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THE DOUBLE CLUB EVALUATION 2009

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Introduction

The Department for Children, Schools and Families commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to undertake an evaluation of Double Club (DC). This initiative aims to improve the attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy, of underachieving pupils in Key Stage 3 (KS3). The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the DC programme, to identify good practice and to provide evidence on how best to operationalise DC in a wider roll out. Strand 1 of the evaluation provided detailed information from five case-study schools. Strand 2 examined the impact of DC on pupil attainment by comparing the KS3 progress of DC pupils with the progress of similar pupils who had not attended the programme.

Key findings

- The DC has been a positive programme in that it has been successful in achieving its aims of motivating and re-engaging underachieving young people. Its success factors were found to be its appeal to schools and young people; pupil selection; learning content, style and environment; and sport coaching sessions.
- Teachers and young people perceived the DC programme very positively. They saw it as an opportunity for lower-attaining young people to access additional support with their learning.
- Young people reported that they enjoyed taking part in DC. Most young people thought DC had helped them to improve their learning (especially in literacy) and their self-confidence.
- All interviewees thought that young people's school attendance had improved during their participation in DC, and one school provided evidence to support this.
- However, more robust statistical analyses found those who attended DC performed less well in English and mathematics at KS3.

Background

DC is an in-school extension of the Playing for Success (PfS) programme, working with underachieving pupils in Key Stage (KS) 3 to improve attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy. It provides an innovative 'double experience' that combines classroom education, with coaching in football or another sport. Young people attend at least twice a week in groups of approximately 15.

DC has been funded by the DCSF since 2004. By 2008 (at the start of this evaluation), DC consisted of 15 sports clubs, with 48 schools and approximately 3,000 young people. The vast majority of pupils attending DC were in Years 7 and 8 (only 159 were in Year 9). In April 2009, 15 new DCs began operating, taking the total to 30 clubs working with a total of 63 secondary schools and 2,497 pupils.

Research methods

The DC evaluation, conducted between March 2008 and September 2009, consisted of two complementary methodological strands, one qualitative and one quantitative, as follows:

- **Strand 1** provided detailed qualitative data about how five case-study schools implemented the DC initiative, and how any positive impacts were achieved. Data collection methods included interviews with 10 DC staff, 7 school staff and 20 pupils, use of an Audience Response System to collect views from 51 pupils and collection of DC self-evaluation data (from their adapted KS2 national curriculum assessments).
- **Strand 2** examined the impact of DC on pupil attainment by obtaining relevant information about participating young people from DCs and matching this to the National Pupil Database in 2007/8. The study used statistical modelling to compare the KS3 mathematics and English progress of 448 DC pupils from 15 DC Centres with the progress of similar pupils who had not attended the programme.

Findings

Programme organisation

The evaluation identified four main models in terms of the organisation and delivery of the Double Club programme in the case studies, each of which was felt to be appropriate in the local context:

1. Full-time DC teacher based in each participating school.
2. DC delivered by a teacher who is not based in the school.
3. DC delivered by a member of school's own teaching staff.
4. DC delivered by both a DC teacher not based in the school and members of the school teaching staff.

Success factors

Key features identified by participants as promoting the success of DC were:

- the programme's appeal to schools and young people (the focus on basic skills combined with the popularity of professional sport)
- pupil selection (in particular selecting young people who had levels of literacy and numeracy below the expected level for their age, an interest in the sport offered by the DC; and those who lacked self-confidence)
- learning content, style and environment (offering a motivating and attractive learning experience)
- the added value of the sports coaching sessions (promoting sports skills, teamwork and enjoyment).

Impact and outcomes

Evidence from Strand 1 of the evaluation, based on five qualitative case studies, suggests that DC was achieving its core objectives. It was having a positive impact on pupils' motivation and self-esteem, with young people reporting that they worked hard in DC sessions and that they felt more confident and able to

contribute in their other lessons. For example, a majority of the 51 young people asked felt that DC had helped them be a more confident person, enjoy school more and learn not to give up. The programme was viewed as being engaging and motivating: in particular young people said they enjoyed improving their learning, playing sport and visiting the stadium. Their teachers felt that DC was well planned, with an appropriate level of adaptability and flexibility. They welcomed the opportunity for underachieving young people to have access to a programme focused on their needs and felt there were wider benefits to the school, such as opportunities to broaden the curriculum and benefit from a relationship with the sports club.

Local evaluation results showed that the majority of young people made progress in an adapted KS2 English test during their time at DC (30 out of 43 improved by one or two levels).

The statistical analyses in Strand 2 provided a more robust measure of impact on standards by taking account of the influence of individual characteristics known to affect progress in key stage assessments. This did not identify any statistically significant positive outcomes in DC pupils' attainment, and in fact found negative associations. Controlling as far as possible for differences between pupils who had attended DC and those who had not, these analyses found that pupils who had attended DC had achieved on average 0.28 of a KS3 level lower in English than those who had not attended DC. In mathematics, pupils who had attended DC achieved on average 0.32 of a KS3 level lower than the comparison group who had not attended DC. The exception to these negative associations was a finding that very low attaining pupils at KS2 (defined as being at level 2 or below in English) who attended DC made more progress in English than very low attainers who had not attended DC, although the effect is so small that it is unlikely to be of statistical significance. This finding was not tested for statistical significance, due to the small number of pupils involved (see full report for further details).

There are several possible explanations for these apparently contradictory findings, including the fact that the two strands used different samples, with Strand 1 focused predominantly on Years 7 and 8 and Strand 2 on pupils in Year 9. The negative associations found in Strand 2 may well indicate an inadequacy in the statistical models: pupils in the comparison group may, in reality, not have the same level of need as those in the DC sample, and the statistical models may not have been able to capture this.

The two strands measured different outcomes. Strand 2 focused on attainment data, while Strand 1 examined a much broader range of outcomes, including pupil attitudes. The strands also covered different periods of time: Strand 1 included information collected in 2008/9, whereas Strand 2 collected data from pupils who attended DC from 2005 to 2008. It therefore included results from DC Centres at an earlier stage of development.

Conclusion

The evaluation concludes that, overall, the DC has been a positive programme because, to date, it has been successful in achieving many of its aims. On this basis, the evaluation team would recommend continued funding for the initiative. The case-study research, which collected data from the more 'typical' DC year groups of 7 and 8, produced positive findings, especially in relation to the attendance, motivation and engagement of DC learners. Although the statistical analysis has produced some negative findings, it should be stressed that these are not causal relationships – there are several factors which could explain these associations, (for example that the sample was based on 'less typical' older DC cohorts). These analyses do highlight the need, however, for continued scrutiny of the impact of DC on pupil attainment in the future. We recommend adoption of a randomised control trial design for any future evaluation of impact on pupil attainment.

Additional information

The full report (DCSF-RR204) can be accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/

Further information about this research can be obtained from Caroline Sharp, NFER (email c.sharp@nfer.ac.uk) or Rosalyn Xavier at the DCSF (email rosalyn.xavier@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.