop and extend third sector initiatives that successfully facilitate access to extra-curricular activities

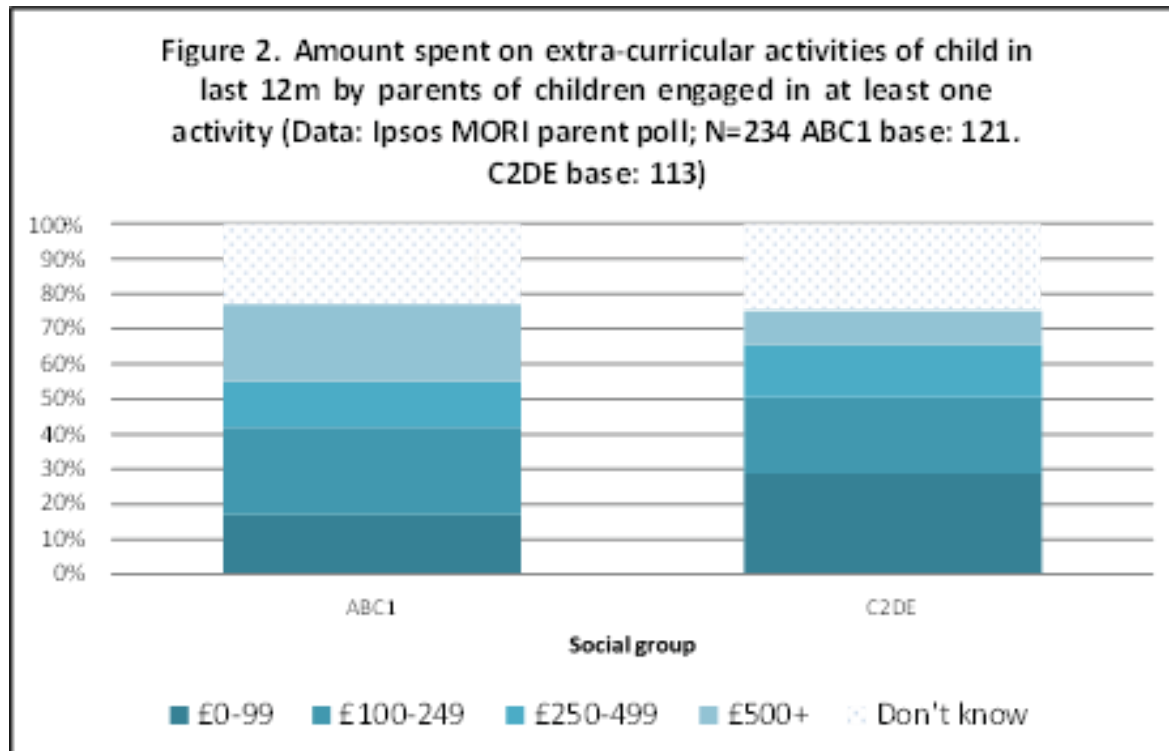
- Increase the organisational capacity of schools to support their extra-curricular provision and improve information on the availability of activities in local areas
- Improve data collection and carry out further research into the nature of soft skills developed and deployed across different settings.

Linked to the above, the Sutton Trust 2014: Extra-Curricular Inequality Report considers social inequality evident within English society. Children from poorer families, as measured by eligibility for FSM, are 40% less likely to achieve the government benchmark of five A*- C (9 - 4) grades (including English and Maths) at GCSE. Those from the most disadvantaged postcodes are three times less likely to go to university than those from the most advantaged areas and are ten times less likely to go to the most selective universities. Their research highlights a significant source of inequality lies outside the classroom.

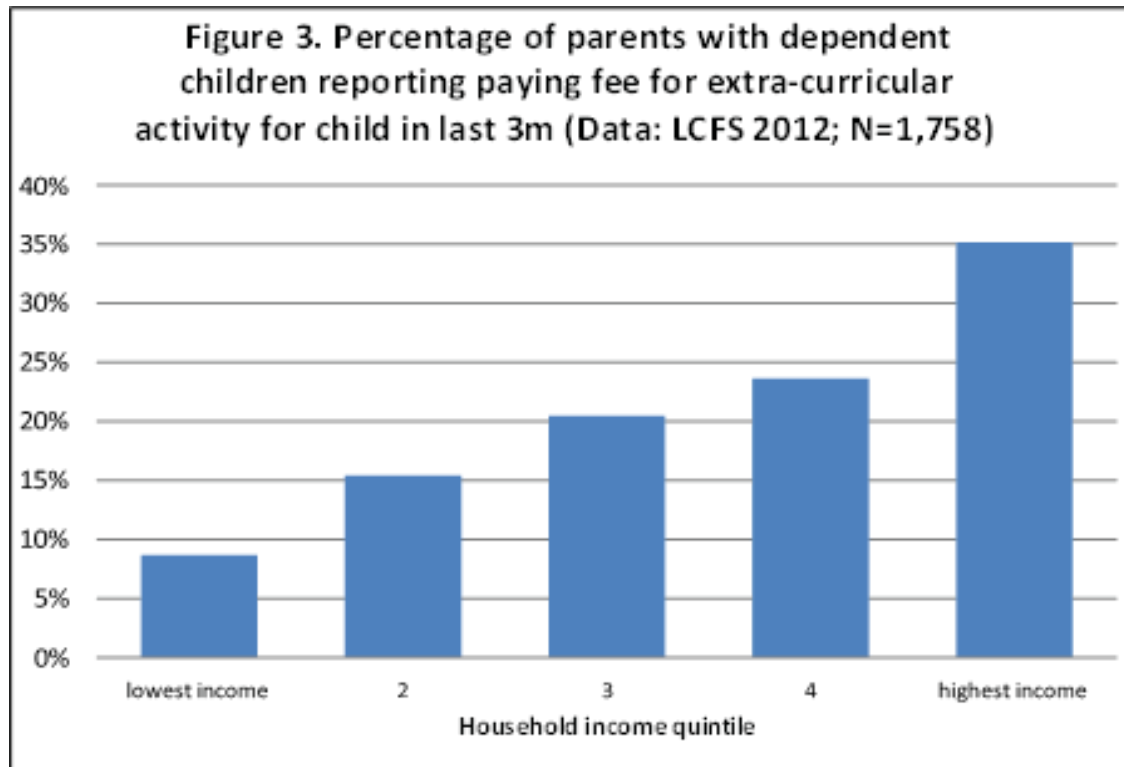
An online poll investigated rates of participation in extra-curricular activities by asking parents whether children regularly participated in any of several extra-curricular social activities outside of school in the last 12 months. 76% of parents reported that their child regularly participated in some form of extra-curricular activity in the last 12 months. Although most parents report some participation, there remains a gap between social groups, with rates of participation around 15 percentage points higher among parents in social groups A, B, or C1 (84%) than among parents in social groups C2, D, or E (69%).

These social groups were based on occupation of main income earner:

- A: higher managers, administrators or professionals
- B: intermediate managers etc.
- C1: supervisors, clerical workers, and junior manager and administrators
- C2: skilled manual workers
- D: semi and unskilled manual workers
- E: casual or lowest grade workers, unemployed people, and state pensioners.



Parents who reported that their child participated in extra-curricular activities were asked how much they had paid for these over the last 12 months. The table above shows the proportion of parents in each social group spending less than £100, £100-249, £250-499, and £500 or more on extra-curricular activities for their child in the last 12 months. These figures show substantial differences in spending by parents in the different social groups. 22% of parents in social groups A, B, or C1 reported spending £500 and up on extra-curricular activities for a particular child in the last year, compared with 10% of those in social groups C2, D, or E. Conversely, 29% of those in groups C2, D, or E reported spending £0-99, compared with 17% of those in groups A, B, or C1. The Sutton Trust also refer to the report 'Parent Power' that indicated similar social differences in the proportion of parents paying for regular weekly classes for their children in activities such as music, dance, drama or sport.



The report also draws upon the ONS Living Costs and Food Survey (2012) that demonstrates top earners are almost four times more likely than bottom earners to have paid for out of school enrichment activities. The Sutton Trust concludes that inequalities in access to extra-curricular activities is a cause for concern. Their previous research has illustrated the positive effect of extra-curricular experience on both education and career outcomes giving children from more wealthy families an edge when compared those families with lower incomes. This research took place prior to the present school attendance crisis, therefore this factor is of minor consideration, however it does highlight significant inequalities which could explain the high levels of school absenteeism amongst poorer families.

Young people's views: what helps them engage with learning?

Carnell (2005) examined young people's views on learning drawing upon 58 interviews in four secondary schools. They expressed a wish that their classroom experiences would include more active learning, learner responsibility and collaboration. In all four schools there was no time to talk about learning. Rudduck et al.'s (2002: 43) found that young people's '... participation [in designing learning activities] can help strengthen pupils' personal confidence, their sense of inclusion, and their sense of agency.' Carnell comments on differing views of young people on approaches to learning:

- Instruction – where young people hold the view that learning is only about gaining knowledge and depends on the teacher their view is limiting. They are passive recipients and dependent on others. This is the contemporary dominant model in English schooling.

- Construction - this model of learning comes about in an active way. The learner is involved in constructing knowledge and understanding. However, the frequency of use of this model was considered marginal by young people in their schools.
- Co-construction – a holistic approach not commonplace in schools but is found in NFL.

The research concluded involving pupils in the development and delivery of their learning will improve engagement.

The Youth Sports Trust supported by the Education Endowment Foundation undertook research into a variety of enrichment activities in a range of schools across 2018.

- Year 7 attendance at the extra-curricular clubs improved through personal invites to young people that historically did not attend.
- A school organised a 13km sponsored walk. This intervention created a positive sense of community spirit with the sixth form taking on leadership roles.
- An extra-curricular secondary school sport club for young people extended for an extra hour each term with Year 6 pupils from primary schools invited. The club was led by a teacher and a small group of young people. This intervention provided an opportunity to build relationships with prospective pupils transitioning to the secondary school and to become familiar with the extra-curricular offer ahead of their time at school while making new friendships.
- Year 8 boys were identified by headteachers due to factors including attendance /behaviour/confidence. Working with an identified school mentor to access activities resulted in a reduction in behaviour referrals with improved attendance and improved social relationships between pupils.
- A Girls Leadership and Marketing (GLAM) Team comprised of the girls that were 'not sporty' pupils. Improved relationships between the girls and PE staff resulted in less disruption with an additional number of girls attending extra-curricular opportunities.

Schooling and disadvantaged communities

The CSJ report 'A level playing field' (2021) considered the need for a school enrichment guarantee and how this could be delivered in response to 'the UKs most disadvantaged pupils face a barrage of adversity, made worse by the pandemic'. As described earlier in this review, children disengaged from school in autumn 2020, the number of pupils who were severely absent rose by 54.7% year-on-year.

The CSJ proposed an extended school day with access to extra-curricular activities to assist with reengaging young people in school. They claim these help pupils both academically and more generally. CSJ cite the ES programme referred to earlier as evidence through an evaluation of 1,500 schools that extended their days (97 per cent of which offered activities including sport, music, arts/crafts, study support, volunteering and business/enterprise activities as part of their offer). The DfE (2010) Extended School Evaluation Report states:

- 71% of schools reported this helped them engage disadvantaged families
- 69% found it had at least some influence in raising attainment
- 82% reported greater pupil enjoyment of school
- 45% noted improved pupil attendance
- 54% said it reduced behaviour or discipline problems
- 31% saw a reduced number of exclusions
- 68% observed stronger links between schools and their communities.

CSJ considers proactive and effective communication with pupils and parents; offering a wide range of activities; tailoring activities to pupils' needs; and providing additional support would improve attendance.

A further CSJ report was published in 2024 in response to the post pandemic trend in school absence that is central to this literature review. It focuses upon restoring the broken link between schools and families. To this end they suggest DfE establish a national parent strategy to include family hubs integrated into existing schools coupled with a roll out of attendance mentors. These would consist of multi-disciplinary teams of practitioners based in schools drawn from a range of organisations. Further to this and returning to the enrichment agenda, CSJ suggest investing £500 million in new youth clubs together with a 'Right to Sport' in all secondary schools involving five hours of extra-curricular activities for every pupil would serve to improve attendance, particularly for young people where the school and family relationship seems to be broken.

Connolly et al. (2023) considers the positioning of young people in Ireland following the pandemic where there is a similar crisis in attendance as in England. The introduction of new professionals into school is suggested as a key ingredient in responding to the multiple issues young people face. Bringing together teachers with youth workers and other practitioners to co-produce a suite of new learning activities through extending the physical spaces of school into the wider community are proposed. Byrne and Prendergast (2020) press for the integration of formal and non-formal contexts to create a holistic view of education. Forbes and Kerr (2023) discuss 'out of school time provision' in neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty. They reflect the theme that young people living in disadvantaged communities in Ireland have poor outcomes and co-producing within community spaces would promote wider positive engagement. Secondary schooling in Ireland have also experimented with an optional 'Transition Year' (Jeffers, 2011). This is a standalone fulltime programme offered to 75% of schools aimed at the 15-to-16-year age group. The focus of this optional year is personal and social development and active citizenship however this has challenged those with more traditional views of Irish schooling.

DfE's response to school attendance

In August 2024 the DfE published comprehensive guidance for schools and parents regarding attendance. 'Working together to improve school attendance' set out the statutory

responsibilities of parents, school and local authorities including a toolkit for schools as to how to improve engagement with parents. The guidance asks schools to move towards a deeper understanding of the barriers families and their children face in terms of attendance through approaches such as family support and sharing responsibilities with other services. While this proposed intervention includes the role of Attendance Mentors, as suggested by CSJ to gain a more holistic understanding of the position of the young person and their family, there is no indication that a shift in the curriculum offer is part of this reengagement strategy for state funded education.

Summary

The English school system engages with personal development and as such is already inclusive of extra-curricular/enrichment activities. Pre and post pandemic piloting enrichment activities have developed through diverse strands of funding and for differing purposes but none with the primary aim to improve attendance. Numerous research papers have focused upon enrichment from differing perspectives with a central theme emerging of young people's access to these activities in relation to their social positioning. By drawing together this selection of initiatives, their associated reports and through understanding the present positioning of young people in terms of formal and NFL, we can extract some clues as to the future potential of enrichment activities to positively influence school attendance.

Reviewing the factors contributing to the attendance crisis and enrichment activities

We have seen how multiple and complex factors contribute towards the present attendance crisis. This section will briefly examine two of these many factors using the literature linked to engagement with enrichment activities.

Young People and Wellbeing

Young people's wellbeing is a major influence upon their school attendance (CSJ,2024). Wellbeing is inclusive of the areas of physical and mental health from low level anxiety through to the challenges presented by critical mental health. Poor mental health is one of the key contributing factors to school absence. Kandola et al. (2020) study suggests that better access to enrichment activities can support improved mental health. An additional hour of light activity a day is attributed to an 8-11% decrease in depression among young people aged 12-16. Carless and Douglas (2010) examine how taking part in regular sport assists the general wellbeing of young people but also progressively builds confidence to recover from episodes of critical mental illness. Biddle and Asare (2011) synthesise reviews that investigate physical activity and depression, anxiety, self-esteem and cognitive functioning in children and adolescents. Their research concerning enrichment activities concludes that taking part in physical activity is associated with improved cognitive performance and academic achievement. They also note it builds self confidence in the short term and will lead to the reduced association between sedentary screen-time and poorer mental health. A further study in the Lancet (2020) outlines how regular participation

in sports during childhood is linked to lower levels of mental illness in later life. This is particularly the case for those who have faced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Hughest et al., 2018). A study conducted in Canada by Oberle et al. (2020) suggests that those that participate in extra-curricular activities are significantly less likely to engage in more than two hours of recreational screen time after school than those who do not, and they are more likely to report higher levels of life satisfaction and optimism. Lagestad (2017) investigates the impact of a sedentary lifestyle combined with fast food leading to the growing trend in obesity and how 14 and 19 year olds taking part in team sport is associated with higher fitness levels than simply participating in informal physical activity.

Supporting Families

Earlier in this review reports discussed how school attendance is influenced by family views and their social positioning. Factors that influence the relationship with school include parental experience of schooling, family poverty and the costs involved in taking part in enrichment activities. Emerging from reports such as the CSJ are proposals to extend the school day to provide breakfast clubs for young people and offer a safe place for them so that parents can work. These clubs also relieve families of the costs of breakfast (IFS, 2024). For young people in addition to having the opportunity for a healthy start to the school day are able to socialise with their peers in an informal setting (Gibson-Moore et al., 2023). Afterschool clubs provide a diverse range of activities for young people such as a place to access information technology, quiet settings to complete homework and enrichment activities such as sport or music. As with breakfast clubs, CSJ (2024) state that these provide parents with free care facilities where they know their child is safe and are able to engage with their peers and responsible adults such as youth workers. In addition to the social activities, these clubs provide space for young people to discuss social issues that concern them in a less formal environment than within the core school day (NYA, 2023).

The ES initiative, as mentioned earlier, provided enrichment activities for young people and parents (Cummings et. al., 2011). Parents in Martin's research (2016) discussed how their own experience of school as a child shaped the view of their child's consideration of schooling. The ES initiative saw parents who previously felt alienated by school become welcomed into primary schools to learn to read with their child or take part for example in music while secondary schools invited them to use the sports facilities as they extended their opening hours into evenings and weekends. Parents learnt new skills using school facilities such as cooking and healthy eating, they were provided with English classes, some to help with reading and other sessions based upon social interaction. Martin (2016) and Cumming (2011) state how this improved the relationships between school and parents and the wider community and helped build a focus for deprived neighbourhoods to move forward and regain confidence and build a new identity. These schools also employed family support workers which were able to broker solutions between school staff and a range of services to overcome issues families faced that impacted upon their children's engagement with school. This contributed to resolving tensions within the family and between others in the community and the school itself.

This section has briefly outlined research that informs of a small selection of the benefits for young people and families through engaging with enrichment activities and how this approach could contribute to improved school attendance.

Enrichment Activities and Young People in broader settings

Education takes place in a diversity of locations. This section will sample a range of settings outside the school gates where learning takes place with a diversity of educators.

The DfE set out guidance for Alternative Provision (AP)(2013) in England:

‘Education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour’.

Pupils are referred to this provision with an expectation of being reintegrated into mainstream schools. Russell and Thompson (2011) describe AP as an integrated provision comprising of multiple agencies to meet the needs of young people and their families not attending mainstream schooling. Paterson and Denn (2022) consider how young people are reengaged in education by preparing for the future through motivation; support and empowerment; confidence and self-efficacy; and balancing academia with physical activity. Putwain et al. (2016) suggests that AP provides a much broader educational offer than pupils receive in mainstream secondary schools. The prime purpose of the provision is to reintegrate pupils into the mainstream offer through personal development programmes that reflect the key elements of enrichment and extra-curricular activities discussed earlier.

Turning to young people within the English care system whose outcomes, including educational attainment and attendance, tend to be poor when compared to those not in care. New Direction established an arts project designed to improve the confidence, social skills and arts capacities of these young people. The ‘We Belong’ Evaluation Report published in 2021 outlines the response made to the belief that the care system could be doing better to meet the needs of these young people. The outcomes achieved included:

- Improved awareness among Virtual Schools (local authority support for children in care) of the arts and their ability, when mediated well, to fully engage and stimulate the positive engagement of children in care
- Improvements in the well-being, confidence and self-expression of young people and a greater understanding of the role the arts might have in their lives.

The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) undertook research in April 2024 to consider the longitudinal effect of youth provision via an analysis of data with the aim to understand the impact covering the period from the nineteen seventies through to post year 2000. They concluded that there is a clear association between participation in youth provision and positive short-term outcomes relating to physical health and wellbeing, pro-social behaviours and education.

Moving to post 16 education the Association of Colleges in Valuing Enrichment Final Report (2024) describe the benefits of a strong enrichment offer for students including supporting and empowering students with skills, confidence, self-esteem.

Their recommendations include:

- Clear recognition of the value of enrichment and proposes a national guarantee for young people
- Enrichment activities play multiple and essential roles in the college curriculum
- Equality of access to enrichment for all learners extends and complements all areas of study.

Atkins et al (2023) published further findings from this research with 'low attaining youth'. They conclude that young people respond to the broader curriculum offer with those featured in case studies overwhelmingly positive about their experiences and their ability to progress educationally.

Youth Zones were established by the Onside Network in 2008 and have developed into a national network reaching 14 centres of activity engaging with 50,000 young people each year. They commissioned a piece of research to investigate the impact of Youth Zones on young people with a focus on attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4 and Level 3 qualifications such as T and A levels; attendance to the end of Year 11 (16 years of age); exclusions and suspensions; the transition into post 16 and their outcomes into employment and training; and progression into higher education. The learning from this research which is currently being undertaken aims to understand the value of youth work interventions set against the outcomes described above.

The National Youth Association (NYA) (2023) Better Together: youth work and schools report proposed new approaches to young people's well-being and attendance. A comprehensive case is built from personal accounts of youth work interventions and linked to a range of issues including school absenteeism. The report proposes through longitudinal research a better understanding of how to tackle attendance, skills and employability. The follow up research to date has not been published.

Summary

This section provides accounts of the value of engaging with enrichment activities in a variety of settings outside the school gates. It outlines the benefits to young people of participating in these activities and informs of the improved outcomes young people experience including confidence building and other 'softer skills' and how these activities are beneficial in reengaging young people in formal learning.

Responding to the research questions and summary

This section will use the learning from the initiatives and reports collected through this review to respond to the research questions. Although no definite studies or data have come forward about the relationship between school attendance and enrichment activities, it will put forward plausible responses to the questions posed.

Research Question 1: What evidence is there of the link between enrichment and attendance?

No substantial contemporary evidence of a relationship between pupils engaging in enrichment activities and their levels of school attendance was found despite intensive research. However, a consensus shared among the school workforce, DfE, further education sector, youth workers, a diversity of enrichment activity providers and parents is that these activities assist young people with their personal, social and emotional development as they move towards adulthood. Further understandings have surfaced of how enrichment activities also help with formal learning and the softer skills employers view as essential.

The recent pandemic had an adverse influence on young people's academic development and their experience of isolation from their peers in social and school settings has added to mental health concerns. Health professionals and school leaders currently portray the influence of the pandemic on young people's social, emotional and personal development as of crisis status. Bringing these dispersed voices together, it would seem reasonable to consider the view that engagement with enrichment activities whether in school or through school partnership work with providers in the community or via young people engaging independently in activities such as sport or music will through improving confidence and other aspects of personal development contribute to young people's success in terms of formal schooling.

Research Question 2: How is enrichment activity being used to promote attendance?

Minimal contemporary evidence exists of enrichment activities directly promoting school attendance at national or local level. However, the trend from 2006 to 2016 prior to the pandemic was of a significant improvement in school attendance. This was at a time when government first instigated the extension of the school day through the introduction of local partnerships to provide broader activities on school sites coupled with the development of localised community-based multi-disciplinary partnerships.

These Extended Schools (ES) acted as a universal implementation platform for the Every Child Matters policy involving a much wider remit than schools were used to. It would appear reasonable to state that ES partnerships contributed to improved attendance post 2006. However, in 2010 English schools were directed to refocus upon outstanding teaching in the classroom, some continued with localised partnerships but many concentrated upon responding to school performance set within narrower measures.

The Department for Education (DfE) started testing out the development of enrichment activities in schools through the Essential Life Skills (ELS) initiative across 2018-2019 alongside the existing requirements regarding the personal development curriculum. They focused upon disadvantaged communities and recognised the gap in skills and employability prior to the pandemic. The aim of this piloting was to promote social mobility in Opportunities Areas to address the inequality of experiences by groups of young people.

More recently, post pandemic, DfE and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) jointly financed Enrichment Partnership Pilots (EPP) to take forward the enrichment agenda linked to 'levelling up' community opportunities. The evaluation of the EPP intervention will be published in 2025.

There are common themes that run throughout the ELS review which indicate there is a discernible link between access to enrichment activities and the positioning of families and schools. Several other reports identify how social disadvantage mirrors the relationship between poverty and school attendance. The Sutton Trust's research concluded young people living in poorer households have less access to enrichment activities when compared to those living in wealthier households with families where higher education qualifications are the norm. They identify the decade of austerity when public services such as youth work reduced dramatically significantly contributed to this position.

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)(2021) also highlight the loss of interventions such as the ES initiative (2005-2010), and the theme of working together in preventative ways that the previous Labour government experimented with. The National Youth Agency (NYA), National Citizenship Service (NCS), Sutton Trust, DfE and further education colleges reports identified in this review indicate that some form of redress is required to assist young people living in poorer communities to access enrichment activities.

The CSJ call for an entitlement for all young people coupled with a reconsideration of the existing English state school curriculum offer to include extended days and the forging of a provider market for agencies to supply enrichment activities to schools. Additionally, the CSJ echo the Labour government of 2024 recent move to introduce multi-agency teams into schools to forge a holistic understanding of young people framed within their family and community setting. The relationship between access to enrichment activities and poverty raises a key question as all reports suggest enrichment equips young people with improved life chances, that making these activities more readily available in disadvantaged communities may assist young people return to regular schooling.

Research Question 3: What is the (potential) impact of enrichment activities on attendance?

Extrapolating the learning from this literature review, including the above correlation between access to enrichment activities and family income and the benefits outlined in improving young people's personal development in its broadest sense, it would seem highly likely that enrichment activities could be successfully applied to improve school attendance. Strong evidence is identified within the literature review that regardless of social background, engagement with enrichment activities helps build softer skills such as confidence,

resilience, relationships and general social and emotional health. It was noted that across 2005 to 2010 the ES initiative as well as providing breakfast and after school clubs leaving parents free to work, that parents were also invited into schools to learn alongside their young people and take part in enrichment activities often free of charge.

Drawing on the identification of the relationship between disadvantaged families and their young people and persistent absence from school, it would seem appropriate that piloting enrichment partnerships in schools with high levels of absenteeism would be a logical step towards re engaging young people in formal education. This is already the case where young people are being educated in Alternative Provision (AP) with the aim to return them to secondary mainstream education. This intervention, should it be implemented, would require qualitative and quantitative evaluations to more deeply understand the relationship between these two elements of education and its future potential. DfE (2023) statistics infer that 1.6 million pupils fall into the category of persistent absence with 24.9% of these from families entitled to Free School Meals (FSM). Although DfE provisional statistics for 2024 predict that absenteeism will fall slightly, amongst the most disadvantaged families it is anticipated to remain at a similar level to that of the previous academic year.

English state school performance has been measured through narrow indicators of learning as opposed to the schooling systems highlighted in this review from around other parts of the UK, Europe and the USA. The CSJ (2024) report calls for a rethink of the lost relationship between schools in England and families and suggests access to enrichment activities can combat the impact of social disadvantage. They propose a similar intervention to that of Pupil Premium would entail extra funding allocated to schools for pupils on FSM be made available as an entitlement. They further recommend government should work to rebuild the partnership between parents and schools which reflects the key theme in DfE's (2024) response to the attendance crisis.

The Relationship Between Formal and Non-Formal Learning

A reappraisal of the English school curriculum offer would seem reasonable in view of the calls from the diverse voices outlined in this review. Their views are set within the present crisis in attendance and the associated concerns around pupil wellbeing and personal development. A constant theme that runs through this review is the relationship between formal learning – that is the school curriculum and NFL. Education is a continuum fostered through multiple and diverse relationships and interactions throughout an individual's life. Learning in the school classroom is extremely important to young people's future, however there are other significant influences that contribute or inhibit their potential. Understanding how formal and NFL interconnect would benefit all young people and seem to be the overarching learning that has emerged from this review.

Areas to consider for further research

There are many qualitative accounts of the value of young people participating in enrichment activities. But a direct link to attendance does not appear to presently exist despite the commonly held belief that enrichment activities add value to formal education. This review considers how formal education is more readily measured when compared to NFL. Research

in this area to better understand and recognise the value and interrelationships between formal and NFL would seem to be an appropriate way forward set within a holistic conceptualised framework. Eraut (2000) attempts to consider this question in relation to professional development and learning in the workplace. The findings demonstrate the complexity of issues associated with identifying and understanding the impact of NFL. Similarly, Werquin (2010) grapples with this issue. Most recently the University of Leeds (2024) is seeking through research to understand the importance of the different forms of learning in the context of youth empowerment.

Almost all the research concerning the influence of enrichment activities is general in nature with little link to attendance and is dominated by professional voices as opposed to those of young people. This represents a significant gap in knowledge and requires redressing.

This review frequently refers to the issue of inequality expressed through other's research. Reports regarding England and enrichment activities view access to these activities through the lens of social positioning. Further research would seem to be essential in terms of diversity such as gender, disability and ethnicity alongside that of poverty.

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