IOE Policy Briefings

2020/21- 2023/24

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Private schools and British society

How far will the proposed VAT levy on private school fees go towards greater social integration on the road to a more meritocratic Britain?

29 November 2023

Britain's private schools have often been in the news in the last five years. Concerns are frequently expressed that state school spending has declined, and that private schools remain socially exclusive, with their alumni occupying too high a proportion of positions of influence in Britain's public life.

Most recently, the opposition Labour Party has said that, if elected, it will not remove the charitable status that most private schools enjoy but instead it has pledged to levy VAT on school fees.

In the run-up to a general election in 2024 and the possible implementation of these proposals or something similar by a new UK government, an informed and rational debate is needed. Programmes of research and policy analysis at IOE and at the think tank Private Education Policy Forum have been unravelling the pros and cons.

So what does the research show?

Key findings

The proportion of private school pupils in England's schools has remained between 6% and 7% for decades, but they take up a greater share of the nation's educational resources. While private schools are diverse, on the whole they are very much better endowed in both income and assets than the average state school. The extent of this is yet to be precisely measured but it is estimated that, taking into account fees, property and donations, private schools have a per-pupil resourcing level between

two and three times that of state schools[2]. Enrolment at private schools remains highly skewed towards the rich (see Figure 1), and so, with exceptions, children from affluent households are often segregated by social class from those who cannot afford the high fees[1,7].

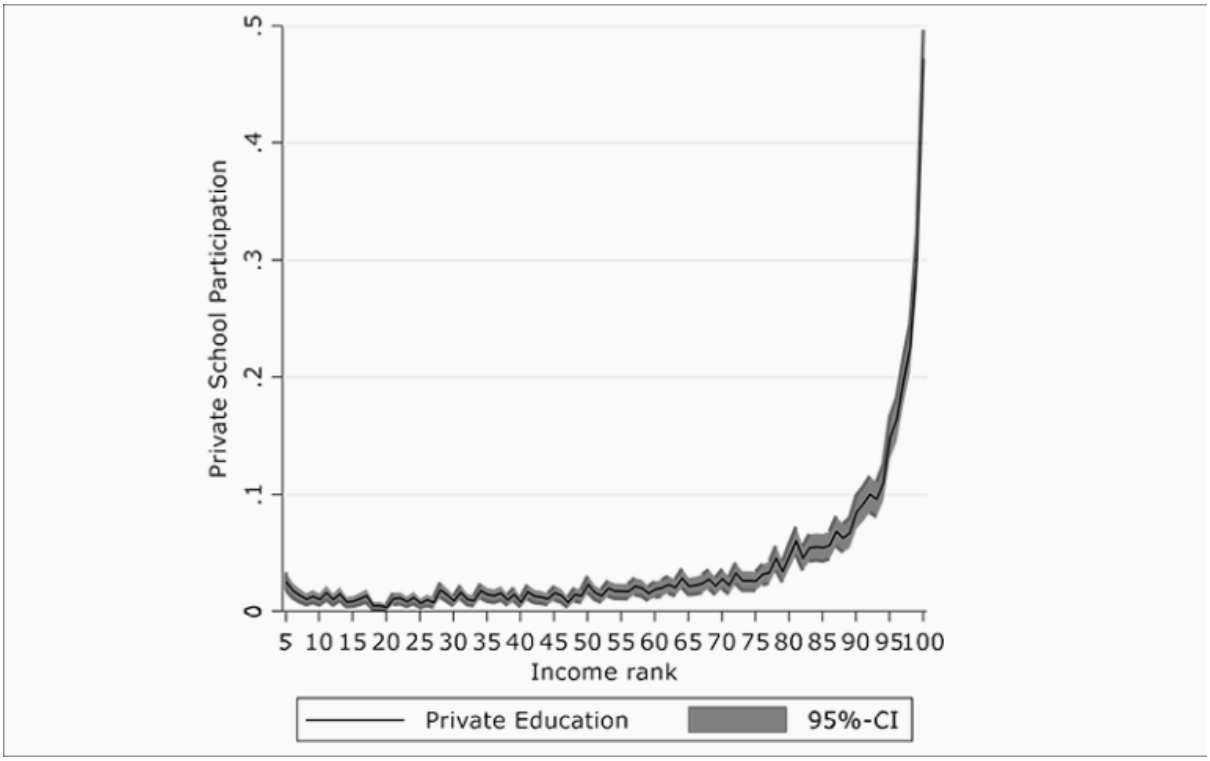

Figure 1: How private school participation varies over the income spectrum

Private schooling delivers, on average, moderately better performance in tests and comparable exams, and thus has helped private school pupils gain access to higher-status universities[6,8,10,11]. That university education, combined sometimes with access to helpful networks, guides privately-educated people into better paying jobs and higher incomes later in life[3,4,5,11]. Private school alumni also gain a disproportionate share, relative to their small numbers, of highly influential jobs in British public life and in business[5].

To move towards a more meritocratic way to allocate places in British society, any successful reform would need to reduce the resource gap between private and state schools, and to reduce the segregation of pupils according to their social class and parental income. It is unlikely that levying VAT on private school fees would achieve this.

In fact, the proposal to levy VAT has a more restricted objective: to raise resources for state education. The best estimates, from PEPF research and simultaneously in more depth from the Institute of Fiscal Studies, suggest this reform would raise about £1.6 billion gross and between £1.3 billion and £1.5 billion net, adding about 2% to the state schools' budget[12]. In other words, it would be a modest plus, as long as this is used as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for the regular budget.

However, judged either against a wider reform agenda or against the prospective financial prosperity of independent schools, the research shows that the policy would not make a large difference. The VAT could raise fees by an estimated 15%, which over the long term would shrink private school pupil numbers by between 16,000 and 41,000 pupils – or between 3% and 7.5% of the sector, thereby causing a small proportion of private schools to close. To that extent, the overall inequality of schooling would be reduced but only marginally. Against that, the pupils remaining in private schools would be drawn from marginally more affluent households, thus having a small adverse effect on the remaining schools' social exclusivity. The large majority of private schools would continue to operate as normal.

Main recommendations

1. **The proposed VAT levy on private school fees could be supported as a modest contribution towards increasing resources for state schools.** Despite the likelihood of a small proportion of pupils moving from private to state schools, thus adding to the call on the schools budget, the levy will raise between £1.3 and £1.5 billion to augment somewhat the amount spent on state school pupils.
2. The VAT levy is unlikely to meet wider reform objectives to reduce the social segregation associated with private schooling and, in the long run, to ensure a more meritocratic society. To achieve that, **policymakers would need to consider alternative strategies to ensure greater social integration of private schools**[9]. These could include:

- policies for the government to pay for state school pupils to access a third of private school places on a non-selective basis at the going state-school rate,
- policies to substantially strengthen the social obligations that come with charitable status, and,
- policies to support further opening up access to good universities.

Images

Top: Michael Jung / Shutterstock.

Figure 1: Henseke, G., J. Anders, F. Green and M. Henderson (2021). "Income, housing wealth, and private school access in Britain." Education Economics 29(3): 252-268.

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Grade expectations: students' perceptions of national examinations in England

Recommendations to foreground the human side of assessment in policy narratives in order to change views of what education means.

25 September 2023

Exam results matter – they provide currency for key aspects of our lives after school, whether that is employment, further study and/or training. But they come at a cost to the personal well-being of students who take them, and nationally, to the view of our education system as a means of schooling for test taking which means the focus rests on results.

School success: more than a grade?

For those who research assessment, national exam results days for A levels and GCSEs in August 2023 revealed what had been feared, a tougher anchoring of the grade boundaries to bring them back to normal – comparative to the outcomes in 2019.

The decisions made by the exam board makers are not undertaken lightly and grade awarding for our national tests takes into account a range of variables as decisions are made about what a pass, a B, or a 41, will look like in any year.

The decisions made about awarding are undoubtedly underpinned with a goal of fairness and maintaining a national standard, but there are always students who lose out, repeatedly and who can do nothing about this inequity because it is not related to variables within their control – they are students from low socio-economic

backgrounds who attend schools in the poorest areas of the country (Sutton Trust, 2023).

Once such losses happen, they are not fleeting and they can stick with individuals and impact not only access to further and higher education, but can shape an individual's view of themselves as a learner (Nevill et al, 2023: Richardson, 2022; Torrance, 2017) and it is not a usually a positive view.

Current narratives

Professor Mary Richardson's recent research has focused on understanding assessment in public life, and specifically how testing outcomes are shaping education systems globally. In the twenty-first century we seem to believe that schooling and further phases of education are shaped entirely by a small number of assessments, and that assessment can only be characterised by exam results. The idea that grades can accurately describe the aims and outcomes of education is unfair, but it remains a persistent and persuasive discourse.

Measures of educational success globally are dominated by a focus on test outcomes and, yet there is copious research to demonstrate that other forms of assessment can and do provide valid and trusted ways to show what students can do and understand. Of course, some measures of educational outcomes are required in order to understand how students engage with learning at individual and national levels. However, the emphasis and preoccupation with a relatively small number of examinations as a means to summarise an entire educational history is unhealthy and it impacts the health of our whole education system.

Key findings

Impacts on policy makers

A recent seminar presentation to Qualifications Wales found Board members "overwhelmed at the size of making key changes in assessment practice", but open to discussion and raising questions such as:

- How can schools ensure a balance between good preparation and causing students to be anxious?
- What role do schools have in supporting parental understanding of high stakes tests and the extent to which they pressurise students (e.g. GCSEs)?
- What do policymakers need to do to improve and promote assessment literacy? It needs to come from the top to ensure schools take it on board too?

And further questions about adaptations to national assessments and what schools can do to support students in lessening their anxiety-led preoccupation with test outcomes.

Impacts on students

Research with 193 students in England who took A levels in 2022 and who have just finished their first year of university found that 143 students said they were stressed and anxious about how fair their results would be (Richardson & Correia, British Educational Research Association 2023 conference).

The same students left comments relating to (a) feelings of loss and anguish at not being able to take GCSEs,

my year has been the most disadvantaged [because] we did not sit GCSEs and the last exams we set were SATS. No one really knows how to revise now (S142)

And (b) feeling unprepared and disadvantaged in taking A levels and wanting the government to use COVID as a means to consider changing national assessments:

Exams are an unreliable way of seeing what a person knows. It all depends upon the day and how the person is feeling (S83)

Recommendations

Policy makers and examination boards should seriously consider a fundamental change in the way that students are assessed using the Covid pandemic as evidence of possible alternatives.

In their last three years in education, students appeared preoccupied with how well (or not) they might do in national tests.

You are killing students with this exam structure that makes them base their entire worth and future on exam results. (S172)

Whilst the pandemic is a unique event, researchers have learned things that should be of concern to us all: notably that basing a national assessment system almost entirely on examinations leaves no means to adapt in a crisis. The sense of concern spread into public life and damaged trust in the examinations system – this will take time to repair but it is possible.

The knowledge and research to create better systems to assess learning exists but it requires a long-term commitment to challenging what is meant by assessment in order to generate public support and understanding. To initiate such changes, Professor Richardson proposes working with a range of stakeholders to generate collaborative engagement.

Policy actions

- **A national 'assessment literacy programme' campaign** (funded by government and led locally by LAs/MAT Principals etc.) should be established to re-evaluate the aims of public education with the goal of demonstrating why learning should be prioritised as a means of enriching our lives and why a range of approaches to assessment will support this goal.

  Students, when asked, feel that their progress and achievements in school

are not well characterised by exam results; leaving them powerless in something that it integral to their futures and susceptible to poor mental health, all of which has a public cost. Invoking a national change of the aims of education (and its outcomes) would provide a way to change how students see their identity as learners and better understand the value of lifelong approaches to learning as a means of continuous self-development.

- **A commitment from Government to providing time and funding for continuing professional development for teachers at all stages of their careers, guided by expertise in Teacher Education Institutions and funded by the DfE, that focuses on assessment practice, leading to assessment literacy.**

  Ensuring that time and funds are set aside to engage with this kind of CPD will enhance its value and demonstrate a commitment to improving assessment literacy. This would improve teachers' confidence as assessors and would improve public trust in their decisions. Enhanced assessment literacy among teachers would facilitate major changes to national systems of assessment – shifting from externally set examinations to a combination of external assessments and teacher assessments to better show the progress and potential of individuals.

Image

Credit: Monkey Business / Adobe Stock Standard License.

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Journeys of walking and cycling improve physical and mental health across the life course

Policy priorities and recommendations to increase active travel, drawn from research using longitudinal population study data.

24 July 2023

This briefing provides evidence from research using longitudinal population study data, which finds that journeys of walking and cycling improve physical and mental health across the life course. It also draws out policy recommendations from this research to help maximise the uptake of active travel across generations.

The UK's Chief Medical Officer's guidelines recommend that people of all ages engage in regular physical activity to improve their fitness levels and mental health, help contribute to a healthy weight, and reduce the risk of chronic health conditions such as coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Active travel provides a means for people to become more physically active and offers broader benefits for the community through improved air quality and reduced traffic congestion, as well as promoting environmentally-friendly behaviours more generally.

Longitudinal population studies provide valuable insights into many domains of people's lives including the ways they travel, the determinants and barriers to active travel and how this interacts with environmental and policy changes.

These studies collect a wide range of data from hundreds of thousands of people across the UK throughout their lives. They allow for consideration of national and

regional factors, enable comparisons across generations, and help to understand how patterns and habits change over people's lives. Longitudinal population studies are therefore excellent resources in understanding how we can get more people to adopt active forms of travel.

Policy context

Active travel is a hot topic that has established a solid footing on the policy agenda. In June 2023, Active Travel England was appointed as a statutory consultee to guide planning authorities on how to support active travel in the design of larger housing developments. In the devolved regions, the transformation of active travel was debated in Holyrood, and the Welsh Government announced £58m of active travel funding. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee is currently exploring the feasibility of the government achieving its ambitions for active travel in England.

MPs and Lords in the UK Parliament, as well as Members of the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments, have already expressed their interest in the evidence and insights longitudinal population studies offer. In Scotland, CLOSER's briefing note was referenced in a Holyrood debate on how best to facilitate the active travel transformation.

Key findings

Benefits of active travel

- Active travel is associated with lower likelihoods of being overweight or obese, having diabetes, or hypertension.
- Longitudinal research demonstrates positive mental health benefits from active travel.
- Free bus passes are associated with an increase in public transport use and have benefits to cognitive function in older age.

Maximising the uptake of active travel

- Factors that promote greater levels of active travel include higher street connectivity or walkability in the local environment.
- Programmes and policies promoting sustainable active travel behaviours are likely to work best when aimed at those in early adulthood.
- The implementation of new infrastructure designed to support greater active travel has resulted in population-level increases in walking, cycling and physical activity.

Main policy recommendations

- Target younger adults with active travel programmes and policies as an efficient means to increase and sustain participation in active commuting.
- Create more walkable environments to maximise the positive impact of walking to school.

- Develop extensive education programmes (for example in cycling) to help improve health through exercise awareness and reduce the incidence of accidents.
- Engage with community planners to address perceptions of neighbourhood safety which encourage recreational walking and physical activity.
- Establish a norm for urban and rural planners to consider improvements to street connectivity and prioritise the needs of walkers and cyclists in terms of making the local built environment more accessible.
- Local policymakers and planners should collaborate on the creation of new, easily accessible active travel infrastructure. Such approaches should be supplemented with targeted and localised communication strategies.

Image

Credit: Roman Koester on Unsplash.

Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources (CLOSER)
UCL Social Research Institute

CLOSER is the UK's partnership of leading social and biomedical longitudinal studies, the UK Data Service and the British Library, and sits within IOE's Social Research Institute.

Links

This briefing originates from a CLOSER briefing note on Active travel: evidence and insights from UK longitudinal population studies (2023) CLOSER. London, UK.

References

This briefing uses data and research from the following longitudinal population studies:

1. Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children
2. Born in Bradford
3. English Longitudinal Study of Ageing
4. Growing Up in Scotland
5. Hertfordshire Cohort Study
6. MRC National Survey of Health and Development
7. Millennium Cohort Study
8. Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study

Arts-in-nature practice improves mental health and connection with nature

Arts-based interventions delivered outdoors, or ‘arts-in-nature’ experiences, offer creative and inclusive means to promote children’s mental health and connection with nature.

30 May 2023

These activities are particularly beneficial for children with risk factors associated with adverse mental health, including those from low income households, those with special educational needs/neurodevelopmental differences, or those who have had adverse childhood experiences, all of whom may feel excluded from existing educational programs.

With four out of five UK children not feeling connected to nature[1], spending creative time outdoors is more important than ever. Based upon the overwhelmingly positive effects of arts-in-nature experiences within and beyond the UK, this research suggests that these practices should be an integral part of the primary education curriculum, as well as being incorporated into the wider mental health infrastructure, including integrated care services.

Policy context

Arts-in-nature practice sets to address three contemporary societal challenges: a sharp rise in children’s mental health problems; an increasing disconnect from nature; and a school curriculum that fails to draw on our cultural, community and natural assets. Mental health problems cost the UK economy £118 billion annually, yet most of this is preventable[2]. In children and young people, the rates of mental health disorders have seen a sharp rise from 1 in 9 (12.1%) in 2017 to 1 in 6 (16.7%) in 20203. In response to what has been described as a mental health crisis, the UK

government's Mental Health Recovery Action Plan has been backed by £500 million of funding; of which, £79 million will be allocated to children and young people[4].

Alongside this, in response to the emerging climate change and environmental crisis, in 2023 the UK government announced the five-year Environmental Improvement Plan[5]. A key strategic goal is the 'Enhanced engagement with the natural environment' and the commitment that everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space. These priorities echo the DfE's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy[6], which committed to increase access to, and connection with, nature in educational settings. At the same time, the value of arts has been emphasised in Ofsted's latest curriculum review which urges that "art should command an important place in every school"[7]. Arts-in-nature practice addresses these priorities through equity of provision and access to arts and nature for every child.

Key findings

Arts-in-nature practice

Arts-in-nature practice offers a creative and inclusive means to promote mental health through engaging children with nature. For example, Artscaping is an arts-in-nature practice developed by the arts and wellbeing charity, Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination (CCI). Since 2015, 7,812 people have engaged with Artscaping, including 2,569 children and young people and 197 educators. The AHRC-funded research studies 'Eco-capabilities' and 'Branching out' showed that Artscaping improved children's mental health, connected them more with nature, and engaged them with issues of environmental sustainability and sustainable behaviours[8]. Findings indicated that following arts-in-nature experiences children felt happier with their life and were more optimistic about what the future holds for them[9]; teachers in particular reported this made them more engaged and confident learners. These outcomes are consistent with studies across the UK, US, Ireland, Australia and Hong Kong, which identify arts-in-nature practice as being effective in reducing health inequities (including physical health through promotion of physical activity[10]), improving nature connectedness and, thereby, contributing to greater environmental awareness and sustainability[11].

"It has made me think differently – mental health support doesn't always have to be something that's gone through referral processes, that relies on external agencies and huge amounts of funding." (Headteacher)

Main recommendations

- All primary-age children should participate in one session of arts-in-nature activities per week to support their mental health and wellbeing, connect them with nature, and positively impact their broader engagement with learning in school. To achieve this, practice should be incorporated into initial teacher education for all primary teachers.
- Arts-in-nature practice should be adopted by Integrated Care Systems, particularly children's mental health services. Mental Health Support Teams,

recently established to support children with mild to moderate mental health difficulties in schools, could facilitate this.

- Established social prescribing programmes, such as HeadStart or the Global Social Prescribing Alliance, should incorporate arts-in-nature experiences into their practice.
- Arts-in-nature practice should be named as contributing to a 'high-quality art curriculum' that allows children to learn from, experience, and experiment with diverse forms of arts, as proposed by Ofsted's curriculum review[7].
- Arts-in-nature practice should feed into broader initiatives on Natural Capital[12] that highlight the financial implications of equipping children with green skills and making informed choices, such as investing money sustainably.

Image

Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination's Fantastical Forest 2022, © Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination

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Links

This briefing was produced in consultation with teachers and headteachers, stakeholders and policymakers, and published originally on PoliticsHome.

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Understanding how we can raise attainment in mathematics

Raising standards in maths attainment at primary school has been highlighted as a UK Government priority. But there are several challenges to supporting all children to reach their potential in maths.

30 June 2022

Estimates suggest that children's maths attainment has been significantly impacted by the disruptions caused by Covid-19, much more so than reading (DfE, 2022). This reflects trends seen in data prior to the pandemic, where a maths-reading attainment gap emerges in the first years of school, with reading skills significantly exceeding those of mathematics (Outhwaite et al., 2022).

As part of the recently released Schools White Paper "Opportunity for All", the UK government are aiming for "90% of primary school children to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths for Key Stage 2 by 2030" (DfE, 2022). To achieve this goal, the UK government have proposed increased continued professional development for teachers and increased parental involvement.

In response, this briefing note summarises the empirical evidence specific to these proposals and some of the challenges relating to raising standards in maths attainment at primary school. This includes understanding and supporting, 1) dyscalculia and mathematical learning difficulties, and 2) the home mathematics environment.

Dyscalculia and Maths Learning Difficulties

Research shows teachers are largely unaware of specific learning difficulties relating to mathematics, including dyscalculia and mathematical learning difficulties (MLD). Teachers also report a lack of understanding of how best to support their pupils in these areas (Dimitriadis et al., 2021), as well as holding their own anxieties when encountering a maths or spatial problem (Costa et al., 2021; Gilligan-Lee et al., 2022).

Dyscalculia and MLD impact children's basic maths skills, such as reading and writing numerals, remembering number facts, calculation, or mathematical reasoning. Estimates suggest up to 14% of primary school children have dyscalculia or MLD, which often manifests during the early school years (Geary, 2015). Importantly, these learning difficulties are unique and specific to maths and cannot be attributed to other areas of special educational needs, including intellectual disabilities, developmental disorders, or neurological or motor disorders.

Research shows children who experience these difficulties are at a greater risk for lower educational, employment, financial and health outcomes in the future, compared to their typically developing peers (Butterworth et al., 2011; Davis-Kean et al., 2022). As part of the White Paper, the government highlight that they will include numeracy as part of the training investment for the early years workforce, which will also focus on literacy. The current offering of specialised support, such as the new National Professional Qualification for Leading Literacy and the SENCO National Professional Qualification does not appear to include a specific focus on mathematical learning and development.

Overall, this means that supporting children, particularly those with these difficulties learning maths will be a significant challenge and more specialised support for teachers specific to maths is required.

Home Mathematics Environment

To help raise attainment levels, the White Paper also outlines a 'Parent Pledge', in which schools will communicate to families, if their children are falling behind in maths (or English) and provide targeted support.

However, recent data suggests 88% of primary school teachers already do this and questions have been raised about how effective this strategy will be in practice (Roberts, 2022). Research shows there are a limited range of effective maths interventions that can be used at school or at home, which are available in the primary school years (Simms et al., 2019; Outhwaite et al., 2022) and when involving parents, communication alone is not enough (Eason et al., 2020). Instead, active parental engagement with children's maths learning at home, particularly for advanced, rather than basic maths skills, is required to increase attainment (Mutaf-Yildiz et al., 2020).

However, there are significant inequalities in opportunities for active parental engagement with children's maths development. Research shows children of graduate parents have higher attainment (mathematics, problem-solving, and

reading combined) scores, compared to parents with secondary school qualifications, followed by no qualifications (Sullivan et al., 2013). Research shows higher levels of maternal education supports higher family incomes, which in turn supports increased parental investments in educational resources at home, and consequently increased maths skills for primary-school aged children (Macmillan & Tominey, 2019).

Similarly, 47% of parents report feeling anxious towards maths (Akribian, 2022) and research shows parental maths anxiety combined with well-meaning home engagement is negatively related to young children's mathematical learning (Maloney et al., 2015).

To help parents to support their children, there is some emerging evidence of promising interventions. For example, parent-based educational apps that provide parents and caregivers with resources and ideas for engaging with their child's maths development have shown positive and sustained benefits for child outcomes (Berkowitz et al., 2015; Schaeffer et al., 2019) and parent confidence (Outhwaite, 2021).

Lessons can also be learnt from national campaigns promoting parent engagement with children's literacy and reading development, such as the Hungry Little Minds Campaign in 2019, which signposted parents to accessible and evidence-based literacy resources (DfE, 2019). A similar campaign to raise awareness of the home mathematics environment would also be beneficial, particularly as estimates suggest parents' engagement is lower in maths compared to literacy activities at home. Figures show parents in England typically read to young children five to seven days a week, compared to maths-related activities only once a week. These engagements have also been shown to be associated with stronger mathematical outcomes for young children after accounting for socio-economic status (OCED, 2020).

Summary and Implications

Strong mathematical skills play a crucial role in children's educational, economic, social, and health outcomes (Davis-Kean et al., 2022; Reyna et al., 2009). Therefore, efforts to raise maths attainment throughout primary school is vital.

Based on the summarised evidence, this briefing note recommends expanding the training investment committed in the Schools White Paper to include specialised support for understanding and supporting children with dyscalculia and mathematical learning difficulties.

Policy makers should also support a national campaign for raising awareness of the importance of the home mathematics environment, which encourages and supports active parental engagement.

Image zinkevych / Adobe Stock

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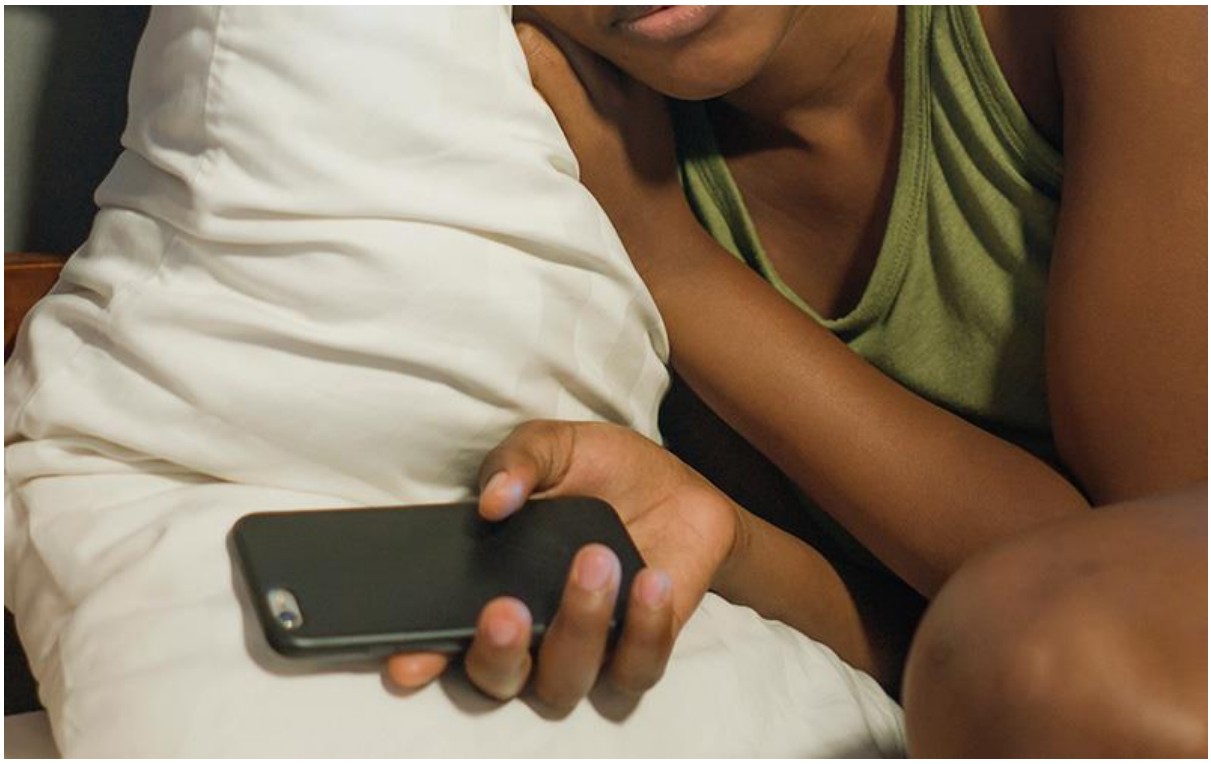
Understanding and combatting youth experiences of image-based sexual harassment and abuse

Non-consensual image-sharing practices were particularly pervasive, and consequently normalised and accepted among youth.



29 April 2022

Through qualitative and quantitative research on digital image-sharing practices with 480 young people aged 12 to 18 years (336 in the survey and 144 in focus groups) from across the UK a team led by Professor Jessica Ringrose (IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society), found that non-consensual image-sharing practices were particularly pervasive, and consequently normalised and accepted among youth. The research used creative and participatory methods to work with young people to excavate some of their mobile phone and social media image sharing practices through talk, drawing and screen captures. The report introduces and applies the terms image-based sexual harassment (IBSH) to describe unwanted sexual images (e.g. cyberflashing or unsolicited dick pics) and unwanted solicitation for sexual images (e.g. pressured sexting) (Ringrose et al., 2021) and image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) to describe the non-consensual recording, distribution, and/or threat of distribution of sexual images (e.g. revenge porn) (McGlynn and Rackley 2017). We aim to raise awareness of using these combined terms image-based sexual harassment and abuse to describe experiences and therefore to shift awareness. Despite not all of these harassments and abuses being illegal at present they are inherently harmful and need to be identified as such.

Key findings

Technology facilitates image-based sexual harassment and abuse

Social media platforms create opportunities for users to engage in image-based sexual harassment and abuse, through their various technical functions-referred to as ‘technological affordances’ (boyd, 2014). Snapchat was the most common platform used for image-based sexual harassment and abuse, accounting for 62% of unsolicited sexual images and/or videos, 60% of solicitation for nudes, and 33% of images being shared beyond the intended recipient. Snapchat enables image-based sexual harassment and abuse through its quick adds, shout outs, streaks, score points and lack of identity verification measures. Instagram facilitates unwanted sexual content through its direct message and group chat features. Instagram facilitates unwanted sexual content through its direct message and group chat features.

Image-based sexual harassment overwhelmingly impacts girls

First, adolescent girls often reported receiving unwanted images of male genitals (i.e. cyberflashing) from unknown adult men, and known and unknown boys (same-aged peers). In our focus groups, 75% of girls had received unwanted penis images. In our survey, 37% girls compared to 20% boys reported receiving unwanted sexual content and 80% of girls reported feeling “disgusted” and 58% felt “confused”. However, over time disgust shifted to resignation due to a process of normalisation.

“Like at first, when I first started getting dick pics I’d be like disgusted, but then I just got so used to it, and every time a dick appears on my screen I’m like – great, again. It’s normal.” (Kathryn, Year 10 girl)

Second, girls commonly reported receiving requests for sexual images from unknown adult men and known and unknown boys (same-aged peers). Of those who had been asked to send nudes, girls felt more pressure to do so, compared to boys. In our survey 41% of girls reported having been asked to send a sexual image, compared to 17.5% of boys. Of those who had been asked to send a sexual image, 44% of girls felt pressured compared to 12% of boys. Solicitation was often initiated through being sent an unsolicited dick pic-referred to as a ‘transactional dick pic.’

Image-based sexual abuse is heavily influenced by gender norms, and an intersectional approach to contextualised harm is needed

Boys experience pressure from the homosocial peer group to obtain images:

“for boys …maybe a joke that can go around the school with other boys…saying, oh, you’re not like …man enough if you don’t have any pictures (Danny, Year 9 boy).

Boys are also rewarded for sharing girls’ images amongst their peers, as an indication of their masculinity status. Girls were shamed and victim-blamed for having their image shared without their consent due to sexual double standards. Further, IBSA risk and harms are not simply gendered but also, deeply classed and raced, with young people having variable access to support. Thus, we argue for a nuanced approach to understanding and contextualising digital sexual violence.

Young people rarely report image-based sexual harassment and abuse

Young people experienced very little relevant and useful support in mitigating these online harms. Rates of reporting to either the social media platforms or to parents or school were nearly non-existent. Just over half of participants (51%) reported doing nothing when they had received unwanted sexual content online or had their image shared without their consent. When asked why they didn't report nearly 1/3 said ‘I don’t think reporting works’. For those who did report image-based sexual harassment and abuse 25% told a friend, 17% reported it to a platform but only 5% reported telling their parents/carers and a mere 2% reported it to their school.

Need for more effective and earlier age-appropriate digital sex education

Reflecting on their own stories, young people found that sex education was often inadequate, didn’t deal with digital contexts and started too late to counter cultures of online harassment and abuse. They offered useful insights into how education could be improved, emphasising the value of schools focusing on the actions of perpetrators and avoiding victim blaming approaches. Recognising the value of specialist expertise, smaller group formats, with younger facilitators and a move away from whole school assemblies to convey important and sensitive messages.

Recommendations for government

Provide schools with adequate funding and resources.

Allocate resources to young people’s mental health services.

Revise the statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education guidance to remove victim-blaming rhetoric and better outline online harms.

Recommendations for schools

Policy level

Introduce a whole-school approach to tackle sexual harassment and abuse

Remain solution-focused and avoid victim-blaming

Implement a victim-centred approach to online and offline sexual harassment and abuse

Train teachers and staff on identifying and responding to online and offline sexual harassment and abuse

In the classroom

Gender and sexual violence should be prioritised in PSHE lessons and those lessons, given they are compulsory, should be allocated time and space in school timetables.

Deliver RSE and digital sex education in small groups by trained and confident members of staff, or external expert providers.

Eliminate punitive and risk-focused approaches to nude image sharing.

Focus on preventing perpetration of image-based sexual harassment and abuse.

Recommendations for child welfare professionals

Provide a consistent approach to sexual harassment and abuse.

Prioritising children's rights when safeguarding.

Recommendations for parents and carers

Avoid taking an overly negative and disciplinary approach to your child's technology use.

Be non-judgemental and supportive towards your child's online activities.

Recommendations for tech companies

Snapchat should maintain a record of images, videos and messages.

Create clearer and more extensive privacy settings.

Create more rigorous identity verification procedures.

Develop innovative solutions to prevent image-based sexual harassment and abuse and improve reporting functions.

Social media platforms should work with child e-safety platforms to improve the online safety of young people.

Youth Sexting: Sharing Networked Image Practices (SNIP) mAPPing

Funder: UCL/University of Toronto Partnership Grant

Professor Jessica Ringrose (Principal investigator), Faye Mishna (University of Toronto Social Work) and Andrea Slane (Ontario Institute of Technology, Law & Technology)

Children and unsolicited sexual images on Social Media Apps: Developing Better Digital Defences and Literacy

Funder: UCL Social Science Plus

Professor Jessica Ringrose (Principal investigator)

Links

- Video highlights - launch of the Understanding and Combatting Youth Experiences of Image-based Sexual Harassment and Abuse Report

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Research evidence to support primary school inspection post-COVID

Informing discussion on how Ofsted inspections might best resume at an appropriate time, given the extensive disruption COVID has brought and continues to bring to English primary schools.

31 March 2022

The briefing draws on findings from a series of research projects based at the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society and conducted between May 2020 and September 2021, using surveys, systematic literature reviews and case study methods.

The research projects have highlighted just how much schools' experiences have varied. They also show just how resourceful and resilient schools and their communities have been in navigating a way through the many difficult dilemmas the pandemic has raised, even when there have been no obvious roadmaps to follow.

The research evidence we present and the recommendations that follow are intended to inform conversations in the field about the best ways forward in education. They build on the knowledge and experience that primary schools have acquired from dealing with the pandemic first hand.

Key points from systematic literature reviews of the research evidence on harms to pupils from the pandemic and their mitigations:

The impacts of the interruption to schooling that COVID has brought are multiple and on-going.

Learning loss or learning disruption: how to assess plans for recovery

Key points from practitioner surveys and school-based case studies: Each school has their own unique 'COVID story'. Primary schools have accrued considerable in-depth knowledge first-hand at the frontline. Understanding their responses begins with a positive focus on what they were able to do, in extremely challenging circumstances (Moss et al., 2020; Moss et al., 2021b).

Schools' experiences during the COVID pandemic varied hugely due to differences in local community circumstances, levels of infection and pre-existing social contexts.

Primary schools play a vital role as community hubs within their local networks of support.

Viable remote teaching offers were shaped in interaction with families.

Research and inspection priorities

Research evidence is still emerging on the likely impacts from the pandemic on children's learning; on their physical and mental health; and what proved to be the best ways of supporting learning remotely. Findings can be unexpected. One research project found that providing real books was more effective at supporting children's reading than online books (https://ickle.leeds.ac.uk/). Oliver et al. (2021) found that some autistic children benefited from being at home. More evidence is needed of longer-term impacts on different groups of children, for example for children with SEND (Gillespie-Smith and Christie, 2021). There are many lessons still to learnt about the best ways forward.

Some research is beginning to suggest that the initial estimates of impact on learning may have over-estimated losses and underestimated children's capacity for recovery (Thorn and Vincent-Lancrin, 2021). The research evidence on the economic impact of the crisis on children is much clearer: the number of children living in poverty in the UK has risen significantly to 4.3 million (JRF, 2022). Some studies conclude that the impact on children's wellbeing, mental health and social and emotional skills is likely to be far more significant and complex than the impact on learning attainment (Blanden et al., 2021). Given such uncertainties, accounts from the schools themselves of the different ways in which they have responded to the challenges they faced, including the recovery strategies they have adopted, could usefully be collected and form part of the evidence base used to develop the resilience of the education system going forward.

Recommendations

1. **The process of understanding what constitutes a quality adjustment to challenging conditions during a pandemic is ongoing.** Understanding how and why school responses varied over the course of the pandemic is a necessary first step in being able to articulate what good practice looks like in adapting to circumstances beyond the school's control. Factors to take into account might include, but not be restricted to: levels of COVID in the community; staffing capacity; levels of poverty and unemployment that impact on basic welfare; housing; digital connectivity; access to other forms of

community support where needed; and resilience of local networks of support to schools. Any lessons learnt locally could usefully be shared and tested within the wider school community.

2. **Additional information, over and beyond that routinely provided in pre-inspection conversations may well be needed to identify the various contextual factors that will have shaped the school's experience of COVID.** Judgements about the quality of education should be informed by an understanding of the range of urgent priorities that will have shaped decision-making locally and the adjustments schools have made to take a range of novel demands into account.
3. Some schools will have experienced bereavements amongst staff or families; some staff, particularly heads, may have had to deal with extreme crises in households involving mental health, domestic violence, and/ or protecting vulnerable children in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. **In some cases, these experiences will have left deep scars.** This should be borne in mind in initial conversations.
4. Identifying the challenges schools faced during COVID could usefully feed into discussions on appropriate funding for schools post COVID. Additional funding is likely to be particularly necessary for schools working in high poverty contexts. **Recovery funding should look beyond attainment gaps to focus on the material needs in families and communities that prevent children from learning well in school, including mental health and basic nutrition.**
5. Research studies of the impacts of the pandemic on schools, pupils and parents continue to report their findings. By keeping such evidence under review, any insights can be used to inform recovery and will benefit from being regularly shared across the field.

Learning through disruption rebuilding primary education using local knowledge

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Professor Gemma Moss, Professor Alice Bradbury, Dr Annette Braun, Dr Sam Duncan, Dr Rachael Levy

Building a more resilient education system post-COVID

COVID has highlighted significant weaknesses in how the education system in England is currently managed and resourced. We need to build a more resilient education system post-pandemic.

17 December 2021

Our project, Learning Through Disruption, set out to explore what headteachers, teachers, other school staff and parents in English primary schools had made of keeping education going during the pandemic; and whether any more general lessons could be learnt for the education system going forward from their experiences. In a context where a relatively modest amount of funding had been committed for recovery in English schools we also wanted to understand whether such funding had been targeted at the issues that schools and parents considered most important.

Findings

The emphasis in policy on ‘Catch-up’ does not adequately reflect primary schools’ concerns.

The funding is for 2021-22 only, and for interventions that in one year are designed to catch children up with where they would have been, had the pandemic never happened. By contrast, primary schools are looking across the range of pupil needs and reviewing what has been gained and what may have been lost during a prolonged period of disruption. This means planning in the round for teaching that can rebuild learning over the medium to long term.

Catch up funding poorly reflects the multiple and varied impacts that the pandemic has had on children's welfare and mental health as well as learning and attainment.

Catch-up programmes targeted on attainment alone are not sufficient to address these needs. Difficulties in getting speedy referrals to CAMHS for children in need of specialist support were of particular concern to schools.COVID has shown just how fragmented and over-stretched community services now are for children who are vulnerable, struggling with their mental health, or living in poverty. More joined up funding to fully address these needs is required.

Catch-up programmes targeted on attainment alone are not sufficient to address these needs. Difficulties in getting speedy referrals to CAMHS for children in need of specialist support were of particular concern to schools.

COVID has shown just how fragmented and over-stretched community services now are for children who are vulnerable, struggling with their mental health, or living in poverty. More joined up funding to fully address these needs is required.

System resilience depends upon staff health and wellbeing.

A pressure-driven approach to education management that places little trust in teachers' knowledge and underestimates the value of their professional judgement militates against good teaching and undermines system resilience.

Recommendations

To build a much more sustainable and resilient education system that can repair the damage COVID has done, the government needs to invest for the longer term.

This should be the primary goal rather than short term catch up funding for interventions that may not adequately address local priorities.

To create a more resilient education system post COVID, the government needs to listen to schools and respect their knowledge of the problems encountered at the frontline.

Rushing to judgement without meaningful consultation risks poor decision-making, based on insufficient information, and resources being wasted on the wrong targets.

Key areas of support for welfare, mental health and for families living in poverty have become fragmented and disjointed. They urgently need repair.

Schools are making enormous efforts to make up for these deficiencies in the interests of the children they teach. The government should audit the welfare and wellbeing demands schools have had to meet during the COVID crisis, and make a clearer assessment of where other support services (e.g. CAMHS) have been stretched too thin. This should lead to a proper funding stream for welfare support for children that matches what schools are already providing.

The testing and inspection regime needs radical overhaul. Current arrangements for testing and inspection apply inappropriate and counterproductive pressure to schools.

They do not take key contextual factors into account that impact on children's attainment. A reformed testing and inspection regime post-COVID should aim to make a much more substantial contribution to what pupils can achieve over the longer term.

Learning through disruption rebuilding primary education using local knowledge

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Schools engaging with families and communities during COVID

During the COVID pandemic, schools have found new ways of working with children and, crucially, their families.

17 December 2021

This has far-reaching implications for how schools and policy-makers consider homeschool communication as a means of developing parental and community engagement in the future.

Our project, Learning Through Disruption, explored schools' communication with children, families and communities during the pandemic, and the nature of the home-school relationships that have been so crucial across the different phases of the crisis. As part of our research, we asked parents about their experiences of the periods of home-schooling, as well as the range of challenges that families faced within their reconfigured home contexts.

Parents told us about balancing homeschooling with paid work, managing financial strains and coping with illness and anxiety while also looking after younger children and/or siblings of different ages. Parents reflected on the challenges of lockdown life, including not being able to see wider family or visit places they might usually visit, and the task of trying to reassure and encourage children amid the uncertainties of the shifting situation.

Parents spoke of the school routines that children missed and the new routines they tried to establish at home, as they balanced concerns for their children's wider wellbeing with concerns for their learning and academic progress. In this context, parental insights into schooling across the COVID crisis are particularly valuable.

Findings

Parental experiences of home-learning varied, as did parents' expectations and preferences.

Experiences of homeschooling varied, depending on family circumstances, what schools were asking children and parents to do at home, and how things changed across different phases of the pandemic. Parents had different expectations and preferences about what schools should be offering and why, in part shaped by how useful they found the tasks sent home, and how manageable the work was, given their personal circumstances.

Some parents wanted 'more work', more structure, more direction and/or learning materials from schools, while others felt this caused undue pressure. Some parents positively welcomed a less structured and more open approach that took greater account of children's willingness to engage and left parents freer to organise the day. Parents' understanding of the tasks set, whether they were also working from home, taking care of smaller children, or dealing with significant financial or health challenges, all helped explain these differences.

Effective home-school communication was critical in supporting parents during the pandemic.

Both schools and parents reported that the quality of home-school communication was key in supporting families through the pandemic. Regular communication from the school, whether electronic, phone or in person, made a positive difference to families' home-schooling experience. It was often crucial to parental perceptions of the 'success' of home-schooling.

Schools developed new ways of communicating during the pandemic, using both individually directed and group communications on email and apps. Parents welcomed regular contact, with teachers 'checking in' with them and their children. They valued clear guidance on both the school's overall approach and the logistics of what they should be doing at any given point in time. Parents appreciated seeing that their perspectives and feedback were acted on. Regular contact was particularly important in a context where government and press communications sometimes caused uncertainty and additional anxiety.

Home-schooling allowed many parents to learn more about their child's primary education.

Parents reported a strong sense of 'knowing their own child'. Many shaped home-schooling depending on what they felt their individual children needed in terms of routine, structure, input, volume of work etc. In this way, their responses to the school's input were informed by their understanding of their children's individual personalities, interests and struggles, as well as the emotional effects of the crisis.

For some parents, a noteworthy 'silver lining' of the COVID home-schooling experience was that they felt more in touch with what and how their children were learning. Some parents reported feeling more connected to their children's progress. Some reported positive outcomes for their child's learning from the time spent at

home, such as improved reading confidence. Some also reported a renewed appreciation of, and insight into, what and how schools teach their children.

Recommendations

Schools and parents will benefit from a period of collective reflection on what has been learnt from the experience of home-schooling so they can identify anything they want to carry forward or change for the future.

If more of the recovery funding was passed directly to schools then decisions on how it could best be spent could be collectively arrived at locally.

Government should work with schools both to support the important and complex work that they already do with families, and to encourage meaningfully collaborative and consultative work between schools and their wider communities.

The pandemic highlighted the central role schools play in their communities. Staff, especially headteachers, have found themselves dealing with a whole variety of issues including those related to social care, mental health, abuse, poverty and marginalisation. Crucially, parents have reported that schools listening to and learning from families, was a critical factor in their managing life and their children's learning during the crisis. It is clear that developing collaborative and consultative work with communities increases mutual understanding to the benefit of all.

Schools should be supported in capitalising on the new ways of communicating with parents that they developed during the pandemic. Many schools developed innovative, effective and inclusive ways of communicating with parents across different phases of the crisis.

We recommend that these approaches, involving a variety of media, be continued, and further evolved to develop the gains made in homeschool communications, and with the aim of engaging still more parents/ families/communities. Schools found additional challenges in communicating with parents in areas of high poverty, for example through lack of mobile phones or email access. This may require additional resources to address and is a specific area in which schools need sustained support (digital and otherwise) in moving forward so that they can continue to be responsive to the varied and complex needs of their communities.

Learning through disruption rebuilding primary education using local knowledge

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Professor Gemma Moss, Professor Alice Bradbury, Dr Annette Braun, Dr Sam Duncan, Dr Rachael Levy

Why school plans for recovery from COVID must be locally led

COVID has disrupted children's education in multiple ways. Schools are best placed to assess the precise effects of disruption on their pupils and their communities.

24 November 2021

To aid recovery, the most immediate priority is a national recovery fund that schools can draw on and tailor to meet local needs.

The Covid pandemic has led to a prolonged period of educational disruption with few precedents from the recent past to guide recovery (Harmey and Moss, 2021; Moss et al, 2021). Our project, Learning Through Disruption, set out to explore the knowledge schools have acquired from working with children and families during the crisis. We found that schools adapted what they were doing as they became more aware of local circumstances and found new ways to address the diversity of pupils' and families' needs. In the process they have developed a deep and sophisticated understanding of their communities. This provides the basis for deciding how teaching and learning can best rebuild going forward.

Findings

Two-way communication between schools and homes increased during the pandemic.

Parents have turned to schools for advice on a whole range of issues affecting their children. Schools have responded to the many issues in the home and community environment that seemed to affect children's capacity to engage and to learn. This provides a better basis upon which to draw up recovery plans than relying on test data alone.

The pandemic has had different impacts in different communities.

The incidence of the disease locally, the extent to which the pandemic impacted on patterns of parental employment and income, prepandemic digital infrastructure and connectivity, the quality of the living space at home, all made a difference to what schools and families could do. Schools are best placed to take these differences into account as they design recovery plans tailored to their setting and the elements in their context that have most affected their pupils.

COVID-19 highlighted many enduring inequalities and hardships faced by school communities that pre-dated the pandemic and were exacerbated by it.

School's insights into their communities' most pressing needs should form the basis for sustained investment that creates the best conditions for children to learn. Funding for recovery should be responsive to local needs and geared to the longer term.

Recommendations

Schools should have a far bigger say over how education recovery funding can be spent.

Schools have a more precise understanding of local needs and recognise how needs interact. Decisions over how to spend recovery funding appropriately should be devolved much more directly to the front line, with schools able to assess how to achieve sustained recovery planning that can have lasting impacts, including by investing in their own staffing and skills.

Schools will benefit from sharing what they have learnt during the pandemic about sustaining high quality teaching and learning in challenging times.

Schools have been at the forefront of learning how education can best adapt and respond to extraordinary circumstances. Collective reflection on what has worked and what has not, taking the local context into account, will help build a more resilient education system going forward. Such conversations should be locally-led. They should involve headteachers in talking with wider networks of support including health and social services and other area-based organisations that are relevant to rebuilding. Local Authorities may well be crucial in brokering such forums at an appropriate scale. The lessons learnt and shared will provide the best foundations for ensuring no child loses out longer term from this unprecedented period of disruption to learning. The insights shared should inform policy.

Schools should be encouraged to tailor decisions about how best to support pupil learning to their own context.

Schools may find that their own priorities differ from their neighbours. We can expect impacts on children's learning to look different in different contexts. Good diagnostic assessment looking at needs in the round will enable each school to plan a whole curriculum response that can be sustained. They should not be distracted by focusing too tightly on short-term objectives and narrow outcome measures.

Additional funding needs to be geared to the longer term.

The emphasis in policy on “catch up” implies that funding can be appropriately focused on short-term interventions targeted at individuals or small groups. In the case of the National Tutoring Programme its efficacy in this context remains unproven. Value for money would be better assured by allowing schools to invest over the longer term in the needs they identify and in strengthening key areas of staff expertise most relevant to their own setting.

Learning through disruption rebuilding primary education using local knowledge

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Professor Gemma Moss, Professor Alice Bradbury, Dr Annette Braun, Dr Sam Duncan, Dr Rachael Levy

Schools serving high-poverty communities need funding that fully reflects the work that they do

The pandemic has shown how important schools are as networks of support for children and families.

24 November 2021

Our project, Learning Through Disruption, also shows that schools have a particularly vital role in addressing the needs of high poverty communities, both directly and indirectly. Yet this work goes largely unrecognised and underfunded. This needs to change.

Findings

Schools are a vital source of support for children living in poverty

In many ways, schools are at the frontline in dealing with deficiencies in the current welfare system that place children living in poverty at risk. During lockdown, schools monitored the wellbeing of children intensely, using regular phone calls and visiting the homes of the most vulnerable children not on site.

there were times when … we just had to go around to the homes. … when you've been trying to get in contact with families, and they're not responding […]and you know they need to have breakfast. … It's just something you just have to get on and do -Head S2

Schools were also crucial in providing safe spaces for families affected by domestic violence and inadequate temporary accommodation. Without this active support, many vulnerable children would have been left at considerable risk during

lockdowns. In many ways, schools are the place families turn to when there is nowhere else to go.

Schools serving high-poverty populations face greater challenges in meeting the depth of their needs

The pandemic made clear that poverty has material impacts on children's lives, whether through basic food insecurity, poor housing, lack of basic necessities such as clothing or digital poverty which limited opportunities to access remote learning.

While all schools did what they could to address issues facing individuals, schools serving high poverty areas faced bigger challenges in helping their communities through the crisis. Many had to rely on a patchwork of charitable support to help ensure pupils stayed fed: This highlights deficiencies in the welfare system that require urgent repair.

eventually we found our way into the kind of food share, food bank system and we've been getting free food that I go and collect every week to give out to families from a more centralised thing in [city]… We were paying for it ourselves, at one point for a couple of months we were spending about £1000 a month on food parcels for our 25 most vulnerable families -Head S7

Pupil Premium funding does not adequately match changing levels of need

Although schools were able to help the most vulnerable in their communities during the crisis, this role is not adequately resourced. Pupil Premium funding is based on eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM), a relatively crude measure. In the context of the pandemic, changing the date when eligibility for FSM is calculated has compounded these funding issues (Thomson, 2021).

Several of our case study schools noted that some of the hardest-hit families were those who had lost jobs due to the Covid crisis. Parents who had been furloughed or had reduced hours of work were suddenly dealing with financial insecurity, and turning to schools to help them through.

What we've noticed over time was that the people who were coming to our food pantry, and we still run it now, weren't the free school meal parents. […] It was this tier just above, the people who'd been furloughed, the people who had always had a job -Head S3

The pandemic should act as a prompt for a review of how schools dealing with children living in poverty can be properly resourced to meet their communities' needs.

Recommendations

Funding should be more clearly weighted towards schools operating in areas of highest disadvantage.

This will enable them more easily to address the multiple impacts material poverty has on children's education.

Current metrics to determine funding for schools operating in areas of multiple disadvantage are inadequate.

FSM entitlement is not capable of capturing the complexity of local needs that impact on pupils' educational functioning.

Only a joined-up strategy to end child poverty in England will enable all children to reach their educational potential.

Schools' role in picking up the damage poverty causes should be recognised and funded.

Learning through disruption rebuilding primary education using local knowledge

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Professor Gemma Moss, Professor Alice Bradbury, Dr Annette Braun, Dr Sam Duncan, Dr Rachael Levy

Why do some young people and not others participate in informal STEM learning?

There are widespread and long-standing inequalities in terms of who does and who does not participate in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

8 October 2021

These trends can be seen through patterns of engagement with STEM both in and out of school, who pursues STEM subjects and who ends up entering the STEM workforce.

All of these forms of STEM participation are patterned by gender, ethnicity and social class (to name but a few social demographics), with those from more privileged backgrounds being more likely to engage.

The informal STEM learning sector includes a range of activities, from visiting science centres and community coding clubs, to watching science TV and tinkering at home, and is often seen as a “ramp-on” to increase and broaden young people’s engagement with STEM. Yet, research shows that the informal STEM learning sector often perpetuates inequalities, with young people from more privileged social backgrounds often participating more. A common “quick fix” response to increasing participation involves making STEM more interesting and fun, assuming that some people do not take part because they are not interested.

Our research project analysed 1,624 survey responses from young people aged 11 to 14 living in London and Bristol and carried out year-long ethnographic fieldwork with 36 young people in the same age group. We found that participation in informal STEM learning does not necessarily reflect young people’s lack of interest.

Key findings

Many young people from more socially privileged (White, middle-class) backgrounds regularly participated in informal STEM learning regardless of their STEM interest.

These young people reported average levels of interest in science and STEM-related careers, yet they regularly took part in informal STEM learning (such as visiting science museums). Their participation appeared to reflect family values and traditions, as indicated by their responses that “it’s just what we do”, rather than responding to young people’s interests in STEM.

On the other hand, many minority ethnic and working-class young people in our study reported being interested in STEM and aspired to working in STEM jobs, yet rarely took part in designed and community informal STEM learning offers.

Despite high STEM aspirations and regularly engaging in everyday STEM-related activities, such as reading science books and watching science-related videos, these young people rarely had access to specific “designed” (e.g., science centres) and “community” (e.g., coding clubs) informal STEM learning spaces and opportunities. For some, these settings did not feel like somewhere that is “for me”. Some of these young people prioritised school learning and questioned what value informal STEM learning opportunities might offer: “in school, you can learn new stuff. Let’s just say you’re going to a club… you’re going to get information but you’re not going to get information more than in school” (a Black British, working-class girl, age 12). For these young people, informal STEM learning participation was costly in terms of time, money and access, and some young people worried that it might compromise the time that they needed to put into supporting their school attainment. That is, they felt that informal STEM learning did not offer a good enough return on the required investment.

Recommendations

- Informal STEM learning settings could consider how they might change their culture, policies and practices so that they are more inclusive and can better value and prioritise the identities, needs and values of minoritised communities.
- Many of the young people had STEM interests and participated in a range of everyday activities. More needs to be done, across both structured informal and formal education, as well as funding and policy, to recognise, support and value broader ways of doing STEM.
- Attention should be given to understanding how many designed and community informal STEM learning settings feel too costly for those from under-represented communities in terms of time, money and access – ensuring that the onus for change is directed at the level of the institution, not the excluded individuals and communities.
- Rather than describing those who do not participate in informal STEM learning using terms such as “non-participants”, “disengaged” or “hard to reach”, policymakers and practitioners might more usefully consider the ways in which these communities are routinely excluded by systems and institutions – and the role that privilege plays in reproducing patterns of inequality.
- Informal STEM learning practitioners and organisations can use reflective tools such as the Equity Compass and Core Equitable Practices to help them reflect, plan and develop more socially just and inclusive practice (see yestem.org).

Funder: National Science Foundation, Wellcome, Economic and Social Research Council

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References

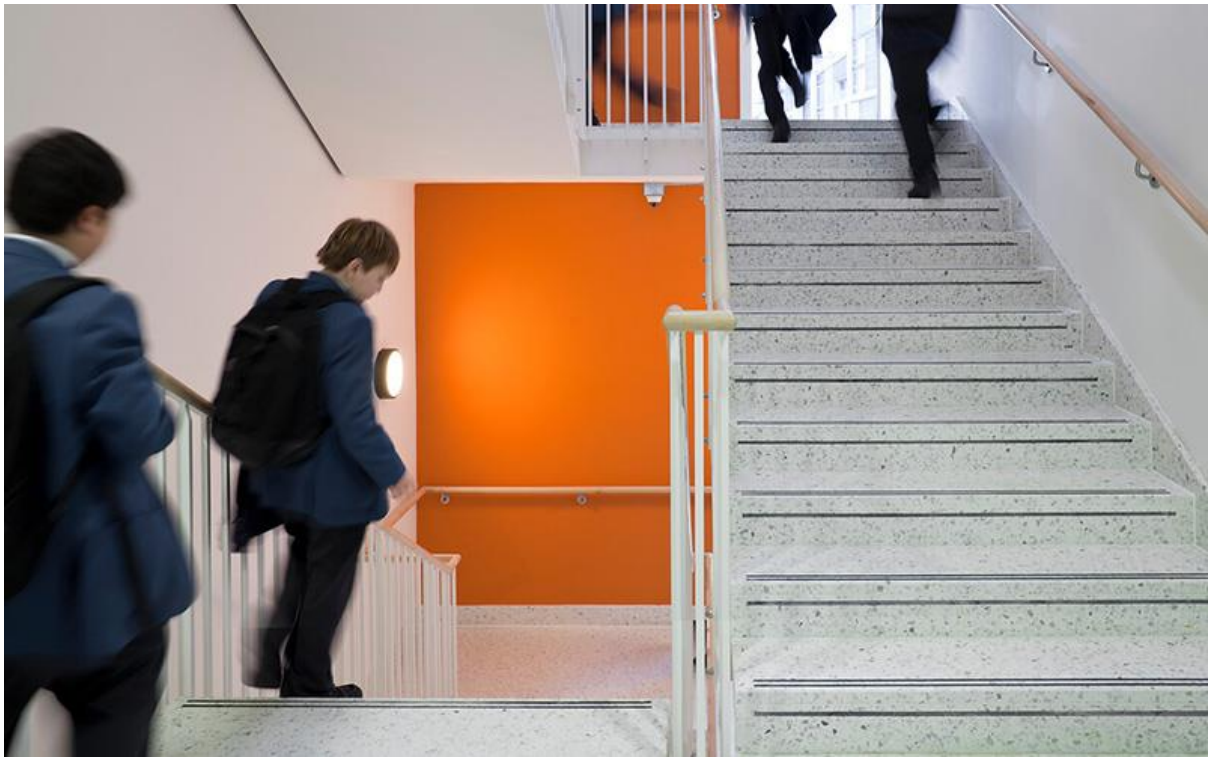
Godec, S., Archer, L., & Dawson, E. (2021). Interested but not being served: mapping young people’s participation in informal STEM education through an equity lens. Research Papers in Education.

Links

- Youth Equity + STEM

The experiences of autistic young people and their parents of lockdown and the reopening of schools

Key messages for policymakers, schools and families.



26 August 2021

This briefing reports on the findings of qualitative research, funded by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conducted in late 2020 with 17 parents of autistic children and young people (CYP) attending mainstream schools in England, as well as six autistic CYP themselves.

The aim of the research was to generate insight into these parents and children's lived experiences of the 2020 lockdown, home-schooling, virtual learning and return to school. While much of the broader focus on impacts of lockdown on education has shown the effects on CYP experiencing socio-economic deprivation, this research demonstrates its significant impacts on autistic CYP, who were already at risk of educational exclusion pre-pandemic. The briefing provides evidence to contribute to current debates about how schools move forward in the wake of the pandemic.

Background

Autism is a developmental condition which affects the way people communicate and experience the world around them. Autistic CYP can experience mainstream schools as difficult environments, especially as autism is a hidden disability and mainstream schools are not always fully sensitised nor equipped to respond to autistic students' needs. Autistic CYP became particularly vulnerable in the pandemic, facing disruption of predictable everyday schooling practices, blurring of home and school, and negotiating upheavals brought by infection control measures as they returned to school.

Key findings

Lockdown conditions were already deeply familiar for autistic CYP and their parents.

Retreating into the private sphere of the home came as a (partial) relief for many participant families, providing respite from their everyday challenges.

Parents faced additional responsibilities to assist their children's access to schoolwork, as they lost vital support from families, support groups and therapies.

Autistic CYP and their parents were keen to return to school, but few parents desired a return to the stressors of school life as it was.

Conclusion

Most autistic CYP were glad to return to school and seemed to benefit from the increased simplicity of COVID-safe schools, for example, breaktimes with smaller groups, fewer big events, reduced school traffic and one-way systems around schools. They desired a return to the structure of the school day, opportunities to see friends and renewing contact with key staff members who helped them. This echoed parents' appreciation of usually one or two individuals, who 'got' their child, and understood how 'small things' matter, such as the sensory challenges which children were expected to overcome, or sudden changes in school routines. However, this insight, on the part of a few teachers, was far from widespread or integrated. As such, many parents felt anxious about returning to the familiar stresses of school-life, especially when SEN provisions like nurture rooms remained closed. Few desired a return to 'business as usual'.

Recommendations

As the government and mainstream schools make plans to recover from the pandemic, there are opportunities to improve provision for autistic CYP's education in mainstream schools.

Prioritise pupil wellbeing particularly for autistic CYP as they recover from disruptions and fragmented learning of the past year.

Recognise the mental health strains caused by mainstream school environments and normative expectations of behaviour for autistic CYP.

Reconsider what makes a good learning environment for autistic CYP.

Adapt recovery plans for autistic CYP in partnership with CYP and their parents.

In preparing for future emergency schooling, review how tasks can be made accessible for those on the autistic spectrum and with co-occurring conditions (e.g., dyspraxia, dyslexia).

Develop a whole-school support strategy.

Image

Top: UCL Digital Media

Funder: British Educational Research Assocation (BERA) Small Grants Fund

Dr Caroline Oliver, Dr Georgia Pavlopoulou, Professor Carol Vincent
Centre for Sociology of Education and Equity
Department of Education, Practice and Society
IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society

References

Oliver, C., Vincent, C., & Pavlopoulou, G. (2021). The experiences of autistic young people & their parents of lockdown & the reopening of schools (Education & Covid-19 series). British Educational Research Association.

What makes minority ethnic teachers stay in teaching, or leave?

Looking at the retention factors affecting teachers from minority ethnic groups and implications for schools.

2 July 2021

There is a gap between the proportion of teachers and students from ethnic minority backgrounds in England. In 2019, 86% of all teachers were from a White British background, compared to 65% of pupils (UK Government, 2020).

While efforts to recruit new teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds are important, these alone will not resolve the shortage. Nationally, retention is lower for minority ethnic teachers than for White British teachers (DfE, 2018). Understanding the retention of minority ethnic teachers is vital in addressing the imbalance between the proportion of teachers and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds in teaching.

The findings are based on interviews with 24 teachers, including 14 Black teachers, two mixed White and Black heritage teachers and eight teachers from different Asian backgrounds. Thirteen of these teachers were in the profession for over five years and nine for five or less years. Nine participants worked in primary and 15 in secondary schools (for details see Tereshchenko et al., 2020).

Some of the factors affecting minority ethnic teacher retention are the same as those affecting teachers of majority background. Unsurprisingly, teachers are happiest in those schools where they feel valued, respected, have autonomy, connection with, and support from, colleagues and senior leaders, and clear paths for career progression. Our research has shown that some experiences affecting retention apply specifically to minority ethnic teachers.

Key findings

- **Racism in the form of microaggressions targeted at teachers' ethnic identity and non-dominant cultural perspective, as well as at minority ethnic pupils, takes a toll on teachers' wellbeing, progression and job satisfaction, more so than high workload.**

It has nothing to do with workload. It has everything to do with me being a person of colour and the issues that mattered to me, and the voice that I wanted to have as a leader made people uncomfortable. (Primary female teacher, Pakistani)

- **Minority ethnic teachers are motivated to teach in ethnically diverse urban schools, often with disadvantaged intakes, because they relate to pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and value diversity in the workplace. This teacher referred to unique and satisfying relationships with minority ethnic students as a reason for staying in an otherwise unsupportive school:**

I do feel like I owe it to kids to be in the room and have my perspective. (Secondary female teacher, Black African)

- **The ethnic diversity of senior leadership teams (SLT) in urban schools with high-minority pupil intakes is important for the overall retention of minority ethnic teachers. Non-diverse SLTs in otherwise diverse schools play a role in minority ethnic teachers' decisions to move schools because of a perceived negative impact on the organisational culture. This status quo also highlights lack of opportunities for progression into leadership, with implications for retention.**
- **Stalled opportunities for career progression are the key retention factor for experienced minority ethnic teachers who felt unfairly passed over for senior posts, leaving many in pursuit of alternative roles outside of the state school sector. Most interviewees said that this 'glass ceiling' was not obvious to them in the early stages of their career.**

I look at the people at my school that have been promoted above me or given opportunities to learn, and they're all White British which I find interesting. (Primary male teacher, Black African)

- **The SLT plays the key role in creating a supportive organisational culture within ethnically diverse schools. This includes making a conscious effort to develop the racial literacy of SLT to enable a dialogue about 'race'/ethnicity and equity in school, to support culturally relevant teaching, and to end stereotypical approaches to minority ethnic staff development (such as direction into pastoral roles).**

As one teacher argued, the SLT cannot address race-related complaints unless they "know the difference between new racism and old racism" and have an understanding that "if you are from […] a minority background, you have certain limitations and certain things that have happened. When we level the playing field,

then everyone has equal access then we can talk about merit." (Primary female teacher, Pakistani)

Recommendations for schools

- School leaders in diverse schools should be asked by stakeholders to demonstrate the experience, training and skills that allow them to develop equitable learning environments that support minority ethnic teachers.
- The ongoing development of minority ethnic teachers should be supported through high-quality mentoring, improved working conditions, and opportunities for career development, especially beyond middle leadership roles.
- Senior leaders should be open and proactive in having conversations with minority ethnic teachers about their career aspirations and progression, and be mindful of mentoring teachers towards taking on roles based on stereotypes, such as pastoral roles for Black teachers.
- School leadership, governors and administrators need to acknowledge how wider social inequalities are mirrored and reproduced in the school power hierarchies and underpin the unequal career progression of minority ethnic teachers.
- Efforts to increase representation among senior leaders of minority ethnic teachers should be supported, due to the evidence that racial congruence between school leaders and staff improves minority ethnic teacher retention.
- All staff claims of racism (both overt and covert) should be investigated and reported, and all leaders should be encouraged to identify practices that have

negative effects (unintended or otherwise) on minority ethnic teachers and pupils.

Images

Top: Getty Images/iStock

Bottom: Phil Meech for IOE

Retention of teachers from minority ethnic groups in disadvantaged schools

Funders: BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grant with funding from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

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- Tereshchenko, A., Mills, M., & Bradbury, A. (2020). Making progress? Employment and retention of BAME teachers in England. London: UCL Institute of Education.
- UK Government (2020). School Workforce in England: Reporting Year 2019.

Links

- Representation and retention of Black, Asian and minority ethnic teachers - IOE Podcast

Families and Food in Hard Times: European comparative research

The unequal distribution of entitlement and access to food is increasingly a feature of wealthy western societies, arising in the context of global crises and governmental policy.

1 June 2021

As Families and Food in Hard Times: European Comparative Research testifies, such crises most affect those with least resources. In this book we focus on the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and its effects on the food practices of children aged 11-15 years and their parents in low-income families.

Funded by the European Research Council, the research was carried out in the UK, Portugal and Norway. Using a mix of methods, including secondary analysis of large-scale datasets and qualitative research with 133 low-income families living in or near the capital cities of the three countries, we examined parents' and children's experiences of food poverty within the material realities of their households, localities and nation states.

Findings

In the UK and Portugal, poverty and food poverty are a result of low pay and low social security benefits, compounded by governments' austerity measures that hit the poorest families hardest. Although Norway was less affected by the financial crisis and its benefits are more generous than those of the UK and Portugal, entitlement is firmly tied to employment in a high skills economy. Given the skills of migrants in Norway are often poorly matched to labour market demands, migrants are at much greater risk of poverty than other groups.

Our analysis of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey found that low-income lone parents were more likely to experience food poverty than those families headed by couples and that, in the UK, the gap was widest by far. Comparing families' food expenditure to national budget standards in the quantitative and qualitative research, we found that almost all low-income families were spending less on food than is customary for the average family of a similar type and size.

The fridge contents in the home of 'Angela', a lone mother with two teenage children living in a British coastal town, the day before she received her Jobseekers Allowance. She typically has between £20-£70 per week to spend on food.

Our qualitative research found that mothers, almost always the 'food managers', fed their families on highly constrained budgets. Some went to food banks, but all shopped around in different supermarkets and locations in search of bargains. Because most relied on public transport, this was expensive as well as time-consuming. Many lacked the money to bulk buy food and so lived hand to mouth. Those who could afford it used freezers as a cheap way of managing limited food resources. In Norway, most migrant families reported making monthly trips to Sweden to access affordable food. Many mothers cooked from basic ingredients and bulked out meals with cheap carbohydrate foods. Some lacked basic cooking facilities, like working ovens or electricity.

Mothers everywhere sought to protect their children from the worst direct effects of food poverty by cutting back on their own food intake and were often reluctant to admit their children were going without adequate food. Still, children in about one quarter of the families in each country mentioned going without enough to eat at

times. A majority reported fruit or vegetable consumption below the national average. For their part, children moderated their needs and helped their parents by cooking or hunting for bargains. But they also mentioned difficulties in concentrating at school, being excluded from social activities and feeling different from their peers. Particularly in the highly unequal and consumerised UK, children mentioned being embarrassed by poverty and frustrated about the injustices of social inequality.

In all three countries, maintaining dignity and avoiding shame deterred mothers seeking help. In Norway, seeking discretionary support from the municipality was a norm for low-income families, although it typically involved a lot of red tape. In Portugal, families relied on family and friends, both routinely and in crises. In term time, their children participated in a three-course school lunch that was subsidised by the state, a provision that mitigated some of the food shortages at home.

In the UK, families more often turned to friends or were referred to formal support such as debt counsellors. Unlike in Portugal, many children did not qualify for free school meals (FSMs), which are means-tested and exclude most children whose parents are in low-paid work. Even if eligible, some children said the allowance did not stretch to a decent meal. Furthermore, children whose parents' migration status meant they had No Recourse to Public Funds were not entitled to FSMs and went hungry, unless schools met the cost from discretionary funds. School holidays when there were no school lunches were times of worry and food shortage for families in the UK and Portugal. In Norway, where there are no school meals, the situation was reversed, with parents struggling to afford the customary packed lunch during term time.

Recommendations

In spite of the efforts of charities, in-kind food 'solutions' only conserve the status quo. The wider causes of poverty must be addressed. As the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, put it, people are not 'a ragbag of different physical needs to be met by a patchwork of largely volunteer organisations', but 'distinct human beings of infinite value'.

We recommend three immediate steps for governments:

1. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) includes the Right to Food: 'when every man, woman or child, alone or in community with others have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or the means for its procurement'. While the UK, Portugal and Norway have ratified the ICESCR, they need to demonstrate how their national laws respect, reflect and enforce its obligations.
2. Governments should use budget standards research to ensure both wages and benefits enable families to afford diets that meet their needs for health and social participation.
3. Healthy school meals should be a universal resource like education and provided free at the point of delivery for all children in compulsory schooling.

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Dr Rebecca O'Connell, Professor Emerita Julia Brannen

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IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society

Links

- Families and Food in Hard Times: European comparative research (UCL Press)
- Who's responsible for making sure our children don't go hungry? Listen to the Research for the Real World podcast, season 6 episode 1
- Families, food and environment research

Improving the retention of minority ethnic teachers in England

Despite the ongoing policy commitment to diversification of the teaching workforce (DfE, 2018a), a gap persists between the proportion of students and teachers from minority ethnic groups in England.

11 March 2021

Figures from 2019 show that 85.6% of all teachers and 65.4% of pupils are currently from a White British background; in comparison, 78.5% of the working age population of England were recorded as White British in the 2011 census (UK Government, 2020).

Efforts to recruit new teachers from minority ethnic groups are important but these alone will not solve shortages. Nationally, retention is lower for minority ethnic teachers than for White British teachers (DfE, 2018b). Teachers from minority ethnic groups also experience unique problems linked to racial inequality and racism in their careers (Haque & Elliott, 2017).

Yet, there has been little empirical investigation of how the ethnic character of the English teaching workforce has changed over time, where minority ethnic teachers tend to be employed, and what happens to these teachers once they are employed that causes lower retention.

Findings

Our study ‘Retention of teachers from minority ethnic groups in disadvantaged schools’ used the 2018 School Workforce Census and related administrative school census datasets to explore the patterns of employment of non-White British teachers (c. 65,600) across all state-funded English schools.

To explore factors shaping teachers’ decisions to stay in or leave teaching, we conducted 24 interviews with teachers from different ethnic backgrounds, including 14 Black teachers, 2 mixed White and Black heritage teachers and 8 teachers from

different Asian backgrounds. Thirteen of these teachers were in the profession for over five years and nine for five or less years. Nine participants worked in primary and 15 in secondary schools, all of which were urban diverse schools.

These type of schools tend to have higher proportions of minority ethnic or disadvantaged pupils and experience higher rates of teacher turnover.

Key finding 1

The analysis of census data found that teachers from minority ethnic groups are concentrated in London schools and in ethnically diverse schools. This pattern of employment has implications for their retention.

Teachers from minority ethnic groups are not equally distributed across schools in England. We found that at the national level, 46% of schools have no minority ethnic teachers, while 16% of schools employ over 20% of teachers from non-White British backgrounds. However, 77% of schools in London employ over 20% of teachers from minority ethnic groups. Schools are more likely to have minority ethnic teachers if they also have high numbers of minority ethnic non-teaching staff. Schools with a relatively high proportion of minority ethnic teachers also have a large proportion of English as an Additional Language pupils.

Finally, more minority ethnic teachers work in those London schools that have a higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and those located in deprived areas.

Recommendation 1

Having identified this concentration of minority ethnic teachers in diverse urban schools, we recommend that government resources and support are targeted at improving the retention of these teachers. Improving retention will help to manage teacher supply in urban schools which struggle to fill teaching posts, and reduce the negative impact of high staff turnover on the outcomes of disadvantaged children and children from non-dominant cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Key finding 2

The interviews suggest that teachers from minority ethnic groups are motivated to teach in urban diverse schools, but the ethnic diversity of senior leadership teams (SLT) in such schools is important for the retention of minority ethnic teachers.

Minority ethnic teachers value diversity in the workplace and relate to pupils from non-dominant ethnic communities. However, all the teachers we interviewed disapproved of the near universal whiteness of the SLT in otherwise diverse schools. We found that this issue plays a role in teachers' decisions to move schools because of a perceived negative impact on the organisational culture.

Recommendation 2

Fair representation which reflects the ethnic diversity of the local community among school leaders should be a core value encouraged in state-funded schools. Ofsted

should be required to pay attention to the ‘mix’ of diversity among the pupils, teachers and senior leaders in a school.

Key finding 3

Stalled opportunities for career progression are the key retention factor for experienced minority ethnic teachers.

The analysis of the interview data found that experienced teachers interested in senior promotions felt unfairly passed over for such opportunities. This left many experienced teachers in pursuit of opportunities outside of the state school sector. Most interviewees said that this glass ceiling was not obvious to them at the early stages of their career.

Recommendation 3

Challenges related to minority ethnic teacher progression into leadership should to be placed on the policy agenda. The schemes facilitating progression require government funding and support. Having more minority ethnic leaders in SLTs will also help overall minority ethnic teacher retention, as shown in this study and other research evidence (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019).

Overarching recommendation

We note the lack of empirical research using nationally representative data on what happens to minority ethnic teachers once they are employed. Investigating trajectories of individual teachers to determine drivers of minority teachers leaving the profession and moving within the state sector will contribute to informing policies around staffing urban schools with high quality teachers and retaining them. Such analysis will also help explore, and potentially raise, equity concerns with respect to the relegation of these teachers to specific schools. The trends must be examined within specific ethnic subgroups to account for different histories of disadvantage in the minority ethnic population in England.

Images Top and bottom: Getty Images / iStock

Transforming early childhood services in England

Since 1997 early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been a policy priority in England. But decades of prior neglect have left a legacy of deep-seated problems, never fully addressed.

9 October 2020

Professor Claire Cameron and Emeritus Professor Peter Moss investigated these problems and sought ideas for solutions from around the world. They found that transformation is needed to give young children the all-round upbringing they have a right to and parents the support they need to both work and care.

Key findings

The need for transformative change

There are a number of problems facing ECEC in England today, including:

- a system split between childcare and early education, creating inequalities, divisions and discontinuities;
- too much focus on ‘childcare’ instead of ‘education’, when ‘care’ should be part of *all* services for *all* children;
- fragmented services, different types providing for different purposes and different families, with unequal access for disadvantaged children;
- transfer to primary school at too young an age, not good for children and weakening the early years sector;

- a devalued workforce, mostly consisting of ‘childcare workers’ with low status, qualification and pay;
- a one-size-fits-all curriculum and a culture of managerial accountability, too focused on standardised and measurable outcomes and preparing children for primary school;
- observation and documentation as tools of measurement and standardisation;
- a democratic deficit, with democracy absent as a stated value, as a daily practice, and as a means of governing the system and individual services;
- a large gap between the end of well-paid parental leave and an entitlement to attend early childhood services. Leave policy itself, like ECEC, is flawed and dysfunctional.

Recommendations

Towards transformative change

A move towards a public and fully integrated system of early childhood education underpinned by a broad concept of education combined with an ethics of care is advocated by Professor Cameron and Emeritus Professor Moss.

This integrated public system would be:

- available as a right for children from birth to 6 years and their carers, combined with 12 months of well-paid maternity and parental leave, with at least 4 months available only for fathers and at least 4 months only for mothers;

- based on a network of multi-purpose and community-based Children's Centres, providing education to all children plus other services for children and families, with opening hours that recognise parents' employment;
- staffed mainly by graduate professionals specialising in work with children from birth to 6 years, having parity of status and conditions with compulsory school teachers;
- recognised as the first stage of education, prior to primary education starting at age 6, and with comparable standing to other stages in the education system;
- free to attend for a core period, equivalent to primary school hours;
- funded directly, not via subsidies to parents. Over time, public funding would be withdrawn from the private, for-profit sector to be used exclusively for the public system;
- closely connected to local authorities, with a rejuvenated role in planning, coordination and support as well as providing Children's Centres, alongside non-profit private providers;
- built on values of participatory democracy, cooperation and solidarity.

The system would be based on pedagogical values and principles, including:

- slow knowledge, slow thinking and slow pedagogy, allowing time to linger, reflect, revisit, and leading to deep learning and rich meaning-making;
- observation and documentation, and in particular pedagogical documentation, that enable all learning of all children to become visible and valued;
- assessment as a cooperative process embedded in everyday educational experience, turning from the current demand for managerial accounting and towards a democratic, participatory accountability;
- trust in and respect for the agency, capabilities and potentialities of all involved, whether children, practitioners, parents or others.

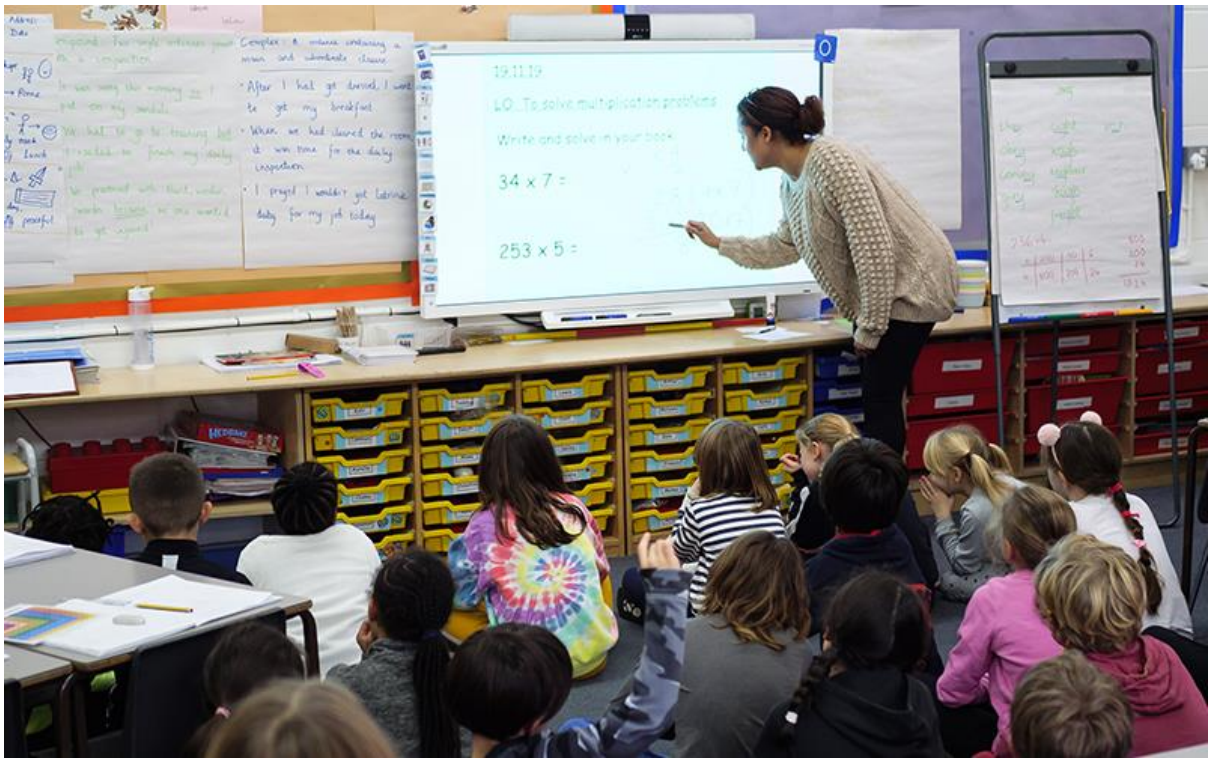
In order for this transformation to take place, a transition period of up to 15 years, continuity of policy, and a single 'early childhood fund' are proposed by the researchers. The proposed transformation, it is argued, is utopian - but it is a real utopia that is desirable, viable and achievable.

Images

- Top: Children playing in a sandpit. Photo by Dr Kate Cowan.
- Bottom: A woman reads to children in a classroom. Monkey Business / Adobe Stock

Primary assessment in turbulent times

How to address areas of concern for teachers around statutory assessment.



9 October 2020

This briefing note considers the place for statutory testing in primary schools during 2020-21, in the light of the COVID crisis [1]. The English system of primary statutory assessment, culminating in SATs tests in Year 6, was suspended during the 2020 lockdown. Yet many questions remain about how primary assessment should resume, given that COVID-19 may continue to cause disruption to children's learning in both the short to medium term. Our research project identified three issues of concern for teachers to which we turn our attention here:

- Whether a quick reintroduction of statutory tests will help or hinder pupils in making progress in the coming year
- Whether statutory tests can accurately be used as school accountability measures, in the coming year
- Whether more fundamental flaws in the current testing and accountability regime have been revealed by the COVID crisis and require urgent reform.

Key findings

Project findings are based on a survey of 1,653 primary school teachers in England, conducted through Teacher Tapp between 27-29 May 2020; a follow up survey conducted by ILC between 3-31 July 2020; in-depth interviews with teachers, head teachers and system leaders; documentary evidence of the wider public debate on education and COVID-19; and a rapid evidence assessment of the relevant literature.

Finding 1: Pressure to meet nationally-set targets will distract schools from responding appropriately to the diversity of pupils' needs

The 2020-21 academic year will be unlike any other, given the long period when most primary children did not attend school between March and September 2020. Different communities have experienced the pandemic in diverse ways. Many schools have put recognising and adapt to these differing needs at the heart of their plans for recovery.

Teachers are well aware that children's wellbeing provides the necessary foundations for learning. Over 70% of our respondents identified children's wellbeing as their top priority in welcoming children back at the start of the academic year. They recognise that pupils will need time to settle back into school after a period of disruption. They know that some will have experienced very difficult circumstances at home which will require additional support. External pressure to focus on preparing children for statutory assessments first and foremost is at odds with these more immediate goals. As one teacher commented,

As professionals I truly believe we need to do what we know is right for our pupils, whatever the government pressure might be.

Administering a Year 1 Phonics Screening Check in the autumn term to children now in Year 2 risks distorting teaching priorities. Teachers can far more accurately identify and respond to individual pupil needs using their skills in diagnostic assessment; and do so at a time better suited to the pupil.

We can monitor progression and 'catch up' without the need to formally test, … which might not actually show more than the child's current ability to cope with a test.

The primary assessment timetable and the assumptions it is built on urgently need review. We know that preparing Year 6 for Key Stage 2 SATs will put intense pressure on a year group which has already missed six months of learning and may miss more as disruption continues. Such pressures will be most acutely felt in our most disadvantaged communities, where the impact of COVID has been deepest. The government rightly abandoned statutory assessments in 2020. This same flexibility should be used to adapt the statutory test requirements primary schools are expected to meet in the coming year.

Recommendation 1: The government should suspend statutory test requirements in primary schools for the coming year.

The statutory testing timetable in primary schools has not been designed to cope with this level of disruption.

Suspension of high stakes testing will give schools the necessary time to reengage children with purposeful learning, taking into account the disruptive effects of COVID in their local communities.

It will also remove at least some of the uncertainty from the year ahead.

Finding 2: Testing and accountability arrangements will not deliver fair judgements during a disrupted year

There are inequalities in how school closure has affected different communities. In our survey, 77% of our respondents agreed that: “If testing and inspection goes ahead as normal next year, schools serving the most disadvantaged communities will be unfairly penalised” rising to 84% working with the most disadvantaged communities (Moss et al, 2020).

During lockdown our data show that schools in the most disadvantaged areas have had to commit more time and resources to mitigating the effects of poverty and hardship. 51% of teachers in the most deprived schools were helping keep children adequately fed, versus just 18% of teachers in the least deprived schools (Moss et al, 2020). More pupils in deprived areas were without access to remote learning and relying more on teachers delivering hard copy resources. All teachers recorded difficulties in keeping children positively engaged and willing to do schoolwork at home. This is particularly hard to remedy if conditions at home are less than ideal.

To date it is uncertain the precise difference that disrupted learning will make to individual children. The most reliable evidence from our systematic literature review suggests that in any group of children some may have gained independently of school inputs, some will have lost but may also catch up fast once schooling is resumed (Kuhfeld et al, 2020). Others will need longer term support.

Lots of different factors come into play in determining learning outcomes from the crisis. Many are entirely beyond the control of the school, including the levels of parental support and the richness of the learning environment that children had access to during lockdown, as well as any impacts the pandemic may have had on family mental health and wellbeing.

Our respondents recognised that it would be quite wrong to judge schools operating under such very different circumstances as if their actions alone were responsible for their pupils' SATs scores this year when so many other contextual factors will have mattered more. (Briefing Note 3 takes up this issue)

Recommendation 2: Ofsted inspections informed by statutory assessments should not resume until the end of 21/22.

Using statutory assessments for accountability purposes this year would be deeply flawed – the methodology takes no account of the contextual factors driving student learning during lockdown nor of the additional pressures that the COVID crisis has placed on our most vulnerable communities. Under these circumstances, fair judgements of the quality of schools' responses to the crisis cannot be derived from test outcomes measured against national norms.

Finding 3: Teachers do not want a return to 'business as usual' in testing and accountability

When asked about what they hoped would change in the aftermath of the crisis, teachers told us repeatedly that one positive outcome would be the end of statutory testing, and particularly Key Stage 2 SATs. As one respondent commented:

We have such a big opportunity now to really listen to children's and their families' needs […] We have to let go of the rigid structures the government have put in place and allow teachers to make decisions as professionals who know the children best.

Our respondents have told us of their concerns about children's mental and physical health during lockdown. The crisis has very much underlined the vital role schools

play as a safe space for many children. Our teacher and head teacher respondents are rightly as motivated by concerns for pupil and family well-being, as they are for supporting pupils' learning. Given the huge additional burdens placed on schools during the crisis, and the ripple effects this will have over the next few years, the reliance on statutory testing in primary schools as the main way of driving school improvement or assuring quality needs urgent review. It is indeed time to think again.

Recommendation 3: The assessment and accountability system is in urgent need of review.

We need a fairer and more resilient system – one designed to help schools rebuild and reconnect with their communities during these challenging times.

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1. Government guidance specifies the resumption of the early years foundation stage profile and all existing statutory key stage 1 and 2 assessments in 2020/21 in accordance with their usual timetables. This includes: the phonics screening check; key stage 1 tests and teacher assessment; the year 4 multiplication tables check; key stage 2 tests and teacher assessment; trialling of Reception Baseline Assessment and an additional phonics check for all year 2 pupils

Learning after lockdown

‘Recovery’, ‘catch-up’, or business as usual? Guiding primary schools in supporting pupil learning going forward.

9 October 2020

This briefing note sets out key findings from our research based on tracking primary schools’ responses to the crisis from lockdown onwards. The briefing is intended to help guide primary schools in supporting pupil learning going forward.

Teachers’ experiences of the COVID crisis have been hugely varied and influenced by the local circumstances that each school has faced. Schools and parents have had to grapple with difficult questions about how to keep everyone safe as well as keeping children engaged with education during turbulent times.

This has meant schools developing new ways of working and setting new priorities in order to best support their communities at this difficult time.

There are many different visions for how schools should respond to what has happened and prepare for what lies ahead. Here we set out what our research tells us about the following issues:

1. Supporting pupils returning to school after a period of absence
2. Setting priorities for learning in the light of diverse needs
3. Preparing for further periods of disruption.

Key findings

Project findings are based on a survey of 1,653 primary school teachers in England, conducted through Teacher Tapp between May 27-29 2020; a follow up survey conducted by ILC between July 3-31st 2020; in-depth interviews with teachers, head teachers and system leaders; documentary evidence of the wider public debate on education and COVID-19; and a rapid evidence assessment of the relevant literature.

Finding 1: A settling in period will allow schools to better identify children's needs

Overwhelmingly, our respondents prioritised children's wellbeing as they planned for the new school year. School leaders and teachers recognise that wellbeing and purposeful learning are intertwined. Schools' normal ways of working ensure these two elements interact: learning routines support pupil wellbeing and pupil wellbeing acts as a necessary foundation for learning. As one respondent commented:

Teachers will need to address children's mental health issues and reintroduce children to school... there will need to be work on nurturing and bringing children back together as a class. This must be the priority - not whether they are meeting national end of year expectations!

The benefits of settling children back into the 'normality' of school routines were seen as equally important regardless of the levels of deprivation in the school community (Moss et al, 2020). Because pupils' experiences during the pandemic have varied so tremendously, there can be no national "one size fits all" system of recovery. Some children will have been able to continue learning at home, especially if their home environment gives them easy access to technology, toys, books, and space. But some of our more vulnerable children living in poverty may lack those facilities and indeed have had little access to safe spaces in which to play and learn. Parents may have been less able to help with work sent home from school. Some will have been under considerable pressure, relying on food banks, struggling with long working hours, caring responsibilities or finding themselves jobless. All of this needs to be taken into account as children return to school. Schools will have different priorities depending upon how the COVID crisis has played out in their local community.

Recommendation 1: A period of settling in will be beneficial for teachers and for children, as new routines are established and children adapt back to the classroom setting.

Understanding precisely how a period of disruption will have impacted on different children will take time. Indeed, it may not be immediately obvious.

A settling in period will help schools more accurately assess how to meet their pupils' specific needs.

Finding 2: Priorities for learning in the light of diverse needs

Teachers have been rightly concerned about the impact of this period of disruption on children's learning. These concerns are most acute for teachers working in our most disadvantaged communities. Our survey data show 71% of teachers working in the most deprived areas thought lockdown would have a significant impact on their pupils' academic progression, compared to 45% in the least deprived. Of those who thought home schooling was working well, only 9% were working in the most deprived areas compared to 33% working in the least deprived areas.

How to deal with this disruption to learning is a challenge which all schools will have to address. As the teachers and head-teachers we interviewed have stressed, careful, teacher-led, formative assessment will be key here. This is part of every teacher's daily professional practice. It is also one of the most important resources teachers can draw on in planning their curriculum during a period of uncertainty.

Our review of the literature (Harmey and Moss, 2020) and research studies published post COVID suggest that the most probable outcome of a period of learning disruption is an increase in the range of learning needs within each class (Kuhfeld et al, 2020). High quality mixed attainment teaching may be the essential starting point from which to address this. Whole class teaching with mixed attainment in mind allows teachers to re-engage children right the way across the attainment spectrum in purposeful learning. It also mitigates the risks of targeting resources too soon (See Hodgen et al, 2020). Some apparent learning gaps may be transitory rather than long lasting. Test and target too soon and children could be needlessly taken out of lessons from which they might actually benefit more (see also CEPEO 2020).

Teachers seem to instinctively recognise the value of reconnecting children to learning in this way. The government push to target low attaining students with catch-up programmes as a way of making up attainment gaps and SATs scores fast has won little support from our respondents. As one senior leader commented:

I just think "What do teachers normally do?" They have a sense of what they want children to learn. They work out what their gaps are and then they do their best to fill in the gaps through whatever version of pedagogy they think is most effective.

Given the considerable sum of money government has committed to this end, this might seem surprising (DfE 2020a). But the money has to be spent in particular ways, with an emphasis on buying in additional programmes or external tutor support. This leaves head teachers with little apparent discretion on how to tailor what they do to meet local needs. As one respondent commented:

Schools need more funding given directly to them to invest where it will have most impact for their unique groups of children.

Recommendation 2: Schools will benefit from having more discretion over how they spend any additional funding to support children's learning, including in what time frame.

The government's provision of additional monies to schools for the academic year 2020-21 is to be welcomed.

However, the close targeting of spending with the aim of catching up with previous cohorts' test scores is unrealistic, not least given the likelihood of further disruption to come.

Finding 3: Locally-responsive planning remains key

Schools and teachers have had to learn fast about how best to support learning through periods of disruption and under different conditions. During lockdown, many of our respondents said they had become more aware of the difficulties families face in sustaining children's learning at home, sometimes under very challenging conditions.

Challenges for parents might come from the logistics – how to keep a particular age range of siblings purposefully occupied at the same time; or from the absence of necessary resources – maybe digital technology or a sufficient supply of children's books; or the necessary competence and expertise to support unfamiliar school tasks. In response, teachers and heads spoke of helping parents and families identify and adapt learning routines that worked for them and that they could sustain. As one teacher noted:

the last thing I wanted to do was make a parent feel 'I can't cope' because that's what they were doing. That's not right.

Most of our interviewees tried to achieve a careful balance, between supplying enough support or guidance to reassure parents and not overwhelming them by making demands with which they were unable to cope, given restrictions on their time or familiarity with the subject matter.

The government suggests that developing remote education should be a priority for schools to mitigate for future disruption (DfE, 2020b). This aim is complicated by our findings that many families lack sufficient devices or adequate internet access to make remote online learning possible. One head teacher stressed:

we've got 30% of children who are Pupil Premium and we have got others who are not far off, they haven't got access to the technology, and neither has the school.

Closing the technological gap has not proved straightforward for government, with the promise of adequate access not fulfilled. Meanwhile, in a packed autumn term, with schools struggling with a range of other pressing priorities, finding time to review how digital learning can best translate into purposeful home-learning may be especially difficult for schools coming to this task for the first time.

In fact, in our data, teachers in schools with a higher proportion of pupils on free school meals were significantly more likely to prioritise supplying families with hard copy resources that did not require online access (Moss et al, 2020). The route schools take to support home learning in their communities should be respected: they should be encouraged to prioritise and resource professional development that will enhance their curriculum planning in the light of local needs (See also International Literacy Centre, 2020).

Recommendation 3: When facing periods of unplanned and unexpected closure, schools should be expected and encouraged to make locally-responsive plans that are attuned to their community's needs.

Schools should:

- plan for a range of activities to ensure that learning experiences for children in and out of school are meaningful, engaging and sustainable under current conditions;
- seek opportunities to develop staff expertise by grappling with these challenges together, in the knowledge that there are few ready-made answers;
- share ideas with other schools.

A duty of care and a duty to teach: educational priorities in response to the COVID-19 crisis.
Funder: ESRC under the Urgent COVID Response Call, project no. ES/V00414X/1
Professor Gemma Moss (Principal Investigator), Dr Alice Bradbury, Dr Sam Duncan, Dr Sinead Harmey, Dr Rachael Levy
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Resetting educational priorities in challenging times

Rebuilding, reconnecting and reimagining a more resilient education system.

9 October 2020

This briefing note is intended to prompt discussion on how to repair the fragilities in the education system that COVID has revealed. Over the length of our research project we have seen a gulf open up between government policy announcements and primary schools' experiences of the crisis on the ground (Bradbury, 2020). Our data show teachers, head teachers and system leaders have not felt listened to by the DfE. Our respondents have expressed little confidence in decisions taken by government or the ways in which these have been communicated. The very different priorities that have emerged during the crisis for government and for teachers have set an agenda for change.

This briefing note considers three critical issues:

- How the education system recognises the needs of our most disadvantaged communities and funds the schools that work with them
- The stresses in our testing and accountability systems that COVID has exacerbated
- The need to better support locally responsive decision-making at times of crisis.

Key findings

The COVID crisis has revealed very clearly how much material poverty impacts on children growing up. 68% of all head teachers and 78% of teachers working in the

most deprived areas said their highest priority was “checking how families are coping in terms of mental health, welfare, food” (Moss et al, 2020) when communicating with families during lockdown.

Our respondents knew many children in our most disadvantaged communities would go hungry during the crisis if schools did not help families access food. They knew that many children were without access to the internet, a private space to study at home or outside space, all elements that might make a difference to their experience during lockdown. Teachers knew that home itself might not be a safe environment and worried about families they thought were struggling with mental health issues. They remembered these incidents in interview:

it was things like one girl saying 'I just need to get out of the house. I just need to see people.'

All these contextual factors impact on children’s learning. Yet our testing and accountability system pays little attention to them. This needs to change.

One way to make a difference would be to replace Free School Meals (FSM) as the main metric used to calculate additional funding. This is too imprecise a guide to provide schools with adequate funding. Any revised approach should ensure schools have the necessary funding to cover the costs of providing children with lunches over the summer holidays, and/or the additional staffing for welfare support required to keep children safe in communities under strain. This funding should act as a threshold with additional funding provided, over and beyond this, to support high quality teaching in communities under pressure.

Combined with local area measures this could help map where more specialist support and early intervention services are required in a given area to work alongside schools.

Recommendation 1: New measures should be developed to better capture the social and material effects of poverty within a school’s local community.

Measures should focus on those aspects of deprivation in a neighbourhood that impact most on children’s learning.

The measures of social deprivation should be used to contextualise assessment data and inform Ofsted judgements.

Finding 2: Assumptions built into current assessment and accountability systems need to change

Throughout our study, the government's emphasis on meeting test targets as usual, regardless of the changed conditions in school, has won little support from our respondents. As COVID continues to disrupt education, such a policy emphasis on testing may well be counter-productive, not least because it sets government at odds with the profession. As one respondent told us:

The government needs to stop the testing for all primary aged children and accept that it is no longer relevant to put children through that stress.

Another commented:

This situation has proved that assessments and constant testing is of no use and that the children and teachers are happier working in a less stressful environment.

The current test architecture ties teachers to delivering particular areas of subject content in a set sequence and time frame. Accountability measures emphasise tracking progress between test points, exerting pressure on schools to keep up. Such a system holds teachers responsible now for what might be achieved later. In fact, assumptions about teaching and learning embedded in the testing and accountability system – that how well a pupil performs in this content area at this time will wholly determine what will happen next – do not stand up to research scrutiny.

Research reviewed for this study shows that pupil progress does not always follow the smooth linear trajectories predicted (Allen, 2015). Pupil needs vary and different

contextual factors come into play in shaping outcomes (Prior, Leckie and Goldstein, 2020). Assumptions built into Progress 8 about the pace at which those furthest ahead or behind move on have been subject to critical review (Leckie and Goldstein, 2017). A test and accountability system that ignores these findings does a deep disservice to schools, to children and to parents.

At a time of crisis it also creates unsustainable pressure within a system already near to breaking point. As one teacher commented:

This system has been on the brink of falling apart for a few years now and it's heart breaking to see.

Teachers in our dataset recognise that reinstating statutory testing and inspection too fast may well hinder, rather than support, the process of re-engaging their pupils with purposeful learning; that pushing pupils too fast into catch up programmes designed to boost test scores is of limited use; and that pupils would benefit more from whole class quality teaching that can take account of the complexity of children's needs and lets them benefit from being with their peers (International Literacy Centre, 2020). This is indeed a moment to take stock. As one of our respondents commented:

I think OFSTED inspections should not run until we have had some time to figure out what works. I think teachers should be trusted to assess their children and fill in the gaps with how they feel best.

This echoes a finding from our systematic review of the literature on learning disruption: that such an unprecedented set of circumstances may well require a period of cool reflection and research if the appropriate lessons for education are to be learnt (See Harmey and Moss, 2020). Adequate criteria to judge individual school's responses to the COVID crisis have yet to be developed. Any such criteria will need to recognise and understand the many local factors that have impacted on decision-making and the different needs to which teachers have had to respond. In the aftermath of such a crisis, inspection visits have to change their purpose and rationale, if they are to help the system learn.

Recommendation 2: Statutory testing and inspection processes should be suspended for the whole academic year.

Any OFSTED visits to school should be used to listen and learn from those most directly involved in finding solutions on the ground.

Finding 3: A resilient education system depends upon fostering collaborative and reflective dialogue amongst all those involved

COVID has revealed just how far current governance structures in education are geared to high level direction from central government based on limited consultation or dialogue with the sector. Such a centralised approach to decision-making has not worked well during the crisis. One senior leader told us:

We feel dictated to with directives that are sometimes conflicting or impossible to implement.

Many of our respondents regarded government guidance as both ill-informed and poorly communicated. When asked directly, almost all of our respondents (79%) considered communications with schools to be handled either badly or very badly. When asked how the government had done on ‘practicality of advice’, a similar number (80%) responded ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’. Not a single respondent picked ‘very well’. As one teacher commented,

The lack of prompt guidance and ever changing guidance has definitely hindered rather than helped schools at an already difficult time.

Another told us:

Government has abdicated most responsibility to schools.

By contrast, where they exist, strong local support structures have played an important part in facilitating good local decision-making. Local Authorities and MATs have both been important in bringing schools together. As one respondent said:

We got incredible support from the local authority, incredible support from them …, even though we're not a local authority school, we're a multi academy trust school, they took an executive decision that all the schools in this authority would be included and used. Huge amounts of regular feedback and updates, they were really supportive in terms of risk assessments, template letters. They were really helpful. They immediately issued schools with phone numbers and dedicated staff that they could ring.

But in a fragmented education system, access to such good support has been patchy. Stronger local support systems would have left fewer schools struggling to solve complex local problems on their own.

The central government's capacity to develop appropriate advice has been hampered by its lack of consultation with and connection to those working at the front line. This has reduced the flow of useful knowledge round the system. By consulting more widely during the crisis, the government would have generated more constructive guidance, better attuned to the dilemmas facing schools on the ground. The fragilities of a system that lacks the means to foster deliberation and reflection between all those most directly involved in managing the crisis has been exposed. This needs to be put right.

Recommendation 3: We need more durable, more deliberative and more transparent ways of connecting all those involved in managing the many different aspects of education across a fragmented system.

Stronger, locally responsive networks would allow policy decisions and national guidance to develop from a much fuller awareness of what the every-day realities of school life are.

Such networks would also help schools collaborate on finding local solutions to novel dilemmas posed by the crisis.

A duty of care and a duty to teach: educational priorities in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

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Inequality in access to grammar schools

Looking at the empirical evidence on socio-economic inequalities in who goes to grammar schools.

15 September 2020

There are large inequalities in access to places at grammar schools with children from lower socio-economic backgrounds far less likely to attend than those from more affluent families. In 2019, only 3% of grammar school pupils were entitled to free school meals (FSM), compared to the 15% of pupils in non-selective schools across England (Danechi, 2020). Grammar schools are not equally distributed around the country, which means contrasting grammar pupils with national averages may not be a fair comparison: the backgrounds of grammar pupils may also be reflecting other local area characteristics. However, Andrews et al. (2016) found very similar figures when comparing grammar school pupils to the non-grammar pupils in selective areas: 2.5% of grammar pupils are eligible for FSM, compared to 8.9% amongst the other pupils in the area (and 13.2% amongst pupils in all state-funded secondary schools). This is a consistent finding, echoing earlier figures from Cribb et al. (2013) and Atkinson et al. (2006).

Using the binary FSM-eligibility measure (a common metric of disadvantage) to delineate groups of families and compute the access inequality between them may be masking important differences in grammar access at a more granular level. Burgess et al. (2018) move beyond characterising inequality in this way, instead looking at access across the full socio-economic spectrum. They construct an index that in addition to FSM eligibility also includes the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) scores, A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods (ACORN) categories (based on the socio-economic characteristics, financial holdings and property details of the

15 nearest households), and the proportion of the nearest 150 households working in professional or managerial occupations, with education at Level 3 (post-compulsory) or above and who own their own home. Using this finer grained measure, they show that in selective areas only 6% of those from families at the 10th percentile of the socio-economic index attend a grammar school. This increases slowly such that, at the 40th percentile, 17% of pupils attend a grammar. By contrast, 51% of children at the 90th percentile attend a grammar school and 79% of those in the top 1% most affluent families attend a grammar school. In total, half of the grammar school places are taken by the best-off quarter of families.

Part of this social gradient is driven by the large differences in attainment at age 11 between children from different family backgrounds. Achievement gaps between children from the most and least disadvantaged families open early in childhood and widen through primary school. Washbrook and Waldfogel (2011) show that children from low- and middle- income families are five months behind children from high income families in terms of vocabulary skills by the time that they enter primary school. Using longitudinal cohort data, Doyle et al. (2009) and Feinstein (2003) show the gaps in cognitive test scores are observed even earlier, by the age of 3. Crawford et al. (2017) show this gap increases through school from Key Stage 1 at age 7 to Key Stage 2 at age 11, at which point pupils from the most disadvantaged families are (on average) over 20 percentiles behind pupils from the most advantaged families. It is not therefore a level playing field at the time that pupils sit the '11 plus' examination: children from disadvantaged families have a greater challenge to overcome to get to the same threshold on the '11 plus' as children from advantaged families.

However, Burgess et al. (2018) find that even comparing children with the same achievement, there remain large differences in the probability of accessing a grammar school place in selective areas, depending on family socio-economic status. Their research shows that comparing two pupils who are both at the 70th percentile of attainment in Key Stage 2 tests at age 11 (combining externally assessed English, maths and science scores), the pupil from the most affluent fifth of families has a 50% chance of getting into the grammar school, whereas a similarly attaining pupil from the most deprived fifth of families has only a 15% chance. At the 80th percentile of attainment, the gap is even greater with children from the best-off families having a 70% chance of attending a grammar, compared to only 25% for children from the worst-off families. Even scoring at the top 10% of attainment gives the child from the poorest fifth of families only a 50-50 chance of getting into the grammar school, whereas the child from the richest fifth of families will be admitted 6 times in 7.

In summary, access to grammar school places is strongly related to family background and this remains the case even when comparing children with the same achievement on national tests at age 11. Whatever advantages grammar school attendance conveys, it is very much concentrated on pupils from affluent backgrounds.

Barriers for disadvantaged pupils

Children from disadvantaged families face multiple barriers to accessing grammar schools. There are a number of reasons why children from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower achievement than their more advantaged peers - disadvantaged families face more constraints in terms of both their resources and their time. Washbrook and Waldfogel (2011) find that half the vocabulary gap at school entry can be explained by measurable aspects of the child's environment, with the home learning environment being the most significant factor in explaining the development gap. The remainder is explained by factors associated with income, and parental education. Similarly, Macmillan and Tominey (2019) show that increasing maternal education led to an increase in incomes and educational resources available in the home during their offspring's early childhood, which is associated with higher cognitive skills at age 5 and 7. Del Bono et al. (2016) find that mothers with university degrees spend a higher proportion of time engaging with the child's learning at home, compared to mothers with no qualifications, which is linked to increased child literacy and socio-emotional outcomes between ages 3-7 years.

These existing barriers in terms of achievement gaps are further emphasised by the investment that the most advantaged parents make in their children's education in the form of extra-curricular tutoring. Work by Jerrim and Sims (2019) shows that more advantaged parents are more likely to invest in extra English and maths lessons, and arrange tutoring or coaching. This is particularly pronounced in selective areas, and in subjects that are core to the 11 plus examination (but not in science, which is not an '11 plus' subject), supporting the view of grammar school head teachers that children from more affluent, middle class families are coached to pass the entrance exam (Cribb et al., 2013).

Finally, the evidence suggests that all of these barriers will be more pronounced for the current cohort of year 5s who are due to sit the '11 plus' examination in September 2020. The current school shutdown due to coronavirus is very likely to widen the achievement gap between the most and least disadvantaged pupils (see Sims, 2020, and Outhwaite, 2020). New evidence from the Sutton Trust finds that children in households earning more than £60k are twice as likely to currently be receiving tutoring during school closure as those children in households earning under £30k. (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020).

Summary and implications

Access to grammar schools is strongly graded by family background. Children from the poorest families are substantially less likely to attain a place even when they have high academic achievement at age 11. There are numerous barriers that hinder access to grammar schools for less well-off families, including the effects of greater time and income constraints impacting on the home learning environment, and restricting ability to pay for additional tutoring. These differences are likely to be considerably exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. If the '11 plus' exam in September 2020 is to remain the method of selection for places in grammar schools, policymakers should urgently consider:

- Providing pupil premium-type funding to lower income families immediately to allow for additional tutoring in English and maths.

- Adjusting the scores from the ’11 plus’ to account for these socio-economic penalties, for example, in a similar vein to the adjustment that occurs for the pupil’s age within the school year in Kent.

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Higher standards of medical training to ensure higher-quality patient care

Graduates of some medical schools perform less well than those from other schools, and medics from black and minority ethnic groups are at greater risk of poor performance in examinations.

20 August 2020

As a result of this work, far-reaching changes are being implemented to improve the validation of the process by which doctors gain a license to practise, and to improve the fairness of medical education and training for UK doctors and for doctors coming to the UK from abroad.

Research findings

This research looked across national datasets of doctors' training records, exam results and GMC sanctions. It revealed for the first time that graduates of different UK medical schools differ significantly in the knowledge and skills they display in postgraduate Royal College examinations, and that the higher doctors' knowledge and skills are, the lower the rates of GMC sanctions for poor professional practice.

It also demonstrated that the current system by which doctors from overseas obtain a UK licence to practise does not ensure equivalence between doctors graduating from different medical schools and countries. Overseas graduates had, on average, poorer knowledge and skills than graduates of UK medical schools, although the best are undoubtedly the equal of the best UK graduates.

The research was carried out by linking longitudinal data from various administrative datasets. Analyses illustrated the variation in knowledge among UK medical school graduates, the fact that a UK licence to practise does not ensure equivalence

between doctors from different medical schools and countries, and the link between skills as measured by examinations and GMC rates of sanction.

In addition, poorer outcomes for UK black and minority ethnic students and doctors were shown in a meta-analysis of the examination outcomes of 23,742 medics. Two subsequent national qualitative studies showed the additional barriers that BME doctors face during training which can negatively affect their learning and achievement.

Recommendations and outcomes

This research underpins change that has improved the quality and fairness of UK medical education, benefiting patients and the profession. The results include:

- Introduction of the UK Medical Licensing Assessment, to ensure the equivalence of educational outcomes and set a common threshold for safe practice in 9,000 UK graduates and 14,000 international medical graduates annually from 2023.
- Policies requiring organisations to provide fair training for the 100,000 or more undergraduate and postgraduate medics in training at any one time.
- Equalities training for medical educators, training providers, and the medical regulator.

In 2014, this research on ethnic differences in performance was cited in a judicial review of a GMC-regulated examination. In 2015 the GMC established its Differential Attainment Project to understand causes and identify solutions. Its approach was underpinned by a literature review citing 10 of the team's studies. In 2017 the GMC launched its Standards for Medical Education and Training, with accompanying equality and diversity guidance, to which UCL contributed.

The future

Covid-19 has produced an enormous, uncontrolled, unplanned, educational experiment whose effects will be studied for decades. The researchers are currently looking at the consequences for medical student selection at a time when A-levels are cancelled and replaced with calculated grades.

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School absences and pupil achievement

A look at the empirical evidence on the strength of the relationship between school absence and pupil achievement.

3 July 2020

School absence occurs when a pupil does not attend school when it would usually be open. In England, the average pupil missed 8.4 of the 195 scheduled days in the 2018/19 academic year. However, this masks wide variation in the number of days missed, with 10.9% of pupils absent for more than 10 days (DfE, 2020).

Absences happen for two broad reasons. First, pupils can fail to turn up to school on a day that the school is open. They may be ill, truanting or natural obstacles such as flooding may prevent them from attending. Second, the school may be experiencing an unscheduled closure due to a teaching strike, extreme weather or a disease epidemic (such as COVID-19).

Pupils who do not attend school when school is open (uncoordinated absences) see a small decline in their academic achievement:

- Each day of individual pupil absence results in around 0.3-0.4% of a standard deviation reduction in achievement.
- Equivalently, eight days of absence (the average in England) would move a pupil one place down a ranking of 100 pupils (e.g. from 50th to 51st).
- Pupils from low-income households see a larger negative effect from each day of absence.

Pupil achievement can also be harmed by term-time school closures (coordinated absences):

- It is not clear whether coordinated closures are more or less damaging then uncoordinated closures. In any case, the magnitude of this effect will likely depend on what kind of educational activities pupils engage in during the closure.
- Again, pupils from low-income households experience a larger negative effect from coordinated absences
- Coordinated absences lasting for several weeks can have small long-run negative effects on pupil achievement.

Implications

- Reducing pupil absences will have a positive effect on achievement and is likely to reduce achievement gaps between high and low income pupils.
- Improving communication with parents via text or email has been shown to be an effective way of reducing such absences.
- Achievement is most negatively affected if pupils are tested soon after their return to school. If feasible, and where pupils will be studying related material in the subsequent terms, delaying tests gives pupils a chance to catch up.

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Read the full briefing note including references to research

Raising Standards in Holocaust Education

Wider research has informed national plans for Holocaust remembrance and the role of education within that sphere.

20 February 2020

Teaching about the Holocaust has been compulsory in secondary schools since 1991. Yet, in 2009, ground-breaking research by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education revealed significant issues, including limited professional development for teachers on how to teach this complex subject, serious gaps in teachers' subject knowledge, and confusion about rationale, aims and definitions.

In response, the Centre produced a high quality, research-informed professional development programme offered by its world-class experts. Over the last decade, this programme has benefitted over 12,000 teachers and counting. The Centre has continued to conduct large-scale national research, making its programmes uniquely responsive to the needs of teachers and students. This includes a 2016 study of students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. Findings from the Centre's latest research with teachers will be released in 2020.

The Centre's wider research has informed national plans for Holocaust remembrance and the role of education within that sphere. It has international reach, informing teaching and providing advice about intolerance and antisemitism through work with intergovernmental and education alliances in more than 50 countries.

Findings and impact

Impact on teaching and learning in England

In 2016, the Centre further developed its professional development programme for teachers, to address key findings from its study exploring what students aged 11-18 years knew and understood about the Holocaust.

This study, based on research with almost 10,000 students, highlighted the limited knowledge and misconceptions students often have about the Holocaust. It indicated that research-informed teaching of the Holocaust must first develop students' historical knowledge and understanding, otherwise students cannot formulate deeper and more profound meanings. For example, many students believed that Hitler was solely responsible for the Holocaust, but this narrow misconception prevented a more profound understanding of broader complicity and collaboration across Europe, and the potential implication of such human behaviour for contemporary society.

The Centre's programmes, therefore, continue to transform learning through:

- a national programme for new teachers - completed by over 5,000 beginning teachers to date
- continuing professional development for teachers, including sessions to address students' confusion about Britain's role in the Holocaust and their limited understanding of antisemitism - completed by over 7,000 teachers to date
- local support through the Centre's 139 Holocaust education 'Beacon Schools' forming a dynamic national network of over 800 schools, reaching over 800,000 students on an annual basis, and improving teaching standards, raising pupil achievement and strengthening spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision
- a new research-informed textbook (for publication in 2020), with at least 30,000 free copies being sent to secondary schools across England, increasing students' and teachers' knowledge of the Holocaust and reducing misconceptions.

Impact on national policy and development

Through government commissions, cross-party and parliamentary committee inquiries, the Centre's work has informed policy to ensure the memory of the Holocaust is preserved and that initiatives emphasize the importance of students drawing on sound historical knowledge and understanding.

- In 2014, the cross-party Holocaust Commission was set up and later published Britain's Promise to Remember: The Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report. The Centre's research was used as evidence throughout the report, citing that effective Holocaust education is failing to reach significant numbers of young people. The commission recommended including a Learning Centre to be built alongside the proposed National Memorial.
- In 2015, the Education Select Committee conducted an inquiry into Holocaust education. The Centre's research-informed recommendations that the status

of the Holocaust in the curriculum demanded high-quality teacher training which the Centre ensures through its programmes.

- In 2015, the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism recommended the government increase its grant to the Centre with a view to expanding its work and the number of teachers it can educate and support.
- In 2019, in partnership with the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Centre launched a DfE-funded national educational programme to commemorate and teach about Bergen-Belsen. Over 1,300 teachers and students will visit the site and education packs developed by the Centre will be sent to all 4,000 secondary schools in England for use with Key Stage 3, 4 and 5 students.

Impact internationally

The wealth of information derived from the Centre's research has been shared around the world and its impact has international reach. It has been described as being 'at the leading edge' of Holocaust education internationally. For example:

- teaching curricula and research-informed materials have been developed for the training of new teachers and senior school leaders in 57 member states of the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe, giving a potential reach of millions of students.
- in 2020, the Centre will launch an online course in partnership with Yad Vashem, "the World Holocaust Remembrance Center", to disseminate the Centre's research to teachers with the aim of improving knowledge about the Holocaust.
- the Centre's aforementioned textbook will be connected to the Wiener Library's website The Holocaust Explained which is the third most visited Holocaust website in the world.

Policy recommendations

Drawing on the Centre's international reputation and its national studies evidencing students' limited knowledge and misconceptions, as well as the challenges teachers encounter when teaching this complex subject, policymakers are alerted to the following recommendations:

1. Teachers continue to struggle to teach the Holocaust. It is imperative that schools can continue to access state of the art, high-quality professional development programmes and resources that better equip them to teach the Holocaust.
2. Meanwhile, there is growing evidence that schools also require greater support in addressing issues of hate speech, extremism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia. Serious consideration should also be given to developing new programmes for teachers which directly address school needs in Holocaust teaching and learning and, crucially, explicitly link to existing policies and

initiatives including, Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural (SMSC) development, Prevent, British Values and Safeguarding.

3. Wherever possible, public policy in Holocaust education should be driven by evidence-based, research-informed intelligence.
4. The UK has developed a world-leading infrastructure and reputation for research and development in the field of Holocaust education, which is also well-placed to contribute to education about wider examples of racism and intolerance. This should be celebrated as a key component in supporting schools and invested in on a sustainable basis.

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Supporting increased and wider participation in STEM

How we can change the way we think and what we do to improve engagement.

20 February 2020

Participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is widely recognised as being highly important for national economic competitiveness, greater upward social mobility and active citizenship. There is a strongly held belief that our future economy and workforce will need more, and more diverse, young people to continue with STEM post-16.

However, despite extensive investment by governments in the cause of attracting more young people to STEM subjects and careers, patterns in participation have remained stubbornly resistant to change.

The ASPIRES2 research, conducted at IOE, sought to generate new understandings of how and why young people come to see science as being ‘for me’, or not, with the goal of supporting more effective approaches to increasing and widening participation in STEM.

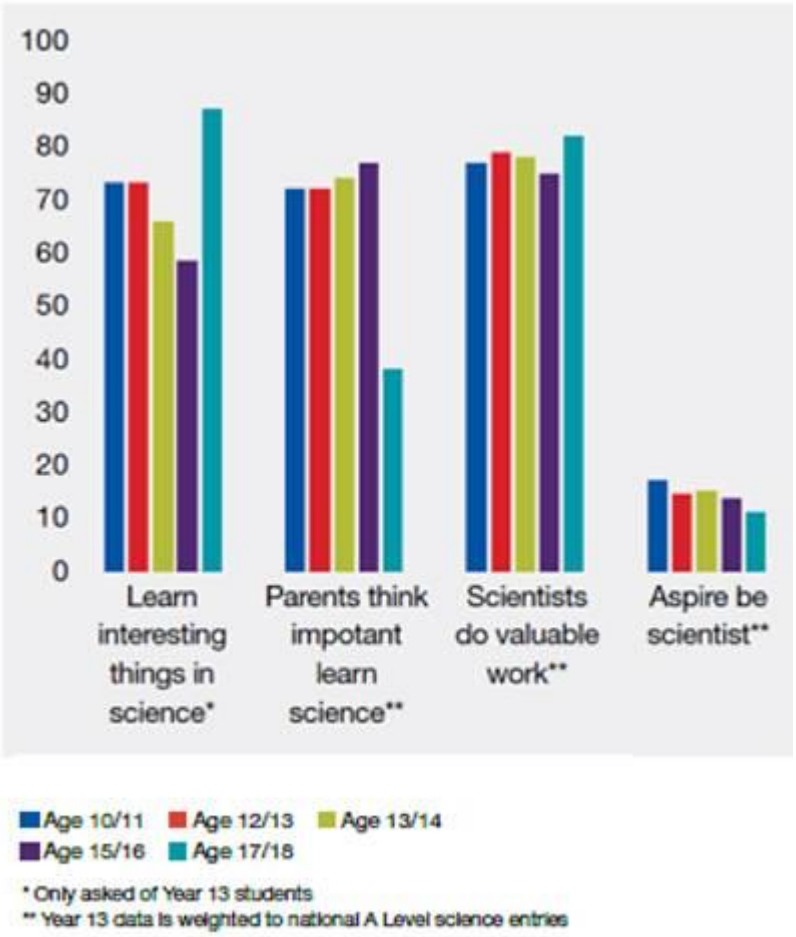
ASPIRES2, conducted 2014-2019, was a large, national mixed methods project that investigated young people’s science and career aspirations from the age of 14 through to 19. It surveyed 40,000 young people and conducted 650 in-depth interviews. The study, led by Professor Louise Archer, extended previous research, the ASPIRES project, conducted with the same cohort of young people at age 10 to 14.

The study provides an authoritative source of evidence on how young people view science (and STEM) and how these views change over time. In the process, it offers

valuable insights into the variety of factors that combine to shape a young person's likelihood of pursuing science and why existing efforts to build interest have had such limited impact. Its recommendations, re-frame the problem and the remedies.

Key findings

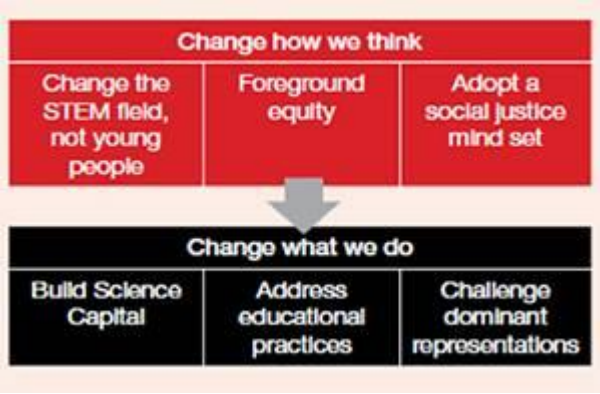
- Around 16% of young people in the ASPIRES samples wanted to be a scientist; this remained stable through the ages 10-19, although the demographic profile of those who expressed this aspiration became less diverse over time.
- Science aspirations and science identity age 10-19 show patterns of inequalities in terms of class, gender and ethnicity, with students from poorer backgrounds and girls showing less identification and engagement with science. While Black students tended to aspire to science careers, inequalities prevent their likelihood of continuing.
- Structural inequalities, science aspirations and identity are shaped by whether a young person has had opportunities to experience, do well in, feel connected with, be recognised in, and continue with STEM.
- This is influenced by (i) levels of 'science capital' – the science-related knowledge, attitudes, experiences and resources that an individual has built up; (ii) representations of science; and (iii) educational practices.
- Science capital is particularly important: 80 per cent of the ASPIRES qualitative sample who had 'never' showed an interest in science had low levels of science capital, while 83 per cent of those who continued with science post-18 had high science capital.
- Reflecting these factors and their interrelation with inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity, the research found that:
    - Working-class and minority ethnic students reported the most teacher turnover and teaching quality issues (e.g. 'non-specialist' science teachers).
    - The most socio-economically disadvantaged students were two and a half times less likely to study all three science subjects at GCSE compared to the most advantaged.
    - Working-class, minority ethnic students, girls and lower attaining students were significantly less likely to receive and benefit from high quality careers support.
    - Over time, many young women who continued with physics progressively 'downplayed' their femininity in order to better fit the masculine image and culture of the subject.
- Importantly, the research found that persistent, low science aspirations were not due to lack of interest in science (see Fig 1).



[Fig 1] Young people's science interest, valuing and aspirations ages 10-18 – survey data from over 40,000 students from age 10-18.

Policy recommendations

In highlighting how inequalities, rather than lack of interest in STEM subjects per se, are driving disengagement from science, the research findings signal the need to re-focus engagement efforts on ameliorating those inequalities. This requires a change of mind-set and of action, as set out below.



[Fig 2] Overview of recommendations for policy and practice: changing how we think and what we do.

Changing how we think

To date, society has tended to regard lack of engagement with science as resting with the individual. Existing efforts to engage young people have focused on ‘exciting, informing and inspiring’, in a way that reinforces the onus on the individual to change. This perpetuates elitism and inequities in access to STEM, as well as wasted talent.

Foregrounding equity and social justice requires a very different approach. The starting point needs to be an acknowledgement of how structural and systemic inequalities impact a young person’s opportunities, aspirations and self-identity in science. A commitment to changing the field (e.g. science and educational institutions, practices, systems) rather than young people, needs to sit at the heart of STEM education policy and practice in order to drive more equitable and informed approaches.

Changing what we do

To act on these changes means:

- **Building young people's science capital.** Science capital is generated through the day-to-day engagement an individual has with science, whether through, for example, the media, or relatives who work in a STEM occupation. Schools in particular should think about how they can develop these engagement opportunities for all their students, particularly in the classroom but also through extra-curricular opportunities.
- **Challenging dominant constructions and representations of STEM.** How science is represented (e.g. through education, the media, and in everyday life) influences whether young people consider themselves ‘suited’ to science. The pervasive association with ‘cleverness’ and (white) ‘masculinity’, and the persistent notion that being good at science is based on ‘natural talent’ (or having a ‘science brain’), are highly detrimental. Replacing them with a more expansive and inclusive image for STEM fields would make a difference.
- **Addressing educational practices.** Teachers’ attitudes and behaviours, young people’s experiences of school science, and the nature of the curriculum all play a part in reinforcing or undermining science aspirations and identities. Teachers can help build student engagement by adopting the Science Capital Teaching Approach – a social justice teaching approach that works with any curriculum and has been found to significantly increase students’ science capital, science aspirations, and attitudes to science. Governments and schools should also urgently address gatekeeping practices that prevent students from continuing with science, such as the stratification of science routes at Key Stage 4 into ‘Double’ and ‘Triple’ science in England (replacing this with a revised common route for all), as well as the often stringent grade entry requirements for post-16 academic science routes.

The impact so far

These challenges as set out by the ASPIRES/ASPIRES2 research are helping to bring about a shift in mind-set within the STEM community.

Based on the findings outlined above, and the team's further study, Enterprising Science, the ASPIRES2 team went on to develop the Science Capital Teaching Approach (SCTA). The accompanying SCTA Handbook (2), developed with 43 secondary science teachers, provides practical examples and tools for adapting lesson plans and activities to cultivate students' science capital. It is a free resource available in English and Welsh.

Since its launch in 2017, the handbook has been implemented in over 18 countries, most notably the UK, the US, Spain, Scandinavia and Australia. To date, over 4,000 teachers have so far engaged with the handbook. The Institute of Physics has trained their regional coordinators in the approach in order to cascade it to primary and secondary physics teachers nationally, and a new UCL/ KCL project is developing the approach for the primary sector.

Evidence from two trials of the use of the handbook showed significant increases in student science capital, as well as greater interest in studying science at A-level and more positive attitudes to science.

The ASPIRES research has also influenced government strategies in New Zealand, Norway and Malta. Science capital is now a criterion within the Primary Science Quality Mark, which reaches 240,000 children and 9,000 teachers annually, across and now beyond the UK. The Scottish government's new STEM Education strategy, which includes funding a network of 'STEM Regional Officers' and 'Gender Balance Officers' was also informed by the SCTA. Capacity is also being built within the informal science learning sector through the Science Museum/Association of Science and Discovery Centres two-year 'Science Capital in practice' programme, which supports 12 national science centres to embed the approach in their practice.

In recognition of this work, the ASPIRES2 team was awarded the British Educational Research Association 2018 prize for Impact and Public Engagement, and the 2019 Economic and Social Research Council Panel's Choice award for impact.

Our work in this area continues through the new ASPIRES3 project (which will continue tracking of the ASPIRES cohort from age 20-23), development of the science capital teaching approach in primary, and two projects addressing equity in informal STEM learning settings. To learn more, find out how you might get involved, and/or to find out how you might embed a science capital approach within your own policy and practice, please get in touch at ioe.aspires2@ucl.ac.uk.

Image

Credit: Alejandro Walter Salinas Lopez, UCL

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Between-class attainment grouping and educational inequality

A key UK policy goal is closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers, and to ensure that all pupils have access to high quality state education, regardless of background.

19 February 2020

Research suggests that the way in which we group pupils in schools may have a role to play here.

What is referred to in the US as ‘tracking’ – separating and directing pupils down different educational routes according to perceived ‘ability’[1] – may be between schools, via pre-selection into different institutions, or within schools, via practices such as streaming and/or setting[2]. In the UK, international data[3] suggest 99 per cent of secondary pupils attend schools which operate systems of grouping by attainment.

Yet longstanding research evidence shows that setting or streaming are not effective ways of raising attainment for most pupils, and that low attainers do relatively worse when in low attainment groups compared to mixed attainment classes.

The international research has shown consistently that pupils from lower socio-economic groups and certain BAME backgrounds are more likely than others to be placed in low attainment groups/tracks (with middle class White pupils disproportionately likely to be placed in high groups); and that pupils in low attainment groups/tracks tend to be subjected to lower quality resources and expectations compared with their counterparts in high attainment groups.

However, there has been little research on the composition of effective mixed attainment practice, or on efforts to improve equity within attainment grouping. Existing research also appeared to have had little effect on practice.

Hence we set out to explore ‘Best Practice in Grouping Students’ – a double randomised control trial study investigating specifically whether a ‘soft’ form of attainment grouping prevalent in English secondary schools, setting, could be made more equitable via an intervention based on prior research findings; and documenting aspects of successful principles in mixed attainment practice.

Our large-scale, longitudinal project[4] was funded by the Education Endowment Foundation. The research’s first strand, ‘Best Practice in Setting’, investigated setting across 126 schools with 24,742 pupils in Years 7-8. This aimed to improve and evaluate the educational attainment and self-confidence of pupils placed in attainment groups for maths or English by preventing poor practices.

The second research strand, ‘Best Practice in Mixed Attainment’, was a pilot study across 13 schools with 2,107 Year 7-8 pupils. It investigated the impact of mixed attainment teaching and grouping on pupil attainment and self-confidence, and what constitutes good mixed attainment practice.

What we have found is disturbing ongoing evidence of inequality of resource and outcomes. We have found that the power of self-fulfilling prophecy that is precipitated by attainment grouping, coupled with practical issues that impede schools from effectively improving equity issues, prevent improved outcomes. Overall there was no improvement in pupil outcomes through the intervention[5], and we found persistent trends of inequality in outcome wherein higher attainers benefit and lower attainers lose out. Given the demographic trends for attainment groups, our findings, reported below, provide illuminating evidence on the ‘double disadvantage’ that pupils from disadvantaged (and certain BAME) backgrounds are facing via subjection to placement in low attainment groups. From a policy perspective these findings demand close attention, given they a) provide insight into a cause of the attainment gap, and b) show that pupils are not being provided with equitable high quality provision (and hence, life chances).

Findings

Placement in sets is inequitable.

As with prior studies, we found that young people from low socio-economic status backgrounds, and from certain minority ethnic groups, were over-represented in low attainment groups in our school sample. This shows how attainment grouping leads to social segregation within schools. On top of this, we found that set allocation is unjust: a third of pupils in the ‘business as usual’ control group schools were allocated to sets that would not have been predicted based on their Key Stage 2 SAT test results. Unlike many prior studies, we did not identify trends of misallocation according to pupil socio-economic background, but we did find strong trends in relation to gender and (especially) ethnicity. For example, Black pupils were 2.5 times more likely than White pupils to be misallocated down one or more sets for maths, while Asian heritage pupils were 1.7 times more likely to be misallocated in

this way. These misallocation patterns appear to illustrate longstanding discriminatory stereotypes about particular pupil groups, reflected in allocation bias[6].

Setting influences self-confidence – in the curriculum subject concerned, and in general self-confidence in learning.

Setting was found to provide a boost to the self-confidence of high attainers in comparison to pupils from lower sets, while the self-confidence of bottom set pupils is significantly lower – both for the subjects in which they are set, and in general self-confidence in learning. We have shown that these significant effects on self confidence are evident shortly after pupils are placed in sets[7]. But importantly, we have also found that these trends are exacerbated over time, with the self-confidence of low-set pupils significantly lower in comparison to high set pupils, and this discrepancy growing over the two year period studied, resulting in a growing gap for self-confidence[8]. See figures in Appendix 1 for illustration.

Setting results in inequitable access to high quality resources.

We found a slight trend for top and middle sets to be taught by more subject-specialist teachers than bottom sets, and evidence of differences in pedagogy and expectation applied to pupils in different sets[9]. Pupils felt that teachers were stricter and more demanding with pupils in higher groups, reflecting higher expectations; while pupils often characterised lower groups as being 'babied' with dumbed down pedagogy and curriculum[10].

Setting significantly benefits the attainment of those in high sets and detrimentally impacts the attainment of those in low sets.

After two years, there was a significant increase in the English attainment level for pupils in the top set, and a significant decrease in English attainment for pupils in the bottom set, when compared with pupils in the middle set. A similar trend was shown for pupils in the maths trial where pupils in the top set achieved better over time, compared to the middle set. The attainment level in the bottom set decreased relative to the middle set, but this decrease was not statistically significant. The development of this trend over the two-year period suggests a cumulative effect over time.

Improving equity in setting practice may be theoretically possible, but is difficult in practice.

Schools struggled to comply with all the requirements of our 'Best Practice in Setting' intervention for a range of reasons, including practical ones such as timetabling arrangements[11]. But additionally, it appears from our findings on pupil self-confidence that the impact of self-fulfilling prophecy (i.e. labelling through attainment grouping and its impact) could in any case undermine outcomes.

Mixed attainment grouping addresses many of these issues, but is not a panacea.

Working with schools succeeding with mixed attainment grouping, we have identified various elements of pedagogy and conditions that support successful practice[12]. This represents a strong contribution to a topic that is presently under-researched.

Although low attainers were significantly more likely to prefer mixed attainment to setting, and there was broad support for mixed attainment practice among pupils experiencing it, some pupils across attainment levels were ambivalent about the approach, and that this was especially true for middle attainers[13]. Further robust research and resources for teachers must be provided if we are to encourage teachers to move towards mixed attainment practice.

Recommendations for policymakers

- There is a need for collective reflection on attainment grouping, for policymakers and professionals. It is clear that attainment grouping is promoting educational inequality (and by extension, social inequality) – which undermines equality of opportunity, life chances, and a strong education system.
- 'High integrity setting' is preferable to other forms of tracking – much more can be done here, both in replacing 'harder' forms of tracking[14] with high integrity setting in those schools that presently maintain streaming, and in improving the 'integrity' of setting for schools that are using this approach.
- Social mixing is established as a social and educational good, and should be facilitated. This can be achieved via mixed attainment grouping, and via replacing streaming with setting.
- Setting – as with all forms of attainment grouping - should be minimised.
- In order to work towards the development and extension of evidence-based mixed attainment practice, the government and its agencies should support further research and professional dialogue and development on good practice in mixed attainment grouping, and the development of high quality resources with which to support teachers and schools seeking to adopt this practice. This will achieved most effectively in concerted dialogue between schools[15] and representative organisations, unions and professional associations, educational charities and providers, researchers and policymakers.

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1 We do not ascribe to a view of 'ability' as fixed, hence our adoption of inverted commas.

2 There is a complex diversity of forms, often overlaying one another in practice; and a continuum between 'hard' and 'soft'/flexible forms of segregation by attainment (see Francis et al, 2020, for full discussion).

3 OECD (2016)

4 See also Styles & Roy (2017) for the RCT evaluation protocols.

5 See Styles & Roy (2017)

6 See Connolly et al (2019)

7 See Francis et al (2017)

8 See Francis et al (forthcoming)

9 Francis et al (2019)

10 Mazenod et al (2018)

11 Taylor et al (2018)

12 Taylor et al (forthcoming)

13 Tereshchenko et al (2018)

14 Such as streaming.

15 Effective and impactful change will be teacher-led, and these professional conversations will be vital to that end – whether conducted through professional associations and networks, unions, subject associations, social media, or individual class and staffrooms. In order to facilitate collective reflection, we have instigated a 'pledge' at our 'Best Practice in Grouping Students' webpage, wherein educators can commit to engaging professional conversations about attainment grouping and its impact, and what improvements might be made in their own school contexts.

16 The 95% confidence intervals were calculated using the standard errors of the regression coefficient and transformed into an effect size to produce the upper and lower bounds of the effect size from the model.

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Why university applications should be based on actual achievement

Students from deprived backgrounds are less likely than their more affluent peers to attend university; those who do progress to higher education are less likely to attend a prestigious university.

24 January 2020

These patterns are seen in many countries, but the problem is exacerbated in the UK by the unusual practice of applying to university on the basis of predicted exam results, before gaining the necessary qualifications. Teachers have a poor record of predicting A levels; recent research from the UCL Institute of Education (IOE) found that they are accurate just **16 per cent of the time**.

This research has added to the growing recognition that access to university could be widened if universities knew applicants' actual results when they apply, an approach called **Post-Qualification Application**. Such a system could increase the chance of students entering a course matching their ability, especially students from less affluent backgrounds.

Background and findings

In the UK, school leavers' applications for a university place are made a year or more before they start higher education. They are based primarily on teachers' predictions of the student's expected results in A levels or other entrance qualifications, alongside a personal statement and earlier exam results such as GCSEs.

IOE research by Dr Gill Wyness has shown the lack of robustness in this system – finding that teachers' grade predictions are accurate only about 16 per cent of the time.

This research used specially commissioned bespoke data from the University and College Admissions Service on predicted and actual grades (N=858,720 applications), and econometric techniques to look at the enrolment patterns of students from different groups.

The analysis showed that in the majority of cases teachers over-predict students' grades.

It also showed that this varied dramatically according to the student's socio-economic (SES) background: teachers tend to underestimate the possible performance of high achieving students from less affluent backgrounds compared with high achievers from more prosperous families, whose predictions tended to be more accurate.

The unintended effect may be that high attaining students from lower-income families are more likely than others to apply for less prestigious courses than their eventual exam results would permit them to enter, a phenomenon termed 'undermatch.'

Given the well-documented returns to high status universities and subjects this has important implications for the future earnings of students from low income backgrounds, and hence for equity and social mobility.

Policy recommendations

The recommendations that flow from this research are that university applications should be made when the results of entrance exams are known, to remove teacher grade predictions as a factor in applications.

This would involve significant changes to school-year scheduling, examinations timing and university admissions processes.

To date, the scale of such change has been a source of resistance to reform. The empirical evidence provided by Wyness has shown the lack of robustness and inequities in the reliance on predicted grades, as well as the scale of the problem. This is helping to make a much stronger case for change.

In the 2019 UK general election, it underlay the Mobility Manifesto produced by the Sutton Trust, the leading education think tank. Of the two major parties, the Conservative manifesto promised to "improve the application and offer system for undergraduate students," while Labour, citing Wyness's findings, said it would "introduce post-qualification admissions in higher education."

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References

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