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# CBC - RADY Project Evaluation

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Final Report  
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## RADY CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL - FINAL EVALUATION

### Section 1 – Introduction and Context to the Evaluation

This report is designed to give a qualitative evaluation of the RADY initiative as it is currently being operationalised in the Central Bedfordshire Council schools who are involved in the programme. The evaluation has three key foci, which are formed as questions that the research team hoped to answer through the course of their inquiry. These are:

1. What is the RADY programme?
2. How is it being operationalised by schools in Central Beds?
3. What aspects of the programme do schools find most valuable in tackling disadvantage?

A full explanation of the RADY programme and its aims can be found in our interim evaluation report, published in February 2021, but briefly, the main intention of the programme is found in its title - Raising Attainment for Disadvantaged Youth/Young people. The term *disadvantaged* here, primarily refers to those young people who qualify for the Pupil Premium. The Pupil Premium grant is a sum of money that a school receives based on the number of pupils it has on role who are claiming (or have claimed in the previous 6 years) free school meals. Looked after children also count towards the grant. However, as the research team discovered, the broad view amongst schools in Central Bedfordshire is that this definition of disadvantage is sometimes too narrow, and they use RADY strategies to work with other pupils who they see as disadvantaged for social or economic reasons despite those children's families not claiming free school meals.

The project consists of a range of strategies which focus on disadvantage and disadvantaged pupils in schools, and these start with what Challenging Education term *the uplift*, a mechanism for raising the targets (and subsequently the aspirations) set for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. This initial mechanism for raising those targets is seen as necessary because many schools set targets for progress based on prior attainment at every stage of a child's education. For such disadvantaged children, prior attainment is likely to be low when compared to other children, and one effect of this is that any targets set from this prior attainment level will continue to be low. Consequently, the RADY programme uses the average attainment of non-disadvantaged pupils in a cohort to generate a target for the disadvantaged pupils, because this former target is likely to be higher. It is important to note here, that the emphasis is on attainment, or school outcomes, especially those at KS4/GCSE.

Within foci 2 & 3 (above), we were particularly interested in those themes/questions raised by the interim report and the early data collected as part of the evaluation, which included:

- What students and staff think of issues that the RADY intervention is concerned with e.g., targets, grades, extra-curricular, reading, cultural capital etc.
- The impact of the RADY programme on day-to-day teaching
- The extent to which RADY depends upon good leadership and good teaching

The evaluation sets out to answer these questions by presenting two case studies of schools involved in the project. While these case studies should not be seen as representative of all the CBC schools involved in RADY, or their experiences, they do provide some rich data and this gives a good sense of the initial impact of the project in its first few years of operation. The research team have also provided a summary of the key literature around disadvantage, attainment and raising aspiration, which should be seen as a means of giving a wider national context to the work of the

programme. The evaluation concludes with some reflections and recommendations offered by the research team, and we invite stakeholders to consider these in the light of CBC's ongoing commitment to the programme.

## Section 2 – Literature and Research Review

Because RADY is a programme that seeks to address the role that disadvantage plays in low attainment, there are three strands of pre-existing research which inform evaluation of the programme. In summarising this literature here, there is an attempt to assess where RADY sits in relation to previous interventions of this nature and what it might offer that is substantially different. There are also a number of key observations raised by this literature which might be useful to the school and local authority teams implementing RADY going forward. These three strands are

1. Literature concerning tackling disadvantage
2. Literature concerning the leadership of schools, in terms of implementing whole school intervention programmes
3. Literature concerning the raising of pupil aspirations and associated links to attainment/outcomes

It should be stressed that this review is not an exhaustive one; there is a wide range of literature that may be considered relevant to RADY (for example, concerning the development of cultural capital in schools, or the role of focused interventions) but in limiting the review to these three areas, the evaluation is attempting to highlight that research which those involved in RADY in Central Beds might find most useful.

### Tackling Disadvantage

The focus on reducing the socio-economic inequalities in educational attainment has been a priority in government policy since the 1960s (Smith and Smith, 2014) and a number of strategies and policy directions have emerged from successive governments to address the issue. One of the main approaches, which came out of the Plowden report (Plowden, 1967), is the idea that educational disadvantage could be targeted by prioritising geographical areas (Welshman, 2010). Plowden recommended that Educational Priority Areas (EPAs) were identified and targeted with additional resources and educational programmes (*ibid*). Shortly after the inception of EPAs the policy focus shifted towards a more school and classroom level approach, with the newly formed Office for Standards in Education being the mechanism for assuring the quality of schools and educational provision (Smith and Smith, 2014). In 1997, the Labour government reintroduced the 'priority area' approach with the forming of Educational Action Zones (EAZ). This was designed to offer a more integrated view of improving educational achievement in order to 'break the cycle' of educational and social disadvantage (Powley, 2001). While it is possible to view the development of EAZs as a kind of high point in tackling educational disadvantage, they were clearly not immune to the winds of political change, and two decades later, one might see RADY as a more agile and flexible means of addressing the problems they were set up to address.

More recently, the coalition and subsequent Conservative governments have shifted the emphasis back to school and classroom level interventions, with the introduction of Pupil Premium. This policy also saw a shift away from the 1960s definition of 'educational disadvantage', which encompassed a number of elements (such as social, cultural, and economic factors), that contribute to low attainment in specific areas (Smith and Smith, 2014), to a socio-economic model defined by

eligibility for free school meals. This more focussed definition was achieved by the ability of policy makers to scrutinise academic attainment for specific target groups through the National Pupil Database (Lupton and Thomson, 2015). While RADY is, in one sense, a socio-economic intervention (based as it is on pupil premium) it is clear from the research set out in this evaluation that the programme has resulted in a much fuller understanding of disadvantage in the two case study schools which we discuss below, and as such involves a return to those sense of educational disadvantage captured by the historical literature above.

### **Leading whole school interventions**

An important question for the research team was to consider the role that school leadership has to play in RADY. The pace of change within UK education has put certain pressures on education leaders with much of the work involved in implementing national reform falling on their shoulders. It has been argued that the sheer volume and pace of required reform may also encourage a more managerialist approach. (Gunter, 1997) The resulting emphasis on a monitoring role being in direct contrast to the more popular view of the Head teacher as a teaching and learning champion who implements change through transformative leadership (Fullan, 1992). The implementation of a whole-school intervention programme, such as RADY, to tackle the impact of disadvantage is no small feat and within different settings the approach to this will be defined by its leadership.

A number of theories suggest that leadership is a person-centred construct which aims to effect improvements through the high expectations and performance of others. In this narrative, leadership takes the form of setting out the conditions for effective performance and monitoring within a policy-driven environment. Day et al. describe effective leadership as a ‘highly contextualised and relationship construct’ (2001:25) and emphasise the importance of individual value systems as opposed to instrumental concerns. In their research into effective leadership Head Teachers were able to articulate their vision and values as well as create a collegiate environment based on openness and modelled through the high standards they placed on themselves and others. The Central Bedfordshire context for RADY was a focus for the evaluation inquiry then; how would school leaders fit RADY priorities to local contexts?

Complex interventions which require whole-school change have several interrelated components and their success is closely linked to how leaders organise and work with others in achieving goals. According to their ‘Seven strong claims about successful school leadership’, (Leithwood et al. 2008:3):‘School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.’ Since the original publication of these claims, the ideas have been revisited, with some being adapted and others reinforced and it is now acknowledged that whilst school leadership has an impact on pupil outcomes, other factors, such as socio-economic or cultural influences must be considered. (Leithwood et al., 2019) As a consequence then, one important line of inquiry would be to assess the way that leadership of RADY influenced day-to-day teaching practices, but also how that leadership coped with those other factors in order to make its implementation work. The variations between school contexts have a range of consequences and undoubtedly influence how leaders enact their roles. Despite this, the research also suggests that there are some discernible features of successful leadership reinforcing the original claim that successful leaders draw on the same set of leadership practices. This evidence further ratifies the four domains of practice outlined in the original research which have been summarised here:

Successful leadership involves:

- Setting Directions – building and communicating a vision.
- Building Relationships and Developing People – building trusting relationships among staff and students, modelling the school's values, and growing the professional capacity of staff;
- Redesigning the Organisation to Support Desired Practices – building a collaborative culture. (and creating a structure/allocating resources to support this), maintaining a safe environment, connecting to the wider community.
- Improving the Instructional Programme – providing support, monitoring improvement.

The research team were interested in the ways that RADY might depend on these domains for its successful implementation.

There is a body of research from the wider leadership community advocating the notion that successful leaders also demonstrate certain traits but much of this is not focussed on education leaders. However, Leithwood (2012) in exploring the links between successful schools (in terms of learner outcomes) and leadership, outlined some Personal leadership Resources (PLRs) which influenced leaders' behaviours and practices, these include:

- Cognitive Resources – problem solving, domain-specific knowledge, systems thinking.
- Social Resources – perceiving emotions, managing emotions, acting in emotional appropriate ways.
- Psychological resources – optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, pro-activity.

In amongst the knowledge and experience outlined in the PLRs there are also some traits which were found to be helpful, for example those listed in the category of *psychological resources*. In addition to leaders' PLRs, there is evidence to suggest that an equally important aspect of leadership is how it is enacted and that the most effective approach is based on a model of distributed leadership. Although there has been some criticism of distributed leadership (Hall et al. 2013, Lumby, 2018) this may be linked to the patterns of distribution rather than the notion itself. Hulolia and Devos (2010) suggest that the implementation of a distributed leadership model is a significant factor in its success and teachers seemed to be more committed to a school where responsibilities were distributed based on patterns of expertise. Similarly, DeFlaminis (2013) advocated the flattening of hierarchies to create opportunities based on expertise rather than position which might involve the creation of new teams to solve specific challenges. We were interested to see what aspects of this research might be reflected in the leadership of RADY in the case study schools.

The connection between leadership and learners' outcomes does seem to be clear and the literature suggests that this has more to do with how leaders enact their roles than any specific model of leadership they choose to adopt. In a way this reinforces an obvious point – thoughts and actions need to be aligned if leadership is to be both authentic and effective. To some extent our case study research is an evaluation of this enactment – thought it also seeks to assess the wider contexts in which the RADY programme is being implemented.

### Raising Pupil Aspirations

As RADY's primary focus is on raising attainment, the connection between this and aspiration may seem a little distanced at first glance, but much of the research into pupil aspiration in both primary and secondary schools demonstrates that attainment and aspiration are inextricably linked, though perhaps not in the ways that we might always expect. Frostick et al. (2016) for example, found a

negative relationship between perceptions of school and attainment and high aspirations; effectively, that the students they interviewed held high aspirations, but that school did not contribute to these in a positive way. Similarly, Hartas (2016) found that cultural and family background were better indicators of high aspiration amongst 11–15-year-olds than school-based interactions such as homework or extra-curricular activities were. However, in an extensive study of nearly 2,500 secondary school students in London, Rothon et al (2011) established that students who held high academic aspirations – in this case to proceed to academic post-16 study – were more than twice as likely to succeed at GCSE than those who did not. One interesting aspect of Rothon's research, which was in agreement with both the Frostick and Hartas studies, is the tendency for higher aspirations to be held by specific groups within secondary schools, most notably girls and students from Asian backgrounds. Hartas, for example, notes a significant disinclination on the part of boys to enter Higher education, and suggests that for this group, *economic hierarchies* of aspiration play a greater role than educational ones. These observations may be significant for staff involved with RADY in the longer term, as the connection between aspiration and attainment may require tackling some significant cultural attitudes which surround some of these groups.

Rothon et al also point out that there are a number of social-psychological factors which influence aspiration and are likely to be connected to the issue of attainment, such as self-esteem. The significance of these factors are echoed in Dann's (2016) study which highlights the way that primary schools involved in raising aspirations in disadvantaged areas seek to build this quality. Here, the schools featured in the study all made a point of developing the pupil's own motivations for learning and engendering *can-do* attitudes, all of which had the effect of developing these social-psychological aspects of learning. These studies would suggest that implementation of the RADY programme requires some other strategies beyond a bald focus on attainment. Alongside this though, there is a recognition in the literature that *aspiration* – what Rothon defines as 'the desires and aims of young people' (Rothon et al., 2011:212) – is a problematic term, particularly when it is appropriated by schools, government and adults in general. There is no doubt that it is a socially constructed phenomenon, perceived in diverse ways by different interested groups. St.Clair & Benjamin (2011) for example, suggest that the level of aspiration for young people in the UK in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are very high, but the economic situation of the UK is the real barrier to achieving such aspirations. Similarly, there may be attitudes and preconceptions prevalent in schools which actually counter young people's aspirations, as evidenced by both St Clair & Benjamin and Spohrer (2016) who suggest that things like teacher language and school/learner feedback loops can result in aspirations being damaged. Spohrer points out for example, that many teachers use the word *aspiration* to connect with white, middle-class notions of educational success, while St Clair and Benjamin suggest that schools often establish aspirations **for** students by telling them that they should concentrate on certain areas of study. These cautionary observations might be of use to schools implementing the RADY programme in that the literature here does suggest some ways around such pitfalls.

### Section 3 – Methods and Theoretical Frameworks

Before exploring the two school case studies it is might be helpful to describe our overall methodological approach to the evaluation and the methods we used to collect data. A case study approach allows for researchers to capture a particular instance of a phenomenon. In this case the phenomenon is the RADY programme, and the two instances are the schools in which we interviewed staff and students. However, in order to establish these case studies, we used some wider ranging tools; the **first phase** of data collection for the evaluation started with an online

survey about school involvement with the programme which was distributed to school leaders across CBC. This allowed for collection of contextual data, such as how long schools had been involved, and asked them to indicate if they would be willing to contribute to the research in greater depth, by having staff and students be interviewed.

A number of schools took part in initial, online interviews, and these are summarised in the interim report. This, **second phase** involved headteachers and the lead teachers responsible for RADY in three schools in the borough, along with an interview with one of the consultants from Challenging Education. Having reviewed this data, the research team decided that the data collection strategy for the **third phase** should be to speak to a wider range of staff and students in two case study schools who had volunteered staff and student time to facilitate this. It is this data which comes from interviews and focus groups of staff and students in both schools, along with data from phases one and two which pertains to those schools which is presented below.

The research team also used two theoretical ideas in order to inform the way that they thought about this data. One of these is the idea of *cultural capital*, which has a very specific meaning for Ofsted and as such differs quite significantly from the way that the term was originally used by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and others (e.g. Savage et al, 2015). Some of the data collection was designed to explore individual participants sense of this term, because it was clear from the second phase of the data collection that Ofsted's requirement to have schools focus on cultural capital was a motivating factor for adopting some of the strategies that RADY promotes. For Bourdieu, in some senses at least, schools cannot generate cultural capital; rather they reinforce its possession by people who have it already. However, putting this to one side for a moment, this term, and the way it is used, does have a role to play in the raising of attainment for the case study schools. The second idea that we have held in mind in our discussions is Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of human development as an ecological system. In Bronfenbrenner's model of development, the child is at the centre of an ecology of systems which affect its development (see diagram). For the research team, RADY appears to be an attempt to positively influence this ecology by connecting the child to a wider range of cultural and social influences and keep out some of the more negative, social, economic, and historical disadvantage.

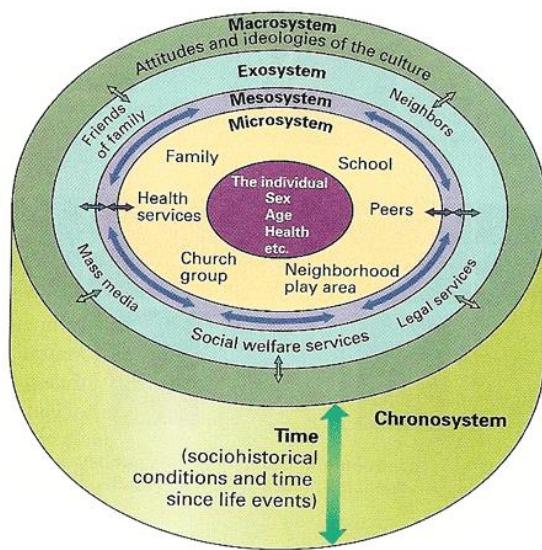


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Model, taken from Santrock, 2008; p33

Here, we see RADY as trying to act as a kind of filter – trying to mitigate against the exosystemic and macrosystemic factors which affect student attainment. How well it does this over time is beyond the scope of this study, but we suggest later that this can be assessed.

## Section 4 – Case Studies/Discussion

### **Case Study – School A**

School A is a larger-than-average primary school in Central Bedfordshire. For this case study we conducted interviews with the Head teacher, a group of four teachers and a group of five pupils. For the staff and Head teacher interviews, we asked questions directly about the RADY programme and its impact, along with questions which were connected to disadvantage in schooling. These questions related to areas such as cultural capital, reading (both in and out of school) and the social, cultural, and economic context in which the school was located. In the pupil interviews, we did not ask questions about RADY directly, as many schools, including this one, do not use the name of the programme with pupils or indeed, indicate to pupils that there is a programme, for good and obvious reasons.

For school A, one thread which comes through the data clearly is how the project has helped to raise awareness of disadvantage and the impact this has on learners' aspirations and life chances. Whilst all respondents acknowledged a tacit awareness of disadvantage, the project had reinforced aspects of specific influence, for example how targets have an impact all the way through schooling and how gaps will continue to widen if support is not in place. Whilst staff recognised the importance of targets, they also had some concerns in relation to uplift, considering the changes enforced by lockdown. As the head teacher at the school noted, when first introduced, the idea of uplift made sense but, in the light of the pandemic, it was noticeably clear that the pandemic has made the attainment gap for disadvantaged children bigger and perhaps even more insurmountable.

*'With Covid, I just think that the uplift is crazy now because really because you're battling so many more disadvantages that the gaps just got wider for the more disadvantaged, yet we're still targeting them above.'*

To some extent, all the day-to-day work of the school has been impacted by Covid, and as such the impact of RADY tends to be viewed through this lens. Notwithstanding this though, there are some specific examples of the way this increased awareness of disadvantage has affected different perspectives across the school. One teacher spoke about becoming more aware of disadvantaged pupils and connecting this to both academic grades and also things like access to technology during the pandemic, while another talked about the need to have high expectations of pupil premium pupils in the Early Years part of the school, and yet at the same time making plenty of room for intervention time to establish those expectations.

Some of this work is about raising aspirations. However, the staff are clear that they do not see the raising of aspirations as a purely academic journey, but rather a personal one as well. This stretches from the Early Years settings, where they learn to perform simple tasks, such as eating with a knife and fork independently, right up to the end of KS2 and learning an appropriate vocabulary with which to settle disputes and negotiate disagreements peacefully. As one teacher noted:

*'It is about them moving away from that learned helplessness and taking their own initiative to take part in the lesson and to do things outside of school as well... knowing the right kind of language to use for the right situation... and seeing those things take root.'*

Staff feel that the RADY project has provided an impetus to offer additional support in school and to really encourage children to participate in activities they might not ordinarily engage with. For example, the school had paid for some of the children to take the LAMDA classes and exams, as well as providing additional support to help them do well. This had resulted in all children getting a merit or distinction in the exam. This kind of activity connects aspirations to prevalent ideas about cultural capital (see below).

Supporting evidence for this impetus can be found in the pupil focus groups which suggest that after school activities have the potential to extend *cultural capital*, - in this context this links to wider knowledge that may help learners to succeed in life. (Ofsted, 2019) When asked what activities they do in specific clubs, pupils referred to reading poems or Greek myths or to playing games such as chess. Although one pupil did talk about reading outside of school this was not the norm within the group, which suggests that the school's efforts to promote a reading culture are all the more essential. Staff at the school talk about cultural capital a great deal in the interviews, and it is interesting to note what this entails for them; a wide range of experiences which are not only cultural, but probably also about life skills and the development of tacit knowledge. One of the teachers working in Early Years for example, is clear for example, that when reading Goldilocks and the Three Bears, pupils making porridge in class is not just about a play-based learning activity, but also learning that porridge looks, feels and smells differently to the way it appears in a book. This is quite a good example of what the research team would term the "change of focus" that RADY brings - seeing an activity that would always have been done with fresh perspective. Similarly, when another teacher talks about trips and using these to develop cultural capital, there is the sense that quite simple experiences, such as going to a beach, can be used to build all kinds of knowledge and experience that would perhaps be denied to pupils normally.

This diversity in the staff's definition of cultural capital is to be emphasised. Some of their understanding links back to Bourdieu's (1986) original ideas about aspects of social culture, for example expectations of behaviour in different settings, or the development of particular tastes. However, it is also influenced by Ofsted's thinking about the term which is closer to the Arnoldian (and deeply problematic) notion of the "the best that has been thought and said" (Ofsted, 2019; p.10). Regardless of these differences of definition, the importance of this kind of learning was recognised and as one teacher respondent said:

*'I think if you haven't had that at home then to come into a setting where other children are behaving to a set of invisible rules that you just have to kind of pick up it's really difficult.'*

Similarly, there was clear recognition of the importance of developing interests and hobbies as this would provide a pathway to additional social groups, and the leadership of the school sees a connection between these things and social mobility, explored further below.

In terms of leadership of the RADY initiatives across the school, there are several whole school themes which recur in School A. The head teacher identifies vocabulary as one important marker of attainment, noting that the more affluent children in the school generally know and use more words, and that for disadvantaged children, there is a significant gap between the number of words they know and the number of words they will need to know in secondary school. This sort of observation is indicative of other school leaders interviewed who have used the RADY programme to identify areas of development for their own school. Similarly, the Head teacher's aspiration for all children to 'leave the school with a hobby', is an interesting one in that it is seen as a route to improvement, but also a means of supporting their own community and a means of maintaining their own mental health. There are other advantages to this kind of aspiration as well, in that it

develops social mobility; hobbies bring young people into contact with groups and people that they would not otherwise meet. For the research team, these conversations with the head teacher of school A were one of several points at which we were conscious of how schools were going beyond the target setting process to make RADY about ecological (in Bronfenbrenner's sense of the word) as well as academic change.

Alongside this kind of thematic observation, School A's headteacher is positive about some of the tools that the programme makes available. For example, the Pastoral Leadership Profile (PLP) provided in CBC's RADY toolkit has been very helpful in thinking about the kind of difficulties that disadvantaged pupils face in terms of ideas such as learned helplessness. This has led to the school emphasising the importance of learners developing self-efficacy, something which is in keeping with principle of overcoming learned helplessness:

*'One thing we wanted to make sure was that children who are disadvantaged knew that they could give back to society and that they have the influence to change the world ... we have put together a structured programme of how our disadvantaged students are going to be giving back to the community as they move up through the school so it's things like they deliver harvest baskets, they decorated the local Christmas tree.'*

An important outcome linked to this is that learners have a portfolio in which they can build a picture of their achievements. This idea is underpinned by the notion that family influence is significant in terms of encouraging children to talk about what they can do well:

*'One of the things we were thinking is that if you are from a family where parents are pushy you are going to talk about your achievements quite a lot and by the time you get to secondary school you have a wealth of things you can draw from which you might not have if you haven't been used to boasting about yourself. That's something that has been quite impactful because the children have grown in their ability to articulate why they're special and what impact they can have on the world.'*

These ideas have been fed into staff meetings in order to focus staff energies on them, and it is also evident that staff think that these have had on classroom practice. This is most notably when, in interview, teachers describe a move from guided reading towards whole class reading, with teachers deliberately choosing books that the majority of the class (other than the very best readers) would not have read themselves. This is a good example of the way that RADY has influenced day-to-day teaching in School A, introducing a degree of teacher control which raises aspirations, and may not have existed in a guided reading environment. In guided reading, pupils select books from a pre-approved list or box, but the teacher may not have read the book that the pupil has chosen themselves. At School A, whole class readers come from a "spine" which is a diverse collection of challenging texts designed to develop a culture of reading within the school. Staff who talk about this change also talk in terms of vocabulary development, which again, they see as being connected to cultural capital.

However, there is also an acknowledgement that RADY works alongside other projects and must be integrated into the day-to-day operations of the school. This suggests the need for a strategic approach to ensure appropriate implementation. As the Head notes

*'They use the term "the golden thread" a lot and that is an important term for us because what RADY has done has been to make sure for our disadvantaged children that it is not a stand-alone element of what we are doing, it is integrated into... everything we do.'*

The leadership approach at school A appears to be based on a clear value system and is supported by a Head Teacher who can articulate their vision effectively (Day et al, 2001). This is in keeping with Leithwood et al's (2008) claims about effective leadership. The data suggests that the over-riding perception of the project's impact has been its influence on raising awareness of disadvantage, however there is also evidence that it has influenced thinking about the implementation of support:

*'The thoughts behind it were already present in the school but it has focussed us and made us more strategic in our implementation.'*

Another correlation with the literature is the way in which the school can provide distinct examples of the impact of interventions, evidencing how leadership of the project influences learner outcomes (Leithwood, 2012). One example is of a learner who had been given flute lessons and the school wanted this to continue when she left so they gave her a flute and created a musical scholarship programme for her. Whilst there is some recognition that this may have happened without the project, there was also acknowledgement that RADY had ensured that impact was measured effectively.

To conclude then, while it should be stressed that much of this analysis needs to be viewed through the lens of the pandemic, for School A RADY has brought a shift in perspective, the "change of focus" that helps teachers to make some of those "invisible rules" more visible for pupils. Some of this is about academic grades, certainly, but it is also about the development of the wider education of the disadvantaged pupils. Through strong leadership, clearly articulated, the school has identified both broad themes and very specific pedagogical strategies which have been, at least to some extent facilitated by the school's involvement in the RADY programme.

### **Case Study - School B**

School B is a large (1300 on roll) 14-19 upper school in Central Bedfordshire. For this case study, again we interviewed the Head teacher, a range of staff in different roles throughout the school and a group of pupils. Again, questions to staff referred directly to RADY, but questions to pupils did not.

For school B, there was perhaps slightly less focus on *the uplift* when speaking to teachers about RADY. All the teachers were aware of it, and saw its benefit, but for most it was largely only one aspect of the way that the school helped its disadvantaged pupils. Indeed, one pertinent point made quite early in the research team's interactions with school B was that the head teacher pointed out that the Pupil Premium pupils in the school did not always constitute their entire population of disadvantaged pupils. This is probably an important point for all the schools involved in RADY; that disadvantage comes in many forms, and they are not always measured by the pupil premium. However, it also demonstrated that staff in school B were very aware of the complexities of disadvantage.

A number of staff talked about the way that RADY idea of "proportional representation" of disadvantaged pupils to the forefront of their thinking. The Pupil Premium lead teacher in the school noted that understanding disadvantage in terms of how many disadvantaged pupils did certain kinds of activities had been quite transformative. For example, the Head teacher remarked that they had looked at things like how many disadvantaged pupils had had the opportunity to represent the school in sports fixtures or school productions. A geography teacher described an allied situation with regard to field trips, where looking at what PP pupils might need in order to take

part – an extra pair of trainers or a waterproof coat - and ensuring that these were provided for those young people. Similarly, for the SENCO in the school, thinking about the different barriers which different pupils might face in terms of their overall ability to engage with school had also had an effect.

*'They've all got the different barriers haven't they. Some of them it was it was about just having a ... place to do it (their homework) ...I don't even have a table to sit at, you know, I don't have a room to go to, to do my homework. It's trying to think about how we might then support them, and I suppose, RADY as an overall, if you want the overall picture, I suppose what it's done is I think it's made it all habit at the forefront of our mind.'*

These kinds of considerations were also present at a subject level. Several teachers talked about the need to make sure that PP pupils had the proper equipment – that they weren't disadvantaged by not being able to afford the right materials in order to complete a homework, for example.

However, there was also the perception that subject content could be an important consideration when tackling disadvantage. In interview, one of the Art teachers in School B articulated the need to get PP students to think about Art in different ways, by looking at the work of a range of artists, and also seeing how modern artists use a medium like Instagram to promote their work. Such looking, she maintained, was very helpful in having pupils think that Art was for them, and not an elitist activity restricted to specific kinds of people.

The staff consciousness of such considerations has, to a great extent been enhanced by the leadership models at work in the school. Leadership in School B is very distributed in its nature, with quite a wide range of staff having direct involvement with both the implementation of RADY and work with Pupil Premium students more generally. During the interviews we spoke with a number of staff in different roles where the role gave them quite a particular insight into the issues of disadvantage within the school. As with school A, there was a sense that tackling disadvantage was everyone's responsibility, but here, there was the sense that approaches to this task were being led from the bottom-up, within individual departments and teams. This may be a function of the way that a large secondary school is organised however, and pointing this out here should not be misinterpreted as an indication that one leadership approach was more effective than the other. Rather, it is important to establish that there may be different ways of implementing the RADY initiative and this may involve different types of leadership. Indeed, this might be viewed as the 'contextualised relationship construct' identified by Day (2001), which sees leadership to some extent, being dictated by local circumstance.

To exemplify this, it is useful to examine what some of the middle leaders in School B said about their leadership roles in relation to RADY. For the research team, one thing that had intrigued us was how RADY might both help and hinder leaders in making difficult decisions. In the original materials produced by for the RADY programme (Hollomby, 2013) there are a few examples of strategies to help disadvantaged pupils which we thought might prove a challenge for middle leaders in particular – for example, moving lower attaining disadvantaged pupils into higher attaining sets in order to boost their progress. It was clear that staff in School B had thought about and dealt with these challenges. The PP lead for the school, who was a maths teacher, thought that RADY had actually informed these difficult decisions around issues like setting, in a very helpful way, particularly in terms of the questions that the programme had made middle leaders ask.

*'Do I think there can be a blanket statement that says this never happens, that we never move a student down? I don't think that's reality. I don't think we can. But I think what I can do as an individual, as PP lead or Head of Maths is ask why do we think we've got to that point? Is it*

*specifically a maths issue? Are there things that we haven't put in place? Are there barriers that we haven't addressed for this specific pupil that have meant that mean.... that we've let him down in his whole school experience.'*

Similarly, the subject leader for English had felt empowered by both RADY and the culture of distributed leadership within the school to not talk about grades with students, or rather not talk about them in a limited sense:

*'If I'm really honest, we don't talk we don't necessarily talk about target grades. We talk about "what do you want to get? Let's try and get it. What do you mean, you only want a grade five? Come on, let's go, for six, eight," you know, because that that's far more powerful. And it's far more powerful to say, look how much better you've got from here to there. That's amazing.'*

This comment accorded with data gathered from the pupil discussion group, where students were clear that they had target grades in many subjects, but not necessarily conscious of them as a dominating factor in their school lives. Moreover, this whole school empowerment arose out of some distinct strategies that the school had established in order to deal with a range of issues involving disadvantaged and pupil premium students. There was a good sense that the solutions to tackling disadvantage had been achieved through a consensus across the school, but that this took different forms in different departments

*'I think a lot of us are involved in working parties and stuff. So, I think we feel even though those people may be leading it from above, we're all involved in as well. And a lot of the working party stuff I think, comes through, like cross curricular. We'll go into each other lessons.... taking ideas from there and then applying it to us. So I think a lot of us feel involved in the whole process of it. But we know what the kind of the main goal of that is. But we then get the freedom to kind of apply it to our subjects as well, and what works well with our areas.'*

There is a good sense here that the RADY initiative and its associated tools have been embedded well across the school because the culture of the school allows for such integration. As one teacher noted there is a kind of "School B way" which is a shorthand for a collaborative, multi-disciplinary and purposeful way of working which allows the school to do what it does. The research team sees this as a particular ecology (to use Bronfenbrenner's term again) which means that RADY is likely to thrive. Moreover, we see this kind of embedded, empowered action as a good example of Leithwood's (2012) cognitive and psychological resources of leadership, evident here across a wide cross-section of School B's staff group.

As in School A, teachers in School B were very conscious of the cultural capital "agenda", but similarly, had quite diverse perspectives on it. The idea of the way that cultural capital relates to wider life skills was again, an important theme in interviews. A number of teachers articulated the view that cultural capital was bound up with the wider moral purpose of the school, and that what RADY had done was accentuated that purpose for disadvantaged children in particular. Both English and Drama teachers noted that their version of cultural capital went beyond the narrow purview frequently expressed in public narratives about the topic (by Ofsted, government ministers etc.) As the subject leader for English explained:

*'We have a unit of work called inspiring voices. And we've chosen texts that deliberately allow our students to hear from current voices and important voices in their world. Because at key stage four it does become a very dead white man, pre 20th century world and we've got a choice how ...to change that, and that, you know, we do to the teaching of English language as well. And it's just opportunity,*

*opportunity, opportunity. We're very well supported in our in reading, we have had a huge push on reading and investment in good texts.'*

There is a sense here that the teachers in School B again, saw reading as key to the development of disadvantaged students. In the pupil focus group, a few participants spoke about the form time reading scheme, which is one of the ways that the school has chosen to make reading a focus. Here, all students in a year group read the same book in tutor time and have an opportunity to discuss and explore the text. Another significant aspect of day-to-day teaching brought about by RADY was an alteration to marking practices. By making a point of marking PP pupils' books first, there was a particular focus on supporting these students through feedback. The acknowledgement that teachers might get tired at the end of a session of marking thirty books, and hence perhaps a little less focused was also an acknowledgement that this might further disadvantage PP pupils.

Teachers were also very conscious of the nature of social and demographic environment in which School B found itself, and as such saw raising aspiration as being about offering all pupils (and not just those who were disadvantaged,) choices and opportunities in their lives. Both teacher and pupil discussions hinted at there were, occasionally, negative perceptions of the local area which hindered opportunities for development. Staff were very clear though, that these perceptions could be overcome and articulated solutions:

*'You know, you've got you've got crack this myth that if you want to become a bricklayer or have a trade, that that's somehow separate to learning, you're still learning something that is a lifelong skill. And it's still valuable for society. And trying to dispel that thing of, if you choose a working-class path, typically, you're somehow not learning or you're limited.'*

However, it is important to note that this did not necessarily entail leaving the area in which School B is located. One teacher stressed that they did not see the choice and opportunity as always lying outside the pupil's own community:

*'The hope is, is that they then stay on in 6<sup>th</sup> form and hopefully go on to further education, but at the same time, even if that doesn't happen, there's still work to be done within this area.... Because it might be then that they're going to make more of a difference staying at home or staying in this area and it's having a choice, isn't it?'*

This raising of aspirations is part of a wider desire on the part of the school to turn out "good citizens" in the words of one respondent. This is again, connected to the notion that raising attainment requires other foci alongside an emphasis on good grades.

In conclusion, School B gave some substance to the point made by Dann (2016) that raising attainment in schools with disadvantaged pupils requires some focus beyond simple grades themselves. The staff and leadership of the school welcomed the opportunity that RADY had given them to consolidate what they saw as their core purpose, and to bring a particular focus to disadvantaged pupils and their needs. This consolidation process was enhanced and improved by a very collegiate and self-aware staff group who saw the RADY initiative as a positive development in their school and community ecologies.

## Section 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

In concluding our evaluation, we would like to reflect on some key observations about the implementation of RADY both in our two case study schools and across the wider Central

Bedfordshire area. It is clear to us that RADY's power lies in its ability to shift teacher perspectives on disadvantage and to refocus school staff and leaders on what is important in teaching and learning which involves disadvantaged pupils. This refocusing process did not require seismic change in the two case study schools we looked at; rather it was a case of very small measures – how a teacher marks their pupils' books, how they plan for trips, how they select their sports team – creating a bigger impact. While disadvantage is obviously a major issue for pupils who are disadvantaged, it was the individual school's ability to operationalise RADY in such a way that it did not *make a big deal* out of disadvantage, that, in some ways allowed it to work. This is in many ways, the ecological model at work. In any ecological system, small changes can have big effects, and one of the strengths of RADY lies in its facilitation of microsystemic changes (e.g. the order in which books are marked) with the aim of affecting exosystemic change (such as being the first person in one's family to go to university).

It is also a great testament to the professional autonomy of the teachers and leaders in both schools that they had taken a broad view of cultural capital. While the accumulation of cultural capital is a goal that few people involved in education would disagree with, there is a danger that narrow views of its definition will result in a *tick list* approach to the way that it is approached in schools. The teachers in the case study schools certainly did not view cultural capital in this way, and while there is undoubtedly a debate to be had about the way that the term is currently being used in the English education system, teachers here had not allowed these debates to sever the connection between a broad view of culture and their core purpose as educators.

With regard to both the uplift process, and the RADY focus on target grades more generally, it was interesting to note that this was acknowledged as a necessary part of addressing disadvantage, but that the schools we spoke to had not allowed this to become the dominant focus of the programme. We might think of the uplift here as a kind of *epiphany*; the process of which makes staff and school leaders aware of the key attainment issues surrounding disadvantaged young people. It acts as a gateway to multiple understandings of disadvantage in the education context and while it is a measure of success, it does not become a proxy for resolving the problems of disadvantage for the schools studied here. Both the schools in the case study are to be commended for keeping this kind of perspective on grades.

Ultimately, we would suggest that leadership and school culture are integral to the success of RADY. Perhaps unsurprisingly, while both schools displayed different conceptions of leadership, they both had the kinds of leadership which made the challenge of disadvantage something that was everybody's business with the school. Both schools had cultures in which staff were empowered to bring multiple perspectives and a degree of autonomy to the work they did with disadvantaged students. Such school cultures, are of course, likely to be aware of disadvantaged children and their needs, driven as they often are by a strong moral purpose. However, RADY provides clarity and strategies for disadvantaged pupils which thrive in such cultures. Schools valued this clarity and new perspective, and this is an undoubted strength to the programme.

These observations lead us to make recommendations both for Central Bedfordshire Council, schools involved in the programme, and the consultants (Challenging Education) who helped to implement it. These recommendations are based on our reflections upon the data and wider research into tackling disadvantage in schools:

- As much of what we observed regarding the success of RADY depended on good school culture and leadership, it seems sensible to foster similar cultures across the borough in schools that are trying to implement the programme. One suggestion to do this might be to

have a mentoring or *buddy* scheme involving head teachers from schools who are a few years into their RADY journey with those from schools who are new to the programme.

- Connected to this is an idea of devolved and distributed leadership. In both schools, while different leadership approaches were evident, there was a good sense that tackling disadvantage involved everyone in the school and that while that job might have looked different in different parts of the school, all staff had a collective idea about how they were contributing. This whole school communication of responsibility is key and both CBC and schools may wish to think about how it can be promoted, because in our initial data collection it was apparent that these ideas were not in place for all schools.
- The individual interpretations of RADY by different schools often involve small differences in approach (for example in the Case Study schools, reading development was approached in different ways based on age and school organisation). It would be worthwhile, we feel, CBC collecting and recording examples of schools approaches to these bigger themes – reading, cultural capital, assessment – so that they can easily be adapted by schools new to the programme.
- We have tried to capture, in this evaluation, the ecologies of the case study schools, and what it was about them that allowed RADY to get a good foothold in that school. We suggest that one thing CBC might like to do in the future is build up an *ecological picture* of each school in the programme. It struck us that the PLP devised by CBC as part of their RADY toolkit might be a good template for doing this. In the same way that involved schools sought to understand the wider environment that their pupils came from, so CBC might build up similar understandings of their schools. While the local authority will have lots of data about schools, we would suggest that it might be the way that this information is presented that is key. In the PLP, there is a connection made between the life of the pupil inside and outside school. For individual schools, it may be worth considering what connects the school to its external communities and cultures and putting these connections all in one place.
- Because RADY is concerned with attainment, at some point it will become necessary to evaluate the impact that the programme has had on attainment outcomes in the long term. This is (probably) most usefully achieved by looking at GCSE results. The very first cohort with any substantial exposure to the RADY programme will take their GCSEs in Summer 2023. However, it is highly likely that a true picture of the programme's impact will only emerge after a number of cohorts have gone through the GCSE cycle. Bearing this in mind we recommend further evaluations which look specifically at those students targeted by RADY and their KS4 outcomes, probably covering the attainment data of three years (2023, 2024 and 2025) and analysing the impacts for these students. There is however, also a case to be made for a longitudinal study looking at the post-GCSE impact of RADY, and how it affects destinations in terms of HE, work and other life achievements.

Finally, we offer three observations about the programme which all those involved with RADY might wish to reflect on. They are not recommendations, nor questions, but simply things that have occurred to us during our evaluation. We offer them perhaps, as conversation starters, or prompts for further research

- 1) We wonder if there is a point at which the RADY strategies for tackling disadvantage simply become self-sustaining. The two case study schools were, we would suggest, quite close to being at a point where their perspective on disadvantage had shifted to such an extent that

they probably did not need more input in terms of development or training (they may have needed more money to do what they wanted to do, but this is, we think, a separate point). However, we are also conscious that staff and leadership groups change, people move on, and strategies sometimes get lost in the operational.

- 2) In the discussion around cultural capital, we are conscious that there might be an evasion of an obvious point which people in schools are too polite to discuss. Namely, that some interpretations of cultural capital simply involve an attempt to make working class children behave like middle class children. While we did meet one or two teachers who were really adamant that this was not the intention of their work (which was very heartening) there is a danger of not valuing aspects of working-class culture which might represent valuable educational capital. It was clear to us that in the two case study schools there was good awareness of how to avoid this, but there is some discussion to be had here, we think by schools that are new to the programme.
- 3) There is some sense in education practice generally, that 'what gets measured gets done' and it will be interesting to see what happens in the event of a change of government, or indeed a change of policy. Some of RADY is undoubtedly seen by some schools as a means of *Ofsted-proofing* their work around disadvantage. This is, to some extent, inevitable, and while there is unlikely to be any let-up in the focus on disadvantaged young people's attainment, one does wonder if the way that this is currently framed (in terms of curriculum, cultural capital, vocabulary etc.) will change at all. If so, what capacity does the RADY programme have to change with it? In the literature review section of the evaluation, we described RADY as *agile*, and it is, compared to similar types of intervention from the past. Again, we would suggest that further evaluation will be required in the future to assess this capacity

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