



## Using collaboration and enquiry to tackle educational inequality

The SIPP is a collaborative school improvement strategy that promotes new ways of working across classrooms, schools and local authorities to tackle educational inequity. Data and collaborative enquiry are used to innovate, test and refine new approaches to tackle the attainment gap. The Programme is a natural extension of a number of policies including *Curriculum for Excellence* and *Teaching Scotland's Future* that focus on providing excellent learning experiences for our young people and life-long professional enrichment for those responsible for learning, teaching and leadership of Scottish schools.

Education Scotland is working with local authorities and university researchers to broker and facilitate partnerships within and across schools and local authorities. The *School Improvement Partnership Programme* (SIPP) is first and foremost a research project. It adopts a solution-focused approach underpinned by systematic enquiry and the use of evidence to address Scotland's attainment issues with a focus on collaboration and innovation to tackle educational inequality.

The SIPP projects are part of a collaborative enquiry programme which creates leadership opportunities and professional learning. In the spirit of action research, the programme aims to encourage staff to learn from each other, experiment with their practice and monitor and evaluate change. The partnerships aim to develop a shared commitment to improving outcomes and raising attainment for all children and young people and particularly for those from the most deprived backgrounds.

The collaborative improvement strategies and principles that underpin the SIPP reflect international educational research and practice that has demonstrated that the most effective school improvements are locally owned and led by teachers and school leaders working in partnership and collaboration with like-minded professionals and stakeholders. Such research<sup>1</sup> also highlights the value of school-to-school networking and cross-authority partnerships as levers of innovation and education system improvement.

A key feature of the SIPP is the **evaluation support** being provided by researchers from the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change at the University of Glasgow. The purpose is to find out what practices work supported by a rigorous research and evidence base to inform future work. An important feature of the SIPP is the opportunity for those involved in the partnership projects to meet regularly across the projects to develop a

<sup>1</sup> Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., Goldrick, S., West, M. (2012) Making schools effective for all: rethinking the task. *School Leadership & Management*, 32(3), pp.197-213.

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**professional learning community.** This aims to generate a collective will and motivation for the project, reinforce the underpinning principles and expectations of the programme, share progress made across the projects; and collect evaluative evidence to inform future

**Core principles that underpin the SIPP are:**

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

developments. This paper sets out the key findings emerging from the first phase of the SIPP from August 2013 to June 2014 published in *The School Improvement Partnership Programme: Using Collaboration and Enquiry to Tackle Educational Inequity*, November 2014 .



## The SIPP partnership projects

A range of partnerships are emerging within and across the SIPP projects. All partnerships have the common feature of tackling inequality but have been taken forward in different ways. Some involve collaboration within a local authority and others involve schools from different authorities as well as some involving multi-agency partners. Some involve partnerships from the same phase of schooling while

others are cross phase. The range of enquiry methods used by partnerships include collaborative action research, improvement science, instructional rounds and lesson study. The projects target learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and cover a range of themes including learning and pupil engagement, behaviour and low aspirations, and parental engagement.

## Key findings

### 1. Establishing partnership projects

Overall, the SIPP has been successfully implemented in that those participating partnerships have been able to develop appropriate plans, infrastructure and collaborative networking in line with that recognised by the literature of collaborative enquiry and improvement. This is already producing positive impact depending on the 'maturity' of the partnership.

A number of partnerships reported that the development of their proposal and inception took time due to negotiating an appropriate design and then communicating the plans to colleagues. However, all those who were successful with their proposals were able to see progress thereafter. Improvements could include greater support for partnership development teams when developing their focus of their collaborative enquiry.

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

The majority of teachers report enhanced awareness and understanding of disadvantage. The majority of partnership members report adopting learning and teaching approaches that aim to tackle disadvantage. However, a notable minority have yet to do so. This

appears to be explained by the fact that those partnerships that have embarked on their SIPP activity more recently have yet to develop and deploy their learning and teaching approaches for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### 3. Approaches to collaboration

Teachers have quickly developed collaborative networks, supported by their partnership colleagues and the external Trio teams, with representation from local authorities, Education Scotland and the University. This is seen as facilitating positive developments in joint projects and enquiry, with initial impacts on learners being reported in those partnerships that have been established longest. Effective collaboration was most evident in working teams constituted to develop the various SIPP projects within each partnership. These promoted sharing

of valuable ideas for learning and teaching and developing new skills, including research and enquiry capacities and leadership opportunities.

Opportunities to get together during the research support events facilitated by the local authorities and involving the Trio members were also effective. The National SIPP events provided opportunities for cross partnership sharing of ideas and demonstration of progress.

#### Individuals experiences of working together

| % Working together has...  | Completely agree | Mostly agree | Not sure either way | Disagree | Completely disagree |
|--|------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| left me with a desire to work collaboratively with colleagues (N=51) | 75               | 25           | -                   | -        | -                   |
| encouraged networking with other colleagues (N=51)                   | 73               | 27           | -                   | -        | -                   |
| increased my leadership opportunities (N=50)                         | 72               | 20           | 6                   | 2        | -                   |
| encouraged me to try new ideas (N=51)                                | 57               | 37           | 6                   | -        | -                   |
| promoted my skills in practitioner enquiry (N=51)                    | 51               | 39           | 10                  | -        | -                   |

### 4. Developing understanding of evaluation and leadership development opportunities

Overall, there has been progress in developing understanding of evaluation but a notable minority of partnership members report that this is taking time. However, the support from the University team and collaborative networking was said to have facilitated

teachers' evaluation capacity. Teachers generally reported that the SIPP experience has promoted their leadership opportunities through their activity in developing innovative learning and teaching approaches and enquiry.

### 5. Impact on learners

To date, impact on children and young people has been less evident than in other activities associated with SIPP developments. This is unsurprising given that it will likely take longer for the SIPP activities to demonstrate a

notable impact on inequality in learners' achievement and opportunities. However, there were some indications that the longer established partnerships were beginning to demonstrate an impact on learners.

Research conducted by the Angus, Edinburgh City and South Ayrshire project has found that, following the implementation of their programme it has had the following impact:

- Improved attendance for targeted young people
- Improved self-esteem for these young people (as demonstrated via the Rosenberg scale)
- Improved teacher awareness of individual young people's context
- Increased teacher awareness of the Social Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)
- Growing teacher awareness of the need to take account of research
- Increase in professional reading
- Better engagement with parents in the identified group.

# Conclusion

The partnerships are at differing stages in their development and this is reflected in their progress to date. Establishing partnerships involving different local authorities, schools and other stakeholders is a complex process, particularly since the focus of the SIPP is to impact on educational inequality. It is not surprising then, that the partnerships have often taken time to become established and develop their strategies and activities.

The external evaluation by the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change and teachers' own enquiry has provided evidence that, even at a relatively early stage of development, the SIPP is making a demonstrable impact. The most apparent progress has been partnerships establishing collaborative networks that have supported teachers' learning and teaching approaches to address inequality as well as their ability to integrate research and enquiry to assess progress and inform developments.

While, impacts on learners is less evident at this stage, those partnerships that have been established longer and

have focused on particular interventions or approaches are reporting their measures are making a difference.

The SIPP has tended to have traction, initially, with a group of committed practitioners who then have been able to engage other staff and expand the influence of the Programme to impact the behaviours more widely across schools and partnerships. This is challenging and complex territory but this type of work is crucial to developing a robust Scottish approach to move the education system forward.

The findings then, strongly suggest that the SIPP is an evolving but largely successful model to promote collaborative networking that stimulates and promotes innovation in teachers' expertise, confidence and practice to promote educational equality. There are tentative emerging indications that, in some more established partnerships, this is impacting on the attainment and wider opportunities of learners.

# Recommendations

## The SIPP should:

- Further develop expertise in a range of collaborative enquiry methods within the partnerships.
- Encourage continued and systematic monitoring of progress at individual partnership level to evidence impact of the collaborative enquiry.
- Engage learners, parents/carers and other stakeholders in the SIPP process consultation and decision-making and in taking forward strategies that address local needs.
- Ensure partnerships continue to develop a greater range of methods for evidencing impact on student outcomes for learners from disadvantaged settings.

## Education Scotland should:

- Further develop its strategic perspective on the programme to connect partnerships and promote system-level learning as well as providing opportunities for quality assurance.
- Play a key role in supporting coherence making linkages between the SIPP and other policy initiatives.
- Work with SCEL to use the SIPP as a key mechanism to build leadership capacity within the system.

- Develop a coherent set of guidance materials and associated tools to provide an overarching framework that supports collaborative enquiry in schools and partnerships.
- Ensure that partnerships have access to a range of high quality and proportionate external support from their local authority colleagues, the University team and Education Scotland.
- Develop a coordinated virtual learning environment that connects the partnerships together.

## For the System:

- Ensure early identification and mobilisation of individuals well placed to lead and manage educational change and improvement through partnerships/collaboration in schools and local authorities.
- Consider establishing innovation hubs as centres of expertise that can play a key role in moving knowledge to action around the system and link with Education Scotland to co-ordinate and guide the strategic direction of the programme.

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