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## **Student performance by social class and gender: Making research findings on students' resilience and self regulation work for teachers in secondary schools.**

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### **Background**

This paper builds on previous research which found that the achievement of pupils from a White British background has started to fall behind that of some ethnic groups within the whole school population and that this has been more in evidence among White British pupils from deprived backgrounds and among pupils of both genders, although even more so for boys (Hayes, Shaw and Osborne 2007[i]). This research was based on a comprehensive analysis of performance at all Key Stages carried out within one Local Authority over three years. It also builds on a qualitative research project into the factors that proved to be important for some students from a deprived White British background who managed to achieve GCSE success, apparently against the odds (Hayes et al 2009[ii]).

[i] Hayes, S. G. Shaw, H. & Osborne, K. (2007). White working class boys: is their performance at school a cause for concern? Information, Research and Statistics Team, Greenwich Children's Service.

[ii] Hayes, S. G. Shaw, H. McGrath, G. & Bonel, F. (2009) Using RAISEonline as a research tool to analyse the link between attainment, social class and ethnicity. Information, Research and Statistics Team, Greenwich Children's Service.

### **Research Questions**

This research project addresses the following questions:

- Does RAISEonline serve a useful purpose as a research tool?
- What factors helped students to achieve success at GCSE above what they were predicted to achieve, given their background and prior attainment?
- How can these findings be successfully disseminated to schools?

### **Methods**

This main methodological approach to this part of the research was to carry out in-depth interviews with individual GCSE students, using a semi-structured questionnaire. The sample of students was selected from the pupil level data in the interactive performance analysis tool RAISEonline<sup>†</sup>, on the basis that they were White British pupils from deprived backgrounds who had performed better than their GCSE estimates. The objective was to find out what factors had helped these students to perform better than they had been expected to.

### **Frame**

The framework for analysis was structured around the use of RAISEonline to identify the sample of pupils for the qualitative aspect of the research and then to carry out the semi-structured interview with those students. The interviews were carried out by two officers of the local authority's Children's Service and were tape recorded to facilitate the transcription of the responses. Through a systematic analysis of the interviews, it was possible to identify which strategies and approaches the students had used to enable them to achieve success at GCSE. This analytical approach enabled the

researchers to construct a list of key factors that were deemed to be instrumental in pupils from a deprived White British background achieving GCSE success.

### **Research findings**

The qualitative research suggests that there are several strategies that the students have successfully employed to improve their outcomes. These included: a level of personal ambition for one's academic success and the ability to recognise the importance of one's friendship groups and, if necessary, to change them. The ability to employ self-regulation strategies in relation to their own learning and to develop personal resilience. Family support was important, both personal and academic, and particularly personal support where levels of parental education and aspiration were low. In school support was cited, both personal from individual teachers and structural, in terms of study support, revision classes and other interventions. The ability to see the bigger picture was something several students also reported and this included the quality of careers advice, the importance of the world of work and finding one's place in the world.

In the local authority context it is important that these findings on the students' strategies and the factors they have employed to support their own success are disseminated to schools, as part of the local contribution to knowledge. There are some important lessons to be learned and the findings can help schools to consider what strategies would redress some of the external factors that might have impeded pupils from a deprived White British background from making good progress.

The dissemination will be through tailored training sessions for senior leaders in secondary schools, particularly those teachers with a responsibility for assessment, student welfare and teaching and learning at Key Stage 4. The training exercises have been developed based on the research findings and will be delivered by local authority staff with a responsibility for school improvement and research. The training will be evaluated through the use of feedback questionnaires and the subsequent work that teachers agree to undertake in school will be monitored and evaluated, as will the impact on any groups of pupils that the teachers decide to track through to their GCSE examinations in 2010 and beyond.

The research findings can help local authorities in their development of school improvement strategies to meet the needs of groups of pupils at risk of underperformance, while making best use of RAISEonline as a tool to support research. The findings can be shared with other local authorities, who are encountering similar issues.