

Context

Chalfont's Community College became an Early Adopter school of the Family Advocacy School Toolkit from Gap Education. It is a larger than average Secondary School serving the small towns and communities around Chalfont St. Peter in Buckinghamshire. It has fewer than average pupils that qualify for the pupil premium and a higher than average number of children with SEN supported with Statements or additional school action. The Principal identified when she took on the role in 2014 that the school had a 'problem with disaffected boys', and despite trying many different strategies recognised the need for a different approach.

One of the challenges faced by the school is the wider picture that within the South Buckinghamshire area the attainment gap is one of the widest of any Local Authority Nationally. The context for this, apart from the issue of disaffection by largely white, British, working-class boys is that Buckinghamshire still has a number of selective schools. Research has shown the selective schools increase inequality, and this in turn impacts the gap between the most and least advantaged.

The school's motivation for engaging with the Family Advocacy School Toolkit was to target Key Stage 4 students who were disaffected by education and as a result severely underachieving. As the school were Early Adopters, the school received the programme on this specially discounted term using their pupil premium funding.

A+ Family Advocacy is a relatively new approach to helping children. It enables schools to use the Pupil Premium to maximum effect by working intensively with families to help achieve stability and improve educational outcomes for their children.

Approach

Chalfont's Community College clearly already understood how important it is to involve parents and had good relationships with the parents of their pupils. The school identified 5 key staff who received the half-day training session from Gap Education. These newly trained 'Family Advocates' were coordinated by a non-teaching member of staff who became the Lead Advocate for the school. The training, resourcing and identification of the right member of staff to lead on the programme were all ingredients to its success.

After identifying students to target, the family advocates approached the families. Using the Gap training of how to deliver effective parental engagement, the school were very successful at getting buy-in with all the families that were approached. The advocates initially identified 3 families to work with. They ran twelve one-hour sessions (mostly in the school) to support and work with the parent(s)/carer(s) as well as some work with the children. The A+ programme covers a number of key areas such as Communication, Routine and Habits, Setting Boundaries, Play and Learning, Health and Nutrition, Managing debt, as well as tailored sessions that tackle particular needs within a family that have been identified in the early stages through some simple diagnostics.

The school are kept involved by the advocates, through regular updates and a mid-point review. At the end of the programme the family, advocates and school colleagues review the progress and measure the distance travelled. The school are then able to evidence this to show impact of their pupil premium spending.

Impact

The impact on the first 2 pupils' attendance and attitude has been dramatic, with 1 student seeing an 11% improvement in attendance over a term and a half. The students' parent said:

"She is much happier to come to school now and doesn't seem as angry as she was." The student herself remarked: "I have really enjoyed the gap programme. I think I would still be the same as I was last year if I hadn't worked with you and on this programme. I think a lot more students should do it."

School have reported a big positive change in both pupil's attitude to school, and for the second student his termly achievement points rose from 52 the previous term to 340 during the term when he was involved in the programme. In his year 10, he received a number of fixed-term exclusions, but since beginning the programme school have not needed to exclude him. His parent has told the school that she has *"Loved the triangular relationship of School, Student and Home – his behaviour in class and in doing homework is so much better."* Her son said: *"They really want to help you, and look at me now; I've completely changed – listen to Miss. Mate! She knows what she's talking about."*





Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The Family Advocacy School Toolkit uses the standard SDQ assessment that is common in many schools. The 25 questions in the SDQ comprise 5 scales of 5 measures that indicate areas of behavioural strength or difficulty. It is usually easiest to score all 5 scales first before working out the total difficulties score. Scores are classified as Normal, Borderline and Abnormal. Using the scale bandings shown below, an abnormal score on one or both of the total difficulties scores can be used to identify likely cases with mental health disorders. As we find the terminology not especially helpful in the context of our programmes, we encourage the use of the Traffic Light system where ‘Abnormal’ = Red, ‘Borderline’=Amber and ‘Normal’=Green.

The SDQ is carried out with the Parent and a Teacher at the beginning and end of the A+ programme. Here are the results from the SDQ that was conducted before and after the programmes in Chalfont’s Community College.

Teacher scores as follows.

	<u>BEFORE</u>	<u>AFTER</u>
Total Difficulties:	15	13
Scale 1. Emotional Symptoms:	4	0
Scale 2. Conduct Problems:	4	2
Scale 3. Hyperactivity:	6	3
Scale 4. Peer Problems:	1	0
Scale 5. Prosocial behaviour:	8	8

The “Impact Supplement” collates feedback from both teacher and parent upon overall distress and social impairment, and was recorded at the beginning and end of the programme. The Parent score is out of 10, and the teacher score out of 6. The higher the number, the greater the impact of the difficulty.

Scores for the impact supplement for how greatly the difficulties interfere with the child’s everyday life were as follows:

Parent:	2 (a little)	0 (not at all)
Teacher:	5 (quite a lot)	0 (not at all)

Due to the huge success of this programme, Chalfont’s Community College is already engaging with another family from the school and identifying future children who will benefit too.

Next steps

Gap Education is seeking funding to scale-up its A+ Family Advocacy programme, to offer this transformational programme to schools all over the UK. Gap Education is developing partnerships with various Schools, Local Authorities as well as Churches, Charities and third sector groups to recruit and train Family Advocates to deliver the programme. Gap Education is looking for schools that would be interested in implementing an A+ programme with one of their families whose children qualify for the pupil premium.

Visit www.narrowthegap.net for more details.



Aims of Gap Education

Gap aims to close the gap between the achievement of children and young people from challenging backgrounds to enable everyone in the UK to achieve their potential whatever their starting point.

Gap Education will close the achievement gap for children in the UK by:

1. Raising self-esteem and bringing hope to families and communities struggling with unemployment and anti-social behaviour.
2. Brokering positive partnerships and mobilising the Church and Voluntary groups to social action.
3. Finding holistic solutions; recognising that complex problems require a number of effective strategies.
4. Being there for the long haul; understanding that there is no quick fix to bringing about lasting change.