



Meeting the challenge of COVID-19

Learning and practice



Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland explore how establishing school hubs has provided early lessons for collaboration and change

What was the challenge faced?

In response to COVID-19 all local authority early learning, childcare, and schools in Scotland were closed from 20 March 2020, the exception being the creation of local hubs to provide provision to vulnerable pupils and children from key worker families. These 'hubs' were strategically placed within each local authority area and were open to pupils from primary to early secondary years, with specialised provision also available for early years pupils who were vulnerable or children of key workers, and pupils with additional support needs.

As the lockdown and closure of schools came about very quickly, local authorities had to establish the hubs at a fast pace and in a way which catered to the needs and circumstances of the different pupils who were still coming to school. For children and young people, as well as teachers and school support staff, this new model of 'schooling' was also going to feel very different to what they were used to, and they needed to be supported to deal with this change. As part of a programme of research and intelligence gathering, researchers at Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland (CNS) – an academic and public policy partnership in Scotland - in collaboration with the University of Glasgow's Network for Social and Educational Equity and Policy Scotland, collected the views of those involved in setting up and running the hubs to capture information about the experience.

What change in practice took place?

To best understand how local responses were working in a rapidly changing context, and provide insights that could support the next phase of COVID-19 action at local and national levels, the researchers spoke to a number of people with different responsibilities in making the hub provision work, including staff in a local authority education service, an education and families manager, teachers and senior managers. Different local authorities opted to go about this in different ways.

Some worked with private or third sector organisations, others fostered closer collaboration between primary and secondary teachers, and some started to mix activities that were usually offered during typical school hours (run by teachers) with those usually held after-school (run by community learning and development, librarians, active school and after school workers). This diversity in provision meant that children and families in different areas experienced different levels of access to hub activities and services. The activity in hubs was also outwards looking, and often went beyond the provision of childcare. For example, children and young people designed PPE for NHS workers and created community art for the local hospital.

Who was involved in making the change?

The design and delivery of the hubs was driven by individual local authorities to meet the needs of their local populations.

What difference did this change make?

All the participants who helped with the research said that the speed at which the hubs and new ways of working were established during an unprecedented time should be celebrated, and that there are lessons to learn here regarding change processes and the associated bureaucracy.

The creation of the hubs at a very rapid pace required local authorities to find new collaborative ways of working quickly. The research found that the successful operation of the hubs relied, in large part, on both new and strengthened working relationships across different sectors and organisations in the public and third sector: it was felt that that COVID-19 had “forced the agenda” of collaboration in local authorities and challenged siloed ways of working. Because of the range of pupils required to still attend school during the lockdown, the focus of the hubs on childcare rather than learning led to the design of creative solutions to engage the children and young people who attended. As a result, participants said that they had seen higher levels of engagement than was expected from some children and young people in these circumstances.

The learning from the new set-up and running of the hubs offered an opportunity for change. This may include, for example, exploring opportunities for teachers to work across school and sector boundaries more consistently. There may also be an opportunity to think differently about the design of curriculum and where new or different learning opportunities might be incorporated.

More Information:

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