DEVELOPING
CHILDREN'S ZONES
FOR ENGLAND

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Save the Children

DEVELOPING **CHILDREN'S ZONES** FOR ENGLAND

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Save the Children

Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.
We help them fulfil their potential.

Cover photo: Elizabeth, 9, at one of Save the Children's Families and Schools
Together (FAST) projects in Islington, London. The award-winning FAST programme
boosts the chances of children in the UK's most deprived areas. (Photo: Magda
Rakita/Save the Children)

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FOREWORD

At Save the Children we run programmes in some of England's most disadvantaged communities to ensure that no child in these areas is born without a chance.

We alleviate instances of desperate material need so that families do not go without essentials in the home. We support parents so they can help their children succeed at school. We work with young people to give them the confidence and leadership skills they need to improve their lives and communities. Each intervention is carefully evaluated so that we offer children the best possible support.

We are ambitious for these communities but there are clearly limits to what we can achieve. Families often face multiple disadvantages, and benefits from even the strongest programmes can fade as children get older. This has led us to consider what the cumulative impact would be if children in deprived areas received high-quality support over time and across all the contexts in which they learn and develop.

A well-known US example of this holistic approach is the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in New York. President Obama has been so impressed by the model that he is trying to replicate it in new settings through Promise Neighborhoods (Save the Children US is involved in establishing a Promise Neighborhood in Kentucky).

This report explores how children's zones in England might look and in which type of areas they should be located. It aims to start a debate about a possible addition to the toolkit of policies aimed at improving children's life chances.

Fergus Drake
UK Director, Save the Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children in England have very unequal chances of doing well educationally and in other aspects of their lives. Those children who live in the most disadvantaged areas are particularly likely to do badly. This report argues that English children's zones, which draw on the principles underpinning the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in New York, offer a way of improving outcomes for these children.

HCZ focuses on a particular area – some 100 blocks of Harlem – marked by high levels of disadvantage. It seeks to create a 'pipeline' of support for children by linking high-quality schools and early years provision with personal, social and health support for them and their families, and with community development initiatives. It is *doubly holistic* in working with children over time and across all the contexts in which they learn and develop. HCZ is funded, governed and led in a way which enables it to concentrate all its energies on the single task of improving outcomes for children and young people. It is not confined to existing public service structures and it can mobilise additional resources.

HCZ offers a range of evidence-based programmes and interventions. There is good evidence that these have important positive impacts on children's outcomes and on the support which children are offered in school, family and community contexts. There is good reason to believe that there will be cumulative effects from these interventions, and HCZ believes it may be possible to create a 'tipping point' so that the area as a whole supports children to do well. However, no full evaluation of HCZ has yet been done, so these remain expectations and aspirations. This means that HCZ is best regarded as embodying a highly promising set of principles rather than as a blueprint which can be exported to other places.

Children's zones are needed in England because there are areas in the country where children experience multiple disadvantages. These areas may be very small (much smaller than local authorities) and may be quite different from each other in the pattern of

disadvantages they present. A highly local approach is therefore needed. This is not *instead of* national efforts to tackle disadvantage and authority-wide efforts to provide good services; it is *complementary* to these.

English children's zones should not simply imitate HCZ. They should seek to embody HCZ's principles, but in ways which match the very different conditions in England – nationally and locally – and which can be shown to work in particular areas.

English children's zones should seek to establish doubly holistic, 'cradle-to-career' support for children and young people. To do this, they will need to:
- bring together a range of partners
- create a governance structure which gives them the degree of autonomy needed to act locally
- leverage funding and resources into their areas
- analyse how disadvantage 'works' in their areas
- formulate a strategic plan for tackling disadvantage across the childhood years and across all the contexts in which children learn and develop
- develop robust evaluation strategies to find out what works locally.

Zones can be led by any organisation or individual working on behalf of children and families. Local authorities will be key facilitators but do not necessarily have to be in the lead. Schools are essential partners. Headteachers – particularly when they represent federations or other groups of schools – may be well placed to contribute to a zone's leadership.

In many places, 'joined-up' working on behalf of children already exists. None of this amounts to fully-fledged children's zones. However, existing structures and practices should be built on, and the best-developed of these could be supported to become pilot zones.

Children's zones sit well with the changing nature of policy in England. They are local developments at a time when the emphasis is shifting from national to local initiatives. They offer a means of bringing together local service providers in a coherent way at a time when provider-autonomy and opening up services to the market are highly valued. Children's

zones offer a potentially powerful way of tackling disadvantage, using existing resources at a time when resourcing is under pressure.

With all of this in mind, the report makes the following **recommendations**:

- English children's zones should be developed in disadvantaged areas.
- English children's zones should plan the doubly holistic, cradle-to-career pipeline of support that every child needs.
- The development of English children's zones should be locally driven so that they match local circumstances.
- Zones should develop governance and leadership structures that ensure a degree of autonomy to enable them to respond to local circumstances.
- Government should facilitate the development of a small number of pilot zones.
- Pilot zones should be offered access to technical support, the opportunity to network with each other, and high-quality evaluation.
- Pilot zones should be encouraged to develop sustainable resourcing models.

This report has been produced in partnership by Save the Children UK and the Centre for Equity in Education at The University of Manchester. It draws on a review of the evaluative and other literature about HCZ, an analysis of area disadvantage in England, a survey of promising developments in the country, and the wider research literature on childhood disadvantage.

1 INTRODUCTION

Children and young people in England have very unequal chances of doing well in education and then going on to do well in their adult lives. These chances depend to a large extent on how rich or poor the child's family is. However, many other factors are involved, including where the child lives. Despite efforts through the years to tackle the inequalities between places, the fact remains that there are many areas in England that are marked by high levels of poverty, worklessness and ill-health. Children who live in these areas do worse, on average, than their peers elsewhere.

This report has been produced by Save the Children UK and the Centre for Equity in Education at The University of Manchester to explore what can be done to improve the educational outcomes and wider life chances of children living in these highly disadvantaged areas. It presents a model for 'English children's zones'. The model draws on the principles underpinning the internationally renowned Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in New York. There is already evidence that these principles are transferable, and President Obama's Promise Neighborhoods initiative is rolling them out to other disadvantaged areas.[1] However, the USA is not England, and American cities are different in important ways from English cities. The model, therefore, builds on the strong foundations already laid in England by initiatives such as Sure Start and extended services. Moreover, even in England, disadvantaged areas are not all the same. The realities of growing up in a disadvantaged part of Manchester, Rotherham, King's Lynn or London are different, and different places, and disadvantaged areas within them, need distinctive solutions. The model, therefore, seeks to capitalise on the government's increasing support for 'local solutions'. While it is ambitious, we believe it to be timely, achievable, and of considerable potential benefit.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2 explores why zones are needed by examining disadvantage in different areas in England.** It shows how multiple forms of disadvantage can cluster in particular areas. However, these areas can be very small. Even within administrative wards there can be contrasting areas of advantage and disadvantage – and even highly disadvantaged areas can differ from each other in the precise nature of their disadvantages. It follows that while national policies to tackle disadvantage are crucially important, some strategies need to be highly local. They need to be configured so that they can tackle the distinctive forms of disadvantage – and make use of the distinctive resources – in particular places. As a locally developed initiative, concentrating on a small geographical area and on tackling the full range of issues that face children and families in that area, HCZ offers one model for doing this.

- **Section 3 explores what might be learned from HCZ.** It argues that HCZ is of particular interest because it is *doubly holistic*. First, HCZ links efforts to improve schools with efforts to tackle family and community issues that make it difficult for children to do well. Second, it sustains these efforts across the childhood years, providing 'cradle-to-career' support as the child grows into an adult. Further work is needed to demonstrate conclusively what this doubly holistic approach can achieve. However, there is already good evidence that HCZ is improving some important outcomes for children, and good reason to believe that it may be capable of achieving even more powerful effects. Moreover, HCZ shows that ambitious strategies can be developed in ways which are not entirely confined to existing public service structures or funding, can mobilise additional resources, and can involve schools without being dominated by their concerns or imposing impossible burdens upon them.

- **Section 4 argues that, as an operational model, HCZ cannot simply be imported into an English context. Rather, a distinctly English model for 'children's zones' is needed.** Efforts to work in 'joined-up' ways for children are, of course, already familiar in England from initiatives such as Sure Start and extended services. These developments fall some way short of the doubly holistic approach operated by HCZ. Nonetheless, they have laid foundations for action. Any new initiatives must build on these and connect with the challenges and opportunities emerging in the current policy context. It seems clear that for the foreseeable future, local innovation rather than central direction will be the driving force for new strategies, and new resources – such as community budgets and the Pupil Premium – are being devolved to the front line. The tasks for local initiatives will be to find ways to make best use of the resources available to them, and to bring highly autonomous schools and wider partners together to meet the needs of all the children and families in an area.

- **Section 5 presents findings from a national survey undertaken for this report to identify current 'HCZ-like' developments in England.** It confirms the patchy nature of developments in England. However, Section 5 also shows how, in some areas, promising initiatives that could be developed into fully-fledged zones have begun to emerge, and it gives some examples of these. These initiatives differ in some important respects – involving different partners, being led variously by schools and local authorities, and working on different scales. But they also share some important features which point to the beginnings of an English children's zone model.

- **Section 6 presents a model for English children's zones.** It sets out how such zones might be developed in the current English context. This section argues that arrangements such as charitable trusts, limited companies, not-for-profit organisations or academy sponsor chains, which can secure schools' contribution to area strategies and attract a wide range of partners, are central to this development.

- **Section 7 makes recommendations to policy-makers.** In particular, it argues that although developments must be locally driven, the government could do much to facilitate the establishment of the first zones.

In advocating English children's zones, we are aware that a strategy focused on disadvantaged areas is not without its problems. Not all disadvantaged children live in disadvantaged areas, and not all children in disadvantaged areas do badly. It is also the case that previous area-based approaches have had limited and patchy impacts – perhaps because they have been powerless to change the wider social structures which create concentrations of disadvantage in particular areas.

While we acknowledge these concerns, the key question is: 'If not this, then what?' There is already substantial evidence that school-focused strategies can help to raise attainment overall, but they have done little to narrow the gap between children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and their wealthier peers. This indicates that schools alone cannot overcome the impacts of disadvantage grounded in local contexts. Targeted interventions have had some positive outcomes for some children and families, but often only for small numbers in their target groups, and across a more limited range of outcomes than anticipated. Centrally prescribed strategies have helped to change schools in ways which have enabled all learners to do a little better, but have seemingly done little to narrow the gap. While all these gains are important, they are not in themselves enough. Children's zones could provide an additional layer of response which specifically addresses the variety of children's needs – not simply in relation to improved attainment, but more broadly – and do so *in context*.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that children's zones offer a magic bullet for areas with poor outcomes. They are certainly no substitute for suitably flexible, high-quality, universal services or for broader efforts to create a more equal society. But England does have many highly disadvantaged areas where a customised response is called for, and where dealing with issues one by one, or working with children and families out of context, will not be enough. In these instances, it is necessary to configure available resources as quickly and efficiently as possible, to match service provision and other interventions to the issues facing local children and families, and to leverage additional resources into those areas where they are most needed. We believe that children's zones could achieve this. At a minimum, they promise more integrated, wide-ranging and efficient working practices at a local level. But at their most innovative, they are far more than an improved attempt at

joined-up working. They shift the focus from targeting particular outcomes for particular groups of children to enabling all children and young people to do well across a range of outcomes. They also shift the focus from joining up existing services to thinking radically about how all the sources of support for children can be configured strategically. Children's zones have the potential to enable radically different ways of thinking and acting to emerge.

However, it is important to be realistic about what even the most radical of children's zones might achieve. Since disadvantages facing children and young people are deep-rooted and have their origin in factors beyond the local situation, wholesale transformation is unlikely. Instead, we should look to zones to bring about modest – but eminently worthwhile – improvements over time. These improvements should nonetheless be greater than those achieved by the patchwork approaches of the past, because zones should enable area-specific strategies to emerge within a common, guiding model, should focus on a wider range of impacts, and should do so for a wider range of children and families. We believe that careful monitoring and evaluation processes can help to reveal these improvements, and that gains can be made despite the current economic climate. For these reasons alone, we believe that an English children's zone model should be fully explored.

2 WHY ARE CHILDREN'S ZONES NEEDED?

There is now a political consensus that tackling the disadvantages which prevent some children doing well – not least in education – should be a national priority. However, there is much less agreement about which methods for achieving this are most appropriate. Does the answer lie, for instance, in national policies for tackling childhood poverty, or in improving universal services? Are interventions targeted at the most disadvantaged children and families the way forward? Should strategies be formulated at a regional, local authority (LA), or city-region level?

Our position is that policy-makers need a toolkit of strategies and that there is a place for interventions developed at a wide range of levels. However, we also believe that one of those levels should be the very local – typically referred to in the USA as the 'neighborhood', and what we here call the 'area'. This is because *areas are different from one another*. They experience different levels of disadvantage, and different forms of disadvantage are found even in areas which appear very similar. This means that *different kinds of strategies are needed in different areas*. In some, providing good schools and services for all will be enough. In others, universal provision might need to be supplemented by a modicum of targeted intervention. In the most disadvantaged areas, however, customised approaches may be necessary to tackle a complex web of issues – and draw on a network of resources – that are not configured in quite the same way anywhere else.

To illustrate this point, we undertook a simple analysis of how different indicators of disadvantage are distributed across local areas in England, and of how these indicators relate to outcomes. There are, of course, many analyses which explore the complex associations between the *circumstances* in which children grow up and how well they do, particularly in terms of educational attainment.[2] There are also a few which analyse in more searching ways than has

been possible here how area disadvantage affects children.[3] However, our analysis is sufficient to show why an area approach to improving children's outcomes is necessary.

THE TERMS USED IN OUR ANALYSIS

Since we are interested in education and disadvantage at a local area level, we have focused our analysis on Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). LSOAs are a valuable unit of analysis, dividing the country into small areas of roughly the same size (about 1,500 people). England has 32,482 LSOAs. We have explored the relationship between disadvantage and educational attainment in English LSOAs. We have also explored LSOAs as they are grouped by electoral ward. While we acknowledge that wards are of different sizes (both geographically and by population) and contain different numbers of LSOAs, looking at LSOAs in this way is still valuable in helping to reveal within-ward variation. This is important because wards are often used as an administrative unit, but this approach may mask more local differences.

For the purposes of our analysis, we have focused on five indicators of disadvantage: (ill-)health, deprivation (as characterised by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation), unemployment, barriers to housing and services, and levels of adult education. We recognise that the indicators we have chosen are far from comprehensive in terms of capturing the full range of disadvantages experienced by children and families. However, we have selected them because they are illustrative of the central concerns of the policy-makers and practitioners we interviewed for this report, and because there is a substantial existing literature linking them to poor educational attainment. We have focused on educational attainment rather than educational and other outcomes more broadly, because attainment has a significant impact on young people's later life chances and because data are readily available. We also acknowledge that there are other outcomes and indicators which are similar to, and strongly associated with, the ones we have chosen. We have excluded

these from our analysis where they might be measuring the same phenomenon as our chosen indicators, as this could create errors in the analysis.

We provide full details of the methods employed in our analysis – including the selection criteria for indicators, the data sets used and the full range of caveats – in a separate technical appendix to the report.[4]

FINDINGS FROM OUR ANALYSIS

We present our analysis in the form of answers to some key questions. These are addressed in turn below.

How are indicators of disadvantage distributed across England? We looked at four specific indicators of disadvantage, which are identified and measured separately, and reported at LSOA level. These were:

- **Health**: the percentage of adults in each LSOA who had reported their health as being 'good' in the past 12 months. A low score may indicate poor health.
- **Unemployment**: the combined percentage of males (aged between 18 and 64) and females (aged between 18 and 59) claiming Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) in each LSOA.
- **Adult education**: the percentage of adults in each LSOA who had reported they had no qualifications.
- **Housing**: barriers to housing and services are recognised and measured separately within the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) on the basis of a number of indicators, including household overcrowding, homelessness and housing affordability. A higher score represents greater barriers.

We also used IMD scores as an indicator of overall **deprivation**. These scores are calculated by combining a wide range of data across seven domains: income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and disability, education skills and training deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment deprivation, and crime.[5] A higher score indicates a higher level of overall deprivation.

Table 1 (below) shows a broad guide to the distribution of indicators across LSOAs in England. For each indicator it details the average LSOA score, the average amount by which LSOA scores vary, and the lowest and highest LSOA scores. The variation of scores across LSOAs and the ranges presented in the lowest and highest scores for each indicator are of particular note. For instance, it can be seen that although the average deprivation score for a LSOA is 21.67 points, this varies between 15.51 points (up or down) across LSOAs. This suggests that there is a great deal of variation in deprivation across LSOAs. With regard to the range of scores, for each of the indicators explored there are some LSOAs that score far above the average amount of variation – for instance, the highest deprivation score in a LSOA is 87.80. This suggests that some LSOAs in England experience far greater levels of disadvantage than the national average, even after typical variations in scores are taken into account.

How are academic attainments distributed across England? We were interested in children's educational attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. For each of these, we wanted to know whether the likelihood of a child meeting (or exceeding) the nationally expected level of attainment was related to the levels of

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF INDICATORS OF DISADVANTAGE ACROSS LSOAs IN ENGLAND

Indicator	Average LSOA score	Average amount by which LSOA scores vary	Lowest LSOA score	Highest LSOA score
Health*	68.71	6.32	37.34	93.12
Unemployment*	2.42	2.08	0.00	22.80
Adult education*	29.26	11.31	0.87	67.63
Deprivation**	21.67	15.51	0.53	87.80
Housing**	21.69	11.09	0.34	70.14

* Health, unemployment and adult education scores are expressed as percentages.
** Deprivation and housing are expressed as point scores.

disadvantage in the LSOA in which they live. We used the following indicators of attainment, and noted the proportion of children achieving these benchmark scores in each LSOA:

- **Early Years Foundation Stage**: At age five, children's progress towards the 'Early Learning Goals' is assessed. A score of 78 or above in each of the assessed areas indicates that a child is working securely towards each of the Early Learning Goals.
- **Key Stage 2**: At age 11, children are expected to have achieved National Curriculum Level 4 in English and Mathematics.
- **Key Stage 4**: At age 16, achieving five A*–C GCSE grades, including English and Mathematics, is used as a national benchmark for performance.

Our findings are presented in Table 2 (below). Again, the variation across LSOAs warrants closer scrutiny. We can see that the average variation in academic attainment across LSOAs is broadly consistent during primary schooling (Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2), with a higher variation in attainment at secondary level. However, there are LSOAs which experience very low (and high) educational attainment, and differ markedly from the average variation across LSOAs.

How are indicators of disadvantage related to educational attainment? We developed some statistical models (see technical appendix) which attempted to explain variations in educational attainment across LSOAs by exploring the apparent impacts of our indicators on attainment. Our analysis suggests that our chosen indicators of disadvantage can explain approximately 11% of the variance in attainment between LSOAs at the Foundation Stage, 15% at Key Stage 2, and 37% at Key Stage 4.

What contribution does each indicator of disadvantage make to explaining differences in educational attainment? We found deprivation to be most strongly associated with low educational attainment at LSOA level, and particularly so at Key Stage 4. Unemployment and adult education also tended to have a positive association with low attainment at LSOA level. The associations between health (as measured by the percentage of adults reporting good health in the last 12 months) and educational attainment, and between barriers to housing and services and educational attainment, were least strong.

How are indicators of disadvantage distributed within and between LSOAs? Having established the importance of disadvantage in relation to attainment, it is also important to consider these indicators 'in context' by examining how they interrelate, both within and across LSOAs. To explore this, on the opposite page we provide a graphical representation of how, within a ward, individual LSOAs are affected by our chosen indicators of disadvantage. We have selected this ward, on the outskirts of a large city, as an illustrative example because it falls within the target area of one of the innovative developments identified by our national survey of activities (see Section 5).

The ward-level maps on the opposite page (Figure 1) show how different indicators of disadvantage are distributed across LSOAs within the ward. Each map shows data for one of our five indicators: deprivation (IMD score), (ill)-health, unemployment, adult education, and barriers to housing and services. The darkest coloured LSOAs on each map (except for the map showing good health) are the most disadvantaged for that indicator, and the lightest coloured are the least disadvantaged. On the map showing good health, the darkest coloured LSOAs have the highest levels of reported good health, and the lightest coloured, the lowest levels. The black border indicates the ward boundary.

These maps have many striking features. For each indicator there is considerable variation within the

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT ACROSS LSOAs IN ENGLAND

Stage of education	Average LSOA score	Average amount by which LSOA scores vary	Lowest LSOA score	Highest LSOA score
Foundation Stage	68.09	11.89	17.00	94.00
Key Stage 2	65.68	11.90	13.00	92.00
Key Stage 4	53.04	15.37	10.30	92.80

Figures are expressed as percentages.

FIGURE 1. INDICATORS OF DISADVANTAGE MAPPED ACROSS LSOAs WITHIN A WARD

IMD score

24.54
24.55–48.74
48.75–55.24
55.25–61.54

Good health

54.4%–56.7%
56.8%–59.6%
59.7%–62.4%
62.5%–67.7%

JSA rate

3.5%
3.6%–5.8%
5.9%–7.3%
7.4%–9.8%

No qualifications

41.3%–43.3%
43.4%–46.3%
46.4%–50%
50.1%–52.8%

Housing barriers score

24.19–25.03
25.04–26.48
26.49–28.03
28.04–32.25
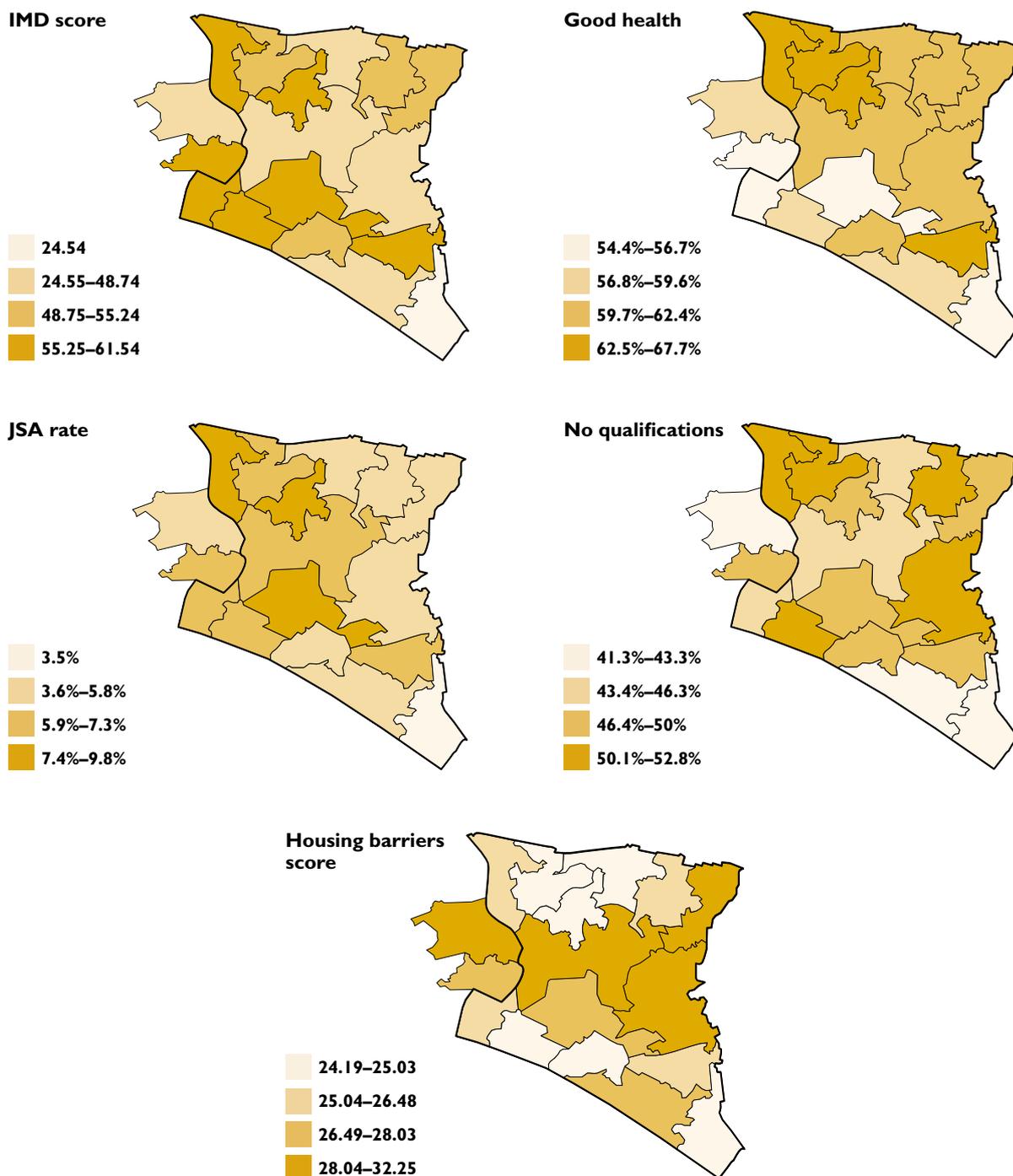
ward, and sometimes across adjoining LSOAs. The maps also suggest that issues can 'spill over' ward boundaries. As we look across the indicators, the picture becomes even more complex. For example, the LSOA in the bottom right-hand corner of each map has low levels of disadvantage across all the indicators with the exception of reported good health. Other LSOAs are much more varied. For instance, one LSOA (right-hand side, centre) has a high proportion of adults without qualifications, and a high score for barriers to housing and services – but it also has one of the lower rates for receipt of JSA and one of the lower IMD scores in the ward. Another LSOA (top left-hand corner) is among the most disadvantaged in the ward in terms of IMD score, JSA rate, and the proportion of adults without qualifications, but appears more advantaged in relation to barriers to housing and services, and reported good health.

In sum, we see that while there tend to be overlapping concentrations of multiple forms of disadvantage within the ward and its constituent LSOAs, there is considerable variation in terms of how different and multiple forms of disadvantage are configured at LSOA level. This is typical of the other wards identified as target areas in our national survey of innovative approaches.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE?

Three things are striking about these findings. The first is that local areas are very different from each other in their levels of disadvantage, and that England retains some highly disadvantaged local areas, with correspondingly low levels of attainment among the children and young people who live there. This is despite the best efforts of policy-makers over many years. The second is that larger areas – wards, towns and cities – are likely to contain very varied local areas. The third is that 'disadvantaged' local areas may themselves be very different from each other, with different configurations of the indicators we have examined.

The implication, we suggest, is that broad-brushstroke strategies for improving children's outcomes are unlikely to be enough unless they are supplemented by very local area approaches. It is not simply, as we have argued, that Manchester, Rotherham, King's Lynn and London are all different from each other, but that small areas within these towns and cities are also different from one another. A framework of national policy and local strategy is undoubtedly necessary, but it has to leave room for, and positively support, more local initiatives.

Moreover, our analysis only scratches the surface of the complex dynamics of local areas. There are many more indicators of disadvantage that could have

been included, and many more outcomes to which they could have been linked. There is much that could have been explored in terms of how children in different areas experience and respond to the disadvantages they face, why some do better than others, and whether the accumulation of disadvantage in an area brings additional disadvantages of its own. Equally important, there is much to explore regarding the assets that even the most disadvantaged places have, both in terms of the services and facilities upon which they can draw, and even more in terms of the capacities of the people who live there to support each other and to improve their own lives. Understanding these very local dynamics is, as we shall see in the following sections, an essential foundation for the development of children's zones.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Nationally, there is a clear relationship between deprivation (as measured by IMD) and educational attainment. Unemployment and adult education are also important predictors of children's educational attainment.
- A focus on LSOAs shows there is considerable variation in how different indicators of disadvantage are configured at a local area level. An examination of the LSOAs which lie within an administrative ward shows that it may only be in some local areas in the ward that (particular) factors associated with disadvantage are worse than average. The combination of factors that are worse than average may differ across LSOAs.
- There is a need for interventions that can engage with local configurations of disadvantage. As the following section explores, HCZ offers one model for this.

3 LEARNING FROM THE HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE

In thinking about how children's outcomes in disadvantaged areas might be improved, there are good reasons for identifying what can be learned from outside England. It is not that England has no history of area approaches – far from it. However, it is difficult to think of initiatives of any substance in the country that have been area-based and have approached the task of improving outcomes through a doubly holistic strategy – tackling multiple forms of disadvantage simultaneously and working right across the childhood years. Even where promising initiatives have emerged, they tend to have been short-lived, and to have disappeared when government priorities and funding shifted.

As we suggested earlier, in learning from elsewhere an obvious starting point is HCZ,[6] which has attracted considerable attention across the USA and from policy-makers internationally. As an indication of this attention, HCZ has been described by *The New York Times* as 'one of the most ambitious social experiments of our time'. Its president, Geoffrey Canada, has been named in *Time* magazine's 2011 list of the world's 100 most influential people,[7] and President Obama has committed to 'rolling-out' HCZ across the USA, in the form of 'Promise Neighborhoods'. Indeed, during his presidential campaign, he presented this as integral to his strategy for 'changing the odds for urban America':

> *If poverty is a disease that infects an entire community in the form of unemployment and violence, failing schools and broken homes, then we can't just treat those symptoms in isolation. We have to heal that entire community. And we have to focus on what actually works… We know the Harlem Children's Zone works. And if we know it works, there is no reason this program should stop at the end of those blocks in Harlem.*

(Barack Obama, 2007)[8]

In this section of the report, we provide a brief overview of HCZ, explore its distinctive features, and review the available evidence about its impacts.

AN OVERVIEW OF HCZ

HCZ is a geographically based non-profit organisation. It currently serves around 100 blocks in Harlem, New York, which is predominantly home to low-income black families. It offers them access to an interlocking network of education, health, family, and social welfare services. These are not simply wrap-around services, but have been designed to create a 'pipeline' of support for children from cradle to career. To this end, HCZ has established an integrated package of programmes to support children's education in early childhood, elementary school, middle school, high school and college contexts, and it runs its own charter schools called Promise Academies. HCZ's wider programmes of family and community support are built around this education-oriented pipeline.

The list below, while far from exhaustive, gives an indication of the range of interventions that make up HCZ's 'pipeline to success' and its wider network of support:

EARLY YEARS

- *Baby College*. This provides a series of parenting workshops for parents of children aged up to three living in the zone. Designed by early childhood experts, the college aims to help parents to provide a nurturing and stimulating home environment.
- *The Three-Year-Old Journey*. This programme concentrates on how best to promote children's language and learning skills. It is for the parents of children who, at age three, secure a place to attend one of HCZ's Promise Academy charter schools.
- *The Harlem Gems*. This is an all-day pre-kindergarten programme for three-year-olds who hold a Promise Academy place. Children benefit from

a 4:1 adult-to-child ratio and are taught in English, Spanish and French. The emphasis is on school readiness.

SCHOOL YEARS

- *Promise Academy charter schools*. HCZ runs two Promise Academy charter schools, catering for elementary, middle and (increasingly) high school students. These have an extended school day, including after-school and weekend tutoring, and a wide range of enrichment activities. Students are given freshly prepared meals and have onsite access to medical, dental, and mental health services.
- *Academic case management*. This is open to all 5th to 12th grade students. Case managers track students' individual progress (academic, social and emotional), creating and implementing a support plan for every student.

COLLEGE PREPARATION AND EMPLOYMENT

- *HCZ Employment and Technology Center*. This promotes technology skills as well as academic support for high school students.
- *Learn to Earn programme*. This helps high school students improve their academic skills as well as prepare for college and the job market.
- *College Success Office*. This helps students with all aspects of college access, from financial aid applications to academic issues and time management.

WIDER FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES

- *Parenting support programmes*. Activities range from parent reading groups to cooking classes and support with managing their children's chronic health conditions – for example, the HCZ asthma initiative.
- *HCZ Community Pride programme*. This aims to support and energise tenant and block associations to improve living conditions.
- *The Family Development Program and Family Support Center*. These help to strengthen at-risk families and run foster care prevention programmes.
- *HCZ Peacemakers programme*. This programme employs young adults to work in public school classrooms as teaching assistants and run after-school programmes.
- *Beacon Community Centers*. These create a shop front for access to all of HCZ's support services.

All those resident in the zone have the opportunity to access its full range of school- and community-based provision. Places at HCZ's Promise Academy

schools are, however, limited and allocated through a random lottery, which is also open to children outside the zone. This means that not all children who live in the zone attend one of its schools – though they may benefit from its other community-based supports. Equally, children living outside the zone may secure a Promise Academy place but not access its full range of community provision. Recent data indicates that approximately 1,300 children attend Promise Academies and have access to HCZ's full range of additional support. A much greater number – more than 10,000 children and 10,000 adults – access other services offered by HCZ.[9]

WHAT MAKES HCZ SO DISTINCTIVE?

HCZ is so distinctive because it offers a template for action which is both simple in purpose and great in ambition. It recognises that inequalities in outcomes cannot be tackled unless the causes of those inequalities in family and community contexts are also tackled. It has set up a system for addressing inequalities which is:

- **focused on a particular local area**, seeking to understand and tackle the dynamics of disadvantage in that area, and to meet the diverse and multiple issues facing the children and families who live there
- **doubly holistic**, working with children *over time* to develop a cradle-to-career 'pipeline' of support, *in the wider context* of the families and communities in which they live
- **able to act strategically for children and families in the area**. HCZ is funded, governed and led in such a way that it can concentrate all its energies on the single task of improving a wide range of outcomes for children and young people; it can do this in a strategic and integrated way, and can sustain this over time.

In these respects, HCZ appears 'one step ahead of the game'. Having had the rare opportunity to develop and sustain its approach over the last 20 years, HCZ has found ways to respond to many of the challenges with which English policy is now grappling. This makes it worth reflecting briefly on HCZ's development.[10] Its origins lie in a truancy prevention initiative, started in 1970, called the Rheedlen Center for Children and Families – with Geoffrey Canada becoming its president in 1990. In 1991, Rheedlen partnered with a local school to establish a Beacon Community Center, offering a range of extended services and out-of-hours activities. However, concerns – which

are all too familiar in an English context – were expressed that:

- only some local children were being helped – many others were not
- the short bursts of progress children made were outweighed by the impacts of the wide range of disadvantages they experienced outside school
- the benefits of interventions would fade or disappear over time without continued support.

This led Geoffrey Canada and colleagues to revise their approach. Rather than developing a well-meaning menu of loosely connected activities and seeing what this achieved, they started with the goal of creating better outcomes for all children, and then asked which factors in a child's life they would need to address and how they could do so in a programmatic and standardised way.

In answering these questions, they laid the foundations for the HCZ model. The zone would focus on a geographical area. It would help all the children in the area and strengthen their families' ability to support them. Instead of trying to create an oasis of academic excellence in an otherwise distressed community, it would try to change the culture of the community. It would saturate the area with high-quality services until it reached a tipping point where positive educational and social activities became the norm. And it would do so strategically, by creating a seamless pipeline of cradle-to-career support, addressing education, health, nutrition, housing, and community safety, among other factors.

Within this distinctive theory of action, HCZ has explicitly sought to apply the best research evidence about the kinds of interventions which are most likely to be effective in achieving particular outcomes, and has sought to introduce evidence-based good practice into family and community contexts. It has, moreover, created the structures and governance mechanisms needed to achieve this in practice. Notably:

- as a charitable foundation, HCZ is an independent entity with strong leadership, accountable to its trustees
- it has its own income generated through charitable donations, and commands a high level of resource
- it is able to employ its own staff, commission services, run its own schools and use its resources flexibly.

These arrangements mean that HCZ has the autonomy and flexibility to set a clear strategic vision for the zone, to ensure that all its service providers buy in to this vision, to configure its provision to create a holistic pipeline of services at an operational level and, ultimately, to be held to account in line with its own vision.

HCZ is, therefore, also distinctive in its governance and operational structures. It demonstrates that a holistic response to poor outcomes can be developed and sustained over time. HCZ shows that the diverse needs of large numbers of children and families can be met within a zone model, and that resources can be mobilised in ways which are not entirely confined to existing public service structures or funding. Schools are important, but not lead, contributors, being embedded within the wider zone. In taking the onus from schools and placing it at an area partnership level, HCZ appears in a strong position to have wide-ranging impacts at a scale greater than schools or other services could achieve alone.

EXPLORING HCZ'S IMPACTS

In many ways, HCZ's achievements to date are remarkable. In an area where, according to Geoffrey Canada, 'literally all of the institutions are failing children', it has established a wide range of service provision and sustained this over time, and is reported to be reaching large numbers of children and adults.

However, in order to understand what HCZ has achieved, and what might conceivably be achieved by a similar approach elsewhere, we need to disentangle the available evidence in relation to the multiple levels at which the zone seeks to work:

- First, the individual programme level. HCZ has numerous evidence-based programmes and services, and it is important to see how well these work to address their target problems – be they poor management of chronic asthma (HCZ asthma initiative), substandard accommodation (HCZ community pride programme) or poor school readiness (Harlem Gems).
- Second, the level of 'cumulative' effects. Where children and families engage with multiple programmes and services, they might be expected to experience gains which are bigger than those from individual programmes because improvements in one domain also contribute to improvements in other domains.
- Third, the area level. HCZ's ultimate aim is to create a tipping point for the whole community, changing its culture so that, for instance, having good health and skilled employment, doing well at school and living in a safe environment become normal and are sustained by everyday practices.

Taking these in turn, at the programme level, there is evidence that the zone's individual activities are having positive impacts. Much of this comes from the zone's own monitoring activities. To give some brief examples, HCZ's evaluation report for the 2011 financial year[11] states:

- More than 455 parents completed Baby College. By the end of the course, almost all parents had fitted safety latches on cabinets (92%) and smoke detectors (98%), and ensured their children had up-to-date immunisations (99%). Seventy-eight per cent of those attending who read to their children less than five times a week pre-course were doing so more often post-course.
- All the children completing the Harlem Gems programme attained a school readiness score in line with, or above, national average scores as measured on the Bracken School Readiness Assessment – whereas on starting the programme, 13% of children were assessed as having delayed or very delayed school readiness.

In addition, two external evaluations have focused on academic attainment in HCZ's Promise Academy charter schools. One, by Whitehurst and Croft (2010),[12] found that students attending Promise Academy schools do 'impressively better than students of their backgrounds attending a typical public school in New York City'. The other evaluation, by Dobbie and Fryer (2010),[13] claims that gains made by Promise Academy students were enough to 'reverse the black–white achievement gap', at least in some subjects and for some age groups. So, overall, at the individual programme level there is good evidence of positive impacts across HCZ's wide remit. These impacts would, of course, be worth having *even if no cumulative or area-level effects occurred*.

At the level of these wider effects, however, there is far less evidence available – largely because the data needed to explore these has yet to be systematically generated. As far as we are aware, there has been no overall evaluation of HCZ that has searched for effects of this kind. HCZ's own evaluations focus principally on the short-term impacts of programmes and on the outcomes that are targeted by those programmes. The two independent evaluations, by Whitehurst and Croft and Dobbie and Fryer, have focused on attainment outcomes, though they have also tried to explore whether the other services provided by the zone have any impact on attainment. Since other charter schools in New York City do as well as the HCZ Promise Academies, and since children who do not receive additional services seem to attain as highly as those who do, they conclude that

there are no cumulative effects of note from these services, and that it is the schools alone that make the difference – challenging HCZ's underpinning theory of action.

The scope for debating these findings is, however, endless – as demonstrated in the public debate between Geoffrey Canada and Whitehurst and Croft.[14] For instance, children who do not receive services from HCZ may well access them from other sources, and some high-performing charter schools outside the zone do in fact provide a wide range of additional services to their students.[15] It is also likely that any cumulative effects will be evident only at the level of individual children where a service targets a particular non-educational issue that prevents the child from doing well. Likewise, area effects may well materialise only in the long term as local cultures are changed, and will therefore be difficult to identify.

The real problem here is the lack of a proper evaluation that could identify these more complex processes and nuanced effects. This should certainly lead us to be cautious about adopting HCZ's practices in England without further thought. Whatever else HCZ is, it is not a proven 'package' that can be transported to English towns and cities in the assumption that it is certain to be effective. Instead, what we should focus on is identifying the principles which underpin HCZ and asking ourselves whether these offer a plausible theory of action for how children's outcomes might be improved in disadvantaged areas in England. It is to this task that we now turn.

IS HCZ'S THEORY OF ACTION PLAUSIBLE?

In the absence of clear evidence on cumulative and area-level effects, it is necessary to move to the next level of proof. This involves assessing the *likelihood* that an HCZ-like approach will have effects that go beyond the impacts of individual programmes. Doing this involves setting the zone's theory of action – the way it expects to improve outcomes – against what we know from other research about how disadvantage 'works' and what kinds of interventions make a difference.[16]

What is HCZ's theory of action? As we have seen, HCZ is based on the assumption that efforts to tackle those factors that disadvantage children will create contexts in the school, the family and the area which support children to do well. By making these efforts multi-stranded and sustaining them over

time, it seeks to ensure that cumulative effects are generated and that the danger of improvements in one domain being undermined by remaining problems in others is avoided. Ultimately, this should create a 'tipping point' in which environments that are 'toxic' to children's development become supportive.

What do we know about how disadvantage works? We have seen the following:

- Multiple forms of disadvantage – poor health, unemployment and so on – tend to be concentrated in particular areas and sustained over time.
- *Individuals and families* living in disadvantaged areas tend to face multiple problems linked to disadvantage.
- These problems are interconnected, and so one can compound another – for instance, a problem in health can compound a problem in education.
- There can be a lot of variation within disadvantaged areas. Individuals and families can experience different combinations of problems, and some individuals and families will experience more problems relating to disadvantage than others.
- Different areas offer different patterns of challenge and opportunity, and seem to encourage different kinds of values and behaviours. It seems likely that these factors can compound the other forms of disadvantage that people living in these areas experience.

What do we know about interventions to tackle disadvantage? We know the following:

- Initiatives which work in a uniform way across all areas or institutions can have positive impacts. For example, a standardised school improvement initiative can raise institutional attainment. However, there is less evidence that these universal approaches are successful in responding to the needs of individuals, and that while schools might improve overall, gaps remain between students, linked to their individual and family circumstances.
- It is possible to intervene at the individual and family levels in ways which tackle particular problems and build resilience. For instance, it is possible to reduce risky behaviour, support families through crises and raise attainment. Not all interventions are equally effective, but in general, the evidence base here is strong.
- Because of the interaction between problems, tackling one problem is likely to have positive effects on other problems affecting the same individuals and families. It is sensible to tackle problems in a co-ordinated way, precisely because

of these effects; otherwise, improvements in one domain are likely to be undermined by the effects from others. For instance, improvements in schools will be undermined by children missing school because of ill-health or failing to learn because of emotional crises.
- Organising services at an area level, in ways which can reflect the dynamics of particularly disadvantaged areas and the range of problems experienced by the children and families who live there, is important in facilitating co-ordination.
- It may be possible to change the patterns of disadvantage and opportunity in an area. It seems *likely* that such changes might also change the values and behaviours of people who live there. It is *possible* that this in turn may impact on children's outcomes, even though these effects will take time to materialise and may turn out to be small.

So is HCZ's theory of action plausible? We can say the following:

- HCZ can already demonstrate impacts at the individual and family level. Although the evidence for cumulative effects is missing or ambiguous, it is plausible to suggest that the services HCZ provides will have such effects. For instance, there is considerable evidence from elsewhere that high-quality early years provision has positive impacts on later educational (and other) outcomes. Similarly, health-focused interventions (such as HCZ's asthma initiative) minimise the amount of time children are absent from school and so are very likely to increase (individual) attainment.
- It is also plausible to suggest that HCZ will have more wide-ranging area effects – perhaps even that some kind of 'tipping point' can be reached. However, whole areas are more difficult to change than are schools and services, or even individual children and families. Although HCZ emphasises community change, this may be difficult to achieve in practice.
- Nonetheless, HCZ seems better placed to implement its theory of action effectively than approaches based on more traditional models of service delivery might be. Because HCZ works at an area level, it operates on a scale which enables it to offer, co-ordinate and sustain a much wider range of programmes and services than any individual institution or service provider could do. This, in turn, means that it is much better placed than smaller-scale initiatives to respond to the diversity of child and family needs within Harlem, to address a wide range of outcomes, and to reach more children and families in total. In principle,

the zone has the services in place to cater for: a child living in a family where there are adult mental health issues and income poverty; a child from a functionally illiterate family; and a child with chronic asthma who lives in a substandard apartment block in an unsafe part of Harlem. There are very few initiatives which would be in a position to achieve this.

The conclusions we draw from this are as follows:

- HCZ offers a plausible – though not fully proven – theory of action for improving children's outcomes in disadvantaged areas. The fact that it is doubly holistic, that it seeks to engage all children and families in its target area, and that it offers a range of support services which can meet variations in need, also suggests that it is well placed to make maximum impacts at scale.
- There are, therefore, good reasons why disadvantaged areas in England should seek to learn from the zone. Learning in this case does not mean simply importing practices and procedures wholesale. It means focusing on underlying principles, and implementing them in ways that are sensitive to different contexts. Above all, in the absence of fully proven effectiveness, it means monitoring and evaluating what happens. The aim in the first instance, therefore, should not be to look at HCZ for a ready-made solution, but to learn systematically whether and how the zone's principles can be made to work in England.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- HCZ is a geographically based initiative. Its approach is doubly holistic, providing cradle-to-career support in the context of family and community.
- HCZ secures its own funds, employs its own staff and runs its own schools, and is held accountable by its trustees. Schools are an integral part of HCZ, but do not drive it.
- There is a lack of robust evidence about HCZ's full range of potential impacts. Individual family- and community-oriented activities appear to have positive impacts for participants. HCZ's Promise Academy charter schools appear to improve students' attainment. The impacts of HCZ's approach overall are not known.
- In principle, the wider research literature on disadvantage, and on the effectiveness of interventions to tackle disadvantage, suggests that HCZ's theory of action is highly plausible at individual and family levels. Moreover, its area-level operation should enable it to reach large numbers and provide a wide range of support services which can address varied needs. There are, therefore, good reasons for acting on HCZ's underpinning principles. However, in the absence of final proof of effectiveness, this needs to be done cautiously and evaluated properly.

4 DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S ZONES FOR ENGLAND

We have argued that there are good reasons for acting on the principles underpinning HCZ. Its area focus and doubly holistic nature, coupled with its ability to mobilise resources, work outside existing public service structures and respond to diverse needs at child and family levels, appear highly attractive in the current English context. However, this context is also markedly different from that of the USA – not least in the dynamics of race and class, the nature of public services, and physical and social geography. This means that while HCZ can help us to explore what is possible in an English context, it cannot simply be imported.

A distinctly English version of children's zones is needed which can:

- connect to the wealth of resources and expertise already invested in work with children and families in England, through schools, public services and the third sector
- capitalise on the opportunities which changing relationships – between the public and private sectors, local and central government, and LAs and schools – are starting to present.

In this section of the report, we explore some of the central features of the current English context, and linked to this, how English children's zones will need to differ fundamentally from HCZ in practice.

THE ENGLISH CONTEXT

Since the late 1990s, England has seen much activity to promote holistic, strategic and area-based responses to children's needs. But it has not, as yet, had anything which quite matches up to the ambitions of HCZ. There have been significant efforts to integrate children's (and to some extent community) services around a set of strategic aims, embodied most clearly in the 'five outcomes' of *Every child matters*. There have been many 'zone-like' initiatives too. Obvious examples include Sure Start children's

centres,[17] extended services in and around schools,[18] and multiple initiatives undertaken by children's trusts and other local organisations – the best-known of which is probably the work in Nottingham which formed the basis for the Allen report.[19] However, for the most part, such activities have been limited in comparison with the scope of HCZ. They have tended to:

- focus on one part of childhood rather than adopting a 'cradle-to-career' perspective
- be somewhat disconnected from schools, or (in other cases) driven too much by school priorities
- target specific groups – for example, so-called 'troubled families',[20] concentrating on a small minority of families rather than all the children and families in a given area.

Although England has created an impressive infrastructure within which to develop holistic approaches for children and young people, those approaches have rarely emerged in a sustainable and doubly holistic form on the ground. Well documented reasons for this include the following:

- Efforts at integration tend to be undermined by the separate targets and accountability systems of the services that are intended to collaborate.
- Schools in particular operate with a high level of local autonomy. This means that they may or may not integrate their work with that of other services, and in any case tend not to integrate their work with each other, so that divides open up between schools serving the same area.
- National priorities (and therefore funding regimes) change frequently, making it difficult to sustain approaches over time.
- Although LAs offer potentially powerful co-ordinating mechanisms, they are subject to national priorities and have only limited control over the services and other resources needed in particular areas. Moreover, the administrative boundaries of LAs rarely coincide with the more fluid boundaries of areas characterised by disadvantage. Typically, there are no established governance mechanisms able to co-ordinate coherent approaches in such areas.

The situation in England is, however, also a changing one, and there have been significant changes since the 2010 general election. Efforts to establish integrated approaches through centrally imposed restructuring have given way to a reliance on local initiatives. The economic crisis has squeezed funding overall, and the funding that is available tends to have been devolved to the front line, as in the case of the Pupil Premium. At the same time, the expansion of academies and free schools has further increased levels of school autonomy *vis-à-vis* LAs, while private and third-sector providers are being encouraged to enter the field not only in education but right across children's services. For better or for worse, therefore, *there is no prospect for the foreseeable future of holistic approaches to improving children's outcomes in disadvantaged areas being developed through central direction. If such approaches do emerge, it will be through local initiatives – and if they are to address children's needs in a doubly holistic sense, they will need to find ways to secure the commitment of highly autonomous schools.*

In this context, HCZ might valuably point to possibilities which have not yet been fully realised in England. There is undoubtedly something to be learned from HCZ's focus on all the children and families in a local area (rather than on particular institutions or individuals), the way in which it has developed structures to match its target area (rather than using administrative structures to define an area), and its doubly holistic (rather than single-issue, policy-per-problem) approach. An English children's zone which can operationalise these principles at a local level, and in ways which are responsive to the dynamics of particular areas and the needs of children and families in those areas, has potentially much to offer.

However, where HCZ and English children's zones must differ quite fundamentally is in their working arrangements and the roles they take on. English children's zones will need greater independence from national and local government than previous initiatives have enjoyed in order to respond to local circumstances. However, they cannot simply 'cut loose' to the extent that HCZ has done. The central reasons for this – and the distinctions this creates between English children's zones and HCZ – are outlined below:

- **The role of children's zones**. England has a system of universal and progressive service provision. There is also – if somewhat patchy in practice – a strong tradition of schools providing extended services, often working with public and third-sector organisations. The role of an

English children's zone must therefore lie in the distinctive and additional contribution it can make within a much wider network of service provision. This is different from HCZ, which has been effectively set up as a stand-alone provider of services.

- **Governance**. HCZ is an independent charitable body which both sets the zone's strategy and manages its activities at an operational level. Moreover, HCZ is held to account by its trustees in line with its own strategic vision. This places it in a position of control. Indeed, HCZ accounts for its sometimes high level of staff turnover as part of the process of identifying personnel who share, and are able to deliver on, the zone's vision. An English children's zone is extremely unlikely ever to be in this position. In working with autonomous schools, public services and third-sector and private providers, an English children's zone is much more likely to have a connective role. This also means that it will be more vulnerable in terms of its ability to generate and sustain effective partnership working.

- **Area focus**. HCZ focuses on a specific and tightly defined residential area, and as it has expanded its activities over the years, it has incorporated more 'blocks' into the zone. It may not be practical or desirable to define the focus of English children's zones in this precise manner. For instance, the services an English zone might work with are likely to be configured and funded according to wider administrative arrangements and to work across a bigger area than the zone itself covers. Taking an area of high disadvantage as the focal point for its activities, an English children's zone is more likely to be concerned with how best to 'bend' existing resources and fill gaps in current service provision.

- **Funding**. English children's zones will need to command some level of resource to support their activities, but how they can capitalise on and add value to existing provision will also be of central concern. They are likely therefore to employ a mixed model of funding which includes (in-kind) contributions from partners as one element. HCZ, by contrast, depends on capturing large amounts of public and philanthropic funding, and then targeting it at a relatively small geographical area. There are doubts about how sustainable the model is in the US context, let alone in England, where available public funds tend to be channelled through existing services, and where philanthropic sponsorship on a grand scale is less developed than in the USA.

- **Public (democratic) accountability**. In England, schools, services and policy interventions are all subject to public (government) scrutiny, which includes the rigorous evaluation of outcomes. However imperfect the processes for this may be, there is a commitment to democratic accountability and to demonstrating that actions are in the public interest and present value for money. HCZ is simply not answerable in this way. Since it is financed through charitable donations, it has a considerable degree of latitude when it comes to accounting for its activities – but it is also under continual pressure to market itself to prospective donors.

We would be reluctant to follow HCZ in an English context in ways which might weaken the principle of democratic accountability. English children's zones will need some form of zone-level accountability which reflects their aims and ways of working. But unlike HCZ, there will also have to be clearly established layers of accountability beyond the zone. For instance, if English children's zones draw on LA services, LAs will need to be able to scrutinise zones' activities in deciding how to allocate public resources. This also means, again in contrast to HCZ, that appropriate research and evaluation strategies, and linkages between different layers of governance, will have to be built into English children's zones from the outset. Rather than simply focusing on attainment, it will be necessary to find ways to capture the wider range of impacts a zone's activities might be expected to have.

There are some clear messages to be drawn out from this discussion:

- To date, English policy approaches have only partially recognised and been able to act on the principles underpinning HCZ. Effective ways have yet to be found to make the underlying dynamics of local areas the focal point of responses to disadvantage, and to bring partners together to develop doubly holistic strategies.
- HCZ does seem well placed to achieve this *in its particular context* – but rather than trying to import HCZ, there appears to be considerably more value in developing an English model of children's zones based on similar principles.
- Where English children's zones are likely to have a distinctive contribution to make is in their potential to focus on an area of high disadvantage, and to take a connective role in the interests of the area's children and families. In this latter

respect, English children's zones will be of a fundamentally different nature to HCZ, and must find different ways of working, not least in relation to governance and where the leadership for such activities will be located.

- English children's zones must find ways to mesh with established structures in order to facilitate partnership working and maximise the use of existing resources. But at the same time, they must have the flexibility to develop their own strategic visions and working practices, and not be hidebound by existing arrangements.

A national survey undertaken for this report shows that in some areas, initiatives are emerging at a local level which are beginning to explore how these conditions might be realised within England's shifting policy context. We believe these developments can serve as a basis for developing a working model for English children's zones – an argument we develop in the following sections.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

HCZ's approach is desirable in an English context because it offers a way of moving English initiatives:

- from focusing on a single point in childhood to creating a continuous pipeline of support
- from disconnected approaches led by individual institutions to a strategy uniting partners in the interests of an area's children
- from targeting groups out of context to exploring how to create a 'tipping point' for the whole community.

However, differences between England and the USA mean that English children's zones will need to work very differently from HCZ. English children's zones must:

- be about contributing something extra to existing service provision
- have a connective role – they cannot control partners but will need to find ways to secure their commitment to zone strategy
- be able to bend existing resources to support their area focus, as well as attract funds
- have multi-layered accountability – within the zone and beyond the zone.

5 CURRENT INNOVATIONS: FOUNDATIONS FOR AN ENGLISH CHILDREN'S ZONE

We have argued that the development of an English children's zone model would be extremely timely, building on the foundations created by past initiatives and capitalising on the opportunities for local action now emerging.

To explore this in practical terms, we undertook a national survey to identify current initiatives in England that closely share HCZ's underpinning principles (see Appendix for details). This asked all directors of children's services, and representatives from organisations including ContinYou, the Local Government Association, and the Department for Education, to nominate initiatives which, like HCZ,

- tackle issues in a local area (such as a neighbourhood, an estate or a district)
- involve collaboration among a range of public, private and/or voluntary sector partners in an area, including schools and/or other educational providers
- address educational and social issues simultaneously
- have developed a long-term, strategic approach.

We supplemented this survey by interviewing key informants in LAs, schools and elsewhere, who we knew were involved in more or less holistic initiatives. We held a workshop for respondents to our survey so that we could discuss with them the implications of their work.

In this section of the report, we provide an overview of our findings and present some vignettes of emerging 'zone-like' initiatives. From these, we draw out the beginnings of an English children's zone model.

AN OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

We deliberately set the search criteria for our survey to exclude initiatives which were only loosely aligned with HCZ's underpinning principles. This means that there is likely to be much collaborative work of *some* kind going on to improve children's outcomes in very many areas, which we have not captured.

Our survey responses and interviews uncovered an extremely patchy and diverse picture relating to 'zone-like' developments across England. Only 15 survey respondents claimed to be developing holistic HCZ-style approaches. There are undoubtedly some initiatives which did not respond, but we also received a series of null responses. Discussions with our key informants (which identified a further four initiatives) suggest that the patchy picture we uncovered is a fair reflection of the wider situation. Overwhelmingly, we were told that efforts to work holistically had been driven by government priorities and funding, that they had never become doubly holistic in the HCZ sense, and that attention shifted each time government priorities changed. The conclusions we draw from this are that:

- there is a great deal of collaborative activity aimed at improving the outcomes of children in disadvantaged areas
- very little of this activity achieves the scale and ambition of HCZ
- there are strong foundations for children's zone-style approaches in England, but the approaches themselves are not fully developed.

Even so, the positive responses we received, supplemented by our prior knowledge of the field, suggest there is much to be learned from current developments about the potential for English children's zones. In particular:

- The impetus and leadership for new ways of meeting local needs is not coming from any one player or level of the system (which, in turn, makes it extremely difficult to map current

activity nationally). Schools, children's centres, ward-based 'operational teams' within LAs, and those working at a strategic level within LAs, were all found to be taking leading roles. It appears that different stakeholders are acting to influence those aspects of the local situation in which they can intervene directly, or where they can facilitate the involvement of other organisations (often from the third sector) to respond to local needs.

- As centrally driven initiatives have ended, local professionals are beginning to apply what they have learned from these to developing new ways of working. They are extremely wary of replicating past practices – for instance, making clear distinctions between newly developing partnership arrangements and the Local Strategic Partnerships of the New Labour era.
- A desire to work more efficiently so that, as a minimum, services can be maintained, and ideally, new and/or more effective services provided, is a key driver. Relating to this is a widespread understanding that provision does not have to come exclusively from state services, and that there may be considerable benefits in working more closely with third-sector organisations.

To explore these lessons further, we have selected four examples to focus on which are working at different levels of the system:
- an LA strategy for initiating area-based school clusters
- a whole LA strategy for area-based multi-agency working
- a school and its partners, which have established a limited company to support area-based working
- an area-based trust arrangement.

These initiatives are considerably more complex, fragile and messy than we have been able to reflect here. While our accounts are inevitably simplified, it should not be forgotten that these initiatives are still in their early stages and face considerable challenges. Nonetheless, they point to ways of working which an English children's zone model might valuably build upon.

EMERGING INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

EXAMPLE 1. LOCAL AUTHORITY-INITIATED, AREA-BASED SCHOOL CLUSTERS

RATIONALE

- In recent years, a small LA has been successful in increasing attainment at age 16, but less so in narrowing the gap between more and less vulnerable groups. The LA is developing a 0–19, cross-phase, multi-disciplinary strategy to address this. This has a strategic dimension, with the LA and partners driving a whole city strategy on issues including raising aspirations, transition and transfer, communication skills, family learning, extended learning and behaviour, attendance and persistent absence. Identifying best evidence-based practice in relation to these is an important part of the strategy. It also has a strong area-based dimension, which the LA sees schools as best placed to lead.
- This area-based dimension has its origins in the national extended services initiative, when schools in the LA were organised into 'extended service clusters'. With extended services coming to an end, the LA took the decision to realign its schools into nine cross-phase area clusters, based on an analysis of where children live and where they go to school at primary and secondary phase.
- Following suit, some other services with links to schools have also reconfigured themselves at an operational level in line with the clusters. These include educational psychology, school nursing, educational welfare and children's centres. The schools and these agencies, together with the police, youth offending teams and integrated youth support services, form the core cluster members.

CLUSTER ORGANISATION

- Each cluster meets every half-term. Meetings are attended by headteachers, the leaders of the linked core services, and two link LA officers who have a lead role in developing the whole authority strategy. Each cluster has a chair and vice-chair, and to ensure cross-phase working one is from a primary school and one from a secondary. All those attending cluster meetings

continued overleaf

EXAMPLE 1 *continued*

are people who can make decisions on behalf of their service with regard to local action.

- Linking the nine clusters, there is a whole initiative steering group. Its members include the chairs of each cluster, the assistant director of children's services, and senior members of wider agencies.

- The individual clusters report to the whole initiative steering group, and the steering group reports every six months to the LA chief executive and commissioning board. The steering group also collates and disseminates each cluster's activities across the nine clusters.

CLUSTER ACTIVITIES

- The LA has allocated a small amount of money for each cluster (which they hope to be able in future years to top-slice from the Pupil Premium by agreement with schools) to do something to make educational outcomes better in the area.

- The data team from the LA generates data for each cluster on Foundation Stage–19 outcomes in their area. The clusters set their agendas by considering what issues the data presents for the area; pooling their professional knowledge in relation to this to try to explain how these outcomes arise; and then identifying and agreeing their priorities on this basis. So, for example, vulnerable groups might differ between schools in the area, but the schools and their partners will all commit to taking action in support of a particular group if the data indicate this to be most pressing *for the area*.

- To access funds, the cluster must put together a proposal for action to address their priorities. They have to complete a pro forma which sets out what the need is (supported by evidence); what their response will be; who will be involved; what the anticipated outcomes are; and what evidence will be generated about impact. This has to be approved to release funds.

- To give an example of the sorts of activities being developed to reflect high levels of poverty and related family crises in its area, one cluster has used its funds to pay the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) to train school staff in debt

crisis management. Staff are able to give parents immediate guidance and arrange appointments with appropriately qualified counsellors through the CAB data management system. Through this, the schools have also been able to actively increase the take-up of Free School Meals (FSM), which, in turn, increases their Pupil Premium funding.

IN PARTICULAR, WE HAVE CHOSEN THIS EXAMPLE TO HIGHLIGHT THE FOLLOWING POSSIBILITIES:

- *Area analysis:* The clusters have been arranged to reflect area dynamics, rather than on a primarily administrative basis. Their focus is on outcomes for the area's children, not individual institutions or services. The clusters' activities are decided in response to area-based analyses, which draw together monitoring data and local knowledge.

- *Cross-phase working:* The deliberately cross-phase nature of the clusters will be integral to any efforts to develop a 'pipeline' of support.

- *Embedding local action within wider authority structures:* The clusters are connected to a wider network of service provision. Operationally, they bring together partners from different services, while steering group and reporting arrangements link them to LA strategies.

- *Financial independence:* That there is a small amount of ring-fenced funding is an incentive for action and has allowed third-sector organisations (eg, CAB) to be commissioned to respond to issues that the partners themselves do not have the capacity or expertise to address fully.

- *Accountability:* Within the initiative's structures, the clusters have freedom to develop their own responses to local issues. Completing the pro forma enables them to set out their own vision, but also provides a clear basis for monitoring activities in line with this.

Sustaining this arrangement will rely on the goodwill of partners and the value they place on area outcomes – and especially so when schools are asked to contribute financially.

EXAMPLE 2. LOCAL AUTHORITY, MULTI-AGENCY 'FRONT-LINE TEAMS'

RATIONALE

This large LA has a recent history of area partnerships and local children's boards. While these were 'all moving in generally the same direction', services were nonetheless working as separate entities with separate policies. A desire to improve effectiveness and efficiency, shared by the LA and NHS foundation trust, led to a process of restructuring services to create a single model for 0–19 intervention that assumes all agencies will work together.

OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

The structure being developed has three levels:

1. Local 'front-line' teams
- There are ten 'front-line' teams which work at a local level, in a defined area, and bring LA services and community health services together. The 'front-line' teams currently include, for example, Sure Start family workers, youth workers, educational psychologists and primary mental health workers. The teams are intended to provide an integrated response to children's needs (for example, as identified through the Common Assessment Framework [CAF]).
- The teams have a single line-management structure. This means their professional training and accountability still resides within their service, but how they are deployed will be determined at team level. Officers have a dual role, working within their service and within a front-line, area-based team.
- Each front-line team is based in a building in their area. Some of these are new buildings and also house other services: in one case, alternative education provision; in another, a GP-sponsored and led 'young person lifestyle centre' with a gym, nurse/GP clinic and sexual advisory service.

2. Area Management Groups (AMGs)
- There are three AMGs at an intermediary level between the front-line teams and Children's and Families' Trust (CFT) Executive level. The CFT Executive brings together officers from the senior executive levels of the LA, the NHS and the police.
- The AMG members are at a senior service level – eg, assistant director.

- The AMGs have three key roles: (1) to 'remove blockages' which stop the front-line teams working effectively – for example, by (re)allocating resources (including personnel) to teams; (2) to communicate wider strategic developments to front-line teams; and (3) to feed back front-line teams' experiences at a strategic level.

3. Children's and Families' Trust (CFT) Executive
- Front-line teams' outcomes are reviewed quarterly by the CFT Executive. Other roles taken by the CFT Executive include setting the strategic direction for the LA and its partners; aligning services; commissioning; and developing single strategic agreements across all public services, including strict data flow agreements.

PLANNED FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS INCLUDE:

- *developing a single performance framework which promotes common strategic priorities and shared responsibility for outcomes.* For example, the team model has already revealed a clash in priorities between front-line police officers – whose performance is monitored partly by number of incidents logged – and other front-line services which aim to reduce police intervention in troubled families. This was fed back to the CFT Executive, and the Chief Constable became involved, which led to an agreement that the police would focus on reducing youth offending and not pursue targets contrary to other services' goals. The police service has since gained national recognition for its achievements around youth offending
- *extending CAF so that it can assess children's needs in relation to family and adult needs.* This can also support developments in relation to the troubled families agenda.

IN PARTICULAR, WE HAVE CHOSEN THIS EXAMPLE TO HIGHLIGHT THE FOLLOWING POSSIBILITIES:

- *'Nested' action:* The three-tier system creates a way of formally supporting partnership working by meshing area-based and service-based concerns. The single line-management structure for front-line teams allows greater operational control at

EXAMPLE 2 *continued*

an area level, which facilitates 'joined-up' action on the ground. The AMGs and CFT Executive support joining up at a strategic level, also allowing the professional concerns of different services to be recognised and in some cases reconciled. The three-tier system also creates 'a loop' – those working at a strategic level can be informed by local concerns, while those working locally can act on strategic concerns.

• *Holistic understanding of children's needs:* Like a number of other initiatives identified through the survey, the existing CAF framework is seen as a basis for developing an assessment tool

which understands children's needs in relation to family and community needs – and can drive the development of a holistic response.

Where this model is currently less strong is in the question of how to ensure that the multi-agency structure can link effectively with schools and other agencies, including the voluntary and community sector. The teams are intended to work 'hand in glove' with schools, and it is suggested that schools have a vested interest in supporting the teams' work. However, there is as yet no formal mechanism to support this in practice, and schools would have to choose to 'opt in'.

EXAMPLE 3. CREATING A LIMITED COMPANY AS A BASIS FOR AREA-PARTNERSHIP

RATIONALE

A sponsored academy in a highly disadvantaged inner-city area has a strong commitment to community engagement and to meeting child, family and community needs. It already provides a wide range of extended service activities, and to move beyond this school-centred remit, it has started to work with a range of other services and organisations in order to understand and address community needs more fully. In particular, it works very closely with the LA regeneration team.

PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

• As the vehicle for this, the academy has taken a lead in setting up a social enterprise as a limited company. The company has three directors, each from a different partner organisation. The wider group of partners effectively forms an executive committee and together they agree on and monitor the company's activities at a strategic level. The company's activities are undertaken by an operational working group, made up of those partners who are best placed to take action in the local community.

• The partner organisations all contribute resources in-kind by committing time to the company's activities.

• The fact that the company is an independent entity, not owned by any one service provider or organisation, is seen as important in ensuring

that area issues, rather than particular service agendas, drive its actions. It also allows the company to secure funds and commission activities in its own right when its activities extend beyond its 'in-kind capacity'.

COMPANY ACTIVITIES

• In order to develop a thorough understanding of its local area, which can inform its future activities, the new company is beginning its work with a process of research and consultation in its local community. This is exploring what's good about living in the area, what local people would like to change about the area, and what it might be possible to do.

• Eleven of the company's partner organisations are actively involved in the research: the academy, the local further education (FE) college, the police, the area's social housing provider, Sure Start, Job Centre Plus, the local church, the local tenants' association, members of a local community-led oral history project, the Primary Care Trust (PCT)'s school health adviser, and the LA adult education service. Each has committed to undertake five interviews with families in the area with whom they already have established relationships.

• A local call-centre business, with which the academy is developing an apprenticeship programme, has offered to undertake a

EXAMPLE 3 *continued*

supplementary telephone 'listening survey' free of charge. This will enable a broader picture – including families who do not currently engage with local services or community groups – to be developed.

IN PARTICULAR, WE HAVE CHOSEN THIS EXAMPLE TO HIGHLIGHT THE POSSIBILITY OF:

- *creating a formal governance structure which can bring schools, wider services, and voluntary and community organisations together in the interests of the area.* The fact that this has been achieved through forming a company which is a separate legal entity allows for action outside existing structures – but because its partners are drawn from local services and organisations, it still has links to these. This means it can draw on their expertise and resources, as well as having the potential to influence their actions.

This model is, however, still limited by who the company can 'attract to the table'. On the one hand, the involvement of the tenants' association and members of the local community-led oral history project makes the initiative distinctive in including a 'community voice' within its executive committee. But on the other hand, none of the area's primary schools have committed to taking part. This weakens its potential to develop a 'pipeline' of support and an area-based education strategy as part of its wider strategy.

EXAMPLE 4. CREATING COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS LINKING SCHOOLS, SERVICES AND A LOCAL AUTHORITY

RATIONALE

- A group of 17 schools serving a disadvantaged area in one LA have formed a 'soft' federation to enable them to offer a range of extended services. The federation is paralleled by a multi-disciplinary 'area children's team' which serves the same area, and by an area children's strategy group, responsible for deciding priorities for children's services in the area. Most of the schools in the federation are also members of a learning trust, which links them into a wide range of external resources, enables them to support each other's development, and promotes common curricular and pedagogical approaches.

PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

- The federation arose out of the clustering arrangements established by the LA for delivering extended services. However, the budgets for this work are now devolved to schools, which have decided to pool their resources and develop a common approach. This means that the federation can employ its own staff (such as teaching assistants and learning mentors) and has a powerful voice in negotiating with the LA about priorities for the area. The federation has a co-ordinator based in one of the secondary schools which has long taken a lead on extended service issues.

- The structure of service provision in the authority mirrors that of the federation. There is an overarching Children and Young People's Board which sets strategy. Beneath this sit area strategy groups which bring together representatives from a wide range of agencies working with children and families. They are responsible for setting local priorities and feeding information into the decision-making processes of the Board. The headteacher of the school which leads on extended service issues is chair of the area group for the communities served by the school, and therefore has a key role in linking the federation, area strategy and overall LA strategy. In addition, children's services are organised into multi-disciplinary area teams which match the area groups and the federation.

- Overlapping the federation is a 'learning trust' which includes 26 schools and other partners, such as colleges, universities and employers. The trust is a charitable organisation focused on teaching and learning issues and is managed jointly by its partners. It supports the work

EXAMPLE 4 *continued*

of member schools and is involved in their governance. The trust works with employers to develop the schools' curriculum offers and increase the number of apprenticeships available to young people, to encourage schools to develop international partnerships, and to fund innovative developments in schools. The headteacher who chairs the area group also chairs the trust's board.

IN PARTICULAR, WE HAVE CHOSEN THIS EXAMPLE TO HIGHLIGHT THE FOLLOWING POSSIBILITIES:

- *Bringing schools together around a holistic agenda, embracing learning, post-school destinations and the provision of services to children and families*;
- *Capitalising on existing networks:* There is a long history in this area of schools working together under the aegis of a range of government initiatives, including Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, and extended services. The current networking arrangements have grown organically rather than being imposed through structural reorganisation;
- *Capitalising on entrepreneurial leadership:* The current system has been developed through the energy of headteachers and others, most notably the headteacher of the lead trust school. Unusually in the current context, he has remained in post for some years, but has had an increasingly wide canvas on which to paint;

- *Achieving a balance between local authority co-ordination and school autonomy:* The schools in the trust are highly autonomous, but the LA has remained closely involved in developments. It has provided a framework and overarching purpose within which school autonomy has developed. Involving headteachers in governance arrangements means that there is a link between schools' actions and strategy formulation at LA level.

Despite this, the arrangements in this area are not fully integrated. There is no single body responsible for everything that happens for children and young people. The different organisations (schools, federation, area group, trust and board), though closely linked, remain separate. Moreover, much depends on the energy of particular individuals and on the willingness of schools to work collaboratively. Other parts of the LA have similar sets of integrated arrangements, but they have not flourished to the same extent. This may be because the front-line professionals there have been less proactive, but it is also likely to be because social conditions in these other areas are less pressing. Finally, the financial pressures on services and LAs have begun to erode some of the provision that has developed in this area. At this stage, it seems unlikely that the whole collaborative structure will disappear, but there are fewer resources for that structure to deploy.

FOUNDATIONS FOR ENGLISH CHILDREN'S ZONES

Many aspects of these examples will already be familiar to readers from what we know about children's centres, extended services and the host of local initiatives that have sprung up in recent years. However, they also have some distinct features – as do the other initiatives identified in our survey – which point the way towards a working model for English children's zones. In particular:

- They adopt broad perspectives on improving outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas. Whether any of them is, as yet, doubly holistic in the HCZ sense is a moot point. Nonetheless, each of them involves a range of partners, works with

children across a wide age range, and attempts to set children's needs within the context of area dynamics as a whole.
- LAs are key partners in these initiatives, but they are not always the key drivers. The role of 'front-line' professionals, notably headteachers, is crucial, and LAs may play a secondary, more facilitative role.
- A wide range of partners is involved in these initiatives. However, there is always a central role for schools, even if they are not the originators of the initiative.
- Schools often become involved in groups rather than singly. This will be essential if the initiative is to reach all children in a given area, rather than simply the students in an individual school.

- To counterbalance schools' individual autonomy, trust, clustering and federation arrangements, which may be more or less formal, are being used to develop a joint approach. These arrangements constitute, or form part of, a set of distinct governance arrangements that embrace all partners and relate specifically to the partnership's activities. In some cases, these may be nested within LA arrangements, or they may build on institutional and service arrangements. However, they all operate at an intermediate level between the LA and individual institutions.

- The areas that initiatives tend to focus on are defined less by administrative boundaries than by the existing configurations of services and institutions, matched to a greater or lesser extent to the 'natural dynamics' of the area.

- Initiatives develop strategies that build on national and LA priorities, but that are not bound by them. Rather than simply implementing external imperatives, these initiatives have lives of their own in which they try to match their actions to the needs and possibilities of the areas where they work. In some cases, there is a careful process of analysing local dynamics in order to inform future strategy.

- Initiatives rely overwhelmingly on public funding, drawing in particular on the resources bound up in existing institutions and services. However, their existence as distinct entities means that they can also leverage other resources into their area by, for instance, making links with external organisations or pursuing funding opportunities. None of the initiatives we uncovered is as yet accessing substantial levels of philanthropic funding, but many of them are well positioned to do so in future.

Our examples also raise some important issues. They are, for instance, heavily dominated by professionals. There is relatively little evidence of community representation in their decision-making, and there is, consequently, a danger that they will only have a partial understanding of the needs, wishes and potentials of the populations they aim to serve. They are also variable in their use of data, and in how clearly they present their theory of action. In some cases, professionals set out to analyse carefully the situations in which they are working, and to show how their actions will engage with these, and the outcomes anticipated. In other cases, there is perhaps a suspicion that professionals believe they already know what is needed. Finally, they are all in their own ways fragile. They represent survivors from the flurry of activity over the past decade. Their great strength is that they have begun to develop their own distinctive approaches despite changing governments and government priorities. Their great weakness is that they remain heavily dependent on public resources of one kind or another, and might easily be torn apart if the pressures on their partners were to increase. Despite these issues, we believe these examples show that there is real potential for an English version of HCZ to emerge. In the next section we explore what 'English children's zones' might look like.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

In some areas, local policy-makers and practitioners are already exploring the possibilities of developing zone-like approaches which current shifts in policy are creating.

The initiatives they are developing point to some basic features of an English children's zone model:

- Zones must focus on an area and understand children's needs in an area context.
- Zones' target areas are likely to be defined through a combination of local dynamics and the ways in which existing services are configured.
- Zones' strategies should be informed by analysing data about the area and its dynamics, and include community voices.
- Partnership working is crucial and the area's schools must be active partners. LAs can facilitate partnership arrangements.

6 A MODEL FOR ENGLISH CHILDREN'S ZONES

Having argued that there are benefits in a zone approach and presented examples of initiatives which are moving in this way, in this section of the report we present a broad model for English children's zones. We believe this model can support the development of customised responses to a wide range of poor outcomes in highly disadvantaged areas.

English children's zones should focus on the most disadvantaged areas, where dealing with issues one by one, or working with children individually or out of context, will not be enough to improve outcomes. Children's zones will not, therefore, be needed everywhere (though national and local policies to tackle disadvantage, of course, *will* be needed even where children's zones exist). In focusing on particularly disadvantaged areas, the role of zones is to bring partners together, harnessing resources and developing locally tailored strategies which can go over and above existing provision.

The aim of a zone, like that of HCZ, should be to create a 'pipeline' of support to enable all children to do well educationally and across a wide range of outcomes. This means working towards high-quality early years provision, primary and secondary schools, and post-school provision, all integrated in terms of aims and practices. A zone would link this educational provision with equally high-quality and coherent health, social and leisure provision for children and their families. And it would also mean working to ensure that the area as a whole is supportive in terms of material resources and infrastructure, community cultures, civic capacity, and opportunities.

If a children's zone is to act to improve outcomes for all the children in a particular area, it must:
- understand educational outcomes – and children's outcomes more broadly – as the product of a wide range of social processes operating over time
- think in terms of a 'cradle-to-career' programme involving schools, families and communities – rather than a school improvement programme alone

- find ways to bring schools together in the interests of all the children and families in the area, bring services together on the same basis, and link the two so they can develop holistic strategies
- begin with an analysis of the local situation and the needs of children and families within this, and get partners to develop a shared understanding of this situation
- develop a robust, long-term strategy for tackling disadvantage, and identify and/or develop effective actions to implement this strategy
- monitor outcomes, and subject the zone's work to public scrutiny
- sustain its activities over time.

English children's zones will need to define their target areas in ways that make sense locally. In some instances this might be an electoral ward, or a distinct area of housing, or a reflection of broad patterns of where children live and where they go to school. In any case, English children's zones will need to operate at an intermediary level, between schools and services, so that they are broad enough to bring local institutions together and attract a wide range of partners, but still small enough to allow for in-depth understandings of local configurations of disadvantage and locally tailored actions to be developed.

The impetus for developing zones can, as we have seen, come from many different sources – from single schools to teams of senior LA officers. But wherever the drive comes from locally, we believe that schools must have a central (if not necessarily leading) role in the development of children's zones. We say this because across the public services, schools are where children and their families are most likely to be known and in disadvantaged areas especially, are where children and their families will often seek help. Schools are also often the conduit for other services to work with children and families, as well as typically providing access to a wide range of 'extended' activities. Unless schools are an active part of a children's zone, the zone will always be limited in its ability to influence core outcomes for children.

To be central to a children's zone, schools must be locked into a holistic area strategy. In a national context where schools have become increasingly autonomous and free from local arrangements, this presents a fundamental challenge. We suggest that giving careful thought to a zone's governance arrangements will be central to meeting this challenge.

In general terms, if it is to improve outcomes for all children in its target area, a children's zone must bring together all the local partners with a central role to play in supporting children's development, and it must enable the local partners to work collectively for the good of the area. To do this, a children's zone must have some form of overarching area-governance structure that has a clear relationship to its target area and can set the strategy for the zone, and within which partners agree to work to develop doubly holistic approaches. And this structure has to have some sort of 'teeth' to ensure partners' continued buy-in. Without this, any effort to establish a holistic and integrated pipeline of services will be extremely fragile, as any partner could 'walk away' at any point.

If they are to be integral to children's zones, the schools in a zone can no longer work on a competitive and individual basis. There are areas where the dynamics of local school systems are changing, and children's zones could capitalise on this. Government is, for instance, supporting the development of local school federations, where schools work together for the benefit of all pupils and their school communities. In the case of a hard federation, there is an underpinning statutory agreement committing federated schools to have a single governing body, integrated service provision, integrated management and joint budgetary decision-making. Another possibility, and by no means incompatible with local school federations, is for a group of schools in an area to set up a charitable foundation or trust to support their work. This can enable the schools to harness a wide range of resources and expertise at an area level, which can support them in developing collaborative approaches. Schools and their partners have also, as we have seen, set up limited companies and not-for-profit organisations to achieve this. All of this will require ways to persuade academies and free schools, and their sponsors, to participate.

In all these instances there is the basis of an area-governance structure which commits schools to working together for the benefit of all children in the area, and which in the case of trusts, limited companies and other similar arrangements can secure the commitment of wider partners – including businesses – to supporting them. This could be one foundation from which to develop a full children's zone. A full children's zone would attract the additional partners needed to explicitly take such collaborative arrangements beyond a concern with raising standards in the area, to meeting all children's needs on a holistic basis.

An advantage of building children's zones in this way is that it provides a mechanism for locking schools into area arrangements, and other services and third-sector organisations could then link into this structure – be it a trust, a company or some other arrangement of this nature. The trust (or similar) – as an area institution – then becomes the vehicle for driving the development of a children's zone, both strategically and operationally. An alternative approach, that of bringing services together at an area level through LA structures – as with ward co-ordination, or multi-agency district teams – and then connecting them with schools, may work well in some areas – for instance, where local schools already have good relationships dating back to Education Action Zones or Excellence in Cities. However, this gives much less guarantee of schools' (continuing) involvement, and there is very little an LA could do to ensure this. For these reasons, we suggest that locating the development of a children's zone *outside* existing LA structures, in some form of collaborative organisation with clear governance arrangements, and which has schools as core members, may be the most feasible approach. But of course, this raises questions as to where the leadership for such developments will be located – and the examples we presented in Section 5 show the current situation to be highly varied.

There may be other benefits in locating a children's zone within an area-level trust or similar organisation. Rather than trying to innovate within the constraints of existing LA structures, a trust or similar arrangement may allow greater freedoms which are conducive to partnership working. For instance, it may be that a trust is able to develop its own accountability arrangements to some extent. Partners could set out their commitments to one another and to the trust, and the trust could set out its commitments to any sponsoring organisations. Indeed, it may be that the LA is a trust sponsor – effectively commissioning a trust to take on the role of developing and operating a children's zone.

A zone will need to determine which partners have to be directly involved in its activities and which are peripheral to these. In addition to schools, those directly involved in a zone can be expected to be concerned with developing seamless 0–19 service provision, understanding how children's needs relate to their parents' and carers' needs and trying to address these together, and building the resilience and capacities of *all* children and families in the area – not just concentrating on those meeting service thresholds. They will primarily be organisations which already have a high level of resource for working with children and families.

Issues which are more peripheral to a zone, but to which it should nonetheless have some link, are likely to include the development of local infrastructures. Zones will need to be connected to such wider planning and development processes – they will have, for instance, a valuable role in communicating local intelligence and interests and creating a 'feedback loop' which can connect local and strategic concerns. However, this interlinking role is different from a zone's core business, which is about directly shaping services to children and families and addressing their needs.

As well as bringing partners together, a zone must be able to get beyond small-scale piecemeal activity and to develop a 'cradle-to-career' strategy involving schools, families and communities. To do this, it will need to command a high level of resource which it can use flexibly. A mixed model of resourcing appears the most viable means of achieving this. Some resources will be in-kind from partner organisations. But zones will also need some capital of their own to support their actions. If set up as an independent trust (or similar), a zone may, for instance, be able to raise funds privately, take part in competitive bidding processes, attract sponsorship and charitable donations, and benefit from a level of public funding. This could occur in its own right or through contributions from partners (for instance as partner schools access Pupil Premium funding, and LAs access funds through the troubled families initiative and community budgets), or maybe even through being commissioned by LAs to carry out particular tasks under a payment-by-results system. This will create a complex web of resourcing, which will inevitably create challenges and take skill to manage. Nonetheless, it does suggest a route through which zones could secure a degree of financial autonomy.

Clarity of purpose – and having a theory of action and way of working which matches this – will be particularly important. It may be that to respond to some of the challenges in its target area, a zone's partners do not change the focus of their work, but co-ordinate their activities to avoid duplication, eliminate gaps and maximise resources – seeking to improve service quality, create seamless provision and ensure ease of access. In other instances, it may be that the zone's partners must seek to understand how particular problems have arisen locally, and what kinds of interventions will reduce these in the long term. This might involve enhancing community capacity for self-help, or building the assets of the community. Elements of both approaches may be necessary at particular times, but it is reasonable to suppose that an approach based on an in-depth analysis of how poor outcomes arise in particular areas, and a robust theory of how these dynamics can be altered, is likely to produce better results in the long term. In either case, how a zone's outcomes are to be monitored and judged, and what zones might reasonably be expected to achieve, can only be determined if it is clear in advance what they are trying to do, why, and how.

It follows that well-developed systems for monitoring, evaluating and learning from the implementation of the zone will also be important. Given the gaps in current knowledge, zones will need robust systems for tracing the impacts of their work and identifying the outcomes that are ultimately produced. This is unlikely to be achievable simply by examining headline performance figures or commissioning small-scale external evaluations. Zones will need both quantitative and qualitative evidence to tell them what is happening as a result of their actions, and this will need to be linked to the impacts that their theory of action leads them to expect. Above all, there will need to be formal mechanisms for feeding this evidence back into decision-making processes.

In line with all of this, it will be important for children's zones to have working practices in place which commit partners to:
- generating a shared analysis of local dynamics and the needs of children and families in context
- developing strategic plans and priorities for action which clearly link to this analysis and inform actions at the zone's operational level
- monitoring, evaluating and learning from the implementation of those plans.

As part of this process, a zone will have to determine which partners are best placed to act on particular concerns – collectively or individually – and how its activities will be monitored. Zones should be required to create an audit trail linking their evidence base, strategic plans, actions and anticipated impacts – and this should inform the processes through which zones are held to account.

Even when a charitable trust or similar organisation is used to drive the development of a children's zone, there will still need to be a strong relationship between this and the LA. A zone will need a *sufficient* degree of autonomy, rather than total autonomy, from LA structures. The nature of the zone–LA relationship will need to be threefold:

- **As a broker of services**: Many of the services the zone will need to draw on are LA services, managed centrally rather than at zone level. Information about needs at zone level will also need to feed into LA commissioning structures and strategic bodies.
- **As a democratic body representing citizens' interests**: A children's zone should be open to public scrutiny. It should be able to demonstrate how it is accessing and acting on local knowledge, and that it is acting in the interests of the area and all its children.
- **As the link to wider regeneration strategies**: LAs are actively engaged in wider area strategies – for instance, the development of housing, transport links, regional economic opportunities – which impact on the areas where children and families live. Local intelligence from a zone level could usefully inform these wider strategies, and the zone can also communicate and respond to wider developments at a local level.

The great danger for English children's zones is that they simply replicate the practices of some area-based initiatives of the past. In particular, they could take the form of unstable, short-term partnerships, where priorities are identified on the basis of the targets of individual partners, informed only by a superficial analysis of performance data. To counter this, the development of zones will need to be based on a structured process which includes all the elements set out above. A partial version of such a process is available for the Promise Neighborhoods initiative in the USA,[21] but this needs to be developed so that it is appropriate for the English context. An example of a process designed to support local policy-makers and practitioners working in England can be found in the report *Taking Action Locally*.[22]

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Children's zones are only needed in the most disadvantaged areas.
- Schools must have a central role in children's zones. This means they must be locked into an area strategy.
- Schools coming together to form area-level trusts, or social enterprises, or not-for-profit companies, or similar, could be the mechanism for this. Wider partners can then join this organisation, and it is the organisation – not schools – that drives the zone.
- A zone will need to be clear about its mission, in order to determine who its partners should be and how its outcomes should be monitored.
- Zones will need to command a high level of resource and be able to use this flexibly. Although complex, a mixed model of resourcing appears most viable to achieve this.
- Local authorities can support zones by acting to broker services, to hold zones to account, and to link zones to wider strategic concerns.
- Clear, structured working processes will need to be established to ensure that zones do not simply replicate the practices associated with previous initiatives.

7 KEY ARGUMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has argued the following:

- Despite the best efforts of successive governments, many areas in England are marked by high levels of disadvantage. In these areas, outcomes for children and young people – most notably, though not exclusively, educational attainments – are poor.

- If something is to be done about this situation, the factors which create disadvantages for children and young people need to be tackled. Policies aimed at creating a more equal society and at supporting individuals and families wherever they live are important. However, they need to be supplemented in the most disadvantaged areas by initiatives at a very local area level.

- Although England has a long history of area initiatives, none of these initiatives have been sufficiently wide-ranging and sustained to make a significant difference. We therefore need to look elsewhere for ideas.

- The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) is highly promising in this respect. It is doubly holistic in that it supports children from cradle to career (with a strategically planned pipeline of services) and it supports the whole child by addressing a wide range of factors which may prevent their doing well. There is good evidence for HCZ's effectiveness in impacting on outcomes for individual children and families, and good reason to believe that it will have cumulative and possibly area-level effects – though much still needs to be learned about how far and in what ways it 'works'.

- There is scope for the development of 'English children's zones' which would build on the principles underpinning HCZ but be different in organisation, funding and governance. There are many existing developments which could be built on for this purpose.

There is clearly a willingness at national level to tackle the link between disadvantage and poor outcomes for children and young people. The continued drive for school improvement and the targeted resourcing available through the Pupil Premium are important. However, *on their own* they will be inadequate because they do not tackle the underlying disadvantages from which poor outcomes emerge. To maximise the impact of in-school improvement policies we must also look beyond the targeted interventions of individual services. In particular, the key role of schools means that we must look both for improvements within the classroom and for strategies which reach beyond the school gates.

England has a good foundation from which powerful children's zones could be developed. Ongoing work on children's centres, extended services, troubled families and community budgets, for instance, has considerable potential. Likewise, schools are increasingly working in a range of partnerships with other schools and agencies. None of these developments as yet adds up to a holistic approach to improving children's outcomes at area level. In many cases, however, it is not difficult to see that a small amount of further development could bring significant benefits.

In this context, and given the government's emphasis on local solutions, there is now a unique opportunity for the emergence of innovative partnerships that tackle educational disadvantage. These would bring schools and other child-focused institutions and service providers together and supplement in-school approaches with a more holistic set of interventions aimed at creating supportive contexts in which children can learn and develop. Furthermore, at a time when current policies may be creating concerns in some contexts about the possible fragmentation of services for children, the development of children's zones offers the possibility of addressing these.

We recommend:

- *English children's zones should be developed in disadvantaged areas.* They should connect education providers (children's centres, primary schools, secondary schools, FE colleges), so that we see a cradle-to-career approach for all local children. They should also forge strong partnerships between educational institutions and wider public and third-sector services (such as housing, health, parent support), because children do best when they are getting the right support in every aspect of their lives.

- *Children's zones should plan the cradle-to-career pipeline of support that every child needs* in order to realise their potential (and this will provide a testbed for seeing how proven early intervention programmes or classroom approaches complement one another).

- *The development of English children's zones should be locally driven* so that they match local circumstances. Each zone should find its own way rather than following a central blueprint.

- *Zones should develop governance and leadership structures which ensure a degree of autonomy to enable them to respond to local circumstances.* In the first instance, leadership can come from anywhere within a wide range of local individuals or organisations. However, groups of schools and headteachers are particularly well placed to contribute to this.

- *Government should facilitate the development of a small number of pilot zones.* There are already a number of areas in England that are a few steps away from becoming fully-fledged children's zones. With a little support and encouragement, they could act as pilots for this approach. This does not require large amounts of funding or a major new initiative. It can be achieved through modest amounts of seedcorn funding and the development of what is already in place locally.

- *Pilot zones should be offered access to technical support, the opportunity to network with each other, and high-quality evaluation.* The task of these zones will be to test the feasibility of a doubly holistic approach in the English context and to disseminate their findings to other interested areas. Rigorous evaluation and shared learning will therefore be essential.

- *Pilot zones should be encouraged to develop sustainable resourcing models.* These should draw on the funding and resources already available to public services, targeted funding streams (such as Pupil Premium), grants and philanthropic donations. The Education Endowment Foundation might be approached to support the costs of evaluation.

APPENDIX – METHODS

A national survey was undertaken to identify innovative developments emerging in England which might provide the foundations of a children's zone model. Initially, all local authority directors of children's services (DCSs) were contacted by email and asked to nominate initiatives which, in line with HCZ's underpinning principles,

- tackle issues in a local area (such as a neighbourhood, an estate or a district)
- involve collaboration among a range of public, private and/or voluntary sector partners in an area, including schools and/or other educational providers
- address educational and social issues simultaneously
- have developed a long-term, strategic approach.

DCSs were asked to provide the name and, if possible, contact details for the initiative, which the research team could then follow up. They were also invited to forward the initial survey email to colleagues if they felt it more appropriate, and to return null responses if they were unaware of any such activity in their authority. Initial emails were sent in November 2011, and a reminder was sent in January 2012. Nineteen responses were received in total, of which four were null responses. Where possible, the research team then accessed existing documentation for the nominated initiatives. This took a variety of forms. For instance, some initiatives had well-developed websites, while others had produced strategy documents setting out their aims. The research team then approached a small sample of initiatives, reflecting the variety found in the survey, to provide more detail about their approach through a telephone interview with key personnel. Of those approached, six took part in this.

To extend the survey, the research team contacted key personnel in national organisations – including the Local Government Association, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, ContinYou, and senior civil servants who work closely with schools, LAs and their partners. This identified a further four initiatives – all with the caveat that they were not as well developed as HCZ and had only some of its elements.

The research team also chose to 'drill down' within a local authority to try to get a clearer picture of the variety of sub-local authority initiatives which might be emerging, but would not necessarily be known at DCS level. The team focused on Greater Manchester, as being based in Manchester they have a wide variety of contacts at various levels of the system. In particular, they interviewed the former leader of the Greater Manchester Challenge, who has close connections to Greater Manchester's 12 constituent local authorities and to schools across the region, about activities in the region which appear similar to HCZ. Again, while this identified a variety of activities – from schools with innovative parental engagement strategies to the benefits of federated arrangements with regard to improving educational outcomes in disadvantaged areas – only partial elements of an HCZ model were found.

To supplement their findings, the research team have been able to draw on their wider knowledge of initiatives involving schools. For example, their recent research includes the national evaluation of extended services for the Department for Education, and the evaluation of schools' community engagement activities for the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Although these initiatives have not sought explicitly to draw on HCZ, they share some of its underpinning principles and features.

As part of the research and analysis process, a half-day workshop was also held to present emerging findings and to test and refine the argument presented in this report. The workshop had 16 delegates, including teachers, local authority officers, researchers, and officers from Save the Children UK.

The technical appendix for the analysis presented in Section 2 can be accessed at: http://www.education.manchester.ac.uk/research/centres/cee/publications/

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. INTRODUCTION

[1] Promise Neighborhoods is a federal programme in the USA aimed at encouraging disadvantaged areas to improve outcomes for children and young people by strengthening school, family and community support. As of 2011, 37 Promise Neighborhoods had been awarded planning grants. The programme website is at: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html; there is a Promise Neighborhoods Institute site at: www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org

2. WHY ARE ZONES NEEDED?

[2] See, for example, R Cassen and G Kingdon, *Tackling Low Educational Achievement*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007

[3] See, for example, R Webber and T Butler, 'Classifying pupils by where they live: How well does this predict variations in their GCSE results? *Urban Studies*, 44(7), 2007, pp 1229–54

[4] The technical appendix can be accessed at http://www.education.manchester.ac.uk/research/centres/cee/publications/

[5] See http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1871208.pdf

3. LEARNING FROM THE HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE

[6] For information on all aspects of the Harlem Children's Zone see http://www.hcz.org/home

[7] *Time* magazine, *The 2011 TIME 100*, 2011 http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2066367_2066369_2066100,00.html

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[9] G Canada, *The Harlem Children's Zone response to the Brookings Institute's report: 'The Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education'*, 2010 http://www.hcz.org/images/stories/pdfs/Brookings%20Institute%20study%20response.pdf

[10] See P Tough, 'The Harlem Project', *The New York Times Magazine*, 20 July 2004, and P Tough, *Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada's quest to change Harlem and America*, Mariner Books, 2009

[11] HCZ, Harlem Children's Zone Evaluation Highlights, HCZ, 2011 www.hcz.org/images/stories/Evaluation_Highlights_FY_11.pdf

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[14] M Croft and G Whitehurst, *The Harlem Children's Zone Revisited*, Blog post 28 July 2010 http://www.brookings.edu/up-front/posts/2010/07/28-hcz-whitehurst

[15] S Otterman, 'Lauded Harlem schools have their own problems', *New York Times*, 13 October 2010

[16] There are very substantial evidence bases in this field. In previous work, we have tried to summarise the 'state of the art', at least in relation to educational outcomes – see C Raffo, A Dyson, H Gunter, D Hall, L Jones and A Kalambouka, *Education and Poverty: A critical review of theory, policy and practice*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007; C Raffo, A Dyson, H Gunter, D Hall, L Jones and A Kalambouka (eds), *Education and poverty in affluent countries*. Routledge, 2010; and K Kerr and M West (eds), *Insight 2: Social inequality: Can schools narrow the gap?* British Educational Research Association, 2010

4. DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S ZONES IN ENGLAND

[17] See, for instance, J Belsky, J Barnes and E Melhuish (eds), *The national evaluation of Sure Start: Does area-based early intervention work?* Policy Press, 2007

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[19] G Allen, *Early Intervention: The next steps. An independent Report to Her Majesty's Government*, Cabinet Office, 2011

[20] See http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/troubledfamilies/

6. A MODEL FOR ENGLISH CHILDREN'S ZONES

[21] See http://www.bridgespan.org/planning-a-promise-neighborhood-guide.aspx?resource=Articles

[22] See http://www.education.manchester.ac.uk/research/centres/cee/publications/

DEVELOPING **CHILDREN'S ZONES** FOR ENGLAND

Children who live in the most disadvantaged areas of England are much more likely to do badly at school and in other aspects of their lives than their wealthier peers. This report argues that English children's zones, loosely-based on the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in New York, offer a way of improving the lives and future prospects of these children.

English children's zones should not simply imitate HCZ. They should seek to embody HCZ's principles, but in ways which match the very different conditions in this country, and which can be shown to work in particular areas. These zones should support children over time and across all the contexts in which they learn and develop.

Children's zones sit well with the changing nature of policy in this country. They are local developments at a time when the emphasis is shifting from national to local initiatives. They offer a way of bringing together local service providers in a coherent way at a time when provider autonomy is highly valued and they offer a potentially powerful way of improving children's lives without requiring extra resources.

The continued drive for school improvement and the targeted resourcing available through the Pupil Premium are important. However to maximise the impact of these policies we must also look for strategies that reach beyond the school gates.

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