

(Disadvantaged) Schools: Education vs Welfare

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Context

- International and National context:
 - Recession and austerity
 - A range of welfare reforms, including the ‘bedroom tax’ or ‘removal of the spare bedroom subsidy’
 - Wider cuts in public sector services and funding
- Local context:
 - Largest effects of bedroom tax recorded in northern cities with an estimated 45,000 households affected in Greater Manchester (New Economy, 2013)

The 'bedroom tax'?

- Reduced rent subsidies for tenants who 'under-occupy' their homes (14% for 1 'spare room', 25% for 2<)
- One bedroom for:
 - adult couples
 - single adults over 16 years old
 - two children of the same gender up to age 15
 - two children of either gender up to age 9
 - an overnight carer (where required)
- Tenants pay an average £11 per week for each additional room

Our project

Pilot project looking at the impact of the 'bedroom tax' on children, their schools and other children's services in Greater Manchester.

Data collection:

- 7 semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders in the schools

Data analysis:

- To date, preliminary thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Key Questions

1. What impact, if any, is the 'bedroom tax' having on schools in Greater Manchester?
2. If there is an impact, how are schools responding to this?

RQ1: Impact on schools

- **Hunger – children and parents**

“The prime example is the food. So, the amount of food parcels weekly now that we’re doing, you know, in the holidays we used to do activities and things with the children. Well, now it’s welfare check, to check that they’ve got food for the holidays”

- **Lack of appropriate uniform**

“We’ve noticed a big increase in the children, you know, from a lack of money perspective, there’s more children coming in with talking shoes ... you know what I mean, we’re having to give out more uniform. It’s an extra cost burden on school from that point of view”

RQ1: Impact on schools

- **Children's and families emotional wellbeing**

“Well, all of the situations we've described, if that's putting a child under stress, that child's not going to be accessing their learning or if the family's under stress and not bringing the children to school, they're missing their education.”

- **Increased child protection cases and children in need**

“We currently have 25 CAFs and that's gone up by 10 in the last 4 weeks”

- **Impact on staff**

“I mean I think we're working very effectively to minimise the implications but it does have a massive impact on everybody's stress levels...you know, it's quite an emotional experience often, you know people telling you really challenging stories”

RQ2: School Response

- **Changing roles of staff – increasing provision, restructuring roles**

“But we’re taking away an experienced teaching assistant from working with children. And we haven’t been able to replace her you know, we’ve had to adjust what other people are doing, so you know, so you sort of start to spread the butter on that piece of toast a little bit more thinly so you can put some on this piece of toast.”

- **Material support e.g. uniform, shoes, food (both child and parent)**

“Another thing we do is, if we see a child ... you know, they might have come with a couple of biscuits or something or an old McDonalds burger in a plastic bag with chips...we just give them a dinner...we just need to give them what they need”

“So, somebody came in the other week and actually had no money for the electricity and actually asked for a loan, you know, so we’re sort of putting systems into place that we can do that”

RQ2: School Response

- **Sharing information about welfare policies**

“And also it’s not well publicised that you can actually get support with it as well. People aren’t aware that they can actually get money ... we publicise it within school, as in we’ll tell people and we’ll ask people”

“We had community events in the school...I remember going onto the estate with the radio station, going knocking on doors with the housing officers”

- **In-school counselling services**

“they can go and talk to somebody who isn’t a teacher, who they feel that they can trust, somebody different.”

- **Additional training on safeguarding for staff**

- **Liaison with external agencies**

RQ2: Range of responses

- Mixture of strategies employed by schools
 - Teaching and learning
 - Material (*Welfare as cash transfer*)
 - Social and emotional (*Welfare as wellbeing*)
- Directed at pupils and/or the whole family
- Preventative vs. responsive

What's new?

- Additional and extended emotional supports
 - e.g. in-school counselling service funded by Pupil Premium, therefore linking to disadvantage (*Welfare as wellbeing*)
- Charitable contributions from staff
 - e.g. Christmas food parcels (*Welfare as cash transfer*)
- Financial support
 - e.g. loan for electricity (*Welfare as cash transfer*)

NB: can't attribute changes *solely* to bedroom tax

Discussion

- What role should schools be taking?
- Policy vs. schools

“But when Ofsted come in and say ‘are you, you know, the two sub-levels’ you know, shall we start at the beginning before we come through the front door, of what you’re dealing with.”

- Welfare (wellbeing & cash transfer) to improve learning?

“You can’t really teach them till they’re sorted, if they’ve got no home or food, then how are you going to teach them?”

“It’s a knock-on effect, without a doubt”

“Obviously as a school, you know ... we want to do the very best that we can for our children and we will do whatever we need to do, to do that. And if that means that we have to be the early intervention because the other systems aren’t actually there anymore, you know, that’s what we’ll do.”

Discussion

- Education vs. Welfare – possible tensions between roles adopted by schools
 - Staff resources
 - Financial resources
 - Additional emotional burden on staff
- Money provided by the Pupil Premium to support poorer children may not be able to offset the increased and extended pressures placed on schools by wider social policy changes (Lupton & Thomson, 2015).