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Submitted to **Educational Underachievement - Give us your views**

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Educational Underachievement - Give us your views

1 What is your name?

Name:

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2 Please provide an email address

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3 Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation - Go to question 4

4 Please provide the name of your organisation and outline briefly its context/ aims and scope?

context/aims of your organisation :

Established in 1997, Forthspring Inter Community Group (Forthspring) is an inclusive and innovative organisation based in a shared space at the Springfield/Woodvale interface in Belfast. Forthspring seeks to enhance life opportunities and to enable sustained relationships through a varied range of programmes and activities.

Moving Up Moving On (MUMO) is a Forthspring programme. Established in 2016, it works in partnership with Springfield Primary School and St. Clare's Primary School to provide support services for children and parents.

MUMO is passionate about providing meaningful opportunities for children and families to develop and strengthen relationships and increase motivation, confidence and aspirations. MUMO has four outcomes:

1 Children make a positive transition from nursery to primary school, through primary school and from primary into post-primary school. Children approach learning with a positive, confident and enthusiastic outlook

2 Families will be engaged with education and learning and will have developed educational aspirations and goals

3 Improved relationships between school, family and community with an increased engagement of families in education and learning

4 Emotional wellbeing will be raised/improved due to the provision and support provided to families and individuals, including access to specialist counselling

MUMO services are mostly cross community and include:

- Programmes supporting parents and children such as Families Connect which aims to increase parent's skills and confidence in supporting their child's learning, focusing on emotional development; literacy and numeracy
- Annual Summer Scheme: a cross community Summer Scheme for up to 60 children from the two schools
- Family Matters: a monthly session where parents and children from the two schools do an activity and eat together
- Regular after-school's activities such as sport and cooking
- A weekly women's group for parents/carers/grandparents from the two schools
- Education and training e.g. Five Steps to Wellbeing (OCN level two)
- Exercise classes – pilates; aerobics; zumba
- Regular health taster promotion events – Give it a Go - health outcomes are very poor in our area, and this impacts significantly on educational attainment
- A transition programme, offering workshops for children in P7 to prepare them for moving from primary to post primary education.

5 Are you responding as? Please choose from the options below:

Not Answered

Other:

6 What would you say are the main causes of educational underachievement?

main causes of educational underachievement:

- Poverty: if a child is growing up in a family experiencing poverty (like 30% of children in the UK are), there is a devastating impact on educational opportunity:
 - Children may come to school hungry as there is not enough money in the household for nutritious food or sometimes not enough money for food basics. The Trussel Trust, the UK's biggest food bank network, reported record numbers of people using its food banks across the UK - during 2019-2020 1.9 million food parcels were given out . This dire situation has worsened since lockdown, with The Trussell Trust saying it distributed 89% more food parcels in April 2020, compared to the same month last year. The Independent Food Aid Network recorded a 175% increase over the same period. Coming to school hungry makes it hard for children to concentrate on school work.
 - Students from households experiencing poverty tend to have lower levels of verbal and reasoning skills than their wealthier peers because their parents are less likely to read to them. With longer working hours, lower levels of education, and fewer literary resources, poorer parents are unable to give their kids the same level of attention and thus their children learn a much more limited vocabulary

- Children's brains develop best when they have low exposure to stress in the home. Poverty can create a series of emergencies that trigger stress hormones. These hormones have a dampening effect on brain development, which can result in an inability to pay attention, regulate emotions, or develop proper memory function.

(from Money Wise)

- In a Northern Irish context, the iniquitous system of selecting and separating children at the age of 11 reinforces inequality and compounds underachievement - 14.3% of grammar pupils are entitled to free school meals, compared to 40.6% in secondary school and 30.7% overall. In 2016/17, 70.3% of Year 12 pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths, compared to 49.5% of those eligible for free meals (Irish News 20.03.2018).

- The digital divide – young people in less affluent homes having to share a device on which to home-school with others in the family (parents and/or siblings) and the differential in hardware and software. 65% of UK students have access to digital online platforms - though there is a steep socio-economic gradient to this. When looking at economically disadvantaged students, digital access falls to just over 40% which is alarming given that over 70% of their more advantaged peers have access

- Poverty of aspirations, many parents do not believe that their children can break the circle of non attainment

- The parent's experience at school also impacts on their children's experience

- Poor housing also plays its role, not only the stress for the parent but for the children finding a space within the home to complete - space to do homework can be difficult

- Pupils who have suffered lack of nurture, lack of attachment, trauma, neglect, abuse, anxiety or other Adverse Childhood Experiences are at a disadvantage in the classroom as focus and concentration are very difficult for them.

7 In your view, what is the main impact of educational underachievement?

impact:

Educational underachievement limits life opportunities. It impacts children before they enter school and, without serious intervention, can stay until they leave. The impact is devastating and trans generational.

The Sutton Trust has reported that: 'The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged counterparts is already evident when children begin school aged 5, with a gap between them the equivalent of 4.3 months of learning. This gap more than doubles to 9.5 months at the end of primary school, and then more than doubles again to 19.3 months at the end of secondary school.'

The end result of this is lower exam grades; fewer qualifications; less access to third level education; reduced access to jobs with satisfactory terms and conditions of employment; lower income; lower standard of living. Educational qualifications are a strong determinant of later-life income and opportunities. This is a major contributing factor to patterns of social mobility and poverty.

8 From the list below please select five (only) interventions that you consider have an impact on raising educational achievement and rank in order with 1 being the most effective. Please add any additional interventions in the comment box below.

ranking - Effective school leadership:

5

ranking - Effective classroom teaching:

ranking - Greater family engagement:

4

ranking - Greater focus on children and young people's mental health, well-being and resilience:

3

ranking - Addressing income poverty:

1

ranking - Raising aspirations:

ranking - Greater focus on early years development including language development:

2

ranking - Improving local employment opportunities:

ranking - Stronger links between school and community:

ranking - Greater investment in schools - capital/ buildings:

ranking - Effective intervention for Special Educational Needs:

ranking - A relevant and engaging curriculum:

ranking - Provision of educational opportunities or life long learning skills for parents:

Other:

9 In your experience what has worked to address educational underachievement?

what has worked to address educational underachievement:

The Joseph Rowntree study: 'Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?' reported that '...home learning environments in isolation cannot possibly eliminate the cognitive skills gap between rich and poor young children. On the other hand, our findings in our companion working paper (Dearden et al., 2010) suggest that the many aspects of the early childhood caring environment have a positive effect on children's social and emotional development, such that policies aimed at improving health, parenting skills and the home learning environment could have further short- and long-term pay-offs...' Interventions, therefore can be extremely effective.

There are many valuable programmes which have been working to address underachievement. Moving Up Moving On (MUMO) is such a programme which works with two local primary schools (Springfield Primary School and St. Clare's Primary School). It has five overall aims:

- To provide intense, focused support for children in schools to improve confidence, enthusiasm and attitudes to learning via children's support workers based in partner schools.
- To provide supportive, caring, joined up and aspirational family support via family engagement workers - one attached to each partner school
- To develop relationships between schools, community groups and Forthspring Inter Community Group
- To offer access to activities, including after-school and holiday activities
- To strengthen and up-skill MUMO staff / volunteer team.

Tackling educational disadvantage and inequalities, in addition to addressing emotional wellbeing are core to the ethos of MUMO. MUMO has strong outcomes as it provides holistic family support, supporting all family members rather than working in isolation. MUMO staff are aware of the impact of poverty and disadvantage on educational opportunity and provide services to support families to mitigate the devastating impact of poverty on educational achievement. Some programmes aim directly to address education inequality for parents and children such as Families Connect which aims to increase parent's skills and confidence in supporting their child's learning, focusing on emotional development; literacy and numeracy.

From the outset MUMO has worked with some of the most vulnerable families in the community, many of whom have very complex needs. At the start of the project it was a challenge to engage parents in informal half-day workshops; but four and a half years in, there are parents eager to sign up to courses delivered over a number of weeks, many with accreditation on successful completion of the course. These benefits are passed directly onto children, supporting parents to become involved in their children's education.

MUMO's independent evaluator carried out research with 13 teachers from the two schools and found that:

Children have built good relationships with their MUMO support staff: 13 teachers

Children are more confident in their learning: 10 teachers

Children are more positive about learning: 8 teachers

The evaluator surmised that if children's attitudes are confident, positive, and enthusiastic about learning, experience shows that they will progress and learn more effectively.

10 How has the Covid-19 lockdown impacted on educational underachievement?**covid-19:**

The Sutton Trust Report highlighted that "The poorest children are likely to be the most impacted by time away from the classroom (during lockdown)". This report looks at how poverty impacts and includes:

- lack of access to electronic devices and to the internet for learning,
- fewer than 1 in 4 children in their class are returning work they have been set;
- teachers from the most deprived schools are more than twice as likely to say that work their students are sending in is of a much lower quality than normal.

A report published in April by Stranmillis University College notes that whilst for some children, the lockdown will have had no negative impact; for others it will have stalled or regressed their learning; some will take time to re-adjust to the routine and discipline of the formal school environment; and some, sadly, will also be dealing with the emotional and practical consequences of family illness or bereavement as a result of the pandemic.

The infection rate in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland (379 cases per 100,000) was nearly 40% higher than the Northern Ireland average rate (272 per 100,000) . Whilst young people were generally less susceptible to Covid-19, there is a greater likelihood that young people from disadvantaged areas have felt the impact of Covid-19 closer to home (families, friends, or neighbours) than those from affluent areas.

Poor housing also plays a role, not only the stress for the parent but, for the children, finding a space within the home to complete homework can be difficult.

Stranmillis research notes "...due to the prosaic hodgepodge of educational opportunity, those who are already most educationally disadvantaged are likely to fall even further behind their peers through no fault of their own".

The Education Policy Institute published research in May 2020. This found that, as well as dealing with the attainment gap, schools and the wider education sector are also likely to need to provide more pastoral and mental health support for pupils who have suffered neglect, abuse, anxiety or bereavement during the pandemic. Supporting pupils with these issues must be the first priority for the sector. MUMO is in a strong position to provide this support and fundraised to place a full time counsellor in each school in September 2020 when it recognised that needs of returning children would be high.

11 Please add any other comments that you would like the panel to consider.

any other comments :