To Bridge the Gap? Voluntary Action in Primary Schools

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Abstract

Voluntary action has long played a role in state education, with Parent Teacher Associations being one of the most common forms of charitable organisation in England. However, education policy, driven by a growing free-market discourse and policy initiatives such as localism, is increasingly pushing for greater voluntary action. This article explores the distribution of voluntary action for primary schools in one local authority area in England. Drawing upon primary data from 114 questionnaires completed by head teachers and secondary data from the financial records (2013/14) of 380 primary schools, we find evidence of considerable uneven dispersal of voluntary action between schools. These disparities are related to factors including school size, location, leadership ideology and the socio-economic profile of the school. The consequence of this uneven distribution is that schools catering for more affluent communities are more likely to have additional resources than those with poorer profiles.

1. Introduction

Voluntary action has a long and established role in the education of children in England (Miller et al., 2009; Morris, 2011; NCVO, 2016), and the blurring of boundaries between the state and voluntary sector (Alcock, 2010) places it firmly on the political agenda. Driven by a neoliberal ideology (West, 2014), education policy in England has undergone a series of sweeping changes and disjointed reforms (Stronach, 2010), with funding of education coming under scrutiny. Indeed, the government has recently committed to the greatest reform of school funding for the last 25 years (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2017). Since 2015-16 school funding per pupil has been frozen, resulting in a 6.5% decrease in real terms, and, under proposed reforms to move to a national funding formula, schools will face up to 3% additional cuts by 2019 depending on where they are based. In addition, continued cuts to community based services reduces support for schools, limiting the external help they draw upon to support more vulnerable children (Ball et al, 2012). As schools attempt to journey through this rapidly changing terrain, voluntary action has been encouraged as one of the mechanisms to which schools are turning to support both core and extra-curricular activities (for example, see BBC News, 2017).

We define voluntary action as any activity that involves voluntarily giving time or money for no financial incentive, of one's own free will and to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives (Payton and Moody, 2008; Hogg, 2016).

Furthermore, it encompasses the voluntary action of both individuals and of groups and organisations (Rochester, 2013). This article explores the role that voluntary action plays in the primary education of children and young people; the commitment, passion, skills and expertise brought into schools by volunteers, and the advantages that additional funding can bring. However, we argue any level of reliance on voluntary action in education is problematic and contested. We identify significant disparities in the distribution of these additional resources across schools, by socio-economic factors, school size, school type and leadership ideology.

2. Social Policy Context

A wave of policy initiatives has placed voluntary action firmly on the political agenda. The former Labour governments (1997-2010) epitomised this through a strong commitment to the role of the voluntary sector (Alcock, 2011). This continued into the subsequent Conservative led Coalition Government (2010-2015) through the Big Society (Alcock et al., 2012), and the Conservative Government (2015 -) in the form of the public-sector cuts and the continuation of localism- a focus on local services run by local people - as a political project. Although the idea of the Big Society is less discussed in current policy debates, public-sector cuts, the themes of localism and empowerment strongly resonate throughout current education policy in England. Indeed, the ideology that underpins the Conservative drive towards localism and marketization suggests that by rolling back the state, the government achieves economic savings to reduce public expenditure, whilst individuals, communities, voluntary agencies and private providers fill the gaps left behind (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014). The central concept of the Big Society and its policy legacy rely on this notion of social action. Former Prime Minister (2010-2016) David Cameron highlighted the need for social action, public service reform and community empowerment. Green et al (2011) argue that the concept of the Big Society was about more than increasing volunteerism, instead suggesting it focuses on unlocking social capital, with the government seeking to capitalise on communities' personal links and networks. Indeed, Rowson et al (2010) suggest that by doing so the government hopes that communities increase social and civic capacity in order to address issues previously addressed by the state.

Further to this, the underlying ideology of public policy in England in recent years supports the notion that children will attain greater achievements if state schools face more competition and have greater autonomy (Adonis, 2012). Ball and Youdell argue that there is 'a growing tendency amongst governments world-wide to introduce forms of privatisation into public education and to move to privatise sections of public education' (2008:8). They identify different forms of privatisation in terms of schools being expected to 'act more business-like' (p.9), through a variety of mechanisms, including increased competition between schools, heightened accountability for budget setting and purchasing and a greater role of philanthropy and private business in the funding of education. In

2

2007, a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, commissioned by the then Department for Education and Schools (DfES) in England, recommended that schools should be led by chief executives, and not necessarily by teachers.

The (renamed) Department for Education (DfE) White Paper in 2010 further helped create this new policy landscape with the encouragement for all schools to become academies, new providers being expected to set up free schools, a reduction in guidance from central government and a pupil premium to follow disadvantaged pupils (DfE, 2010). Initially set at £488 for each pupil registered as eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) in 2011–12, the pupil premium expanded to cover pupils eligible for FSM at any time in the past six years. Eligibility for FSM required families of children to be claiming one or more social security benefits associated with reducing poverty. In 2014–15, the level of the pupil premium was increased to £1,300 per primary school pupil (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2017). This approach shifted responsibility for 'closing the gap' between advantaged and disadvantaged children away from central government and into local schools. The DfE continues to encourage, through both literature and funding, voluntary action from the role of governors, teaching assistants, reading assistants, sport coaches and fundraisers; and for schools to engage in philanthropic support to fund additional activities and to form collaborations with voluntary sector partners (DfE, 2012).

On election in 2015, the Conservative Government continued this commitment to the privatisation of education through a series of curriculum and governance reforms. Despite widespread protest (Ingram, 2016), the government remains dedicated to an ambition for all schools to convert to academies by 2022. In March 2015, the DfE announced a £1m funding pot to help schools recruit 'highly skilled volunteers as governors'. Furthermore, Ofsted promotes voluntary action as 'good practice' in schools, highlighting those where governors are highly involved, volunteers actively support students' learning, additional philanthropic funding is obtained and collaborative partnerships are formed to enhance children's learning opportunities. Nevertheless, this continued shift towards privatisation (Ball et al, 2012) of primary schools has attracted much criticism and debate as concerns about growing inequalities within the system increase (West, 2014).

Studies which have attended to resource distribution in schools highlight inequalities. For example, drawing on the experiences of head teachers from less advantaged schools, Lupton and Thrupp (2013) highlight the significant disadvantages that schools in areas of economic deprivation face in comparison to their counterparts in wealthier areas. They suggest a need to further contextualise funding mechanisms to support these schools, as constrained budgets mean they struggle to provide a transformative educational experience (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013). Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise (2015) echo such findings, proposing that resource distribution amongst rich and poor schools is unequal, and consequently, education is not a level playing field. Though funding rules seek to

3

distribute resources evenly and prioritise disadvantaged schools, resources still differ significantly between schools, largely due to the local context within which they operate. Furthermore, the funding premiums for disadvantaged pupils do not account for the complexity faced by schools in areas of disadvantage, including teacher retention, and an increased risk of lack of parental engagement (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2015). The impact of cuts to other public and voluntary sector organisations places further pressure on these schools as provision delivered by wider community support services reduces (Ball et al, 2012).

Volunteers in Primary Schools
In 2015-16, 32% of adults aged 16 and over, reported volunteering formally at least once a month, while 49% reported volunteering formally at least once a year (Cabinet Office, 2016). Just under one third (32%) of those who volunteered gave unpaid help to support children's education and schools (NCVO, 2016). Furthermore, almost half (45%) of those who volunteered at least once in 2014-15 were involved in raising or handling funds, with a similar proportion (44%) involved in organising and running events, albeit not necessarily in schools. In terms of volunteer profiles, data from the 2005 Citizenship Survey (Low et al, 2007) shows that women are more likely than men to be volunteering in schools, suggesting that 37% of females who volunteer do so in educational settings, compared to 23% of men. The same survey shows that volunteering in education is most common among young people (43% of 16-24-year-old volunteers), who may still be in or have recently left formal education and those in younger middle age (41% of 35-44 year olds), who may have young children in education.

The role of volunteers within primary education has long been encouraged. The influential Plowden Report (Plowden, 1967) emphasised the value of parents being involved in school activities, fundraising, volunteering in the classroom and as governors (Morris, 2011). Indeed, many have recognised volunteers in the classroom as a positive feature that can aid development of both volunteers and the children they seek to support (Brooks et al., 1996; Tracey et al., 2014). Research advocates the positive impacts of volunteers within the classroom, highlighting the reduction of disruptive behaviours (Sheldon and Epstein, 2002; Dominia, 2005), increasing teacher capacity (Miller et al 2009) and increasing children's attainment (Ritter et al, 2009). However, in contrast others have suggested that volunteers in the classroom can be more problematic, requiring a high level of guidance and support from teachers, thus proving counterproductive (Elliott et al, 2000).

Furthermore, research suggests volunteers within school are most frequently parents of children attending the school (Musick and Wilson, 2008). Musick and Wilson (2008) argue that school-age children draw their parents into the wider communities in which they are embedded. Parents will commonly have a vested interest in both the school and the local community. In the USA for example,

parents are more than twice as likely to volunteer for education and youth-oriented organisations as people with no children (Boraas, 2003).

Philanthropic Giving in Primary Schools

Philanthropic giving to primary education is complex and multi-dimensional. We know that over half of individuals in the UK regularly donate (NCVO and CAF, 2012); however, donations are not evenly dispersed across cause areas (Body and Breeze, 2015). Indeed, based on the latest data only 6% of individuals who regularly donate give to schools (CAF, 2015). Yet, this does not account for activities and events that individuals may support, such as school fetes and fundraising evenings, which contribute to a school's fundraised income. However, research suggests that individuals are often unwilling to give to causes where they consider their donations substitute for government spending (Breeze, 2012), which places schools in an interesting position when it comes to fundraising.

In terms of who gives, data suggests that individuals who are female and occupy professional or senior management positions are the most likely to donate funds to schools (CAF, 2015). Indeed, research suggests that demographic factors significantly affect individuals' propensity to give and the amount they may give (Carpenter et al, 2008; Smith, 2012). In addition, Mohan and Bulloch (2011) present the notion of a 'geography of giving' in which they identify a 'civic core' of people representing 9% of the population who account for over 40% of voluntary action. These individuals tended to be in professional or managerial roles, living in the most affluent areas of the country, well established in a local community, highly educated and often practicing religion. In contrast, other studies suggest that 'being asked' is far more important than individual characteristics, such as age, religiosity and education (Wiepking and Maas, 2009). Demographic differences, the uneven dispersal of the civic-core and differences in asking practices all potentially contribute to an uneven playing field in terms of schools' abilities to attract donations.

Although primary education is firmly rooted within communities and is historically reliant on voluntary activity, the concept of philanthropic activity in education in England remains largely unexplored by academics. Reich's (2007) research into the distribution of philanthropic support across schools in California, USA highlighted the increasing reliance on philanthropy and evidenced increasing inequality in schools as a result (Ingram et al, 2007). Many schools or districts in the US have professional fundraising functions that raise funds to support schools. It is up to the school or district to decide whether these philanthropic donations can be spent on core academic activities or whether they can only be spent on extracurricular activities. Either way, this gives donors leverage over what the school is offering – if they do not like what the money is spent on, they can simply stop donating (Ball and Youdell, 2008; Reich, 2007). Parents and others who donate to schools do so because they want to do the best by their children and to support local public services. However,

Reich (2007) argues that there are clear consequences of the uneven distribution of philanthropic funding among different schools and districts. Those in more wealthy areas can raise substantially more than those in poorer areas. As Ball and Youdell (2008) observe at an international level, 'poor parents are unable to subsidise their children's education or to mobilise philanthropy' (p.32). The result of this is that schools in richer areas will have more per head to spend on their pupils than schools in poorer areas.

3. Methodology

Based on this review of literature, the research underpinning this article sought to explore the following research question: *How is voluntary action dispersed across primary education settings, and what factors affect this?* The response to this question draws upon two main sources of data, financial reporting and questionnaires, from primary schools within a single local authority area (LAA) located in the south of England. As one of the largest LAAs in England, and one of the fastest growing, the setting offers a comparative picture of some of the wealthiest areas in the country versus some of the most deprived, with 13.9% of its wards falling into the 20% most deprived areas in England, and 18.4% of children living in poverty, compared to 20.1% nationally, based on 2015 data. As of January 2017, there were 453 primary schools (including free schools and academies in the LAA), and on average 12.2% of primary school pupils were eligible for free school meals in 2017.

Financial data (2013-14) on 380 primary schools was obtained from DfE records. All LA maintained schools are required to report on donations and private funds, and this figure was used as the dependent variable and compared to independent variables of school size based on pupil numbers, percentage of children on FSM (in 2013-14) and overall school income (all data held and published by the DfE). Though all schools report on income based on financial guidelines there are likely to be discrepancies in how this is reported. Furthermore, this data does not include primary schools which converted to academy status before April 2013. However, since the 2013-14 data financial data was recorded, 62 of the schools included have moved over to academy status. Given these limitations, the methodology sought to gather further information from all schools, including academies and free schools, through an online questionnaire.

As a familiar and accessible research method (Newby, 2010), questionnaires were sent to all primary schools across the selected LAA. Questionnaires were divided into two parts. Section 1 focused on the number of volunteers that supported the school, the type of activities they engaged in and the amount of time they gave per week. Volunteers were divided into those which regularly supported the school, defined as once a month, and those which sporadically supported the school, defined as less than once a month. It is important to note that the data gathered about activities in the school was focused on regular volunteers and based on estimates by the head teacher or senior leaders in the school.

6

Furthermore, in terms of time, numbers were rounded into bands, for example 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours and so forth. Schools were specifically asked to report on regular volunteer support within a 'typical school week', to exclude periods of heightened activity, such as school fetes or sports day, which would typically encompass more sporadic volunteer time. Section 2 of the questionnaire focused on the fundraising activities. We were clear to define fundraising as raising funds which would directly support school costs and activities, and differentiated this from fundraising for external causes such as 'Children in Need' or 'Comic Relief'. Schools were asked to discuss their fundraising activities, indicate the amount they raised per year, the reliance on fundraising and aims for moving forwards. At the end of the questionnaire all schools were given the opportunity to respond to an open-ended question about how they view the role of voluntary action in primary education.

114 questionnaires were completed by head teachers and senior leaders from a range of schools, representing a 25% response rate. Responses were broken down into school types[i]; 41% of the responses were from community schools, 23% from academies, 16% from voluntary aided schools, 14% from voluntary controlled schools and 3% from both foundation and special needs schools. Just under 3% of the schools fell into the high FSM bracket (that is over 35% of the children are eligible for FSM), 39% into the medium FSM bracket (that is between 20% and 35% of the children eligible for FSM) and 58% into the low FSM bracket (under 20% of the children eligible for FSM). Averaging across the participating schools, 12.3% of pupils were eligible for FSMs, suggesting the sample is relatively reflective schools across the LAA.

The financial data was analysed to indicate the trends in fundraising within the LAA. Acknowledging the aforementioned limitations, this data provided contextual backdrop and was used to help explore some of the wider patterns emerging – this data was particularly useful for extrapolating links between deprivation, based on FSM data, and philanthropic income. The questionnaire provided additional opportunities to explore these emerging themes in more depth and provided information on the role and frequency of volunteer support within schools. The majority of the questions followed a similar format, asking schools to select from a Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree against set statements, such as: 'we find it easy to attract volunteers', and 'fundraising forms a core part of our school business plan'. After each question, participants could provide an additional comment to support their response. Likert scale responses were grouped and analysed against school size, type and FSM data. The more qualitative responses were analysed in terms of emerging themes around how schools viewed voluntary action and used to inform the forthcoming discussion on how schools frame voluntary action. The use of the multi-method approach within this research study has allowed for the advantages of these methods to be judiciously balanced off against one another in an attempt to reduce the limitations offered by any one method (Greene, 2009; Hesse-Biber, 2010).

The research is not without limitations. First, the availability of data to explore this phenomenon is sparse. Schools are not required to hold records or report on volunteer support. Therefore, beyond the limited financial data, the research was reliant on schools self-reporting levels of activity via the questionnaire. The questionnaires asked for approximations of volunteer numbers and time, type and fundraising amount. These figures are therefore estimations, rather than precise calculations. The lack of consistent data across schools limited this element of the data to the 114 responses, and relied on the accuracy of the individual reporting the data. Second, though the participating schools generally reflect those across the LAA as a whole, it must be noted that 8% of the schools in the LAA fall into the high FSM bracket in 2016-17, compared to only 3% of schools in our research. This suggests a possibility of non-response from schools in high FSM brackets, perhaps based on limited engagement in voluntary action. In addition, schools with high rates of voluntary action may well have been more willing to share their successes, potentially skewing the results in a positive direction. Finally, we must acknowledge the challenges involved in using FSM as a proxy for deprivation within schools (Kounali et al, 2008). Indeed, Kounali et al (2008) suggest that FSM data significantly under-estimates deprivation within a school, whilst others suggest it has the potential to be misleading (Montemaggi et al, 2016). However, though Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data captures geographic disadvantage, primary schools are now attracting children from outside of their traditional boundaries, therefore FSM data provides the most accessible current indicator of deprivation levels within the school community and consequently was chosen as the indicator of deprivation within this study. Nevertheless, even taking into account the limitations and challenges, this study provides an important picture of this significant area of school life and activities.

4. Findings: Voluntary Action in Primary Schools, An Irregular Landscape

Volunteers in Primary Schools:

Here we draw upon the data gathered primarily through the questionnaires. In doing so, we can conclude that volunteers are valued by schools and are seen as an important and central component within the school workforce. Reasons for this ranged from volunteers *'bringing a wealth of knowledge, skills and experiences which enriches school life' (head teacher, Voluntary Controlled School)* to volunteers helping *'to develop a sense of community beyond the school gates' (head teacher, Academy).* Indeed, 93% of the schools said volunteers form an important part of their school community. Furthermore, 73% of the schools reported that they would like to increase the number of volunteers they have, whilst 52% stated that they would like to increase the number of hours their current volunteers give. However, attracting volunteers proved more complex. 42% of schools stated that they found it easy to attract volunteers, whilst the remaining 58% of schools struggled to attract the amount of volunteer support they would ideally like. Schools in more disadvantaged areas, represented as those in the 20% most deprived areas in England, were three times more likely to

report struggling to engage volunteers, consistent with rates of volunteering being lower among those from lower socioeconomic groups (Cabinet Office, 2013).

Supporting previous research findings (e.g. Musick and Wilson, 2008), schools reported parents of children currently at the school as the most likely group to volunteer, with 96% of schools engaging this group. Almost two thirds of schools report engaging individuals from the local community, whilst approximately one third engage grandparents and extended family of current pupils. Members of staff also make up an interesting group of potential volunteers. Just over 30% of schools identified staff as volunteers, doing activities that were outside of their working hours and contractual obligations. Furthermore, 25% of schools also engaged family and friends of staff as volunteers. There was a smaller proportion of schools (17%) who engaged with parents who had formerly had children at the school, suggesting that once a child moves on from a school, so does the parent's commitment as a volunteer to that school.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the type of activities in which volunteers engage range from educational provision to general maintenance of the school. The findings suggest that different categories of activities attract different types of volunteers, with some volunteers giving time on a regular basis (once a month or more) and others supporting the school more sporadically (less than once a month) with specific tasks or activities.

Types of activities volunteers support the school with	% of schools with regular volunteers supporting activity	% of schools with sporadic volunteers supporting activity
In the classroom	96	20
Fundraising	71	65
Management and leadership	67	17
Events and educational trips	63	78
Extra-curricular	60	19
General maintenance	5	28
Other	5	3

Table 1: % and types of volunteer activities in schools

Management and leadership volunteers raised a particularly interesting tension among schools: 67% of schools reported regular voluntary support from governors, whilst 17% reported sporadic support. However, 16% of the schools reported no volunteer time for management and leadership, which is surprising given the role of volunteer governors in schools. We initially supposed this resulted from a misunderstanding in the question, which must still be considered as a possibility for some of the

9

schools. However, we also contacted and asked for further details from these schools. The three sample schools of this 16% who responded suggested that as they were all part of a multi-academy trust (MAT), where a single trust is responsible for a number of academies, their governors were further removed and volunteered for the MAT rather than the school. This is a noteworthy tension, which may require further investigation in the future. It also raises interesting questions about how schools define and frame volunteering.

Nonetheless, considerable disparity emerged across the primary schools in terms of how much cumulative volunteering time they each received. These figures are based upon the data reported by schools for their 'typical week' during school time, and excludes sporadic volunteers. One school reported receiving around 227 hours of volunteers' time each week, whereas other schools reported receiving just three hours of volunteer support each week. For the purpose of analysis, it is useful to understand this in terms of the school size and therefore this figure has been converted to equate to the amount of volunteer time per child within the school per week. On this basis, it equates to approximately 72 minutes of volunteer support per pupil at one school, versus less than a minute of voluntary support for several others. On average, schools reported approximately 12.5 minutes of volunteer time per child per week in the school. It should be noted that not all of this voluntary support would be directly working with children, rather this is the amount of volunteer time dedicated to the school overall by regular volunteers in a 'typical' week. As demonstrated in figure 1 below, when considered in terms of minutes per child, the smallest schools, on average attracted over eight times as much volunteer time per child than the largest schools in the study.
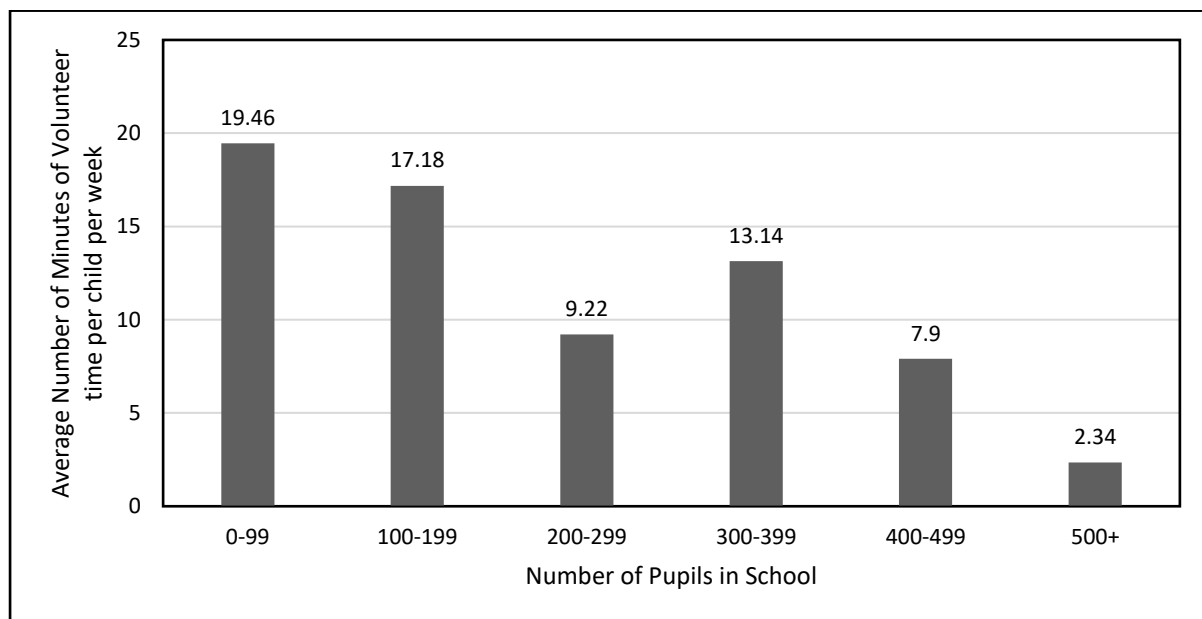

Figure 1: Average minutes of volunteer support per child, per week by number of pupils in school

However, as figure 2 demonstrates, it is also important to consider the relationship between deprivation, considered here in terms of the number of children accessing FSMs, and volunteer time. This study suggests significant variation in the amounts of volunteer time received based on the percentage of children accessing FSMs. On average, schools which fell into the high FSM bracket (that is over 35% of the children are eligible for FSM) secured 1 minute of volunteer time per child per week, compared to schools in the medium FSM bracket (that is between 20% and 35% of the children eligible for FSM) which had on average just under 3 minutes of volunteer time per child per week. Schools which fell into the low FSM bracket (under 20% of the children eligible for FSM) secured, on average, just over 15 minutes of volunteer time per child per week. Figure 2, demonstrates this trend, and highlights the few outliers which skew the averages slightly.
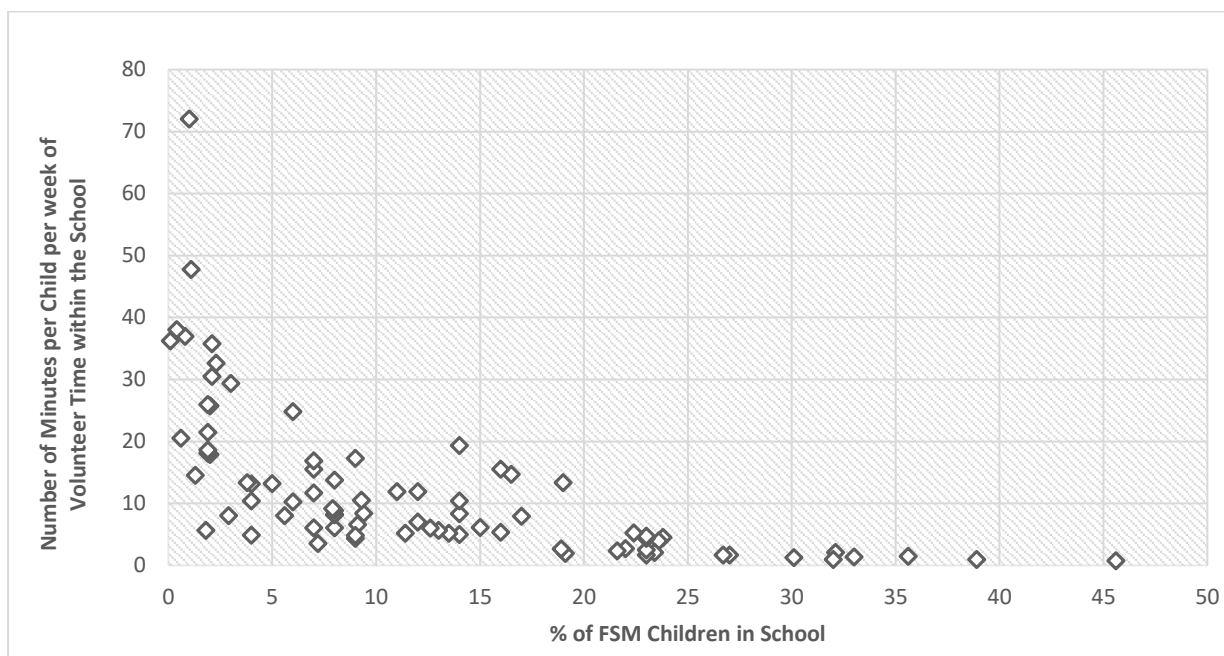

Figure 2: Number of volunteer minutes per child, per week, by FSM data

Though revealing, again we suggest caution is applied in interpreting these figures as the majority of participating schools, 58%, fell into the low FSM bracket, whilst just under 3% occupy the high FSM bracket. To achieve any form of statistical significance, further research on a wider scale would need to be carried out.

Fundraising in Primary Schools:

Here we draw upon both the questionnaire data and the financial data to explore fundraising in primary schools. This appears to be increasingly more central to schools' activities. As one head teacher commented, *'unfortunately, in this financial climate, it is now necessary to fundraise in order*

to enhance provision for children' (head teacher, Academy). However, less than one third of the sample of primary schools (29%) who responded to the questionnaire agreed that fundraising formed a core part of their school business plan. Despite this, 66% of the schools said they were actively trying to increase their annual fundraising income. Furthermore, 53% of the primary schools said they relied on fundraising income to support school activities, with 28% of the primary schools claiming fundraised income was used to support core educational activities. As Figure 3 shows, primary schools use a range of methods to raise funds.
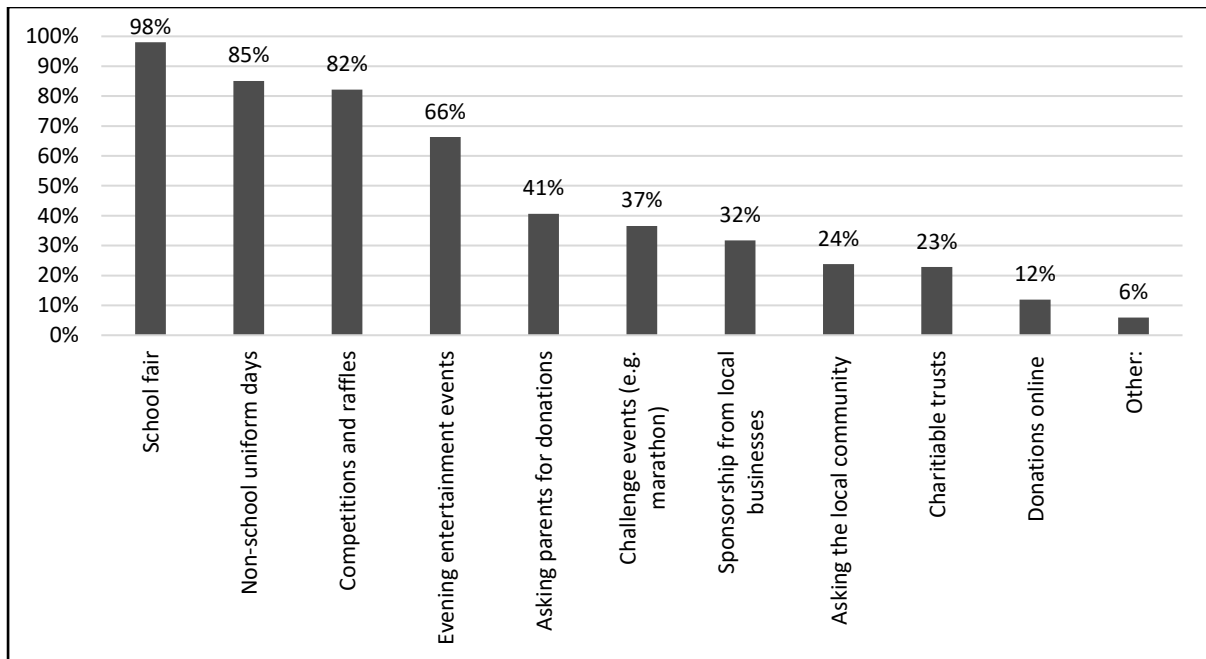

Figure 3: Percentage of schools engaging in particular types of fundraising

School fetes, non-school uniform days (when children wear their own clothes to school in exchange for a small donation to the school) and competitions, such as raffles, remain the most popular forms of fundraising for the school. We know that being asked is one of the most important factors prompting donors to give (Wiepking and Maas, 2009) and indeed over 40% of schools asked parents for donations and a further 23% sought to raise funds from their local community. Interestingly, over 10% reported having a mechanism for individuals to donate to their school online.

Financial data from the 380 schools indicates that fundraised income varies considerably. This is unsurprising given the range of different mechanisms employed by primary schools to help raise funds. Fundraised income includes all funding donated to the school for activities through either specific events and activities, gifts or philanthropic grants. To understand this data, income is based on both the total amount of donated income and the amount of donated income per child in the school per year, uncovering a number of disparities. When we look at the overall financial data for schools,

foundation schools and academies tended to attract the largest amount of donated income, averaging around £16,000 per year. Whereas, voluntary controlled schools and community schools had lower amounts, attracting around £8,000 per year. Interestingly, academies appear to show the greatest range in fundraised income with some individual academies securing over £100,000 and more (in one case over £200,000) of donated income in the year 2013-14.

As with volunteering, the size of the school has an impact, both on how much donated income is raised, and on the amount of donated income per child. The data available suggested that donated income per child in a school ranged from £0 per child to £248 per child per annum, with an average across all the 380 primary schools of £43 of fundraised income per child per year. On average the larger the school, the more donated income in total they secured. Schools with 500 or more children raised just over £15,500 per year on average, whereas schools with less than 100 children raised on average just over £5,000 per year. It must be noted that this disparity is likely to be partly absorbed by economies of scale meaning that the larger schools may not notably feel this difference. However, when considered in terms of the amount fundraised per child in the school, as Figure 4 below shows, smaller schools fare better:
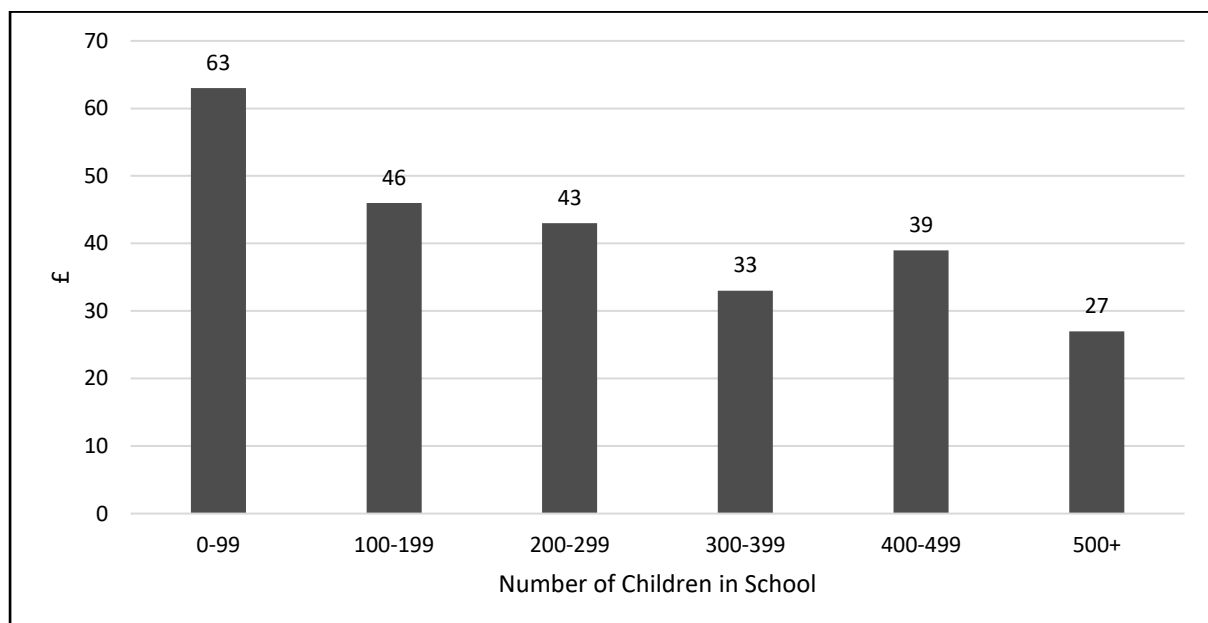

Figure 4: Average donated income (£) per child, per year, by school size

Therefore, as with volunteering, the data suggests that the amount of fundraised income a school receives is related to the size of a school. Once again, the geographic location of the school is also of significance. Utilising the wider financial data from the 380 schools, we also draw upon FSM data. Understanding FSM data as an indication of the level of economically disadvantaged children within a school, the data suggests some association between the social-economic position of the families of

the children within schools and the amount of fundraised income. On average, schools which fell into the high FSM bracket (that is over 35% of the children are eligible for FSM) achieved £3,591 of donated income, compared to schools in the medium FSM bracket (that is between 20% and 35% of the children eligible for FSM) which had an average of £5,901 of donated income. Schools that fell into the low FSM bracket (under 20% of the children eligible for FSM) achieved on average £11,208 of donated income in 2013-14. When calculated as donated income per child per year, schools in the high FSM bracket achieved on average £15.70, schools in the medium FSM bracket achieved £21.90, whilst schools in the low FSM bracket averaged £48.40 additional income per child. Though this suggests some clear patterns in the data, the distribution of this data is more nuanced with a number of schools securing significantly more fundraised income per child per year than others within their FSM bracket.
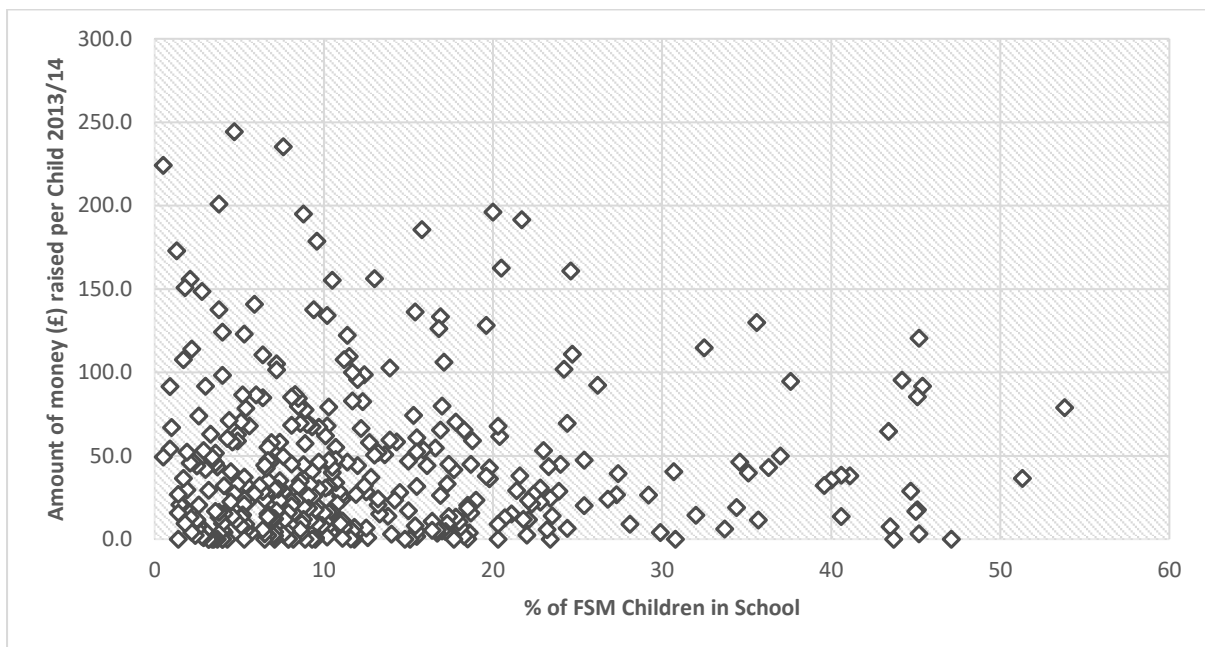

Figure 5: Amount of money (£) raised per child 2013/14, by FSM data

Nevertheless, overall fundraised income in schools presents significant disparity – on average each child within schools that fall into the low FSM bracket attract over three times as much donated income as a child within schools that fall into the high FSM bracket. Given the opportunities that these donations create, the likely impact of this is that children already experiencing some form of disadvantage are further disadvantaged.

5. Discussion: Framing Voluntary Action

The data discussed highlights several significant patterns, which suggest school size and socio-economic factors affect both volunteering within the school and fundraised income. While

acknowledging the importance of these findings, it is notable however, that significant disparity still exists between schools that are similar across all factors. It became apparent through the research that in addition to these influencing factors, how schools framed and pursued voluntary action also considerably affected their approach and focus. Therefore, in this section we discuss schools' motivations for engaging with voluntary action and the crosscutting barriers that emerged. Primary schools identified different motivations for engaging in voluntary action, when thematically analysed these broadly sat in one of the following three category frames.

Frame 1: *Voluntary action as a mechanism to increase support for children and enhance their experiences:* The leading reason for engaging voluntary action identified by primary schools was the ability to provide increased and diverse support for the children within their school. Volunteers were perceived as reducing pressure on teachers and increasing teacher capacity by delivering one to one support to children around a particular need, for example listening to reading or supporting writing development. Fundraising was seen as a mechanism to purchase additional support to help individual children, or support whole school activities such as school trips or entertainment, such as an annual pantomime. For example, as one head teacher commented *'I think if it is to provide 'extras' for the children then fundraising is appropriate. I don't believe that schools should have to use this for core educational purposes' (head teacher, Voluntary Aided School).* Furthermore, the schools identified volunteers as having an array of different professional skills and expertise, and welcomed the use of this to supplement and support teaching. Schools also identified the positive benefit of having volunteers as role models and support for children, for example *'volunteers bring so much extra to our school, they offer children an adult role model, especially when they may lack that elsewhere in their lives' (head teacher, Academy).* Within this, volunteers were framed as providing emotional support for children. This was seen as particularly important for those children who were perceived as not having adequate support within their home environment.

Frame 2: *Voluntary action as a way in which to achieve community engagement and increase community empowerment:* Voluntary action was identified by some schools as providing strong links to the local community. Viewed as a strength, this identified fundraising and volunteers as both having an internal purpose of increasing school capacity alongside an external purpose in terms of 'reaching out' to the local community. For example, as one head teacher commented *'the school is the hub of the community, by using volunteers and fundraising we strengthen these links' (Head-teacher, Academy)*, whilst another observed *'there is an increased community awareness of what happens at the school' (head teacher, Voluntary Aided School).* This benefit was seen as two-fold; firstly, as strengthening the role of the school as a community hub, and secondly, acting as a conduit to attract more local support into the school. Furthermore, the primary schools recognised how their fundraising supports and benefits the local community in which they are situated, as well as fostering

philanthropic attributes in children. For example, as one head teacher commented *'it teaches the children key skills about giving' (head teacher, Foundation School)* whilst another stated *'it teaches the children core skills in thinking about their wider social responsibilities and helping others' head teacher, Voluntary Controlled School).* Schools also frequently acknowledged the power of good relationships with the whole community and use fundraising events as a way to foster such relationships.

Frame 3: *Voluntary action as a response to depleting budgets:* Framing voluntary action as a response to depleting budgets emerged as a strong theme in both terms of engagement of volunteers and fundraising. Primary schools viewed volunteers as a mechanism within which to increase teacher capacity and resources at a minimal cost to the school. For example, as one head teacher commented, *'they are a free resource and bring a wealth of skills to the school' (head teacher, Voluntary Aided School)* and another stated, *'we are able to deliver additional support activities without it putting strain on already stretched school budgets' (head teacher, Community School).* Furthermore, whereas 68% of schools agreed that they fundraise to support extra-curricular activities (those outside of the core curriculum requirements) for the children in their school, 53% of the schools agreed that they fundraise broadly to support the school's general and overall educational activities. Such findings are consistent with previous research (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013) which suggests that all schools are facing strong external pressure on performance and little access to additional funding. Therefore, primary schools are faced with a dilemma. Whereas many identified that they do not feel that fundraising should form a core part of a school business plan, in the current climate, it must.

Comparing Frames

The framing of voluntary action by individual primary schools reflected how and to what intensity the school sought to increase their voluntary action. For just over one third of the participating schools, voluntary action in terms of both volunteering and fundraised income was a historical activity within the school and accepted as a routine part of school life (Morris, 2011). They sought to neither actively increase nor channel the activity but viewed any additional support as *'a bonus' (head teacher, Community School).* Fundraising activities primarily took place within the Parent Teacher Fundraising Association (PTFA) and volunteers were not actively recruited but accepted if they put themselves forwards. These schools tended to view voluntary action through frames 1 and/or 2. Interestingly this more 'naturally occurring' voluntary action continued to reflect the disparities in volunteering time and fundraised income discussed previously based on social demographics of the school, size and structure. Therefore, unsurprisingly considering previous research (CAF, 2015; Mohan and Bulloch, 2011), even without a pro-active drive primary schools with lower levels of pupils receiving FSMs continued to attract higher levels of voluntary action than those schools in more disadvantaged areas.

The remaining two-thirds of the participating schools encouraged volunteers in their schools and actively sought to increase their fundraised income. Indeed, just under one third of these schools reported that they relied on fundraised income to provide some of their statutory core activities. These schools tended to view voluntary action primarily through frame 3, whilst acknowledging the benefits of voluntary action when understood through frame 1 and 2. Accepted as a historical part of school life, school fetes, events and PTFA activities were considered appropriate and community engaging. However, many schools reflected a growing necessity to seek to increase funds beyond these activities, even if this was predominantly met with hostility by schools who felt they were under pressure to *'bolster reducing budgets' (head teacher, Community School)* and *'support a corporatisation of education' (head teacher, Community School)* which they opposed. Such findings suggest that school leadership contributes to the emphasis a school may place on fundraising and volunteer engagement. There was a shared acknowledgement by schools that under the current ideology for education in England, schools would increasingly have to seek alternative ways in which to increase their funds (West, 2014; Ball et al, 2012). For example, as one head teacher commented*, 'I think that schools have to review their models of practice to ensure that fundraising and voluntary action becomes a role within the school…enrichment for all pupils is hard to achieve when budgets are so tight' (head teacher, Academy).* However, another warned that *'by engaging in this raising our own funds to bridge budgets we are giving the green light to the government agenda to corporatise education' (head teacher, Community School).*

Even within the schools which actively tried to engage and increase voluntary action, multiple challenges exist, with schools in areas of disadvantage more likely to report struggling to engage volunteers and successfully fundraise. Such findings resonate with previous studies (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2015). Additional barriers identified included finding the time to engage, train, coordinate and manage volunteers within the school (similar to Elliott et al, 2000), and problematic bureaucratic aspects, such as applying for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, which were considered costly and time consuming. Furthermore, schools placed emphasis on attracting the 'right' type of volunteers, suggesting that volunteers needed to be skilled, educated and good role models for children. Previous research suggests volunteers in schools are rarely fully representative of society, or at times even the school community (Ranson et al, 2005). Additionally, schools, particularly those in areas of disadvantage, felt they faced particular challenges in engaging volunteers from cohorts of parents with *'their own negative experiences of school' (head teacher, Academy).* Likewise, societal shifts in terms of increases in workloads for families and lack of available time to volunteer were also recognised as a barrier. Furthermore, shifts in social policy concerning the school curriculum and education posed significant barriers in terms of volunteers training needs and skill development, for example, schools training volunteers in phonics to help

support children's reading requires a greater degree of training than would have traditionally been the case.

In addition, almost all the schools felt they lacked the skills and expertise to engage actively in fundraising. Though most schools engaged in more traditional fundraising activities, such as school fetes, far fewer actively sought to fundraise from other sources such as local donors, major donors, charitable trusts or crowdfunding (Body, 2017). Schools also expressed concern over fundraising from parents; highlighting concerns about the socio-economic position of families, lack of community support and fear of alienating parents and the local community. As one head teacher commented *'I think we should be mindful of how much money we are asking parents for, especially if in an area of economic deprivation' (head teacher, Community School).*

Where schools actively engaged, and sought to recruit volunteers, and successfully fundraised larger amounts of money, this was predominantly grown from a 'grass roots' perspective based upon the skills and/or interests of one or two individuals in the school. These individuals sought to upskill themselves in response to this growing activity. For example, in one school an individual had actively developed a marketing strategy, recruitment policy, training programme, support and development plans and recognition mechanisms for volunteers. As a result, the medium sized school engaged over 50 volunteers on a planned and regular basis. Where fundraising activity existed within schools, it tended to be around an individual's, or small group of individuals, personal experience rather than an overall strategic approach (see Body, 2017 for further discussion on this). In these cases, schools actively sought to increase philanthropic income, by engaging donors with a connection to the school (e.g. parents), and approaching locally focused charitable trusts, philanthropists and businesses. We know that donors are more likely to give to organisations to which they feel connected and networked into (Yörük, 2012), and being asked is the strongest signifier of giving (Wiepking and Maas, 2009). As one school commented *'we're lucky we have a fundraiser as a governor who has done loads for us' (head teacher, Community School),* and consequently, this school had actively sought individual donations and charitable trust support, securing over £50,000 in a single year to support school activities. A second example included an academy, where the head teacher focused on developing a relationship with an international corporate partner, which had a local presence in their area, and as a result had secured over £115,000 to support school refurbishments, trips and additional educational opportunities.

6. Conclusion

Primary schools value voluntary action. Both volunteering and philanthropic income are perceived to positively contribute to a schools' capacity to educate, both in terms of breadth of delivery and relationships with parents and the wider community (Miller et al, 2009; Tracey et al, 2014). However,

18

the increasing blurring of sectors (Alcock, 2010) and the drive for privatisation of education (Ball and Youdell, 2008; West, 2014) raises significant questions about the reliance on voluntary action as a mechanism to bridge the funding gap in primary schools. The majority of the schools involved in this research highlighted an awareness of need and pressure to increase the role of voluntary action within their schools to help address budget short-falls, increase teacher capacity and support the desire to continue to offer extra-curricular activities. This research does not seek to undermine the positive benefits voluntary action can bring to education (as highlighted by Miller et al, 2009; Dominia, 2005; Sheldon and Epstein, 2002). However, it does question this growing pressure on schools to seek alternative ways to boost their income and capacity. As schools increasingly turn towards alternative sources of funding and support, to continue to provide high quality education, disparities in the distribution of these additional resources become apparent. Schools in the low FSM bracket averaged 14 minutes more of volunteer time per child than schools in the high FSM bracket. In addition, schools in the low FSM band achieved three times as much donated income than those schools in the high FSM band. Such findings echo previous international research (Reich, 2007; Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2015) suggesting that education is not a level playing field and that there are substantial differences in how voluntary action is distributed across areas of advantage versus those of disadvantage. The consequences of this uneven distribution mean that schools in wealthier, more affluent areas are more likely to have additional resources than those in poorer areas.

However, although socio-economic factors contribute to this uneven distribution of voluntary action, they do not reveal the complete picture. Smaller schools tended to fare better compared to larger ones. The smallest schools in the cohort had on average 17 minutes of volunteer time and £36 more donated income per child than the larger schools. This trend may be explained by parents perceiving larger schools to be well resourced due to size and thus effectively they are 'crowded out' (Houtenville and Conway, 2008; Payne, 1998). Furthermore, this disparity is likely to be partly absorbed by economies of scale meaning that the larger schools may not notably feel this difference. In addition, the ideological standpoint of leadership within the school plays a significant role in facilitating or inhibiting the engagement in voluntary action, with some head teachers ideologically opposed to increasing voluntary action, whereas others embrace the concept. Those schools which frame voluntary action as a mechanism in which to help offset depleting school budgets were more likely to attract higher levels of both volunteers and philanthropic income demonstrating that these barriers can be overcome. Finally, school 'type' is also a contributory factor. Academies secured almost double the donated income on average than all other primary school types (excluding independent private primary schools), and were the most likely 'type' of school to actively seek significantly more donated income, with a number of examples attracting over £100,000 per year.

The research reported here set out as an exploratory study of voluntary action in primary education. We have identified a number of meaningful disparities in the distribution of this activity and examined a number of barriers schools face when trying to engage volunteers and fundraise. These areas require further exploration and theorisation to understand the impacts such policy driven activity may have on primary schools and social inequality for children. The figures are also not statistically significant, and suggest a need for further, wider research to explore this topic further. The findings of this research are relevant for policy makers tackling social inequality in education, and contribute to the wider debate concerning the role of voluntary action in public services.

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22

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[i] There are different school types, dependent upon how they are managed and funded. There are four main types of state schools funded by local authorities, all of which follow the National Curriculum and are inspected by Ofsted (the government's Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). Community schools are run by the local authority, which employs school staff, owns the land and buildings. Foundation schools are run by a governing body which employs the staff and sets the entrance criteria. Land and buildings are owned either by the governing body or by a charitable foundation. Trust schools are similar, but are run together with an outside body – usually a business or charity – which has formed an educational trust. Voluntary-aided schools are religious or faith schools. Just like foundation schools, the governing body employs the staff and sets the entrance criteria. School buildings and land are usually owned by a charity, often a church. Voluntary-controlled schools are a cross between community and voluntary-aided schools. The local authority employs the staff and sets the entrance criteria, like a community school, but the school land and buildings are owned by a charity, often a church, which also appoints some members of the governing body. In addition, academies are independently managed schools set up by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups in partnership with the local authority and the government Department for Education. Lastly, Free Schools are normally brand-new schools set up by teachers, charities, community or faith groups, universities and groups of parents where there is parental demand. They will be set up as Academies and will be funded in the same way, directly from central government. They also share with Academies a greater

control over their finances, the curriculum, and teachers' pay and conditions. (Definitions based upon BBC Learning Zone definitions at http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/types_of_schools/)