IPPR

REPORT

EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

Tackling educational disadvantage in England's secondary schools

Contributions by
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Edited by Jonathan Clifton

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FOREWORD

HOW WILL WE KNOW WHETHER WE HAVE SUCCEEDED IN TACKLING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE?

BRETT WIGDORTZ

This book is based on an important premise: that there is an urgent moral, social and economic imperative to address educational disadvantage – one of the UK's most destructive and pervasive problems. There have been some general improvements in education over the last decade and there are countless exceptional teachers up and down the country working tirelessly to help their pupils to succeed, but debate about how to narrow the attainment gap between wealthier and poorer children rages on. The situation across England highlights the level of educational disadvantage: nearly 50 per cent of children claiming free school meals achieve no GCSE passes above a D grade (Cassen and Kingdon 2007); the reading skills of children from disadvantaged families are, on average, more than two years behind those of pupils from wealthier backgrounds, a gap twice as wide as in some other developed countries (Jerrim 2012); and in 2011, a quarter of English universities failed to meet their targets to admit more students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (OFFA and HEFCE 2011).

These are shocking statistics when you consider that educational inequalities have an impact throughout a child's life. Education is linked with happiness and wellbeing, mental and physical health and, ultimately, life expectancy. The more you learn, the more you earn, and you are more at risk of spending time 'not in education, employment or training' if you have no qualifications.

Clearly, focusing at the school level is vital. However, many great colleagues have been doing that for more than a decade and, while there have been dramatic improvements in many schools benefiting many pupils, it is still not enough. I fundamentally believe that the scale of change needed will only be achieved through the sustained collective effort of leaders in classrooms, in schools and throughout society. Each must challenge and change the status quo child by child, class by class and school by school, in order to address educational disadvantage for every single one of them.

This book sets out some ways to tackle educational disadvantage. But how will we know when we have succeeded in this mission? In order to help answer this question, Teach First has developed a set of National Impact Goals for 2022 – the result of consultation with thousands of teachers, school leaders, and other colleagues in Britain and around the world. These start with the important goal of raising school attainment, but this alone will not be enough. We must also support young people to realise their aspirations and enable them to access good jobs or continue their education. These three things combined will help us to improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged in society.

Ultimately what this ambition reflects is the crucial need for a culture of high expectations for all young people. When it comes to the education of our children we, as a nation, must support and expect them all to achieve, regardless of background. The first objective should be to raise school attainment, especially among schools that take in a high proportion of children from low-income backgrounds. To this end, Teach First uses a broad measure that looks at a pupil's best eight GCSE results, not counting equivalences. In primary school, we are looking to ensure a much higher proportion of children from low-income families achieve at least a minimum level of literacy and numeracy before moving on to secondary schools.

Attainment in exams is important because it demonstrates that a pupil has acquired key skills and knowledge, and helps to unlock the door to further education and employment. But in order to ensure that every child succeeds, we think there is a need to look at solving the problem 'in the round'. This led us to our second area of focus: 'getting the grades' needs to be part of a broader well-rounded education that takes into account how important it is to develop non-academic attributes.

In 2012, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation observed that while there isn't a proven poverty of aspirations among children from poorer backgrounds, there may be a lower likelihood of those young people *reaching* their aspirations (Carter-Wall and Whitfield 2012). This is an essential distinction. We believe that young people at schools in challenging circumstances may need to be even better equipped with the skills and characteristics necessary to see them succeed in life than their wealthier peers. They need to be leaving compulsory education with the resilience and emotional strength necessary to support them to meet their aspirations, whatever they may be.

This links to Teach First's third point of focus – we want to see pupils from low socioeconomic backgrounds accessing the same high-quality opportunities following compulsory education as those from wealthier backgrounds. To monitor progress towards this we will track the percentage of young people who are not in employment, education

or training one year after leaving school. We will also track graduation rates from universities, including the top 25 per cent most selective universities.

Teach First was created ten years ago in an attempt to tackle educational disadvantage, and our teachers and ambassadors, with the support of countless colleagues, have helped to transform the education of many children. But realising these three goals – raising attainment, realising aspiration, and increasing opportunities for school leavers – goes far beyond what Teach First, or any organisation, can accomplish on its own. It is going to take huge momentum and effort to create an environment where every child has access to the full range of life chances. It is ambitious, it is exciting, but more important it is necessary and evidence shows that it is achievable if we are going to create the society that we all want to live in. This book sets out some new ideas for how this could be done.

Brett Wigdortz
Founder and CEO
Teach First

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INTRODUCTION

JONATHAN CLIFTON

The story so far

Contrary to popular opinion, England's schools have come a long way over the last 20 years. We have progressed from a system where around half of 17-year-olds stayed in full-time education in the early 1990s, to one where more than three-quarters do today. Inner city London, once characterised by sink schools and middle-class flight, now has the best performing schools in the country. Teaching is an increasingly well-regarded profession, attracting a larger share of top graduates and being more open to public scrutiny. Reflecting these changes, exam results have improved, even accounting for grade inflation. In 1995 around half of 11-year-olds left primary school with the expected level of reading skills for their age group, while today that figure stands at over 80 per cent. Perhaps most encouraging of all, one of the most stubborn features of the English school system – the performance gap between poorer and more affluent children – has steadily narrowed over the last decade.

Some of these improvements are the result of factors that lie beyond the direct control of the school system, such as the gentrification of inner cities, reductions in child poverty and individuals opting to stay in education as a response to the changing demands of the labour market. But education policy has had its part to play in driving the improvements. Reforms initiated by Kenneth Baker in the late 1980s helped to establish a set of minimum standards that all children should be entitled to and gave schools more freedom to manage their own affairs. These reforms were built on by subsequent Labour governments, with high-profile policies such as replacing failing schools with academies, creating a new graduate training programme through Teach First, and systematically investing in new school buildings. Less glamorous, but probably more important for raising standards, was the steady focus on literacy in primary schools through the National Literacy Strategy, spreading good classroom practice throughout the school system through innovations such as the Literacy Hour, investing in leadership training for head teachers, and fostering greater collaboration between schools through the city challenges.

The challenge

There is therefore a lot that the school system – including teachers, school leaders and policymakers – can be proud of. But despite these improvements, there is more to do. Chapter 1 sets out some of the challenges facing England's schools. It shows that around a fifth of pupils still leave school without basic levels of literacy, a tail of low achievement that is almost twice as large as our competitor countries. England also stands out as having a particularly strong link between a child's socioeconomic background and their educational performance, as well as having a higher than average degree of social segregation in its schools. We may have halved the attainment gap between pupils on free school meals and their more affluent peers over the past decade, but we'll have to halve it again before we match the performance of our competitor nations. Educational performance is also very varied across the country, meaning that where a child is born has a considerable impact on their school results. In Hull, for example, 40 per cent of pupils end up in the tail of low achievement, compared to 9 per cent in Rutland (Leunig and Wyness 2013). When pupil characteristics have been controlled for, it is clear that some areas are much better at getting pupils out of the tail of low achievement than others – with London performing particularly strongly in this regard.

Taken together, these statistics paint a picture of a school system that is failing to equip over a fifth of young people with a proficient level of education. This is a problem because education provides children with the skills, knowledge, friendships and credentials to lead a fulfilling and productive life. School exam results are directly used to determine whether pupils can progress to further study or a job. A child's level of education will therefore determine the opportunities that are open to them later in life. The strong link between deprivation and attainment is a particular problem for social mobility, as it means a child born into a poor family 'faces life-long penalties regardless of their own abilities or effort' (Gregg and Macmillan 2010: 260). Gaps in education performance can go on to entrench wider inequalities in the labour market, housing market and social structures, creating cycles of disadvantage across the generations. The challenge facing the school system is to reduce the long tail of low achievement and break the link between poverty and educational outcomes, producing a system that is both excellent and equitable.

The purpose of this book

This book aims to examine how England's schools can tackle educational disadvantage, so that all children get a fair start in life. Its central argument is that relying on general school improvement policies will not be sufficient to do the job. Policymakers have tended to rely on the intuitive assumption that 'having better schools' will be enough to break the link between poverty and attainment. This has been the logic of many flagship policies including the introduction of

academies, free schools and tougher inspections. All of these are welcome policies that could help, in their own way, to raise standards in England's schools. However, as a number of the chapter authors point out, they are relatively limited in what they can achieve. This is because the difference between good schools and bad schools is smaller than many policymakers suppose. Even good schools have a large range in attainment, with disproportionate numbers of poorer pupils getting lower grades. As Clifton and Cook demonstrate in chapter 1, even if every school was rated 'outstanding' by the inspectorate, the attainment gap between more and less affluent pupils would only close by a fifth. Similarly, Machin and Silva (2013) demonstrate that while sponsored academies have been effective at raising average attainment, they have struggled to raise results for the lowest achievers. It is therefore important to think about what other tools are open to policymakers that will enable them to tackle low achievement within all schools – the good ones and the bad ones.

This challenge will be made much harder given the external climate that schools are operating in. A child's educational attainment is not just the product of the school that they attend – it is also the result of their individual characteristics, their family environment and the area where they live. In this light, the recent trend towards increased unemployment, child poverty and social segregation means that schools will have to work even harder to tackle educational disadvantage in the coming years. Many of the educational gains that England witnessed in the early 2000s occurred in a relatively benign climate of low unemployment and rising government spending. The environment that schools will be working in over the next five years will be far more challenging.

The remainder of this introduction sets out some of the key arguments and recommendations contained in the book.

School choice and admissions

The ability to choose a school is important for parents, who naturally want to do the best for their child. It has been at the heart of schools policy for the last 20 years, as policymakers have promoted choice and competition as a way to drive up standards. In chapter 2, Rebecca Allen explores a simple but important question: which families benefit from this choice? She shows that it is more affluent families who are in a position to play the admissions game, by paying inflated house prices near good schools, fulfilling complicated admissions criteria, and availing themselves of the option to choose a school. Rather than enabling poor families to access better schools, school choice has actually led our schools to become more segregated than the neighbourhoods in which they are located. This problem is compounded by the fact schools are able to administer their own admissions, as it presents them with an incentive to covertly select pupils who are easier to teach. The school segregation that results can affect pupil attainment in a number of ways,

for example disadvantaged schools may struggle to attract and retain good teachers, or the social mix of children in the classroom may affect the aspirations and attainment of the group as a whole.

The challenge facing policymakers is to create a school admissions system that balances the desire for parents to choose a school on the one hand, with the need to reduce segregation in our schools on the other. On this score, she argues that the government is moving in the wrong direction, with free schools and academies being given greater flexibility over admissions. The conversion of large numbers of schools into academies has also created a lack of oversight of the admissions process as a whole, raising concerns that some schools are 'cherry-picking' certain pupils (Academies Commission 2013).

While the right for parents to choose a school for their child is an important principle, it must be made to work in a way that is transparent and fair for all families, not just the wealthy. The government has already pledged to expand the best schools in order to accommodate the demand for places, but many schools will remain oversubscribed and their admissions should not be restricted to a small number of expensive houses that are closest to the school gates. To overcome this, schools should expand their catchment areas and devise a fairer way of allocating places if they are oversubscribed. Allen argues this could be done through a ballot, so that every applicant has an equal chance of being admitted. In a similar vein, some schools are already using 'banded admissions' where they admit a certain proportion of pupils from across the whole ability range. The government should support the use of these admissions processes, as they create a more level playing field. They should also prevent schools from administering their own admissions; this is inefficient, and schools are not neutral as they stand to gain from subtle forms of selection. It would be better for admissions to be administered by an impartial body such as a local authority or, as proposed by IPPR, a local school commissioner. This would prevent accusations of unfair play, save head teachers from endless rounds of appeals, and free up schools to focus on the core business of teaching and learning.

School accountability

Few school leaders would dispute that the accountability system – the plethora of league tables, targets and inspection regimes that has grown up over the last two decades – drives the way they manage their schools. This system developed in response to pressure from policymakers and the general public for greater transparency about how schools were performing. It is particularly important given the recent trend to give schools more autonomy over how they spend their resources and educate the nation's children – as the right checks and balances need to be in place to ensure that schools use their freedoms to good effect. As the international PISA study has shown, giving

schools autonomy leads to better results 'when combined with effective accountability systems' (OECD 2010: 4).

The finding that accountability systems are important in a system of autonomous schools does not, of itself, tell us which type of accountability system is most effective. They key question is whether the accountability system that we have in England is effective at raising standards, especially for those at the bottom of the attainment distribution. Some critics have argued that the apparatus of league tables and Ofsted inspections is too adversarial and should be abolished in order to leave teachers free to provide a more rounded education (Wilson 2012, Park 2013). However in chapter 3, Simon Burgess reminds us that these tools, while not perfect, have been very important for driving improvements in schools in England. Moreover, they are particularly important for schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which may lack other pressures to improve. He presents evidence from Wales that shows that the performance of schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods fell when they abolished league tables in 2001, a reform they are now reversing.

While a robust accountability system is important for driving improvements, it is clear that there are a number of flaws in the design of our system that need to be addressed. In particular, the incentives that schools receive through league tables and Ofsted inspections are not properly aligned with narrowing the attainment gap or raising low achievement. In his chapter, Burgess shows how performance incentives have been focused on middle-attaining pupils close to the borderline of gaining five A*–C grades, rather than those who are falling behind. In a similar vein, Brett Wigdortz argues that focusing on a child's exam results is too narrow a measure of success – we must also ensure that schools support young people to realise their aspirations and access good jobs or further study. To its credit, the government has recognised that the school accountability system has not been well designed to meet the needs of low-achieving children, and has proposed a number of reforms that are currently out for consultation. The evidence presented in this book supports a number of the proposed changes including replacing the main performance benchmark for schools with the average GCSE point score for all its pupils, collecting data on the destination of school leavers, and reforming Ofsted judgments to include separate measures for how a school performs for high-, middle- and low-attaining children.

These changes would mean schools face a more balanced set of incentives to raise low achievement, however there is a danger that such a large amount of information will be confusing to the public, and will still leave people focused on the 'headline' of raw attainment. In order to overcome this problem, a number of commentators have advocated bringing this data together in a single 'school report card'

(see for example Clifton and Muir 2010), something that Ofsted has now pledged to do.

While improving the existing accountability system is important, a theme running throughout this book is that focusing on outcomes alone is not enough. Policymakers also need to be concerned about the means through which these outcomes are achieved. There are many examples where a high-stakes accountability system can have perverse consequences. In chapter 8, Christine Harrison shows that schools have come to rely too heavily on short-term test results taken every few weeks, which can distort teaching practices, lead students to become disengaged, and reinforce a sense of failure. In chapter 9, David Price shows that a similar fate can occur when the curriculum becomes too content heavy and tied to test material. Research from the US has also raised concerns that performance metrics can lead schools to focus their effort and resources on teaching short-term test-specific skills, at the expense of making lasting learning gains (Corcoran et al 2011).

The lesson from these examples is that 'judgmental' accountability systems – such as league tables and inspections – are a useful tool for challenging low-performing schools and ensuring basic standards are met, but they cannot be the main driver for improvement in the school system, as it can demoralise teachers and distort their practice in the classroom. Sustained improvement requires more intelligent forms of accountability, which intervene initially in a non-judgmental manner – holding up a mirror to a school about their performance and building their capacity to improve; a role the IPPR proposes could be filled by the creation of expert school commissioners.

Ultimately, of course, it is teachers, not policymakers, who will drive excellence in our schools. Michael Fullan, the architect of Ontario's prized education system, argues that policymakers too often focus on the accountability system when they should be focused instead on building the collective capacity of the system to improve, with teachers being the key agents of change (Fullan 2010). Building the capacity of the teaching profession should therefore be the main emphasis of schools policy.

The teaching profession

It has now become widely accepted that the quality of teaching is the key driver of outcomes in the school system. As Dylan Wiliam demonstrates in chapter 5, a pupil placed with a high- performing teacher could make three times as much progress than if they are placed with a low-performing teacher. When it comes to getting good results, it matters much less whether you go to a good or bad school – what matters most is who teaches you once you are there. What's more, the effects of high-quality teaching are especially significant for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, while more affluent pupils appear to

be more resilient to differences in teacher quality. Increased teaching quality could therefore help to close the achievement gap as well as raising overall standards.

There are a number of ways to raise standards in teaching. An obvious point of call is to screen and recruit stronger applicants. The expansion of Teach First and the decision to raise the minimum degree qualifications for teacher training have been important tools in helping to bolster the status of the profession. However some of these gains were undone last year, when the government gave academies – which now represent the majority of secondary schools – the freedom to hire staff without qualified teacher status. Teaching is a highly skilled profession that requires rigorous training. Allowing large numbers of schools to hire unqualified teachers is a retrograde step that could damage the quality of teaching in this country, and it is a decision that should be reversed.

While policy has tended to focus on recruiting better teachers, Dylan Wiliam makes a powerful argument that we have to invest more in the teachers we already have. The gains that can be made through improving teacher recruitment are modest and will take a long time to filter through the system. What's more, even the best new recruits can begin to coast after two or three years in the job and stop making improvements in their classroom practice. He shows that what is needed to produce expertise is at least 10 years of deliberate practice, with a focus on reviewing and improving performance. A systematic strategy for professional development, where teachers are required to demonstrate how they are trying to improve their practice in order to progress, could therefore be twice as effective as all the attempts to improve teacher recruitment. Thankfully, developing the existing workforce does not require large upfront investment by schools, but it does require staff to be given time and support. In chapter 6, James Toop examines the role that middle leaders can play in driving up teaching standards. He describes them as the 'engine room of the school' as they are involved in curriculum development, observing lessons and coaching. Better use of middle leaders could help to ensure more consistent teaching within schools. Tim Brighouse, in chapter 7, sets out a very simple checklist for schools to help them create a culture of continuous improvement.

Strategies of professional development are important for raising standards across all schools, but they do not address the particular needs of schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These schools can struggle to attract and retain high-quality teachers, suffering from high staff turnover that can be very destabilising and contribute to their poor performance (Allen et al 2012, Husbands 2013). The incentives in the teacher labour market are generally for good teachers to work in good schools that are disproportionately located in more affluent areas. While programmes such as Teach First have helped to direct graduates

to schools in deprived areas, they are concentrated in London and Manchester – and do little for targeting schools in areas of the country that lag further behind, such as coastal towns. Devising ways to attract and retain good teachers to schools in these areas will be a priority in the coming years. In chapter 6, Toop shows how Teaching Leaders are allowing networks of schools to join their programme in these areas, building the capacity of middle leaders in places such as Humber and Hastings. Writing elsewhere, Husbands (2013) has proposed incentivising good teachers to these areas by offering a salary supplement, professional development guarantee and one-term sabbatical if they complete five years in post.

A fragmented school system

One of the biggest trends in English education policy over the last 20 years has been the gradual extension of school autonomy. Schools have been given more freedom to run their own affairs – most notably through the introduction of Local Management of Schools in 1988 and more recently through the academies programme, which has removed over half of secondary schools from local authority control. The decision to give schools more freedom rests on the important principle that 'the state works best when it works with and through strong autonomous institutions in a strong civil society' (Adonis 2012: xvii). Rather than seeking to micromanage public services, it is better for the state to empower skilled professionals to get on with the job. This is particularly important for schools in disadvantaged areas, which have to respond to very specific external circumstances. School managers have to be able to adapt their organisation and methods to fit the local area, which means that 'a one-size fits all' model of school improvement will not work (Lupton 2004). At their best, free schools and academies can provide a diverse range of strong institutions that respond to the needs of their local communities, helping to moderate the worst excesses of interference by both central government and market forces.

However, the rapid expansion of the academies programme over the past two years has created a number of tensions that need to be resolved. In particular, it is leading to a fragmented school system, with little coordination or oversight at the local level. England now has thousands of individual schools that are directly accountable to Whitehall, with no intermediate tier of governance, and which are not part of a coherent system. The danger is that the Department for Education is both too distant and too stretched to provide effective support or oversight to so many schools. The most successful school systems around the world all have some form of middle tier of governance, to help monitor performance, support schools to improve and help foster collaboration at the local level (Mourshed et al 2010). IPPR has argued that local authorities or city mayors should appoint school commissioners, who could provide this function (Muir 2012).

These individuals would not be responsible for managing schools – but they would be trained education professionals who can act as a champion for standards, intervening when school performance slips. They would draw from best practice in Ontario, which initially intervenes in schools in a way that is non-judgmental and supports improvement.

A particular danger with the current system, based on thousands of individual institutions in a competitive environment, is that it prevents schools collaborating with each other to improve. A number of studies have raised concerns that few converter academies are in chains and many are not fulfilling their obligation to work with weaker schools (Academies Commission 2013, O'Shaughnessy 2012). Meanwhile many of the structures that facilitate schools to collaborate, such as the highly effective London Challenge programme, have been cut. A review by Ofsted confirmed that when schools in London became academies, 'the change in designation appears to have separated them from the networks of support that they once enjoyed ... their commitment to school improvement has become much narrower in its reach' (Ofsted 2010). In chapter 7 Tim Brighouse advocates extending the use of 'families of schools datasets' to help overcome this problem. All schools should be given data on the performance of a series of named schools which are in a similar context to their own, so they can learn from strong performers in their own 'family'.

In Chapter 11, Hodgson and Spours present evidence that the fragmented school system is a particular problem for the 14–19 phase, with competing providers creating a complex array of pathways that risk young people falling through the cracks. This makes it difficult for young people not on the 'A level to university' track to know what options are open to them, making it difficult to transition into adulthood. They argue for partnership boards at the local level to bring all providers of education and training together to ensure the needs of young people are met.

The pupil premium

In chapter 4, Jonathan Clifton argues that the key to narrowing educational inequality is to provide interventions targeted specifically at those who are falling behind. This is the approach adopted in Finland, where nearly half of pupils receive some form of extra catch-up tuition over the course of their school career. It is also at the heart of some of England's most successful schools. It is particularly important to intervene early in a child's school career – around half of the attainment gap that we witness at age 16 was already present when those children started secondary school. Children who enter secondary school without the expected level of reading can struggle to engage with the curriculum and fall further behind. If policymakers are serious about tackling the attainment gap in secondary schools, they will have to address low attainment in primary school.

Thankfully the government has provided funding, in the form of the pupil premium, that could support targeted interventions. The pupil premium is a good idea, because it distributes funding in a more transparent way than the previous system and ensures that schools have resources to help disadvantaged pupils achieve good outcomes.

However, there are concerns that the pupil premium is not being used to best effect. In particular, the pupil premium provides insufficient funds targeted at the right age range, a problem that is exacerbated by a lack of accountability over how the funds are used. Chapter 4 argues that the pupil premium should be more explicitly targeted towards interventions for pupils who fall behind in primary and early secondary school, delivered through a 'catch-up entitlement'.

It also argues that the pupil premium needs to be accompanied by a wider infrastructure of professional support, providing schools with specialist teachers, training, guidance and materials. This was the key to the success of the Reading Recovery and Every Child A Reader programmes introduced in the 2000s, which involved training a cadre of Reading Recovery teachers, appointing a lead teacher to champion the programme in each school, and providing a package of professional development for staff. Evaluations have shown that these programmes were extremely effective at narrowing the attainment gap in primary schools, and it is concerning that they have been scaled back in recent years. The pupil premium should be reformed to ensure that this sort of activity takes place.

Beyond the school

A child's educational outcomes are influenced by a whole range of factors, including the families and communities where they live. In chapter 1, Clifton and Cook show that these wider social influences can have a bigger impact on a child's development than the school they attend. This is not an excuse for schools to give up on the aim of tackling education disadvantage, but it does provide some clues for where they might need to focus their effort. Attempts by schools to close the achievement gap could therefore focus around making up for what some families and communities fail to provide.

Chapter 10 draws on the model of the Harlem Children's Zone in New York and shows how they have created a 'pipeline' of support around a child as they grow up, including parenting programmes, health initiatives and family support work. This requires agencies to work together to tackle problems at the local level. The notion of 'area-based' programmes is not new to England, but it has receded from the political spotlight in recent years, and is something that could be revived.

Conclusion

The government has embarked on an ambitious school improvement agenda. This has tended to rely on a series of structural changes, such as the creation of academies. While these are important, they will not be sufficient to close the gap between more and less affluent pupils. This book proposes a number of other ways that policymakers could try to tackle educational disadvantage.

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1.

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN CONTEXT

JONATHAN CLIFTON AND WILL COOK[1]

Education can provide the springboard to a better life. It equips people with the skills, knowledge, friendships and credentials to participate fully in society. Research studies have identified a causal relationship between high levels of education and a number of outcomes, including higher earnings (Dickson 2009), lower teenage pregnancy (Black et al 2008), healthier lifestyles and a lower likelihood of serving a prison sentence (Heckman et al 2006).

Why does the achievement gap matter?

In this context, it is important that every child has an equal opportunity to succeed at school. However, a number of studies have shown that there is a strong relationship between poverty, deprivation and academic achievement (Sylva et al 2012, Duncan and Murnane 2011, Gregg et al 2012). This means that a child born into a poor family 'faces life-long penalties regardless of their own abilities or effort' (Gregg and Macmillan 2010: 260). Gaps in education performance can therefore go on to entrench wider inequalities in the labour market, housing market and social structures. Tackling the link between education and poverty could therefore help to break these cycles of disadvantage (Blanden et al 2007).

This problem isn't just a matter of giving our children a fair start in life, it also affects our ability to compete with other countries. In the world's leading school systems a child's academic success is less likely to be a result of their family background, and more likely to be the result of their own ability and effort. In countries such as Finland, Korea and Canada one in ten pupils fail to reach basic proficiency in reading. In England that figure is twice as high.

What role can schools play in narrowing the achievement gap?

A child's educational development is influenced by a complex range of factors, including their individual characteristics, the wider family environment, the neighbourhood where they live and the schools they attend (Rasbash et al 2010). While many of the factors driving low

1 This chapter is based on our 2012 report, *A long division: Closing the attainment gap in England's secondary schools* (Clifton and Cook 2012) published by IPPR.

achievement lie beyond the direct control of schools, it is a mistake to assume that schools cannot therefore be part of the solution. As a key public service, schools are charged with mitigating these wider effects of poverty. More than any other institution, they can help level the playing field so that all children get a fair start in life. Case studies of good schools serving disadvantaged communities show that high-quality education can help to transform lives and compensate for shortcomings elsewhere in society (Ofsted 2010).

It is therefore possible to argue that schools *can* reduce educational inequality, although their job will be made much harder in the face of wider social problems such as poverty, poor parenting and a weak labour market. The recent rise in unemployment and child poverty, in particular, may serve to widen the achievement gap in schools. In government terms, this means policies pursued in relation to the economy, communities and job market may undercut the ability of schools to tackle educational disadvantage.

The scale of the problem

The link between poverty and educational achievement is well known. The government often reports this by comparing the results of pupils who are eligible for free school meals with those who are not. For example, last year 36 per cent of pupils on free school meals achieved five good GCSEs including English or maths, compared to 63 per cent of better-off pupils. This provides a useful snapshot of the problem, but it masks a bigger story.

As Figure 1.1 shows, the problem is not just that a group of the poorest pupils fail to reach a basic level of education (though this is certainly true). Rather, there is a clear and consistent link between deprivation and academic achievement wherever you are on the scale. Those pupils living in the most deprived postcodes score on average 320 points at GCSE, or the equivalent of about eight grade Cs, and the results gradually improve as you move towards the least deprived postcodes. Pupils living in the wealthiest postcodes score on average 380 points, or the equivalent of just over eight grade Bs. It is therefore not possible to identify a particular level of deprivation at which performance falls. This challenges the assumption that programmes targeted towards pupils who are eligible for free school meals will be sufficient to close the gap, as the problem is much wider than just this group of pupils.

It is important to stress that this relationship is not deterministic. The line in the graph is the average performance of pupils living in those postcodes, and many do considerably better than this. It is perfectly possible for a child living in a deprived neighbourhood to achieve excellent results that are higher than those of wealthier pupils. However, the graph shows that the general trend is not for this to happen.

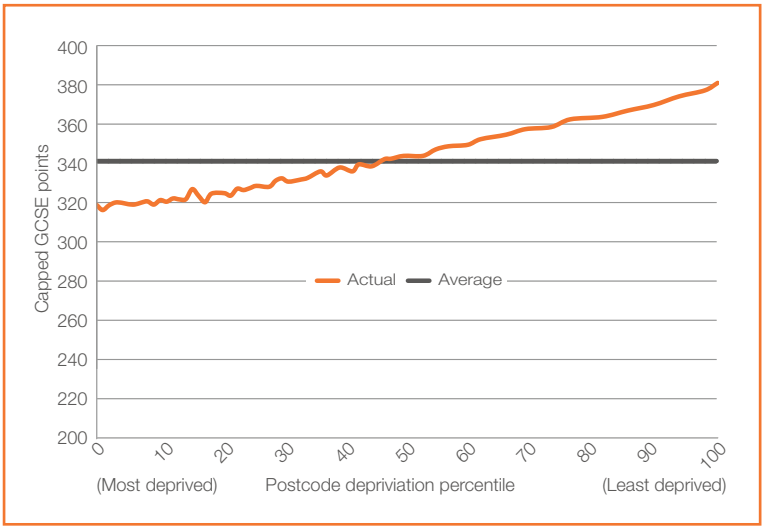


Figure 1.1 Capped GCSE points by postcode deprivation

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all charts in this chapter are based on analysis of the National Pupil Database. The data is for pupils who completed their GCSEs in the 2010–11 academic year and were educated within mainstream schools. For a detailed explanation of the methodology, see Clifton and Cook 2012: 8.

How does the achievement gap in England compare to other countries?

The link between social class and educational performance is not unique to England. The influential Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that an achievement gap between rich and poor pupils exists in all Organisation for Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. In the latest test, students from more socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds outperformed students from average backgrounds by around 38 points, the equivalent of one year's worth of education (OECD 2010a: 14).

While a relationship between family background and education performance exists in all countries, the strength of that relationship varies considerably. In England the relationship between socioeconomic background and educational performance is particularly strong, and we also have a higher than average degree of social segregation in our schools. Many countries that have equitable systems also have high overall standards – including Finland, Canada and Korea. This shows that it is possible to have both equity and excellence in a school system – they need not be viewed as competing objectives (OECD 2010a: 57). The following box summarises how the UK compares to other countries on some key indicators.

Table 1.1
Measures of the relationship between socioeconomic background and reading performance, PISA 2009

Box 1.3: Equity in the school system: how the UK compares to other countries

	Strength of socioeconomic gradient	Slope of socioeconomic gradient	Percentage of 'resilient students'	Proportion of students failing to reach level 2 baseline
United Kingdom	14	44	6	19
Key competitors' average*	11	38	11	10
OECD average	14	38	8	18

***Key competitors are defined as Australia, Canada, Finland, Korea and Singapore. These were chosen as countries that traditionally score well on PISA and are frequently cited in comparison to UK performance.**
Source: Adapted from OECD 2010c

Strength of socioeconomic gradient: The OECD constructs a socioeconomic gradient, which summarises many of the aspects of educational equity that can be analysed by PISA. The strength of the gradient measures the percentage of variation in student performance that is explained by the student's background. Equitable systems will have a low score. The UK has the same score as the OECD average (14 per cent) but in competitor countries this is lower still, at 11 per cent.

Slope of socioeconomic gradient: This measures the average gap in performance between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The slope shows how much a student's performance changes with a change of socioeconomic status. The steeper the gradient, the greater the impact socioeconomic background has on performance. Equitable systems will therefore have a low score. The OECD average is 38 points, which means for every extra unit on the index of socioeconomic status, students will on average score 38 points higher on the test. The UK is well above the OECD average, with a score of 44.

Percentage of resilient students: These are defined as students who come from the lower quartile in terms of socioeconomic background but go on to score in the top quartile in terms of their PISA test results. They can therefore be seen as having 'overcome' a disadvantaged background. On this measure, the UK trails both the OECD average and key competitors, with only 6 per cent of students being defined as 'resilient'.

Proportion of students reaching baseline proficiency: A key measure of absolute outcomes in an education system is the proportion of students who achieve the basic proficiency required to lead an effective and productive life. On the PISA test, this

is defined as the proportion of students who score below level 2. On this measure, the UK performs almost exactly at OECD average, where 19 per cent of students fail to achieve level 2. But it trails well below high-performing systems, which are able to get all but 10 per cent of their students to this level.

How has the achievement gap changed over time?

Most official data sources on the attainment gap measure the difference in GCSE results between pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those wealthier pupils who are not eligible for free school meals. This data shows that while both groups have improved their results in recent years, there has been a faster improvement among the FSM eligible group (see figure 1.2). There has therefore been a small narrowing of the class gap over the last decade.[2]

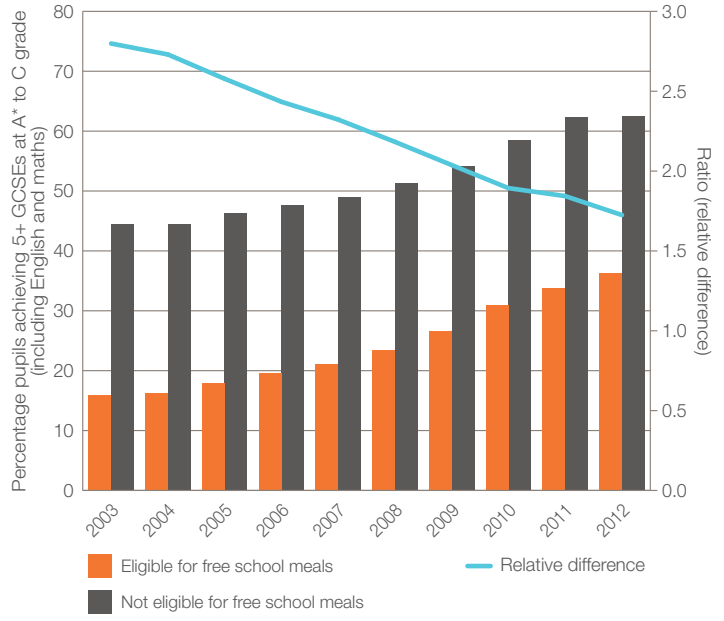


Figure 1.2 Changes in the attainment gap at GCSE 2003–2011, by free school meal eligibility

2 Some critics have argued that the improved performance of FSM pupils is a result of grade inflation and the increased use of vocational 'equivalent' qualifications. However, the narrowing attainment gap can be seen even when 'equivalent qualifications' are stripped out of the analysis (Cook 2011). This shows that the growth of vocational qualifications cannot explain more than a fraction of the reduction in educational inequality in recent years.

It is difficult to identify what has driven this improvement in educational achievement among the poorest pupils. A key part of the story will be reductions in child poverty and urban deprivation that in turn had an impact on educational achievement. Increased immigration and an increasing ethnic minority population could also explain the improvements, since the educational achievement of immigrants and ethnic minorities has been found to be less affected by family income (Luthra 2010, Kapadia 2010). Reforms to qualifications in the late 1980s will also have had a part to play, as they encouraged more children to stay in education and increased motivation (Machin 2003). Some of the more recent GCSE results will also reflect the education policies of the previous government: such as improved teaching and investment in schools in deprived areas; the provision of wrap around services such as the extended schools programme; and targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy in primary school.

The positive lesson from recent history is that public policy can turn the tide of low achievement in England's schools. However, the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their wealthier peers remain very large, and there is a danger that they could increase as a result of the recession. As a society, we are still failing large numbers of young people, and schools have an important part to play in rectifying that.

A challenge at the top and bottom

The government has placed particular emphasis on increasing the number of pupils on free school meals who get top GCSE results and gain access to elite universities and professions (see for example Gove 2012, Clegg 2012). While raising achievement at the top is important, it is only a small part of the picture; there is also a long tail of underachievement among disadvantaged pupils. This is a far bigger problem for policymakers to address, in terms of both the proportion and absolute number of pupils involved.

Figure 1.3 shows why big improvements are needed among low achievers. There is a much bigger variation in GCSE results among poorer pupils than there is among wealthier pupils. The highest-achieving pupils from deprived postcodes score almost as well as the highest-achieving pupils from wealthier areas – they score about 40 points less at GCSE. However, the low-achieving pupils from deprived neighbourhoods score much worse than the low-achieving pupils from wealthier areas – they score about 120 points less at GCSE. In essence, the challenge for policymakers is to reduce the large variation in scores that occurs among children from deprived areas, by raising the tail of low achievement.

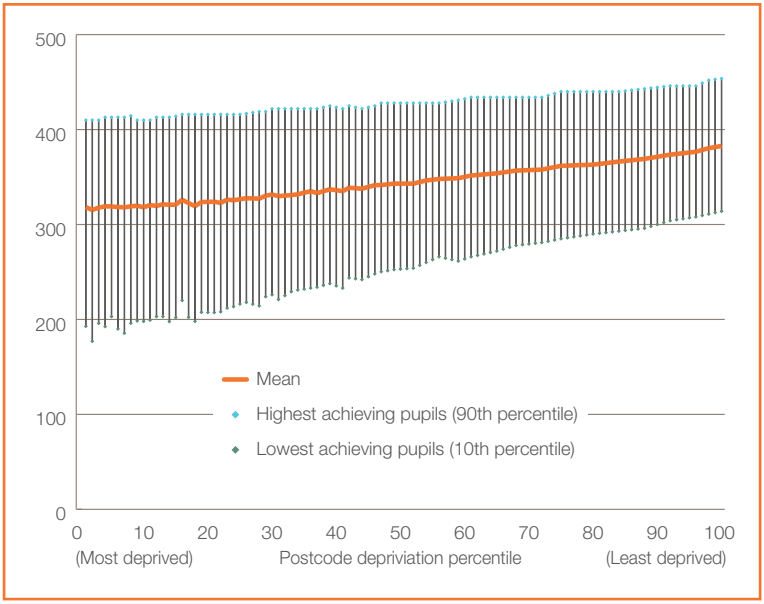


Figure 1.3
Variation in pupil performance at GCSE, by postcode deprivation (capped GCSE points)

Policymakers are right to be concerned about stretching the most able pupils from deprived areas, with its potential to help them secure access to good universities and professions. They must, however, not lose sight of the bigger challenge facing the English system: tackling low achievement. International comparisons show that the key to creating a world-class school system lies in raising the performance of those at the very bottom of the attainment distribution (OECD 2010a). If England wishes to develop a world-class school system, it will have to focus on raising its long tail of low achievement.

Are secondary schools to blame for the achievement gap?

The gap in achievement is not something that just occurs in secondary school. The influential work of Feinstein (2003, 2004) has shown how educational inequalities appear as early as age three and then continue to widen as children grow up. This is because children from wealthier families are exposed to more stimulating environments and a larger vocabulary in their early years, which enables them to develop their cognitive abilities at a faster rate. As a consequence, a large part of the achievement gap that we witness at age 16 did not occur in secondary school – it was already present by the end of primary school. Clifton and Cook (2012) estimate that around half of the achievement gap that is present at age 16 was already present when these pupils started secondary school. It is clear from this finding that even if the gap in

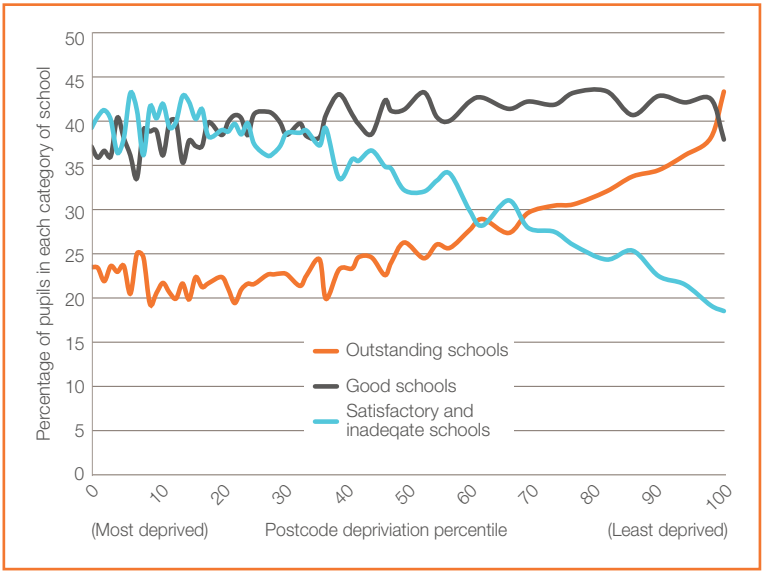
attainment did not widen at all during secondary school, a substantial gap would still exist at GCSE as a result of inequalities from earlier in life.

This finding has two implications for policymakers. First, it will be hard for secondary schools to do all the work in narrowing the attainment gap – primary schools and early years services will also have their part to play. Second, it will not be sufficient for secondary schools to simply ensure that all pupils make equal levels of progress. Rather, they will have to actively target those pupils who are already falling behind when they begin Year 7. Targeting pupils who fall behind in late primary school and early secondary school will be particularly important, as research shows the attainment gap widens very quickly between the ages of 7 and 14 (Goodman et al 2010).

Can 'school improvement' policies narrow the attainment gap?

A common explanation for the attainment gap is that pupils from deprived areas are more likely to attend bad schools and as a result do not receive as good an education as wealthier pupils who go to better schools. Figure 1.4 clearly shows that this is true. Indeed, pupils from deprived areas are about as likely to attend a school rated 'satisfactory or inadequate' as wealthier pupils are likely to attend a school rated as 'outstanding'.

Figure 1.4 Distribution of pupils by Ofsted rating (% of pupils)



In an attempt to address this problem, successive governments have tried hard to improve the quality of schools serving deprived areas. Most notably, the Labour government introduced the academies programme,

which successfully turned around a number of inner city schools (Adonis 2012). More recent efforts have seen the schools inspectorate increase pressure on schools rated as 'satisfactory' to improve, the forced conversion of a number of failing schools into academies, and the introduction of free schools intended to provide a competitive spur to drive school advancement. The underlying logic of these policies is that educational inequality can be tackled by school improvement policies.

The government is right that having a larger number of good schools in disadvantaged areas will improve the results of poorer pupils. However, this on its own will not be sufficient to close the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils. This is because although disadvantaged children get better results in outstanding schools, so do all the other pupils. The overall level of attainment is shifted upwards in these schools, but the gap between rich and poor remains. Figure 1.5 shows this problem by comparing the performance of poorer pupils with other pupils in the same school. The horizontal axis ranks schools from the weakest on the left to the best on the right, using a school's contextual value added score as a measure of its quality. It is clear that poorer pupils perform worse than wealthier pupils whichever school they are in. Even in good schools (those on the right-hand side of the graph) we see pupils living in the most deprived neighbourhoods tend to perform worse at GCSE than the rest of their year group. This supports analysis by Cook (2012) who found a similar result when looking at the performance of pupils in schools when rated by the proportion of their pupils achieving five good GCSEs.

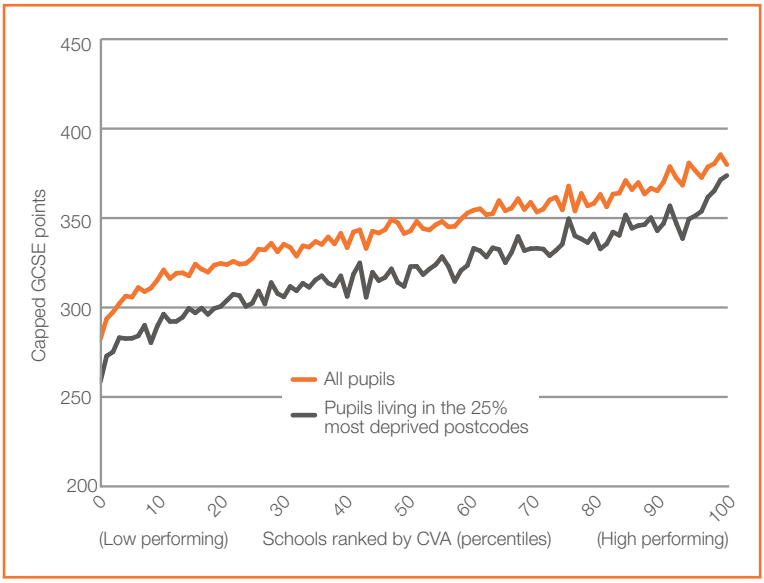


Figure 1.5 GCSE performance within schools, by CVA score (capped GCSE points)

School improvement policies are therefore a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for closing the attainment gap. Even if the government was able to turn every school into an outstanding one – and this will of course be very difficult to achieve – this would not be enough to close the attainment gap between rich and poor children. Our calculations show that if every pupil went to an outstanding school, the attainment gap would only be cut by a fifth. This is because even in outstanding schools the wealthiest pupils still tend to get the best results and the poorer pupils the lower results. It's what happens within the school that really counts.

Conclusion: The importance of tackling within-school variation

Despite notable improvements since the turn of the millennium, there remains a strong causal link between a child's family income and their educational achievement. International comparisons show that breaking the link between social class and educational achievement, while raising our long tail of low performance, holds the key to creating a world-class school system for England.

If the government is serious about narrowing educational inequality, it will have to actively target pupils who are falling behind, whichever sort of school they are in – the outstanding ones as well as the underperforming ones. This will not require big structural changes such as creating academies and free schools, important though these are. Instead, it will require teaching and interventions targeted at those pupils who are falling behind. This is the approach taken in world-class systems such as Finland and Canada, which emphasise developing consistently high-quality teaching, coupled with catch-up tuition in primary and early secondary school (Sahlberg 2011: 45–49, Fullan 2010).

This raises a variety of questions for policymakers and school leaders: How can we ensure schools use their resources to help pupils who are falling behind? How can the curriculum be designed to stop pupils from becoming disengaged? How can we improve the quality of teaching and ensure it is consistent across all classrooms? How can schools compensate for communities and families that fail to provide a supportive learning environment? How can we ensure that the context in which schools operate – including the admissions process and performance management systems – are aligned with raising low achievement and tackling educational disadvantage? The following chapters set out some ideas for how this might be done.

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2.

FAIR ACCESS: MAKING SCHOOL CHOICE AND ADMISSIONS WORK FOR ALL

REBECCA ALLEN

> 'The debate about admissions, while often appearing to be about arcane technicalities, does in fact go to the heart of current policies about how best to achieve social justice, an improved education system and a cohesive society.'
>
> Coldron et al 2008: 3

In England, parents can choose where their child is educated. The question is who, if anyone, benefits from this choice? The introduction of a quasi-market for school places has been central to government aims to improve school standards for the past 20 years. However, opinions remain polarised about whether these types of reforms are welfare enhancing. Critics argue that higher-income families benefit at the expense of the poor, because they are advantaged in their ability to exercise choice or because schools that control their admissions 'cream-skim' easier to teach pupils. The large number of school conversions to academy status has seen these concerns rise following the removal of central oversight of the admissions process (Pearson and RSA 2013). Proponents of the reforms suggest that low-income families necessarily benefit most from the removal of the housing market's role as a gatekeeper to schools, because they are the group for whom 'the current constraints [of school allocation] are most binding' (Hoxby 2003a: 10). Many advocates go further and argue that, regardless of how choice alters the allocation of pupils to schools, all pupils ultimately benefit because competition between schools for pupils induces them to increase their effort, thereby raising productivity – described by Hoxby (2003b) as 'the tide that raises all boats'.

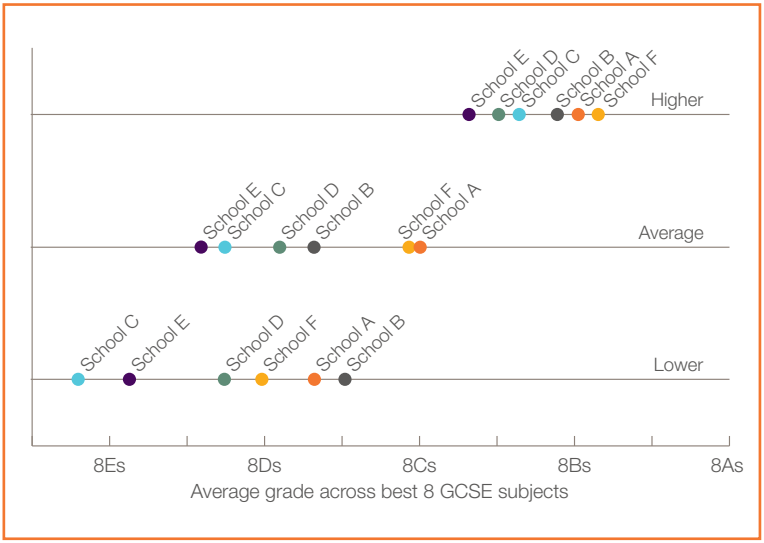
In this chapter I argue that choice of school is far more critical to the life chances of those who are falling behind academically than it is for other children, and it is precisely these children who may have families who struggle to negotiate our very complex school choice process. Policies to constrain school freedoms over admissions policies can improve the social mix across schools and I describe how the desire for socially integrated schooling might best be balanced against minimising school journey times and maintaining access to neighbourhood schools.

School choice matters most for educationally disadvantaged pupils

Pupil attainment isn't solely determined by the luck of a child's social and genetic endowment; the quality of the teachers and schools a child experiences throughout their childhood makes a substantial contribution to their educational success. Research I completed with Simon Burgess shows that school choice matters more for those with poor initial skills and for deprived pupils than it does for more affluent pupils (Allen and Burgess 2011, Allen and Burgess forthcoming). We make this claim by predicting how every child in England would perform if they had attended each of their local secondary schools in turn. In general, we find that those who scored highly in their end of primary school tests are likely to be almost equally as successful in each of their local schools. By contrast, those with poor primary school test scores have a very wide range of GCSE predictions, depending on which secondary school they are able to attend.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the divergence in the importance of school choice for different groups of children choosing between six local schools (named A to F). The typical child with high attainment at age 11 is likely to gain about eight B grades at GCSE and there is little difference in expected outcomes at the best (school F) and worst (school E) performing schools. By contrast, a lower-attaining child at age 11 might be expected to achieve fewer than eight Es or as many as almost eight Cs, depending on which local school they attend. The variation is likely to be most stark for this group of children because schools vary so much in how they accommodate their curriculum offer, pastoral care and organisation to meet their needs.

Figure 2.1
How school choice matters most for low-attaining children



So, given the known relationship between social class and attainment at age 11, it follows that school choice is crucial for precisely a group of families who are known to engage very differently in the choice process to the way the government intends. Other research shows that primary school admissions are equally important: school allocation at age five is an important reason why the social-class gap in achievement widens as children progress through school (Hobbs 2007, Sacker et al 2002). Indeed, these inequalities in progress are an almost inevitable consequence of social stratification between schools if a child's peers affect their educational success or if social mix of children in a school attracts particular types of teachers or other resources. The social mix of children in the classroom shapes the culture and aspirations of the group as a whole – this is known as the 'peer effect'. But schools with deprived intakes may have other more serious disadvantages if they struggle to recruit and retain a stable and talented teacher workforce (Allen et al 2012).

Inequalities exist in access to the highest performing schools

Across the English state-funded sector parents are first asked to express a preference for schools, then school admissions criteria and practices determine how places are allocated, taking account of the preferences of schools for pupils ahead of parental preferences for schools. School capacity imposes very real constraints on the extent that parental choice is genuine and feasible; but the current system of admissions clearly offers some parents a greater and more appealing choice of schools than others. This is, in part, a result of the housing market, with wealthier families more able to access higher quality schools through house moves – Gibbons et al (2013) estimate that a school right at the top of the league tables attracts a house price premium of around 12 per cent relative to one at the bottom. But the greater choice available to churchgoing families also exacerbates inequalities in choice because those families are more likely to be of a higher social class (Allen and West 2011). Finally, the capacity to prepare a child for an academic selection test at one of the nine per cent of secondary schools who are partially or fully selective is highly socially conditioned.

Schools are more segregated than the neighbourhoods in which they are located, confirming that where pupils are not attending their nearest school, it does tend to increase social segregation between schools, relative to underlying housing segregation (Allen 2007). Furthermore, where children who live in the same postcode attend different secondary schools, the child who is eligible for free school meals is still two percentage points less likely to attend a high-performing school than the child who is not (Burgess and Briggs 2010). This should be taken as an indication that the choice processes allocating pupils to schools may

in some way be inequitable with the result that high-quality schooling is unevenly distributed across the social classes. This may be because low-income families are financially constrained in their ability to make choices, or they are unable to meet the criteria to gain places at popular schools, or alternatively they may not be choosing to engage in the choice process.

The case for stricter regulation of school admissions

Decades of cumulative reforms have resulted in a process that is complex for parents, with experiences varying considerably across the country. The Labour government of 1997–2010 worked hard through a series of reforms to the School Admissions Code to rebalance school admissions in favour of parents rather than schools. For example, they removed the right of schools to interview parents or pupils or to access primary school academic records in advance of admission. They also prevented priority being given to families with a historic connection to the school or to the children of staff or governors. Research I completed with Anne West and John Coldron showed that these reforms directly contributed to more socially integrated schooling over this period (Allen et al 2012).

Unfortunately, some of these reforms have already been reversed by the Conservative-led Coalition government, justified as facilitating greater diversity within the system. For example, the children of staff and founders are now able to gain priority in admissions, which makes the recruitment of teachers and assistants easier for already popular, oversubscribed schools at the expense of struggling schools. There is also a reduction in the circumstances under which objections can be made to the adjudicator. This justification of 'diversity' is wrongly placed since it simply introduces greater complexity into the choice process and protects the interests of schools to recruit a pupil intake that suits their interests at the expense of parents navigating a complex system. The government suggests that a school's incentive to cream-skim will be removed by the introduction of the pupil premium (currently £623), but the pupil premium will never reach a rate that incentivises schools to take on poorly performing pupils given the obvious risk to their league table position.

The design of a school admissions system should place equality of access to schools at its heart. I do believe the right of parents to have a say over how their child is educated is important and should be facilitated as far as possible. But I do not believe that social segregation is the price that must be paid for enabling free parental choice and facilitating competition between schools. It is true that there exists a social-class gradient in the capacity (and desire) of parents to engage in the school choice process. However, this has been exacerbated by the complexities of the English choice system, which continues to sanction variation in admission procedures across state-funded schools

and allows criteria so complex that it is impossible for a family to assess the probability of achieving a place at their desired school. There are no moral or market-orientated arguments as to why schools should have so much discretion over admissions, and the current complexity simply serves the interests of these schools, and indeed of parents, who are most able to navigate the system. Policies to simplify admissions procedures may in themselves be more equitable, and in addition simplification may encourage low-income families to engage with the system. There are clear efficiency and equity reasons for paying closest attention to those most currently disadvantaged since school allocation matters to their educational attainment the most.

Conceptualising 'fair access'

My recommendations to change school admission policies follow the concept of 'fair access' as enshrined in the 2007 admissions code, in which the then education secretary Alan Johnson wrote that the advent of the new code would ensure that admissions procedures 'operate in a fair way that promotes social equity and community cohesion' (DfES 2007: 7). Social equity or balance has all the advantages of producing greater equality in school choice across social classes and also creates an effective competitive environment where schools must attract parents based on quality rather than intake characteristics. The right to access a nearby school allows children to be educated with friends, creates community cohesion around the school activities, reduces car congestion and pollution, maximises the chances a child can walk to school and lowers the stress of choice for parents.

Proposals for new admissions rules

I do not propose radical changes to school admissions, simply because it is unrealistic to expect such change to take place in any plausible future political climate. So, for example, I will entirely set aside the issue of the remaining grammar schools and will continue to allow an element of faith selection, as discussed below.

The core reform to the school admissions system would be to set aside capital funds to allow the amount of spare capacity in the system to increase to as much as 20 per cent if it is needed (up from current levels of somewhere between 5 and 10 per cent). All standard non-faith schools would be assigned a catchment area with guaranteed child entry that represents approximately 80 per cent of their places; if possible, catchment areas should include a mix of housing types; and all remaining places would be allocated by lottery, without regard to a child's place of residence. This system would give every family some degree of certainty that they will get a place at their local school; everyone would also have a chance to roll the dice to attend a school of choice, even though the odds of getting in might not be high. By contrast, under the current system spare capacity is usually allocated

on the basis of who lives next nearest to a school, thereby only giving a chance of entry to an extra street or two of children if school capacity expands. For popular, oversubscribed schools, families currently living on the fringe of the catchment are likely to be slightly wealthier, on average, than the typical applicant using the lottery system, which is why this reform should slightly reduce segregation.

Religious schools should continue to be allowed to admit up to 50 per cent of their pupils on a faith criterion (and substantially less where it is clear the religious community is not large enough to support this level), but I would severely restrict the terms of criterion. The current system enables religious schools to ask questions – such as marital status and place of child's baptism – to help them put a family on a 'continuum' of religiosity. This by its nature reveals information about the social background of the family and could enable 'covert' selection. Even without explicit cream-skimming taking place by religious schools, the complexity of their current admissions criteria may discourage low-income families from applying, or alternatively they may apply but be less skilled at meeting a specific school's criteria for religiosity. One way to simplify the admissions process for all families would be for the churches themselves to establish a nationally agreed binary criteria of 'religious adherence' that families are deemed to have either met, or not met. Once this is established, religious schools could then rely solely on the presence of a signature on a form from a religious leader to decide who has priority in the admissions process, so avoiding the need for the schools themselves to collect family background information.

The number of places made available to those of faith will be fixed by an independent monitor based on a count of the number of eight-year-olds taking part in religious worship in a week chosen at random. The allocation of the remaining places at religious schools would depend on existing patterns of attendance. Most faith schools (particularly village primary schools) would be allocated a catchment area where parents are guaranteed a place. Any other places would be allocated by lottery, open to anyone of faith or otherwise who wishes to attend the school.

Finally, I would remove the right to select up to 30 per cent of intake for the notable minority of schools who use ability or aptitude tests. This clearly raises social stratification in non-selective schooling areas, and it is not clear these schools do serve children's specific specialist talents. Indeed, the current right of automatic entry to partially selective schools for the younger siblings of pupils who secure selective places is particularly unfair since they displace others where they have themselves displayed no aptitude for the school's specialist subject. There is no clear rationale for allowing this policy to continue (it would be unthinkable for the younger siblings of grammar school pupils to be given automatic right of entry) and the policy has enabled a minority of 'comprehensive' schools to exclude almost all neighbourhood pupils.

Admissions authorities

The entire process of admissions under this new system should not be administered by schools because this is inefficient and presents schools with conflicting incentives. Previous studies (West et al 2004, West et al 2011) have shown that schools that are their own admissions authority are more likely to have admissions criteria that enable schools to be unfairly selective in their intakes. There is therefore a case for moving admission powers away from individual schools and putting them into the hands of an independent body that administers admissions across an area, and ideally sets consistent admissions criteria across all schools. Moreover, if admissions were administered by an independent body, it would increase the transparency of the admissions process and ensure that decisions are not made behind closed doors with no external scrutiny. An appropriate body to administer school admissions would be a local authority or some similar middle-tier organisation (for example a pan-London admissions body).

Conclusion

While parents value the right to choose a school, our current system of school admissions – allied with the oversubscription criteria used by schools – ensures that many find choice futile, because they have virtually zero chance of being allocated a place at the school they would like their child to attend. My proposals aim to simplify current school admissions criteria with the aim of giving every family an equal chance of securing a choice place. I argue that greater simplicity should help disadvantaged families engage in school choice, and it is their children who are likely to disproportionately benefit from it. Under my reforms, schools will remain segregated, because many school places will be allocated by postcode; this segregation is the price I believe we have to pay to reduce stress for parents and maintain community cohesion. However, by removing large amounts of selection by religious or academic tests, I do believe that the system will be less stratified overall. Lower social stratification forces schools to compete on a more level playing field, making the market for school places less dysfunctional and so holds the promise of improved educational outcomes for all.

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3.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY, PERFORMANCE AND PUPIL ATTAINMENT

SIMON BURGESS

Accountability is central to the efficient and equitable operation of schools, and has an important role to play in influencing the attainment of all pupils.[1] This has been emphasised by recent comments by the chief inspector of schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, who said of the education system of 20 to 30 years ago, 'we failed generations of young people because of an unaccountable system that schools could get away with blue murder'. He went on to say,

'And people knew it [a school] was declining, but nothing much was done about it until it reached the point when it became headline news and was called the worst school in Britain, because Ofsted wasn't around, because we didn't have league tables, because we didn't have the publication of results, etc. We don't want to go back to those days.'

An organisation is accountable for the appropriate use and treatment of resources placed under its authority, and a system of accountability ensures that this is monitored and reported to the relevant individuals. There are two components to school accountability because there are two resources that schools are entrusted with: public money (schools spend over £30 billion a year), and the talent and potential of the nation's children. The decisions that schools make strongly influence the extent to which that potential is maximised or wasted. At a national level, the value of having a well-educated cohort of pupils is far greater than the schools budget. At a personal level, individuals really only get to have one go at school. So either way, while accountability for public money cannot be neglected, it is accountability for the educational outcomes of half a million children a year that is central.

Accountability requires a measurement system and a set of consequences for particular outcomes. In this context, the issues concern the measurement of educational outcomes and their implications for schools. The central insight is that these choices are not neutral, rather the decisions about what to measure and how to reward or punish schools will drive schools' behaviour. In other

1 This chapter draws on prior research by the author, jointly undertaken with others (specifically Rebecca Allen, Deborah Wilson and Jack Worth) and noted in the end-of-chapter references.

words, the accountability framework should reflect whatever it is that policymakers want schools to achieve, and offer policymakers a set of tools to encourage schools in that direction. This is important in any context, but currently education policy is emphasising school autonomy by encouraging the growth of academies and free schools – this subsequent increase in autonomy means that it is even more important that there is a robust accountability system to keep track of outcomes.

School accountability in England is implemented in two ways. First, there is a universal, objective and quantitative system of performance metrics, which are produced annually by the Department for Education (DfE) and very widely publicised in the form of school 'league tables'.[2] Second, there is an inspection regime run by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education)[3] which provides a system of selective, subjective and more narrative reports published following a visit by inspectors to a school. Though there are some interesting questions about the optimal interactions between these two approaches, the current system seems like an appropriate combination[4] – providing what is referred to as 'consequential accountability', as poor performance can have serious consequences for schools.

The big policy question is: what is the best set-up for school accountability? The rest of this chapter reviews the evidence on the effects of the current system to help us answer this fundamental question.

How does the current system of accountability affect attainment gaps?

While there is a very substantial literature on the impact of school accountability in general, this chapter focuses specifically on the effect on the attainment gap and asks two principal questions. First, are league tables helpful or counterproductive for attainment gaps? And second, do Ofsted inspections spark a school turnaround or trigger a spiral of decline?

School performance tables

The existence of school performance tables might be counterproductive for narrowing attainment gaps if they principally act to coordinate the sorting of more affluent families in the high-performing schools, and have no impact on performance. Alternatively, they may be helpful in shining a bright and public light on the low-performing schools that poorer students typically find themselves in. This can act as a spur to focus increased attention on specific learning goals.

2 See http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/ and Allen and Burgess 2011

3 See http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/ and Allen and Burgess 2012a

4 See for example Prendergast 1999 for a general discussion of the combination of objective and subjective metrics in the highly related context of performance pay.

How can we tell? These are causal questions, and the standard of evidence required to make causal statements is high. Burgess et al (2010) exploit a natural policy experiment that allows a clean comparison of student outcomes in England and in Wales. When responsibility for education was transferred to the Welsh Assembly, one of its first acts was to abolish the publication of school performance tables. Since the rest of the education system largely continued unchanged, the following years allow an analysis of the comparative GCSE performance of schools with (England) and without (Wales) performance tables.

The central finding was very clear: 'We find systematic, significant and robust evidence that abolishing school league tables markedly reduced school effectiveness in Wales. The impact is sizeable: a fall of 1.92 GCSE grades per student per year' (Burgess et al 2010: 2).

When reviewing the impact on the attainment gap, the results are stark. The schools with the fewest poor[5] children suffered little exam score penalty from the removal of school performance tables: the most affluent quarter of schools in Wales saw a fall of 1.4 percentage points in their headline performance metric relative to their 'matched' schools in England, a change that was not statistically significant. However, pupils in the poorest quarter of schools experienced a fall of 6.6 percentage points, which was strongly statistically significant.[6]

Why this difference? It seems likely that high-performing schools in Wales were under performance pressure from other sources: for example, they had strong reputations to maintain. However, the low-performing schools in Wales were able to hide. Relative to very similar schools in England, they faced no public pressure for greater performance. Also, since there simply was no comparative information available to schools, there may have been no internal pressure within the school as no one knew what other schools were achieving in similar circumstances.

Ofsted inspections

In recent years Ofsted has visited around 800 schools a year, and has announced a fail result in between 5 and 10 per cent of those cases (Allen and Burgess 2012a). The average school failing its Ofsted inspection has a much greater fraction of poor students than the average school passing – about a third higher in fact – so the consequences of school failure matter for the attainment gap.

An Ofsted visit can be very stressful for school staff, and a failure rating can be traumatic. The key question is: what are the medium-term consequences of a school being served a 'Notice to Improve'? Allen and Burgess (2012a) utilise a set of statistical techniques that compare schools that only just failed to those which only just passed

5 In this chapter, 'poor' means eligible for free school meals.

6 See Burgess et al 2010: table 6

the threshold. They show that two to three years after the visit, GCSE results rise substantially in the just-failing group relative to the just-passing group. This amounts to a one grade improvement in one or two of a student's best eight exam subjects – a significant amount. Allen and Burgess also show that this gain largely reflects true improvements in learning rather than schools 'gaming the system' by placing pupils on courses that are deemed easier in order to improve.

In summary, the present school accountability system in England appears to be a positive force for narrowing attainment gaps. When school league tables are removed, educational inequality increases, so their high visibility in England contributes to the pressure that low-performing schools are under to improve. Likewise, Ofsted visits and the use of 'Notice to Improve' judgments does have a positive effect on exam performance. Since low-performing schools and failing schools disproportionately serve poorer neighbourhoods, these outcomes show that the accountability system does work to protect such students.

How can accountability help to narrow attainment gaps?

School accountability and incentives for schools

It is well established that what is measured and published matters. Performance metrics for organisations or individuals focus the mind on that specific outcome, potentially at the expense of other outcomes. So the choice of what measure(s) to include in school performance tables is not neutral – it will undoubtedly affect what schools focus their attention on.

For example, the fact that the main metric has been the fraction of students achieving at least five C grades or better has encouraged schools to focus their effort on students on the C/D boundary. This may or may not have been what the original designers of the scheme had in mind, but it does mean that schools have less incentive to focus on students at the bottom (or the top) of the ability distribution. This is hard to detect in data, but Burgess et al (2005) have found some evidence to support the claim that a concentration of school resources around the C/D border comes at the expense of lower-ability students.

What can be done about this? The first is to recognise that it is crucial to get the content of performance metrics right; we have to be sure that this truly is what we want schools to focus on. The second point is that having thresholds or discontinuities in the measure (such as whether a pupil did or did not achieve at least five good passes) does introduce more opportunities for distortions to arise. A continuous measure – for example, a simple average capped GCSE point score – encourages a school to deploy its resources more broadly. In fact, this is part of a set of new proposals for further reforms to the accountability system,[7]

7 https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/secondary-school-accountability-consultation

supplementing data on the fraction of pupils passing English and maths with the average GCSE points score in eight 'core' subjects.

School accountability and parental choice

Of course, policymakers do not have a completely free hand in setting up the performance tables because they are the main source of information for parents choosing schools. This market mechanism is the main way through which the accountability measures actually act on schools, through influencing the demand for places. From this perspective, we can ask the key question, what is the best content for performance tables, and what would help parents to make the best decision? By means of a statistical model (Allen and Burgess 2010) and by considering more broadly what is the best form for this information (Allen and Burgess 2012a), we conclude that the performance tables need to be functional, relevant and comprehensible. The functionality derives from the statistical model: what is the content that allows parents to best identify the school that their child will achieve the highest GCSE score?

Our recommendation is that performance tables publish simple GCSE scores for each school at three levels of prior attainment: low, average and high attainers. The idea is that this inherently takes account of the first-order effects of school intake, that it is straightforward to understand and that it performs very well in helping parents make good decisions. This approach has now been introduced and was first published in the November 2011 performance tables (see Conclusion).

Finally, the availability of straightforward information is important. A fascinating intervention study in the US provided disadvantaged families with direct information on school test scores in a public school choice plan (Hastings and Weinstein 2007). The results showed that receiving the information significantly increased the fraction of parents choosing higher-performing schools. Moreover, where children from the poorer families actually attended those higher-performing schools, it had a positive impact on their final academic achievement.

Conclusion

The school accountability system – both the content of the school performance tables and the role and responsibilities of Ofsted – is always in a state of change. Indeed, at the time of writing (spring 2013), further reform proposals for the inspections regime are under consultation – I have discussed the criteria for deciding the optimal content for the performance tables, and these can be used to evaluate the format emerging from this consultation.

What does the system imply for pupil attainment gaps? The current performance tables report the GCSE attainment of three groups within each school: 'low attainers' (those working below the expected level at

age 11), 'middle attainers' (at the expected level) and 'high attainers'. This has a number of advantages: it is, for example, a much more intuitive way of informing parents about how a school performs for students of different abilities. It is not perfect, however: the bands defining high, low and middle prior attainment are very wide (see Allen and Burgess 2012b), which means some distortions of the present system are retained. In fact, the performance tables also now explicitly report separately the attainment of students eligible for free school meals. This is helpful to a degree, though less useful than might be thought because of the lack of differentiation in the 80-plus per cent of students not eligible, combined with the varying mix of schools' intakes.

But the reforms do offer some hope of reducing attainment gaps. More intuitive information does have the potential to reduce the social gradient in how parents choose schools and so may achieve more balanced intakes at popular schools if a greater proportion of disadvantaged families apply. In the short run, if disadvantaged families make better informed decisions on which school to choose, this is likely to improve their test scores, and so reduce educational inequalities.

In the long run there may be deeper effects. In any accountability framework, the agents will strongly focus on the metric that is measured. Assuming that the new more personalised information is widely used, schools will have to take a much wider view of where to focus their resources, and reduce the excess investment in students near a (rather arbitrary) threshold.

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4.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE PUPIL PREMIUM

JONATHAN CLIFTON

Last year, around one in five children left primary school without having reached a sufficient standard in reading and writing. This meant that they left primary school without the level of literacy that is required to participate effectively at secondary school. For the vast majority of these pupils the die is already cast, as they will struggle to engage with the secondary curriculum and, as a result, will fall even further behind. As Clifton and Cook demonstrate in this volume, around half of the achievement gap that we witness at age 16 was already present before those children started secondary school. The job of tackling educational disadvantage would be made much easier if every child started secondary school with a solid foundation in reading and writing.

The importance of catch-up tuition

Goodman et al (2010) show that the achievement gap between children from different socioeconomic groups widens very quickly between the age of 7 and 14. It is therefore imperative that those children who fall behind in primary or early secondary school receive targeted support to help them catch up.

Targeted support for pupils who are failing to reach a sufficient standard of literacy is a particularly effective way of reducing the achievement gap, because it ensures that help reaches pupils regardless of which school or class they are in. There is a danger that policymakers will focus all their effort on improving a handful of failing schools, when in reality disadvantaged pupils tend to perform worse *whichever* school they are in – the good ones and the bad ones. Pupil level interventions are therefore a good way to ensure support is targeted where it is most needed.

This is the approach adopted by England's most successful schools, which place pupils in small groups with highly trained teachers until they have reached a sufficient standard in literacy and numeracy. It is also at the heart of some of the world's top-performing school systems, such as Finland and Canada. The systematic attention given to children who are identified as having 'learning needs' is a key feature of Finland's success in international rankings, where nearly half of pupils receive some form of catch-up tuition over the course of their school career (Sahlberg 2011).

Current policy initiatives

The key to narrowing the achievement gap is therefore high-quality literacy and numeracy interventions that are targeted towards pupils who are falling behind in primary and early secondary school. The challenge for the government is to create a policy framework that will turn this into a reality.

The government's flagship policy in this area is the pupil premium, which is designed to help schools raise educational attainment specifically among those children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2012/13, a total of £1.25bn was allocated for the pupil premium, and this is expected to rise to £2.5bn by the end of this parliament. Schools are given funds based on the number of pupils who are from low-income families (those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years) or who are in care. This year, schools received £623 for each pupil in this category. The funding that schools receive through the pupil premium is added to their main budget, and they are free to spend the money as they see fit. The intention is that it will be targeted towards disadvantaged pupils but there are no formal mechanisms to guarantee this. It should be noted that the pupil premium is not the only funding that schools receive to support disadvantaged pupils. Schools have always received deprivation funding within their main budget and this 'implicit premium' is worth around £2,000 per free school meal (FSM) pupil in primary schools and £3,400 per FSM pupil in secondary schools (IFS 2011).

In addition to the pupil premium, the government has also introduced a funding stream to help secondary schools deliver catch-up tuition to those pupils who start school without a sufficient level of literacy and numeracy. This 'catch-up premium' is worth up to £500 for every pupil who enters Year 7 below national curriculum level 4 in English and maths. Both the catch-up premium and the pupil premium are designed to provide additional resources for activities such as additional tuition in an effort to help schools tackle educational disadvantage.

Is the pupil premium working?

The pupil premium is a good idea. It distributes funding for disadvantaged pupils in a more transparent way than the previous funding system, and it encourages schools to think about how they use resources to tackle educational inequality. Most important of all, it provides schools that have large numbers of disadvantaged pupils with extra support to achieve good educational outcomes.

Given the pupil premium was only introduced two years ago, it is far too early to make a comprehensive assessment of the policy, which will inevitably take time to 'bed down' in the school system. However, early indications suggest that it is not working as effectively as policymakers hoped it would. Ofsted's (2012) survey of 119 school leaders found

that the majority were using the pupil premium to maintain existing provision within their schools rather than put in place new initiatives, while others are funding well-intentioned programmes that, in practice, have not been proven to raise attainment (see box 1). The same survey also raised concerns that the pupil premium has not been spent on things designed to tackle educational disadvantage: 'in some schools it was clear to inspectors that the [pupil premium] spending was not all focused on the needs of the specific groups for whom it was intended'.

Box 1. An example of the gap between evidence and practice: Teaching assistants

A survey by Ofsted (2012) found that 40 per cent of school leaders are using the pupil premium to fund new or existing teaching assistants, primarily to deliver small group interventions in literacy and numeracy. However a comprehensive longitudinal study found that when schools use teaching assistants (TAs) in this way it can have a negative impact on pupil progress, especially for those pupils with the highest level of need. This is largely because schools used TAs to work directly with lower-attaining pupils, which in turn deprived them of contact time with a trained teacher (Blatchford et al 2012). If teachers engage with research it could provide guidance about better ways to deploy support staff. For example, TAs could be asked to work with the middle and highest attaining pupils, creating time for the teacher to give more individualised instruction to those who are falling behind (Webster and Blatchford 2012).

Why is the pupil premium not being more effective?

For the pupil premium to have maximum impact on the achievement gap, it should be used to fund targeted interventions for pupils who are failing to reach a sufficient standard in primary and early secondary school. However, early indications suggest this is not happening. There are four problems with the way the pupil premium has been designed and implemented that could explain why it is not being more effective.

First, for the majority of schools, the pupil premium is not additional money. Over the next three years, schools face a cut in their main budget on the one hand, and an increase in their pupil premium funding on the other. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that when these two things are taken into account, the majority of schools are expected to see a real-terms cut in per-pupil funding. They conclude that around 65 per cent of primary schools and 80 per cent of secondary schools will see a real-terms cut in their budget between 2010/11 and 2014/15 (IFS 2011). However a small proportion of the most disadvantaged schools will see a substantial increase in their budgets.

On one level, the fact the pupil premium has helped to mitigate the impact of budget cuts could be seen as laudable at a time of unprecedented fiscal constraint. Nevertheless, the fact that the pupil premium is not additional money for the majority of schools does help to explain why it will not have a bigger effect. Many schools are struggling to maintain their existing level of provision, and are unable to fund additional or innovative activities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those schools that report they have 'significantly' changed the way they support disadvantaged pupils tend to be the same schools that have seen an increase in their budget (Ofsted 2012).

Second, schools face pressures to spend their resources on things that are not directly related to tackling educational inequality. The pupil premium is not ringfenced – it is an additional sum of money in a school's general budget and is therefore subject to competing demands. Many commentators have noted that the accountability system incentivises schools to focus their resources on pupils near certain performance thresholds at GCSE (see Simon Burgess in this volume). This can lead to excessive 'cramming' for pupils likely to gain a C grade in their GCSE year, rather than making long-term gains much earlier in a pupil's school career. There is a particular danger that secondary schools will target their resources to older pupils who are nearing their exams (Paterson 2013).

Third, there is some confusion about what the pupil premium is intended to achieve. Policymakers talk interchangeably about the pupil premium being used to support pupils who are falling behind, and it being used to support those who are on free school meals. However, the overlap between these two categories is not as large as many people suppose. Last year, only 23 per cent of low-attaining pupils at the end of primary school were eligible for free school meals, and only 26 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals were low attaining. This puts schools in the difficult position of having to decide whether to spend their pupil premium resources on pupils who have a learning need, even though many of them will not be eligible for free school meals, or whether they should focus them on FSM pupils, even though many of them will be performing at the expected level. As shown in chapter 1 in this volume, it is the former that should be the priority for schools. Tackling the long tail of low achievement is the biggest challenge facing England's school system, in terms of both the absolute number and proportion of pupils involved. Besides, many of the pupils who fall behind do come from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, although they are not technically eligible for free school meals or the pupil premium.

A fourth concern is that schools have not been provided with a wider support infrastructure for raising low achievement. The laissez-faire logic of the pupil premium is that providing schools with additional money will be sufficient to drive improvements. But evidence from successful

policies in the past shows that extra money for schools, on its own, is not enough – funding also needs to be accompanied by a strong professional infrastructure to deliver change on the ground. In a review of evidence-based teaching in the US, Slavin (2013) argues that the most successful policies 'are assembled into interventions incorporating practical professional development, pupil materials, technology and other elements'. This was the key to success for the Every Child A Reader programme in England, which provided schools with specialist staff, training, guidance and materials, and was extremely successful at narrowing the achievement gap in primary schools.

Box 2. Every Child a Reader

The Every Child a Reader (ECaR) programme was rolled out by national government in 2008. It offers a three-wave approach to supporting reading in early primary school, including whole-class activities, small group interventions, and intensive one-to-one support for children with particular needs.

ECaR drew heavily on the established Reading Recovery programme, which places the lowest attaining six-year-olds with a specially trained teacher. These children get individual lessons for 30 minutes every day in their own school. Evaluations have shown the children learn four to five times faster than their peers, which enables them to catch-up with their classmates within about 20 weeks. Most important of all, these gains remained with pupils until the end of primary school. In a sample of children who completed Reading Recovery, 95 per cent went on to achieve level 3 in reading, and 78 per cent achieved level 4 in reading at age 11 (Hurry 2012).

ECaR created an infrastructure to help schools implement the programme. This included training a cadre of specialist Reading Recovery teachers, appointing a lead teacher to champion the programme in each school, a package of professional development for staff, and support from the local authority. This package of support was essential for the success of the programme, but it made it very expensive to deliver, costing roughly £2,600 per participant on the Reading Recovery scheme.

In 2010 the government decided to axe the ECaR programme, and there are concerns that schools have stopped using many of the effective interventions contained within it.

Source: Tanner et al 2011, IoE 2012

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that targeted support for pupils who are failing to reach a sufficient standard in primary and early secondary school holds the key to closing the achievement gap. While the government's flagship policy in this area, the pupil premium, could provide resources to make this happen, there are a number of problems with its design that are preventing this from becoming a reality. In particular, the pupil premium provides insufficient funds targeted at the right age range; an acute problem exacerbated by the fact secondary schools are incentivised to focus their resources on pupils near key performance thresholds at GCSE. There is also confusion about whether the pupil premium should be focused on tackling low achievement, or whether it is explicitly for pupils who are eligible for free school meals regardless of how they are performing at school.

In order to have maximum impact, the pupil premium should be explicitly targeted towards raising low achievement in primary and early secondary school. The following recommendations could help to achieve this.

- Over the next two years, the government plans to add an additional £1.25bn to the pupil premium, which will be spread evenly across all age ranges. These resources would be better spent solely on pupils in primary and early secondary school. The Department for Education should therefore focus the additional funding at this age range. It should use the additional £1.25bn to create a higher level of pupil premium in primary schools, and to increase the 'catch-up premium' (for year 7 pupils) in secondary schools; the pupil premium in secondary schools would be held at its current level. This would provide primary schools with sufficient resources to fund targeted interventions, such as Reading Recovery, for all children who are at risk of falling behind. It would also compensate secondary schools that have large numbers of pupils starting school below the expected level of literacy and numeracy.
- Secondary schools are currently given a catch-up premium for every pupil who enters below level 4 in English and maths. However, there is no mechanism to guarantee that these pupils benefit from the money. The 'catch-up premium' should therefore be replaced with a 'catch-up entitlement'. Every pupil that falls into this category would be entitled to have the money spent specifically on helping to raise his or her attainment. Schools would be required to write a letter to these pupils and their families explaining how the resources are being spent.
- The pupil premium needs to be accompanied by a wider infrastructure of professional support, including training specialist teachers, expanding professional development, and placing schools in networks so they can share best practice. Without these supports, there is a danger that the pupil premium will not change practice on the ground.

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5.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING

DYLAN WILIAM

In this chapter I make the case for raising the quality of teaching as the key to closing the achievement gap. My argument rests on four propositions. First, higher educational achievement is necessary both for individuals and for society. Second, higher educational achievement requires increased teacher quality. Third, increased teacher quality requires investing in the teachers already working in our schools. Fourth, that investment in teachers needs to take a radically different form from the professional development that teachers have received over the last 30 years.

Education matters

Education brings a number of economic and wider social benefits. Those with higher levels of education not only live longer, but they live in better health and are less likely to commit suicide, to be a teenage parent, or to be involved with the criminal justice system (Wiliam 2011). They are also more likely to be involved in a range of prosocial activities (Feinstein et al 2008). While the benefits of education go well beyond just preparation for working life, it is important to understand that education is likely to be increasingly important for employment. In *The coming war for jobs*, Clifton (2011) estimates that of the 7 billion people in the world, approximately 3 billion want a good job, and 90 per cent of these want to work full-time. The world therefore needs around 2.7 billion full-time jobs, but right now there are only around 1.2 billion jobs available globally. Some jobs, such as taxi-driving and hairdressing are unlikely to be offshored or automated, but what has been extraordinary over the past 20 years is how technology is allowing news kinds of jobs to be offshored; for example, it is now over 10 years since the first transatlantic telesurgery procedure (Heyman 2010). As some jobs are automated, and others offshored, higher and higher levels of education will be needed to provide reasonable chances of quality employment (Goos and Manning 2007).

While the exact relationship between education and economic prosperity is still a matter of some debate (see for example Wolf 2004) there appears to be widespread consensus that improving the levels of achievement of 18-year-olds is essential for higher levels of prosperity and economic growth (Hanushek and Woessman, 2010).

Teacher quality is the crucial variable

In some jurisdictions, such as the US and England, the emphasis has been on improving the quality of schools. This has intuitive appeal – all parents want their children to attend good schools – but what is surprising is that in most rich countries, as long as you go to school, it doesn't matter very much which school you go to. In fact, in the vast majority of OECD countries, the school attended by an individual accounts for less than 10 per cent of the variation in student achievement (PISA 2007). This is why most policies for improving school quality, such as free schools in Sweden, charter schools in the US, and specialist schools and academies in England have had little impact on national levels of achievement.

If, for the sake of illustration, we classify schools in England as 'good', 'average' or 'bad', with one third of schools in each category, then students going to a 'good school will, on average, achieve about one third of one grade higher on their GCSEs. In other words, a student who achieves eight grade Ds in the average school would achieve five grade Ds and three grade Cs in a good school. In terms of valued thresholds such as five good grades at GCSE, what this means is that the difference between the average school and the good school matters for just one student in 10. The other 90 per cent are either so far above the threshold that they will still reach it even in the average school, or so far below it that they will not reach it even in a good school.

The reason for the relatively small size of school effects is because of the very large differences between students. Students at a 'good' school make around 10 per cent more progress every year than those in 'average' schools, so five years at a good school will result in 50 per cent more progress than at an average school; but as noted above, this is equivalent to only one third of a grade at GCSE, while the range of achievement at GCSE for individual students is five times as great.

At this juncture, it is important to point out that I am not saying that there are no bad schools. There undoubtedly are bad schools, and some of them are dreadful. Indeed, for some, it is hard to imagine any way of improving things short of closing the school down, and replacing the leaders, and possibly even the majority of the teachers (Bryk et al 2010). What I think is important to understand is that the differences in progress made by students in good and bad schools are small, and much smaller than the kinds of improvements we need to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

In my experience, many people find these results counterintuitive, perhaps implausible. However, independent analyses based on data from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and analysis of the relationship between contextualized value-added and raw results at GCSE (Ray 2006) yield extremely similar

results (see Wiliam 2010 for details of the calculations). In terms of the progress made by students, differences between schools are small; as long as you go to school, it doesn't matter very much which school you go to. However, what is clear from more fine-grained analysis carried out over recent years is that it matters very much which teachers are teaching you.

If we allocate teachers into three equal-sized groups, below average, average and above average, then students taught by an above average teacher make 50 per cent more progress, and those taught by a below average teacher make 50 per cent less progress than students taught by average teachers (Hanushek 2011). The most effective teachers are therefore at least three times as effective as the least effective. In fact, the differences in teacher quality are even greater than this, because children do make progress, especially in language development, simply as a result of maturation. Indeed, one study (Fitzpatrick et al 2011) estimated that one third of the progress made by seven-year-olds was a result of maturation, so that it is likely that the most effective teachers are at least five times as effective as the least effective. Moreover, in both primary (Hamre and Pianta 2005) and secondary schools (Slateret al 2008) it has been found that the best teachers benefit lower achievers more, so increased teacher quality closes the achievement gap.

We have to invest in the teachers we already have

The fact that teacher quality is the most important ingredient of an effective education system does not, of itself, indicate the kinds of policies that can secure high-quality teachers. In some high-performing countries, such as Finland and Singapore, there are 10 to 20 qualified applicants for every place on teacher training programmes. This means that in addition to high-level academic qualifications, applicants need good communication skills and the necessary personal qualities to win selection to be trained to become effective practitioners. For countries in this fortunate position, it might seem as if almost nothing else matters; if you are lucky to have the smartest people in your country wanting to be teachers, then you can get many of the other pieces of the puzzle wrong and still have a high-performing education system. However, it is worth noting that highly selective admission to teacher education does not guarantee a good education system. In the Republic of Ireland, admission to teacher education remains, as it has been for many years, highly selective, and yet the country's PISA performance in 2009 was indistinguishable from that in the UK.

Nevertheless policy prescriptions continue to advocate improving the quality of the teachers through a two-pronged approach of removing ineffective teachers (Hanushek 2010) and increasing the quality of entrants into the profession (Barber and Mourshed 2007).

It might be assumed that removing ineffective teachers would be uncontentious, but identifying culprits is rather more difficult than it might first appear. Observation protocols such as the Framework for Teaching developed by Charlotte Danielson do 'work' in that students taught by teachers who are rated higher on the framework do learn more, but the framework accounts for only around 10 per cent of teacher quality (Sartain et al 2011, Kane and Staiger 2012). If such frameworks are used for teacher evaluation purposes, because they account for so little of the variance in teacher quality, there is a real danger that teachers might become less effective even though they raise their ratings on the framework. More seriously, since teacher deselection effectively amounts to terminating employment, it is necessary to follow employment law, and it seems that at least six different lessons, each independently evaluated by five expert raters, are required to produce estimates of teacher quality that are likely to be stable enough for high-stakes decisions such as teacher deselection (Hill et al 2012)

Value-added approaches do reliably identify different aspects of teacher quality from observations (Rockoff and Speroni 2010), but estimating the value added by a teacher is extraordinarily difficult, even when we take into account prior student achievement, since most of our assessments underrepresent the important outcomes of education. For example, good teachers continue to benefit students for at least two years after they stop teaching them (Rothstein 2010); in other words, good teachers make the teachers who teach their students in future years look better. One therefore cannot estimate the full value added by a teacher when she or he stops teaching a group of students. Even if we could adopt the approaches advocated by, for example, Jack Welch when he was CEO at General Electric, and deselect the lowest performing 10 per cent of teachers, then this would only improve teacher quality if the deselected teachers were replaced by better teachers – by no means obvious in many countries. And if we could replace the lowest performing 10 per cent of teachers with average teachers, this would increase student achievement by only two points on PISA. Of course, if this were done every year, the effects could be substantial (Hanushek 2010) but the inaccuracy of the process, combined with the political cost, renders such policy prescriptions speculative at best. Moreover, such schemes would be disastrous for teacher collaboration – teachers would have an incentive to make other teachers look worse, simply to make their colleagues more likely to end up in the bottom 10 per cent.

Raising the bar for entry into the profession also looks like an attractive policy option, especially since high-performing jurisdictions tend to recruit teachers from the highest one third of college graduates – unlike in the UK, where teachers' qualifications are close to the graduate average, and in the US, where teacher education tends to be among

the least selective undergraduate programmes in most universities. However, there are at least three problems with this argument.

The first is that it is hard to implement, since we have little idea what makes a good teacher until they are in front of a class (see Gladwell 2008 for a summary of the argument and the evidence). There is evidence that well-structured interviews have some utility (see for example Dobbie 2012) but the correlation is modest, and so the proportion of false positives is likely to be very large. Second, it takes too long. If the bar for entry into the profession were raised, it would take at least 30 years before the last of those who entered the profession before the bar was raised left teaching. Third, the effects are modest. Suppose we 'raise the bar' for entry into teaching so that we no longer recruit those who would fall in the lowest third of current teacher quality. As noted above, we currently have no idea how to do this because we cannot reliably identify who will make good teachers, but even if we could, in 30 years' time, the net effect would be an increase of teacher quality of 0.5 standard deviations, which would produce an increase in student achievement of 5 to 10 points on PISA, assuming that the correlation of teacher quality and student progress is in the region of 0.1 to 0.2 (Hanushek 2004).

One approach to raising teacher quality that is particularly popular at the moment is through elite programmes such as Teach for America and Teach First, whereby high-achieving graduates undertake to teach in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas for at least two years. Evaluations of these schemes have not yet shown clear evidence that they are superior to traditional routes into teaching, even though they tend to be much more expensive than traditional teacher education programmes. Such schemes may raise the status of teaching as being a job that is worthy of the highest achievers, but the very design of such programmes, together with the fact that they are explicitly 'elite' programmes, means that the proportion of teachers in post entering via these routes is unlikely to exceed one per cent of the teaching force even under the most optimistic assumptions. There is evidence that students taught by teachers with higher academic achievement or IQs do make more progress (Slater et al 2008, Hanushek 1971), but the correlation is modest.

The cumulative effect of all of the policy prescriptions listed above, even if implemented effectively and faithfully, would be to increase PISA scores by around 12 points. This would have substantial economic value to the UK – according to Hanushek and Woessman (2010), around £2 trillion over the next 80 years – but would place the UK at a considerable economic disadvantage to its industrial competitors. Given the scale of the improvements needed in education that are needed, these kinds of measures are the policy equivalent of rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic.

Teacher professional development needs radical overhaul

The foregoing may seem like a council of despair, but the research on expertise in a number of different areas suggests that the teachers already in our schools could be much more effective than they currently are. There is now increasing evidence to show that measures of general ability predict how well someone does something only in the beginning stages. For example, those with higher IQs are better chess players when they begin, but after a few years of practice, there is little benefit – grand master chess players do not have higher IQs than club players. Indeed, measures of general ability account for only around four per cent of the variation in the performance of experts. David Berliner (1994) has shown that expertise in teaching appears to be very similar to expertise in other areas, so a strategy of getting 'the best and the brightest' into teaching is not only insufficient to build an outstanding teacher workforce, it is not even necessary.

What does produce expertise is at least 10 years of deliberate practice – an effortful focus on improving performance (Ericsson 2002). Most studies of the effects of experience on teachers' productivity find that teachers improve for the first two or three years, but this development slows for most, and even stops for some (Rivkin et al 2005). This suggests that many teachers are only scratching the surface of the kinds of improvements that are possible.

If we are to help teachers gain the expertise that the research suggests is possible, then first we need to recruit those with a passion for the job. Deliberate practice is not inherently enjoyable – it is instrumental in achieving further increases in performance – and only those who are passionate about helping all students achieve at high levels will be willing to invest the energy needed.

Then, we need to create environments in which all teachers embrace the idea of continuous improvement. This is not the hackneyed idea of 'keeping up with new developments' – it is, rather an acceptance that the impact of education on the lives of young people creates a moral imperative for even the best teachers to continue to improve.

Then teachers need to focus their deliberate practice on things that make a difference to student outcomes, avoiding fads like learning styles and Brain Gym®, and instead focus on the improvement of classroom practices that research indicates are likely to improve learning. For the very weakest teachers, it would be necessary for a coach or line manager to specify what the teacher should work on, but for the vast majority of teachers it would be up to the teacher to decide what to work on.

One way to achieve this would be to use changes in teachers' pay and conditions to tie incremental progression to improvement in classroom skills. It would be up to the teacher to decide what aspects of their practice to improve, provided they could show evidence that it would be likely to improve student learning. It would also be up to the teacher to decide what evidence to produce in support of their claims to have improved their practice in their annual evaluation meeting. The teacher could bring evidence in the form of measures of student achievement, questionnaire responses from students, reports from peer observations, videos of classroom practice or whatever else the teacher believed would support their claim to have improved their practice in ways that benefited students.

The important point here is that there would be a requirement for each teacher to evaluate their own progress. The supervisor would then have to either accept or reject the claim of improvement, with a requirement that any rejection would require validation from a more senior member of school staff, and a formal appeals process. The teacher would then propose professional development priorities for the coming year, and these would have to be agreed by the supervisor unless there was clear evidence that the proposed improvements would be unlikely to benefit students.

The evidence from studies of focused attempts to improve the performance of serving teachers (Wiliam et al 2004, Allen et al 2011) is that the effects can be two or three times as great as the combined effect of all the attempts to improve teaching by teacher replacement outlined above. As Stephen Stills sang, many years ago, 'If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with.'

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6.

REDUCING WITHIN-SCHOOL VARIATION AND THE ROLE OF MIDDLE LEADERSHIP

JAMES TOOP

We have made great progress over the last decade in raising standards and improving pupil achievement in schools in the most challenging contexts. Average national GCSE results have risen to 59.4 per cent of pupils achieving five A*–C grades including English and maths, and there are now only 195 secondary schools below the government's floor target of 40 per cent.

Key to driving up standards in the most disadvantaged schools has been a relentless focus on the quality of teaching and leadership. This is what research evidence has shown to be the key driver of outstanding school systems. Innovative organisations such as Teach First, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders have increased the number of outstanding teachers and leaders in the schools that need them most, while head teachers of outstanding schools, designated as National Leaders of Education, have provided intensive support to other local schools to improve results.

However, while many individual schools have raised floor standards, the achievement gap between rich and poor still persists. Socio-economic background still predicts too strongly the likely academic achievement of pupils: there is currently a 26.3 per cent achievement gap at GCSE between those pupils on free schools meals (FSM) and those who are not.

The importance of reducing within-school variation

As the introduction to this volume shows, policy levers focused on 'improving bad schools' alone will not be sufficient to close the gap. Even if every school were outstanding, the gap between the most and least deprived schools would only close by a fifth (Clifton and Cook 2012). To close the achievement gap, we need to look at what is happening *within* our schools because it is there that most of the variation in pupil performance is present. Even the best schools have a large variation in pupil performance. As Dylan Wiliam highlights in the previous chapter, it matters much less *which* school you go to; what matters much more is *who* teaches you when you are there.

England has a longstanding problem of within-school variation. In 2002, the OECD published data showing that the variation in pupil performance within UK schools was one of the highest in the world – the picture has remained unchanged over the last decade. A National College report of 2006 described 'the successful reduction of within-school variation as the educational holy grail'; a claim supported in 2009 when the OECD showed that 55 per cent of the variation in pupil results comes from variation within schools, compared with 10 per cent between schools.

Figure 6.1 shows why within-school variation is so important for closing the achievement gap. It compares the performance of poorer pupils with other pupils in the same school – the horizontal axis ranks schools from the weakest (on the left) to the best, using a school's contextual 'value added' score as a measure of its quality. It is clear that poorer pupils perform worse than wealthier pupils whichever school they are in. Even in good schools (those on the right-hand side of the graph) we see that pupils living in the most deprived neighbourhoods perform worse at GCSE than the rest of their year group. Policies designed to reduce educational inequality must therefore focus not just on 'improving bad schools', but also on tackling the variation in results that occurs *within* each school.

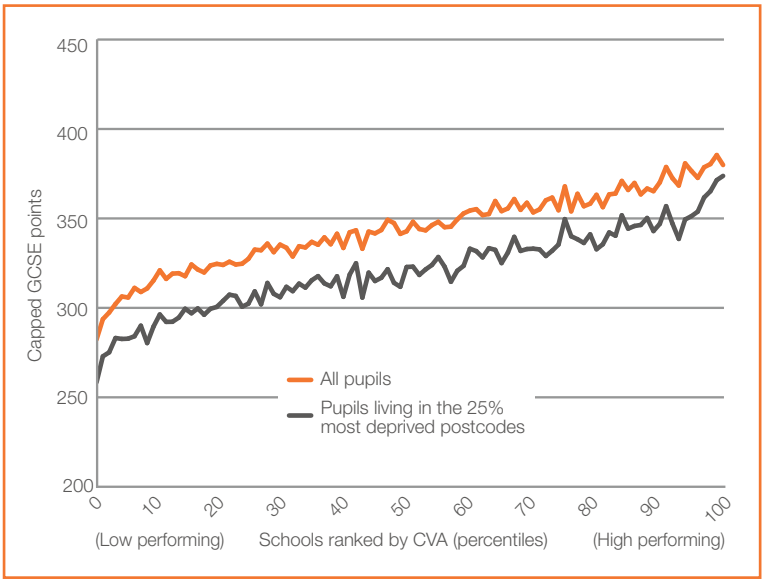


Figure 6.1 GCSE performance within schools, by CVA score (capped GCSE points)

Source: Clifton and Cook 2012

There are individual schools that have succeeded in both raising overall standards, and closing the achievement gap between

richer and poorer pupils. In May 2012, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) highlighted 446 schools doing just this – all of whom demonstrate a marked reduction in within-school variation with disadvantaged pupils outperforming the national average GCSE points for all pupils (Collins 2012).

These schools have been successful because they reduced the wide variation in performance between different pupils and classrooms. Haydn Evans, head teacher at Sir John Cass School in Tower Hamlets, one of the schools identified by the EEF, says that reducing within-school variation has been one of the crucial aspects in the astonishing improvement in his schools exam results which have increased from 45 per cent five A*–C with English and maths in 2008 to 82 per cent in 2011. His school has done this by adopting many of the strategies identified in this volume: including an unremitting, data-driven focus on variations between predicted grades in English and maths; targeting resources on those pupils who are falling behind; running ongoing lesson observations to share good practice and pick up underperformance early; and moderating predicted grades for overprediction well before external exams.[1]

The key to success: middle leaders

Haydn Evans highlights a key feature within the structure of his school that has driven this consistency in excellent teaching: middle leaders. The engine room of the school, middle leaders are heads of department or year, or leaders of whole-school areas such as Gifted and Talented or English as an Additional Language. They lead teams of teachers – turning the senior leadership's strategy into outstanding classroom practice on a daily basis. High-performing middle leaders drive consistent teacher quality in their areas of responsibility through curriculum leadership, lessons observations, holding staff to account and developing staff. They also ensure consistency across the school by collaborating and challenging their fellow middle leaders, influencing whole-school behaviours through sharing, coaching and mentoring. As Russell Hobby (2012) says:

> 'Middle leaders have more day-to-day impact on standards than headteachers. Middle leaders are, simply, closer to the action. Teachers' and pupils' experience of leadership comes most frequently from their middle leaders. And the essential work of curriculum planning, monitoring and developing teaching belongs with middle leaders.'

David Hargreaves' research shows that peer-to-peer working, coaching, mentoring and joint practice development across departments and within school clusters are the key to improving the consistency and quality of teaching and learning. Middle leaders are

1 Interview with Haydn Evans, April 2012

particularly well placed to drive all these activities in a school. They therefore hold the key to developing the existing workforce within our most challenging schools.

A policy focused on developing a cadre of outstanding middle leaders with the skills to address within-school variation could become critical to closing the achievement gap. If middle leaders are to reduce within-school variation, they need to pass two tests: the first is to drive consistently outstanding teaching within departments on a daily basis; and the second test is to work collaboratively across the school to ensure consistency between departments.

A case study: Teaching Leaders

This is the approach being taken by Teaching Leaders, a national charity launched in 2008 specifically focused on developing outstanding middle leaders. It runs two programmes targeted at the two issues identified above: variation within departments, and variation between departments.

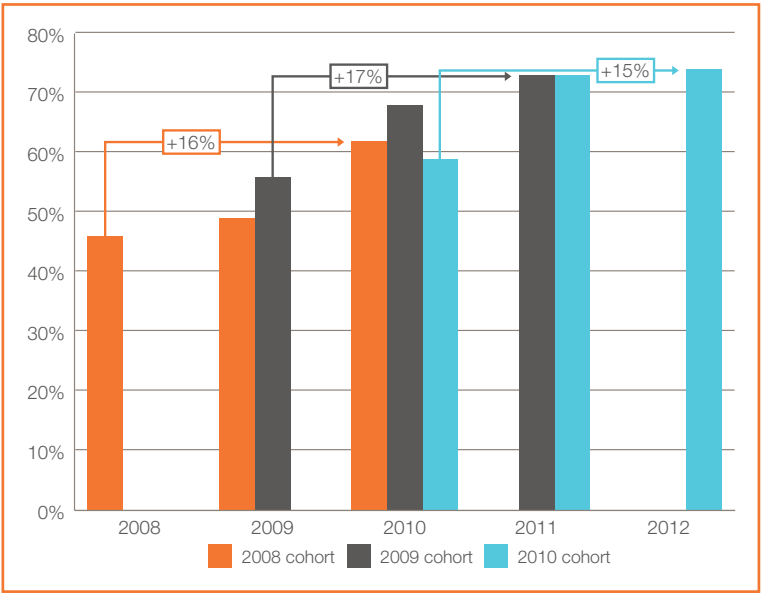
The programme 'Teaching Leaders Fellows' focuses on addressing variation within departments, and invests intensively in high-potential individual middle leaders to achieve significant change in their areas of responsibility. As Figure 6.2 (over) shows, each of the three graduating cohorts has raised GCSE A*–C achievement in their departments by over 15 percentage points over the two years of the programme. As well as raising performance, schools enrolled in the programme have a narrower achievement gap between poorer pupils and their wealthier counterparts. Teaching Leaders schools have a gap of 10 percentage points in GCSE results between FSM and non-FSM pupils, compared to a national average of 29 per cent. The Fellows also have an impact across the school, by mentoring other middle leaders and inspiring colleagues to raise achievement.

The second programme, 'Teaching Leaders Teams', focuses on addressing variation between departments by training groups of 15 middle leaders across a school. It is non-selective, less intensive and does not contain coaching, but brings middle leaders together to focus on mission, high expectations and belief that all children can achieve, before focusing on practical issues such as performance management, lesson observation, analysing data and having challenging conversations. This instils a shared belief and sense of purpose across the middle leadership team, which leads to greater collaboration and sharing.

Scaling up the approach taken by Teaching Leaders would work in an increasingly devolved and self-improving system. Schools make their own decision to invest in and fund each middle leader, which costs up to £2,000 per year with government providing a subsidy for the rest.

Individual schools can make this decision for their own middle leaders, while academy chains are using the programme as talent management and retention strategy across their groups; Teaching Schools are also increasingly playing a delivery role in the programme to add to the suite of programmes they offer across their alliances. In more isolated rural and coastal areas, schools have collaborated to identify a local cohort of high potentials, using the programme to develop existing talent and cross-school collaboration and thereby increasing retention and prestige of working in the area. Teaching Leaders is now replicating this model to form local delivery hubs in Humber, the north east, Merseyside, east Midlands, east Kent, Hastings and Southampton.

Figure 6.2
Percentage of pupils achieving GCSE A*–C in departments led by a Teaching Leaders fellow



Source: Teaching Leaders annual report 2013 (forthcoming)

This case study shows that investing strategically in developing outstanding middle leaders can have a significant impact on reducing within-school variation. Developing middle leaders should therefore be a key priority for schools and policymakers as they try to narrow the achievement gap.

Middle leaders in the new schools landscape

As the education landscape evolves, head teachers will be required to take on more responsibility for managing autonomous schools, and helping to lead the education system in their local areas. They will therefore increasingly be playing a leadership role beyond their immediate school. In this context, there is a danger that they will take their eye off managing teaching and learning inside their own

institution. Having a strong team of middle leaders could help to prevent this. It would enable head teachers to play a system leadership role, while middle leaders focus on improving performance in their own schools. The number of opportunities should increase for high-performing middle leaders to have an impact within their departments, across their own school and across local schools.

There is also a danger that as we move towards a system of autonomous schools, we focus leadership development at head teacher level to facilitate school-to-school support, and so neglect the leadership pipeline in the system. What's more, career progression routes can become more disparate and less defined, and we risk losing talent from the system. It is therefore important to raise the status and impact of middle leaders to help counter these risks. There is much more value we could gain from our middle leaders if we start to rethink their role and purpose. Not all teachers see middle leadership as an aspirational step on the career ladder: career progression, consequently, can sometimes seem slow, and the lure of senior leadership can seem distant, which makes it hard to retain and develop top talent in the system. By putting more emphasis on the important role played by middle leaders in reducing within-school variation and broadening the responsibilities of middle leaders, we could make middle leadership an attractive reason to stay and progress in teaching.

This could lead to middle leaders playing the role of supervisors and coaches leading the development of the teachers they manage. Middle leaders firstly drive teaching quality and student results in their own departments. This could then be expanded to a role across the school, supporting and peer-mentoring heads of weaker departments. Finally, we could look at the role of the middle leader across schools – for example, heads of English from neighbouring schools could collaborate and peer mentor. Middle leaders could also play the role of in-school researcher, bringing in and disseminating research within the school to help make education a more evidence-based profession.

Conclusion

If we want to close the achievement gap then we must continue to focus on teacher quality and leadership development, with the aim of reducing variation in performance within each school. We must 'drive this from the middle' by building the capacity of our middle leaders. Middle leaders can drive consistent teacher quality in their areas of responsibility through curriculum leadership, lesson observations, holding staff to account and mentoring staff. They also ensure consistency across the school by collaborating and challenging their fellow middle leaders, influencing whole-school behaviours through sharing, coaching and mentoring. A strong cadre of middle leaders could help to drive high quality teaching across the country.

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7.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION: CREATING 'FAMILIES OF SCHOOLS'

TIM BRIGHOUSE

If schools really are going to crack the issue of chronic educational underachievement among traditionally disadvantaged groups of pupils, they need two sorts of evidence. The first is reliable data on the scale and varied nature of their attainment gap, and how they compare to other schools in a similar context. The second is reliable research and evidence from other schools about how to improve their performance.

This chapter draws on the successful use of 'families of schools' data sets in Birmingham and London. It argues that all schools should be provided with data that enables them to identify other schools in a similar situation to their own. It then suggests how schools could use these data sets to learn from each other and create a culture of school improvement.

Making the best use of data, part I: families of schools

The use of data about pupil performance is now the key starting point for school accountability and for school improvement. Any lead inspector about to head an Ofsted school inspection team, will have formed a provisional hypothesis of what category to put a school in based on their reading of RAISEonline – the key data set used by the school itself to analyse performance over time against unidentified schools in similar circumstances. The Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data has also acted as a spur for school improvement and for broad-brush target setting for pupils over recent years.

An intelligent examination of data has become the starting point for schools to take action to improve the everyday processes – such as leadership, management, teaching and learning, teacher development and pupil and parent involvement – which are the bread and butter of school life. In short, the process of school self- or external review and subsequent action is underpinned by the discerning use of data.

It used not to be so.

Two decades ago, hardly any schools used data relating to pupil performance to measure their own progress. Before the publication

of test and exam results very little data was available unless, at the primary school, some rare keen leader had kept longitudinal reading or NFER[1] maths scores. At secondary school awards evenings – and not every school ran one – the head would give a broad-brush and selective picture of exam results and other sporting successes. Subjective judgment, anecdote and newly introduced public inspection reports from Ofsted were the means by which parents and the public judged schools.[2]

Now, as set out above, there is a plethora of data used either by the public to judge a school's effectiveness, or by the school itself as a springboard for further improvement, including the data available to schools both through RAISEonline and the FFT. My argument is that while these are important sources of information, they suffer from the disadvantage that they make the schools in the data sets anonymous. Yes, you can see where your school stands in relation to others – whether, for example, you are in the top or bottom 10 per cent of performers on some particular measure. But since the other schools are not named, you have no means of easily identifying which other school it might be sensible to visit to learn from others. That is not to say that those rich data sets are not useful to a school both in target setting for individuals and cohorts of pupils – they are. It is just that they are not as useful as they could be.

It does not have to be so.

In Birmingham in the 1990s, a general drive for school improvement was made more focused when John Hill, the Education Department's chief statistician, suggested a means by which schools could compare their performance against other schools that had pupil intakes with similar socioeconomic profiles. These data sets revealed widely differing pupil performance in apparently similar circumstances. What was different about what came to be called 'family of schools' data sets, was that the schools could see each other's data in full detail so that they could visit and try to understand why some schools' practices differed so much. Figure 7.1 shows the format of how each family of schools was represented.

The horizontal axis measures 'absolute performance' of the school[3] – schools with high results are placed on the right, those with low results on the left. The vertical axis represents 'rate of improvement'[4] – the fastest improving schools are at the top, while those which are not improving are towards the bottom. The average for the family is where the two axis lines intersect. Each school is then marked with an X,

1 National Foundation for Educational Research
2 See the introduction to Rutter et al 1979
3 Measured in points per pupil averaged over a three-year period.
4 Measured by improvement in exam results averaged over a three-year period.

based on their performance against the average. An annex to each 'family' lists the detailed outcomes in each subject for each school, enabling more detailed analysis.

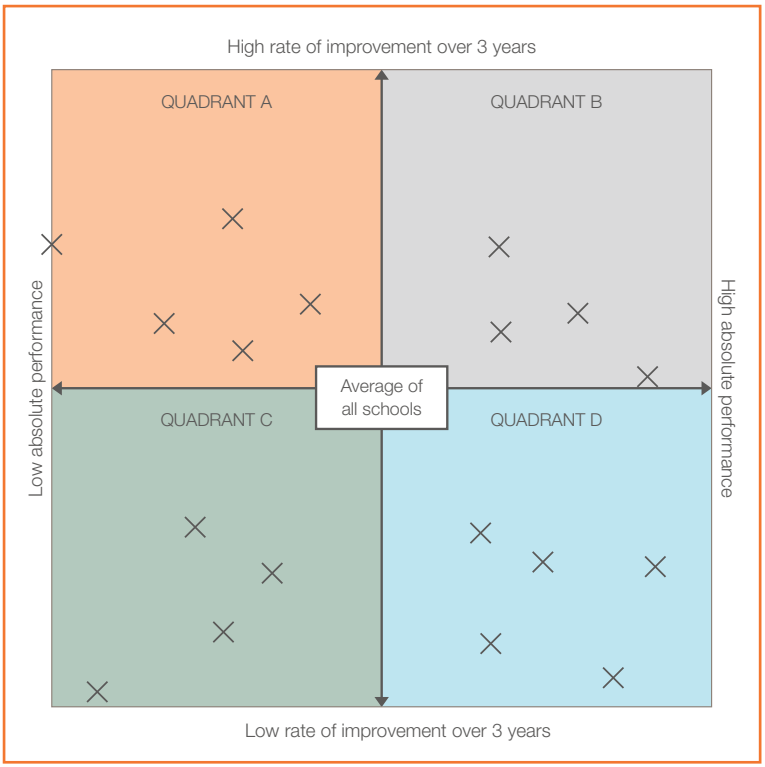

Figure 7.1
Family of schools performance map

The advantage of this approach is that it is easy for any school to see how apparently similar schools are doing. Clearly the schools in Quadrant C have low performance and are not improving as fast as other comparable schools – perhaps 'not waving but drowning'? Quadrant A schools are improving more quickly but have low points per pupil – perhaps 'heads above the water'? Quadrant B consists of schools with high points per pupil and high rates of improvement – perhaps 'walking on water'? Finally Quadrant D schools have high points per pupil but low rates of improvement – perhaps 'treading water'?

The point of the 'family' is that schools have similar prior entry attainment scores and similar numbers entitled to free school meals. So schools do not need to waste time – they can visit and learn from schools they know to be broadly similar.

This approach was used in a broad-brush way in Birmingham to stimulate debate among heads and to promote inter-school learning. It suffered at the secondary level from being based on just fewer than 80 schools; a data set was too small to have sufficient schools of similar characteristics to overcome a natural tendency to 'explain away' differences as simply the result of different pupil cohorts.

A similar approach was taken at the start of the London Challenge in 2003, although the number of secondary schools involved – over 400 – meant that much more meaningful comparisons could be made. It was then used in the Black Country as well as in Greater Manchester where there was an energetic development of inter-school visits aimed at school improvement.

More recently Yorkshire and Humberside have commissioned and begun to implement a much more ambitious online version of 'families of schools' where schools can construct different families based on self-selected criteria. This shows that there is far more possibility in creating a data set which will enable schools to exercise creativity in its use. If such data were to be integrated with data from the Fischer Family Trust, there is the potential for schools to learn from each other – both at the primary level across the basics and at secondary level, subject by subject and, significantly, with different groups of pupils.

Making the best use of data, part II: creating a culture of school improvement

The first part of this chapter argued that schools should be provided with more transparent data sets that enable them to compare their performance against other, *named* schools with similar pupil intakes. However, this on its own will not lead to improvements. Schools must then use the data effectively to learn from each other. This will require a wider change of culture in schools – one that emphasises teachers continually learning from each other and improving their practice.

There are five main points to be made.

First, a culture needs to be established which embraces the idea of continuous improvement and learning from elsewhere: in short, the school – however outstanding – can never be sufficient within itself. It needs always to be looking for best practice wherever it may be found. Among the best ways of achieving this is to form partnerships with other schools – so that schools can learn from each other and staff can develop their skills together.

Second, school improvement needs to be linked to professional development so that each teacher's personal needs are partly linked to the needs of the school as a whole. Of course there are many aspects of continuous professional development which need to be addressed

if a school is to be as successful as it could be, but one essential is a commitment to research in all its aspects. So, one feature of the school's development plan might be to understand more about the progress of disadvantaged groups of pupils. It might be the case, for instance, that members of staff could apply for small bursaries to undertake some action research to increase the school's understanding of the issue.[5]

Third, the pupil data must be shared among staff and governors so that the major interest groups know exactly the performance of each target group. Above all, the school needs a thorough pupil 'tracking' set of practices. Ideally this will be a part of the schools teaching, learning and assessment policy and crucially it will form part of the staff induction programme so all newcomers are quickly 'on the same page' and 'singing from the same song sheet'. Tracking is not something to be left to the senior leadership team, or worse still, one member of that team; it must be something which everybody understands and embraces.

Fourth, the school will not be 'blinded' by the pupil data. The school must constantly check that the data does not obscure certain groups of pupils, for example those who are not near key performance thresholds but have the potential to improve. The school must also ensure that data does not replace staff observations and perceptions. For example, are there groups of children in danger of being 'invisible' in the sense that they don't cause trouble, seem quiet and biddable, but may actually not have a worthwhile relationship with any member of staff? The point being made is that schools must be anxious not to be 'taken in' by overall performance data – because focusing on aggregate data can lead to complacency. Schools must have checks in place so that each and every pupil's progress is noticed and discussed.

Fifth, internal organisational practices must be aligned with the performance of pupils from traditionally disadvantaged groups. So, for instance, awards evenings, job descriptions, performance management arrangements, agendas for meetings of both faculty and senior leadership teams, will all reflect a determination that those most at risk are constantly at the forefront of discussion.

These five steps will ensure that schools use data effectively to improve their performance. This will require a much wider change of culture in schools – one that emphasizes continual improvement and the professional development of teachers over time.

5 Bentley Wood High School in Harrow has just involved 10 pairs of teachers in small studies for which they will receive honoraria, and all of which are linked to the school's improvement plan.

In this regard, there is a useful check which the American educator Judith Little set out[6] when she said you knew when you were in a good school or faculty when the following four things happen:

- Teachers *talk* about teaching
- Teachers *observe* each other's practice
- Teachers plan, monitor and evaluate *together*
- Teachers teach *each other*

The simplicity of these features is particularly attractive because it is easy to see how each could be achieved by small changes to existing practice. So for example, a school could use an inset day to send its staff to observe classroom teaching in a different school; it could dedicate staff meetings to discussing new teaching practices, rather than the usual administrative announcements; and it could schedule time for departments or year groups to plan and evaluate lessons together. If schools were to do these things with a clear focus on the performance of traditionally disadvantaged groups – using a 'family of schools' data base to guide their investigations – it could help to substantially reduce educational disadvantage.

Conclusion

In summary there are two keys to schools making more progress with underperforming groups of pupils. First, all schools should be provided with 'families of schools' data sets that enable them to identify other schools with similar pupil intakes. These could be developed from existing data sets such as RAISEonline and the Fischer Family Trust. Second, schools must use these data sets to learn from each other. This will require a much wider change of culture, centred on continual improvement and professional learning. It will require a school system built on collaboration.

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6 As quoted in Fullan 1982

8.

TESTING TIMES: REFORMING CLASSROOM TEACHING THROUGH ASSESSMENT

CHRISTINE HARRISON

Engagement and effort are essential characteristics of good learners. Children who start school socially and academically ahead of their peers tend to be more successful in the first years at school, and this in turn encourages them to put in even greater effort to strengthen their engagement with learning (Yeh 2010). Conversely, those children who enter school socially and academically behind their peers are often less successful and begin to doubt their own abilities, and this negative belief leads to reduced effort, engagement and achievement. The result is an achievement gap, which, if allowed to persist, widens as the two groups of children move through the school system. How assessment is perceived by these youngsters can have a major influence on these beliefs as it can either strengthen or break them.

This chapter looks at the ways in which assessment is being used in schools in England and explores how these practices can influence the way high and low attainers conceptualise their likely success. It argues that increasing the use of formative assessment could help to improve engagement in learning and raise low attainment. While the importance of formative assessment is recognised by many teachers, it has not always been well implemented in the classroom.

What is assessment for?

Assessment serves many purposes in schools, with Black (1995) identifying the main three as:

- formative – to support learning
- summative – to provide information for certification, transfer and reporting on progress
- accountability – to ensure teachers and schools are being effective.

Newton (2010), however, argues that this simplistic view does not take into account the many and varied purposes that schools and teachers use assessment for, and he suggests that there are at least 20 different purposes. His point is that teachers and schools do not pay attention to what purpose a specific assessment is designed for, suggesting that the assessments that they are using may not be 'fit for purpose'. For example, the assessments may not have sufficient detail or appropriate

scope to do the job they are put to, and this would therefore lead to inadequate or misleading data on which judgments are made.

Schools in England have become data driven and teachers tend to be heavily influenced by the need to produce summative performance data for evaluating school effectiveness, target setting and monitoring standards (Tiznak and Sutton 2006). The government requires schools to report on levels achieved within subjects at age 7, 11, 14 and 16, which are the end of key stages within the national curriculum. In fact, most schools have amalgamated testing against these national curriculum levels into their regular monitoring systems, with teachers being asked to report on achievement using levels and sublevels at several points in each school year. In 2001 the School Curriculum and Assessment Agency recommended that level descriptions within each subject's national curriculum document be used primarily for making 'best fit judgments' for summative assessment at the end of a key stage, rather than be used to assess pupils' progress on interim assessment tasks in the short and medium term. However, this recommendation has been ignored by many schools, which means that criteria intended to summarise and make holistic judgments about an individual's capabilities at the end of a two- or three-year learning period, are instead being used to track progress of learning over the short to mid-term.

This has led to a focus on the measurement aspect of assessment tasks. As a result, there has been a big increase in the extent of summative assessment and assessment for accountability. Teachers have come to rely very heavily on summative tests and assessment tasks in order to help them report their pupils' progress every few weeks. The problem here is that if a learner is not successful with these then they can come to believe that they are failing if they don't progress through the levels. Perhaps the most upsetting example of this comes from work by Reay and Wiliam (1999) where an 11-year-old worried about an impending test believed that if you did not achieve a level 4 'you are a nothing'. This approach to assessment in schools amplifies the negative messages that low attainers perceive about their lack of success, compared to others in their class, and this leads to increased feelings of helplessness (Dweck 2000) and decreased motivation.

A further factor which has intensified the problem is the high-stakes assessment regime that accompanied the introduction of the national curriculum. This encouraged teachers to 'teach to the test' (Brooks and Tough 2006). High-stakes testing causes considerable anxiety for most students and this is exacerbated for low attainers because regular reporting of low attainment reduces self-esteem. This demotivates learners and contributes to lower future performance, (Harlen and Deakin Crick 2003), which further increases the gap between high and low attainers, which, in turn, has significant consequences for

future learning. Their review also revealed that the effect of 'high stakes' tests on teachers was to lead them to adopt teaching styles that emphasised knowledge transmission rather than more active and creative pedagogies, and so using the results of summative assessment for accountability and monitoring can, and does, affect students through impact on teaching and the curriculum (Harlen 2004a). If teachers allow themselves to be seduced into teaching to the test, then they change the classroom ethos from a learning orientation to a performance orientation. The consequence of this change is that students may be less willing to make an effort in their learning unless they can see clearly that it will help them achieve a higher test score. More damaging than this consequence is that learners may refuse to attempt challenging activities because they see any struggle as failure rather than an opportunity for learning (MacBeath and Mortimore 2001, Harlen 2004b).

Assessment for Learning

So far, we have only considered the negative effects of assessment for accountability and some aspects of summative assessment, but assessment can have positive effects on teaching and learning. In 1998, Black and Wiliam published a review of formative assessment, which spearheaded dramatic changes in classroom assessment in the UK and other parts of the world. Not only was formative assessment hailed as a more desirable approach to classroom assessment, it also promised a rise in achievement and, as such, received considerable interest from teachers, schools and government. Formative assessment is an approach to assessment which requires both the teacher and learner to focus on the use of judgments for feedback purposes so that mistakes or errors in one piece of work can be used to inform the next steps of teaching and learning in order to develop better understanding in future attempts at that work. In other words, assessment takes place alongside the learning to inform future action rather than after the learning has taken place. The Assessment Reform Group coined the phrase 'Assessment for Learning' (AfL) to distinguish this specific use of assessment, and over the last two decades this term has become synonymous with formative assessment.

Assessment for Learning involves a group of classroom practices that helps both the teacher and learner focus on the current state of learning and make decisions about which steps to take next. The goal is to find out what students know, what they partly know and what they do not know so that the follow-on activities can advance learning (Black and Harrison 2004). This awareness comes out of activities that encourage students to talk about the learning, and to apply whatever knowledge they already have. Through this approach, teachers can gauge the level of understanding demonstrated as students make sense of their learning experiences and so be aware of the starting point for future learning. At the same time, students will be able to compare their developing

understanding and ideas with those of their peers, and this can help students question their own learning as they try to make sense of their own ideas in relation to those of others.

In classrooms where assessment for learning works well, the learner comes to see improvement as a journey, and the feedback comments provide sections of a map for them to use to move towards their goal. In classrooms where teachers regularly give feedback not just on what is correct and incorrect but on how to improve, learners come to understand what is required in terms of a quality piece of work and so can begin working towards making that improvement. So the process and routine of feedback is extremely important. Learners not only need to know how to improve, but also need to be motivated to want to make that improvement. Each step, however small, and the means of achieving them in the short term, is what moves the learning forward and prevents such learners losing sight of their long-term goal or being inhibited from attempting it because of overtones of comparison and competition.

This is very different from testing where the purpose is generally more summative. Mansell et al (2009) highlight four characteristic differences between these two uses of assessment:

- summative comes at the end of learning episodes, whereas formative is built in to the learning process
- summative aims to assess knowledge and understanding at a given point in time, whereas formative aims to develop it
- summative is static and one-way (usually the teacher or examiner judges the pupil), whereas formative is ongoing and dynamic (feedback can be given both to the pupil and the teacher)
- summative follows a set of predefined questions, whereas formative follows the flow of spontaneous dialogue and interaction, where one action builds on (is contingent upon) an earlier one.

The goal of AfL is not just to motivate students to work hard on challenging problems, but also to ensure that they develop identities as capable learners (Shepard 2000). Two categories of student learner self-concepts differ significantly from each other in the dimensions of attitudes to autonomy. Dweck (2000) notes that 'performance-oriented students' believe that academic achievement is determined by fixed ability and are more likely to work to please the teacher, pick easy tasks and be less likely to persist with tasks. By contrast, 'learning-oriented students' attribute academic success to their own efforts, are motivated by an increasing sense of mastery, use more self-regulatory and metacognitive strategies and develop deeper understanding. Assessment for Learning encourages a more learning-orientated route for students since it focuses the learner on their own learning trajectory rather than continually comparing them with others. It also helps learners

realise that they can learn from their mistakes and that it is worth putting in the effort to have a second or third attempt at a piece of work as it is the improvement that is valued by the teacher rather than simply the attainment. In this way, assessment plays a key role in developing this orientation and therefore in forming a student's learning identity – not only through the experiences of being judged, but also through their interactions with teachers and peers which communicates expectations and influences pupil perceptions of success and failure (Gipps 1999). For low-attaining students, AfL offers a way out of their downward spiral as it can refocus their attitude towards assessment as something that can help them learn rather than a process which highlights their incompetencies.

Implementing Assessment for Learning in the classroom

The problem though is that despite the very positive response from teachers and schools to developing a more formative approach to assessment, many have not yet achieved this. In 2004, AfL was adopted by the National Strategies as one of its policies for whole-school improvement, and considerable funding and professional development was aimed at implementing AfL across schools in England. Despite this huge investment, reports from school inspectors (Ofsted 1998, 2004, 2007) and government agencies (DCSF 2007) indicate that the implementation is sporadic and underdeveloped. Other research (James and Pedder 2006, Keppell and Carless 2006) has revealed the complex nature of the practical implementation of AfL as a pedagogical practice, because the way that a teacher approaches assessment reflects teacher beliefs and assumptions about what it means to know or understand – this, in turn, shapes the learner's own beliefs about learning.

Sometimes assessment practices within a school are out of step with teaching and learning approaches (James 2006) and can limit the realisation of AfL. This was evident in the government's own action research project – Assessment for Learning 8 Schools Project – which categorised the factors schools needed to ensure are in place for AfL to function. Thirteen messages arose from this research for the successful implementation of AfL across a school: four of these focused on what went on in the classroom, while the remaining nine involved how whole-school support, implementation and development needed to be done.

There are many reasons why teachers have found it difficult to incorporate AfL within their classroom practice, but perhaps the most fundamental one is that they cannot conceptualise AfL fully before they begin to develop it in their classrooms and so are unable to perceive the types of changes they need to make in their day-to-day practice. The problem here is that changes of this size and complexity are sometimes difficult to achieve. There already exists a substantial tome

of literature that explores how teachers' beliefs affect the decisions they make in practice for both experienced (Nespor 1987, Eik and Reed 2002) and inexperienced teachers (Pajares 1992). Much of this focuses on how teachers use their previous experience of classrooms to make sense of new situations and dilemmas as these arise. So, for both novice and experienced teachers, beliefs about lesson planning, assessment and evaluation influence the actions and decisions made in the classroom scenario (Enyedy et al 2005). If context and experience strongly influence practice, then this suggests that it may be difficult to bring about change in practice as the status quo of teachers' existence confines the interpretation of any new pedagogic ideas within the realms of previous ideas. This suggests that radical change in practice may be difficult to achieve.

Conclusion

The problem then is what do teachers do when they want to develop a more formative approach to assessment, but feel unwilling or unable to change other aspects of their practice. Many simply apply their interpretation of AfL within their current context. So, for example, a realisation that AfL is founded on improving feedback between learners and teachers might be interpreted by a teacher as doing tests more frequently. This misinterpretation of the principle of feedback within the AfL classroom focuses both the teacher and learners on performance rather than learning. This reinstates the type of classroom environment where high attainers do well and are motivated to do more, while low attainers become demotivated by their lack of success.

Although the intention to develop a more formative approach might be there, many teachers need help in realising the types of changes that they could make and how they need to tailor these to support their learners in focusing on their learning. This is especially the case for low-attaining students whose faith in their learning capacity diminishes as they experience classrooms where the emphasis is on performance rather than learning.

Initiatives in the last two decades have certainly demonstrated that assessment can shape pedagogy and schools need to reflect on how their multiple uses of assessment affect the motivation and the self-esteem of their learners. The emphasis needs to be placed on helping all learners develop and sustain a capacity to learn that not only lasts through the years of compulsory schooling but benefits them throughout their lives.

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9.

TACKLING PUPIL DISENGAGEMENT: MAKING THE CURRICULUM MORE ENGAGING

DAVID PRICE

Talk to most politicians and they will cite 'raising standards' as the single biggest priority for educational policy. Ask them about raising levels of student engagement, and you are likely to be rewarded with blank looks. Yet, increasingly, the evidence suggests that focusing upon achievement – usually at the expense of engagement – will yield only short-term, modest improvements. The irony is that if educators were mandated to make learning more engaging, achievement would naturally follow.

Disengagement: an alarming trend

Teachers argue that learning has become less engaging, primarily because of two pressures: the need to 'cover' a content-heavy curriculum, and the pressure of high-stakes testing, with the attendant 'teaching to the test'. Engagement matters, not simply because of the obvious link to attainment, but also because an engaged student is more likely to be a confident learner, and more likely to want to continue their learning into, and beyond, further education.

Recent research reveals disturbing levels of disengagement in school, consistent across western industrialised countries.

- 98 per cent of US students feel bored at school at least some of the time; two thirds feel bored every day;17 per cent are bored *every lesson* (Yazzie-Mintz 2009).
- 11 per cent of English students claim to 'hate' school, with a further 30 per cent stating that, for them, hating school was partly true. Children from lower-income families are more likely to have negative attitudes to school (Gilby et al 2008).
- Estimates of English 14–16-year-olds defining themselves as 'disengaged' vary from 20 to 33 per cent. These students are predominantly white, male, and from disadvantaged backgrounds, and are most likely to truant. Approximately 25 per cent of 14–16-year-olds said they were disengaged from school, but intended to continue their studies in further and higher education. Only one-third of year 10 students were defined as 'engaged' (Ross 2009).

- Engagement progressively decreases over time: in Canada, 82 per cent of Grade 5 students are considered to be 'intellectually engaged' in school – by Grade 11, that number has halved. In Canadian schools, only 31 per cent of students are interested in and motivated to learn (Willms et al 2009).

Disengagement is, perhaps, the most significant underlying factor in the rising pattern of both truancy and Neets (not in education, employment or training). While disengagement from school disproportionately affects students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and those with low academic attainment, we are also seeing increasing numbers of 'disengaged achievers': students who gain good GCSE passes, but have been dissuaded from staying in formal education.

In schools in disadvantaged areas, student disengagement happens earlier, is more acute, and results in poor literacy and numeracy, passivity or cessation of effort, underachievement, disruptive behaviour and poor attendance (Cole 2006).

In short, we are facing a crisis of student disengagement in our schools.

While disengagement with schooling has been a longstanding challenge for educators, the crisis is likely to have deepened in recent years because of the alternative possibilities of learning informally, through digital and social media. Most schools routinely prevent their students from accessing the wealth of learning now available through social media and online courses, contrasting sharply with the learning experience available to many students at home. While concerns about digital safety are understandable, the gap between learning at school (restricted access + low motivation) and learning socially (unlimited access + high motivation) is growing wider. Compounded by less autonomy, and more prescription in how they teach, it's not hard to see why teachers increasingly feel like helpless observers of student disengagement.

How do we reengage students?

The Learning Futures[1] programme, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, set out to find radical solutions to the challenge of student engagement. Our starting point was that, while environmental factors, like social backgrounds and geographic locations, played their part in determining engagement, there was little that could be done to effect change. But we believed that pedagogy – the business of teaching and learning – was critical in engaging students. So, we recruited 40 schools who were prepared to innovate in the classroom, with the declared aim of enhancing student engagement *and* improving student outcomes.

First, however, was the question of what we mean by the term 'engagement'. Most models of engagement are, essentially, about

1 http://www.learningfutures.org

student compliance: students are deemed to be engaged when they are passive, not disruptive, in class; they complete work on demand and on time, and stay 'on task'. Our schools understood the need to recalibrate their ambitions for students. Collectively we agreed that a deeply engaged student:

- cares, not just about the outcome of their learning (usually the test score), but also the development of their learning
- takes responsibility for their own learning (and the learning of others)
- brings discretionary energy to the learning task
- locates the value of their learning beyond school and wishes to go on learning beyond school hours.

In other words, we need to envisage engagement, not as an expression of passivity, but as students developing a sense of agency over their own learning. These were ambitious aims, particularly in schools where families expected learning – in the words of Mick Waters (former director of curriculum at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and early advisor to the project) – to feel 'like a cold shower; if it isn't hurting it isn't doing you any good'.

Having redefined the characteristics of an engaged student, we then worked with schools to transform their learning environments, for we quickly realised that, in order to see engaged students, we had to provide them with *engaging schools*. What do we mean by an 'engaging school'? Perhaps the most obvious place to start is in the classroom. While schools experimented with a range of teaching and learning strategies, those which saw the biggest increase in student engagement were those that made a significant commitment to enquiry and project-based learning (PBL). Neither of these approaches are new, but both fell out of favour in the 1980s, when there were too many examples of PBL that were lacking structure and rigour. In order to ensure both, we worked with one of the leading chains of schools in the world – the High Tech High schools in Southern California – and produced a teacher's guide to project-based learning (Patton 2012).

When done well, carefully 'scaffolded' enquiries and projects embody the 'four Ps' of engagement: they ensure student's learning is *placed* – within their community, family or the online world they inhabit; they make learning *purposeful* – deriving learning from researching issues or creating products or services that matter to people; they enable learning to be *pervasive* – much of the learning happens 'out there', in communities or local businesses; and the increased freedom in enquiry and project-based learning encourages students, and teachers, to follow their *passions*.

A brief example from one of the Learning Futures schools, Cramlington Learning Village in Northumberland, captures the power of effective PBL.

Year 8 students were asked to construct an enquiry around an artefact that had strong personal significance for them. One student brought in a ten-pin. When asked to explain his choice, the student told of how his grandfather used to take him bowling. One night, a drunk-driver mounted the pavement while they were walking home, killing his grandfather. The boy wanted to research why people continue to drink and drive. He analysed statistics, learned how alcohol triggers function impairment, and talked to families who lost a loved one at the hands of a drunk driver. The product arising from this research was to be an educational video with a powerful set of images connecting a pedestrian collision with a ten-pin being struck by a bowling ball. The project encapsulated all four Ps, being placed, purposeful, pervasive and passion-led. It provided a dramatic response to the question most disengaged students ask when faced with the ubiquitous worksheet: 'so what?'

Critics of enquiry and project-based learning often adopt a polarised stance – one is either for, or against, traditional didactic teaching. Both students and teachers at Learning Futures schools felt that a 60:40 ratio (60 per cent of learning being delivered through enquiries or projects; 40 per cent being more transmissive forms of teaching) was the optimum balance. To a committed teacher, the challenge is not to choose one form of pedagogy over another – it is knowing how to blend them.

Time to engage in new approaches to teaching

School transformation, however, cannot be achieved simply by changing pedagogy. The culture and structure of the school needs to be transformed also. Together with the adoption of enquiry and project-based learning, Learning Futures schools advocated three key approaches:

- **Extending learning relationships:** We know that relationships matter, in teaching and learning. Typically, however, students are supported by a fairly narrow range of adults. Our belief was that the cast of characters supporting learning needed to be extended. Learning became more engaging when students were mentored, as well as taught – those mentors could have been peers, or community experts. Some of our schools saw success by training parents and carers to become 'learning coaches' for their children, developing a shared understanding of cognition, motivation, resilience, and a range of other attitudes and dispositions which rarely get talked about when the focus is all on the target grade. Recent research[2] suggests that students will struggle to achieve, or engage, in learning if they have a limited, fixed view of their intellectual capacity. We also know that children from deprived

2 See for example Dweck 2007

backgrounds are more likely to hold this mindset. So, having these views challenged by a range of supporters is more likely to effect change, than the teacher–student relationship which defines most learning conversations in school. Equally, having regular and systematic input from business or community experts, adds authenticity to enquiries and projects.

- **School as basecamp:** A 19th/20th-century view of school places it firmly as the destination for learning. A 21st-century vision, sees it as merely the basecamp. The rapid growth of Studio Schools in the UK, and Big Picture schools in the US (where students spend up to two days per week in work-based learning) shows the demand for learning outside the classroom. Learning from a mentor, expert or potential employer doesn't just make learning more authentic: it gives students hope, in a time when youth unemployment is running at 25 per cent, that they can develop employable skills. Learning Futures schools locate projects where they have most relevance – supporting services and organisations in their communities. Through technology, the destination for learning need not be restricted to a school's immediate locality. Students from several of our schools have worked collaboratively with students from High Tech High schools in San Diego, using Skype, file-sharing and webinars to share their learning.
- **School as learning commons:** The metaphor used to describe the culture of an engaging school is that of the learning commons. Seeing school as 'common ground', with all its users sharing access to its resources and taking responsibility for its development, ensures that those participating in newly extended relationships, and those who host learning outside school, all have an input into the way the school operates. One Learning Futures school, Matthew Moss High School in Rochdale, has built common ground around the science of learning. Here, staff are researchers, going out to study how great schools structure learning, bringing in experts and establishing partnerships around the world. Importantly, students and parents are seen as fellow enquirers – breaking down the notion of school as an enclosed, inward-looking place. An important principle behind their success is that of 'co-constructing' both the curriculum and pedagogy. As Mark Moorhouse, deputy head teacher at Matthew Moss says: 'Co-construct with learners. They have brilliant ideas. Always, always spend time designing learning with them.' Another Learning Futures set of schools, The Harris Federation in south-east London set up the Harris 'Student Commission for Learning' to ensure that their students' much-lauded achievement was also matched by enhanced engagement. Students and staff spent two years, gathering evidence around the question 'what makes great learning?'. Their CEO, Dan Moynihan, understood that good exam results were not enough:

> ‘We asked ourselves “what would future-proof our improvement?” We knew it had to be about a new level of engagement – making sure our learners and teachers were passionately involved in and excited by learning.’

Crucially, he committed the federation to implementing the findings of the student commission *before* they submitted their final report (Harris Federation 2011).

These three approaches are the foundations upon which an engaging school (Price 2012) can be built. The schools we worked with, in the development and research phase of the project, innovated in discrete areas – a whole year group, or within specific subject areas. To embed these innovations, we created a range of free resources for teachers. In the next phase of the project the Innovation Unit will be working with schools (including new academies and free schools) to implement Learning Futures principles, in order to create radical new schools, or implement whole-school transformation.

Throughout the first phase of the programme we worked closely with researchers from the University of Bristol who observed the following benefits.

- Students were more engaged – scoring higher on self-identity, motivation, positive attitudes to their learning capacity, resilience and taking responsibility for their learning.
- Improved exam results – while most schools transformed their key stage 3 curriculum, so the exam results will not be known for these students until 2013, there was an overall improvement in 2011 GCSE results in schools taking part in Learning Futures of around 10 per cent. Monkseaton High School applied aspects of Learning Futures approaches to their key stage 4 science curriculum, where GCSE results showed a 31 per cent improvement.
- Teachers were more engaged – teachers taking part in Learning Futures cited an enhanced sense of autonomy and agency in their teaching, referring to themselves as ‘designers of learning’, not simply deliverers.

Conclusion

Successive educational policymakers have, in recent years, seen the raising of academic standards as the strategy which trumps all others. The loss of student engagement has been regarded as acceptable collateral damage. But, as the events of the English riots of 2011 showed, disengagement in school is a short step away from civic disengagement, and we ignore it at our peril. Nor should we be cowed by the ‘either/or’ syndrome. As Finnish schools have shown, it is possible to achieve excellence through equity, and we believe the Learning Futures programme demonstrated that achievement can be realised *through* engagement, not at the expense of it.

As a nation, we can surely take no comfort from having only one in three adolescents being actively engaged in their learning at school. Over the past decade, we have seen determined policy efforts to raise the attainment of those who are least engaged – with little success. Simply urging these students (and their teachers) to 'do more, work harder' hasn't brought about a change in either attitude, or results. Standards and structural reforms have had limited impact on student outcomes, particularly for the most disadvantaged. At the same time, the most innovative businesses (such as Google, Amazon, 3M) have understood the importance of engaging their workforce, and customers. Creating engaging schools, that have a mission to innovate in order to re-ignite the fires of learning in their students, might yet be the key to unlocking the most intractable of problems facing governments and schools alike: bridging the attainment gap among students.

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10.

BEYOND THE SCHOOL GATES: DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S ZONES FOR ENGLAND

ALAN DYSON, KIRSTIN KERR AND CHRIS WELLINGS

As other chapters in this volume attest, there is substantial evidence that a wide range of outcomes for children and young people – most notably, educational outcomes – are strongly related to social background (Cassen and Kingdon 2007, DCSF 2009). Equally important from a policy perspective is that social and educational disadvantage are spatially distributed (Lupton 2006). In other words, children growing up in different places have different chances of encountering disadvantaging factors in their lives. In some places, these factors appear in high concentrations, meaning that children's chances of doing well are substantially lower than they are in other, more advantaged places. As a result, while children can experience disadvantage wherever they live – and policy must remain alert to this – there is nonetheless a strong rationale for focusing particular attention on places where disadvantage is most concentrated.

The context

The ways in which social background and place translate into outcomes are complex. It is not simply the case that coming from a poor family or living in a poor area 'causes' children to do badly. Instead, it seems that families and places create environments that are more and less supportive of children's growth and development. The strength and warmth of family relationships, the support and encouragement that are offered for learning, the material resources that are available in the home: all play a part (Desforges with Abouchaar 2003, Duckworth 2008, Goodman and Gregg 2010, Hartas 2012). Likewise, the opportunities that are available in the area, the availability of positive role models and peer groups, the quality of schools and other services, all help shape the opportunities children have and the way they view those opportunities (Bright 2011, Kintrea et al 2008, Kintrea et al 2011, Lupton 2006). There can be supportive elements in these environments however economically poor the child may be, but the reality is that children from poor families, living in poor neighbourhoods, are much less likely than their peers to experience these positives.

In this situation, there is undoubtedly much that schools can do simply by getting better at their core task of teaching children well. Going to

good schools makes a difference, even – perhaps especially – to the most disadvantaged children (Raudenbush 2012, Sammons, 2007, Sylva et al 2012). However, the impact of even the best schools is strictly limited; many of the factors that shape children's outcomes originate beyond the school gates. While teaching well is of vital importance, therefore, it cannot *on its own* tackle the disadvantages of background and place or reverse the effects of those disadvantages on children's life chances. As one school improvement researcher explains:

> '…even if we found all the factors that make schools more or less effective, we would still not be able to affect more than 30 percent of the variance in pupils' outcomes. It has therefore become increasingly clear that a narrow focus on the school as an institution will not be sufficient to enable work on more equitable educational outcomes to progress … Interventions will need to impact more directly on pupils' environment and life chances.'
>
> Muijs 2010: 89

For the most disadvantaged children living in the most deprived places, then, it seems that the most effective way to make a difference is likely to be through coordinated approaches which simultaneously tackle issues in children's schools, in their family and social backgrounds, and in the places where they live. These approaches need to be local so that they can tackle local issues and make the best use of local resources.

With this in mind, the Centre for Equity in Education at the University of Manchester, working with Save the Children, has begun to explore the internationally renowned Area Based Initiative (ABI), Harlem Children's Zone in New York City. Setting this alongside an analysis of the characteristics of disadvantaged areas in England and a survey of promising English initiatives, our report (Dyson et al 2012) makes detailed recommendations for the development of 'children's zones' in England, as summarised below.

The Harlem Children's Zone

The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ)[1] is a non-profit organisation serving around 100 blocks in Harlem, which are predominantly home to low-income black families. What makes HCZ so distinctive is its 'doubly holistic' approach. First, rather than focusing on a single stage of childhood, HCZ has created an interlocking 'pipeline' of support for children from cradle to career. It has programmes to support children's education in early childhood, elementary school, middle school, high school and college contexts, and it runs its own charter schools (broadly similar to academies in England) called Promise Academies. Second, it has wider programmes of family and community support built around

1 See http://www.hcz.org

this 'pipeline', so that at every stage of a child's education, the wider factors which might affect their achievements are being addressed. These include parenting programmes, family support work, health initiatives and community organising initiatives, often delivered directly by HCZ staff. Through this long-term dual approach, HCZ aims to sustain and build on the gains children make at every stage of schooling and to make sure these are not undermined by the wider problems and challenges they may face. Ultimately, its aim is to create a tipping point for the whole community so that positive and supportive practices become the norm.

It is not only HCZ's scope and ambition which is impressive. In many respects, so too are its achievements to date. Operationally, HCZ has established a wide range of service provision, sustained this over time, and has reached large numbers of children and adults – around 11,000 of each according to its latest report (HCZ 2011). As a non-governmental organisation, it has been able to concentrate on the needs of its target area as a whole, and to develop its own structures and governance mechanisms suited to meeting these, rather than having to manage large services firmly entrenched in their silos. It has also leveraged significant new resources into a historically poor area. Its latest report shows it operating with an annual budget of $250m, the vast majority of which (some $224m) comes from corporate, foundation and individual donations rather than from public funds.

In terms of impact, HCZ is also able to produce some strong evidence of the ways in which its programmes change children's and families' experiences and may, ultimately, change lives (ibid). Independent evaluations point to substantial improvements in educational attainments in the zone. One, by Whitehurst and Croft (2010) found that students attending Promise academies do 'impressively better than students of their backgrounds attending a typical public school in New York City'. Dobbie and Fryer (2009), meanwhile, claim that gains made by Promise academy students were enough to 'reverse the black–white achievement gap', at least in some subjects and for some age groups.

While there are some debates about what exactly has driven these improvements,[2] and it is therefore necessary to exercise some caution in interpreting the available evidence, there is a substantial body of research suggesting that approaches combining school improvement with interventions in children's lives beyond school can have powerful impacts. In addition to the Harlem evidence, this includes (but is by no means restricted to) evidence from Chicago school reforms about the centrality of work with parents and communities in securing sustained school improvement (Bryk et al 2010); evidence from the Boston City

2 Dobbie and Fryer (2009) and Whitehurst and Croft (2010) question whether it is the additional services provided by the Harlem Children Zone that has driven these improvements, or simply the impacts of more effective schools – a claim contested by Canada (2010) and Matthews (2010).

Connects programme about the impacts of providing children with prevention, intervention and enrichment services (Center for Optimized Student Support 2012); and evidence from the Full Service Extended Schools initiative here in England about the multiple impacts of coordinated, holistic approaches on the most disadvantaged students (Cummings et al 2007, Cummings et al 2011).

The debates about what drives the reported effectiveness of HCZ should, however, alert us to the fact that HCZ cannot be seen as a well-proven blueprint which can simply be transported elsewhere. Instead, it is better to focus on its core principles – of tackling all the disadvantages facing children simultaneously, throughout the childhood years, and through a long-term, integrated strategy. Since we know that children's outcomes are shaped by all of the contexts in which they learn and develop (see for example Duckworth 2008), that single-strand interventions have only a limited impact (see for example Muijs 2010), and that disadvantages are configured differently even between neighbourhoods in the same part of town (Dyson et al 2012), those principles seem to offer a promising basis for improving outcomes in the most disadvantaged places. The challenge now is to find ways of embodying them in structures and interventions that are effective in and appropriate to local circumstances in this country.

Children's zones for England?

While many aspects of HCZ are familiar here, England has yet to see an area-based approach which is truly 'doubly holistic' in the Harlem sense. However, our survey of initiatives in this country suggests that New Labour's drive for local coordination, and developments such as Sure Start and extended services, have created strong foundations on which this could be built. Indeed, the spaces for local innovation created since the 2010 general election have enabled some local professionals and policymakers to begin exploring this possibility. In some places, for example, existing extended service clusters have been reoriented to take on a broader area remit and develop cross-phase working. In others, local authorities have built on integrated children's services and children's trust arrangements to reorganise services on a coherent area basis. In others again, schools (including academies) and other agencies have come together around a common cause and have established trusts, or not-for-profit companies, or some other kind of governance structure to enable them to work together more effectively for all the area's children.

All of these developments are creating new 'vehicles' for the specific purpose of addressing children's needs in some of the most disadvantaged places in England. They have the flexibility to innovate outside existing structures, or to realign existing structures as needed. Typically, they have arisen in response to local entrepreneurship rather than central imperatives; are supported by local authority facilitation,

but are more or less autonomous; have the potential to raise their own funds; and are able to focus on area issues and explore how corporate priorities can be aligned with these. They draw, in particular, on the contributions of schools, but these are less likely to be the individual 'extended' schools of the past, and more likely to be clusters, federations and trusts of schools able to act collectively in working with other agencies and developing coordinated area approaches.

While such initiatives currently remain patchy – both in their geographical distribution and range of activities – it is not difficult to see how some of the more coherent of these could be developed into fully fledged, doubly holistic children's zones. Since they are local initiatives using existing funding, this would require no new national imperative. Central government could do much to encourage local efforts in this direction, however. For instance, small amounts of new funding could help to support the overarching and strategic coordination of resources within a zone, and the development of locally sensitive evaluation strategies, matched to zones' strategies and aims.

As English children's zones develop, they will need to set themselves the task of building on HCZ's principles while avoiding the temptation of trying to import its practices wholesale. At the same time, they will need to avoid simply replicating the problems of previous ABIs in this country (see for example Dyson et al 2012, Lupton 2010, Rees et al 2007). This means that they will need to develop their own governance structures with enough autonomy to enable them to formulate a coordinated, long-term strategy for tackling area issues. This structure will have to be sufficiently robust to withstand both the inevitable changes of policy direction at national and local level, and the centrifugal forces of the short-term priorities of partner agencies and organisations. The likelihood is that local authorities and schools will be key partners in (though not necessarily leaders of) children's zones, and that local democratic accountability will be important to ensure the stability of the zones and to avoid their being dominated by the concerns of individual services.

In order to make their strategies sustainable, they will need to develop equally robust funding arrangements capable of freeing them from the dependence on short-term policy initiatives that, in the past, has seen so many ABIs flourish for two or three years, only to disappear without trace. The likelihood is that they will need to place greater emphasis than HCZ does on 'bending' existing public services and funding streams to local priorities. They are likely to have to develop complex mixed models of funding, including, for instance, charitable and corporate giving, existing public service resources and funding streams, in-kind contributions, and funds secured through competitive processes.

As a further safeguard, an urgent task for English children's zones will be to conduct a proper analysis of the needs and potentials of the areas they serve. Such an analysis cannot simply identify the most troubling statistical indicators, or decide which service's targets are most at risk, or rehearse the assumptions and priorities of education professionals. It must also explore the deeper processes which underpin headline figures and seek to understand the complex local interplay of factors which create and perpetuate disadvantage. It will involve drawing on quantitative and qualitative evidence in a sophisticated way, and, above all, on the lived experience of children and families. This means that families, children and local communities need some authentic involvement in shaping how a zone will develop – something with which many public services currently struggle.

Similarly, the work of children's zones will need to be properly evaluated. It is not possible to assume that a set of interventions – even if evidence-based, and even if (and perhaps especially if) modelled on those in HCZ – will produce the desired outcomes everywhere. This is particularly so if the aim of interventions is to change the underlying dynamics of areas in the long term rather than produce 'quick wins' on short-term performance indicators. Evaluation, therefore, demands sophisticated approaches which articulate what the zone is seeking to achieve and how it believes its activities will bring about those achievements – in other words, its theory of action – and which track the impacts of those activities over time. This means that it may need to develop bespoke measures of impact which capture what the zone is setting out to achieve, rather than relying on ill-fitting proxy measures developed for other purposes.

Children's zones, then, need to engage in structured processes of democratic engagement, analysis, partnership building, resource-acquisition, intervention and evaluation (see Dyson and Kerr 2011). To do this, they will need technical assistance, and we are beginning to develop some tools to help them in this process. As a first step, there is an urgent need for the establishment of pilot zones in England so the country as a whole could learn how best to make this approach work. These pilots are likely to be located in those places where a coordinated approach is already well developed and will undoubtedly depend heavily on the commitment and initiative of local leaders. Charitable and corporate funders might be persuaded to support these pilots. So too might central government. It would not take much by way of additional resources to enable existing local collaborations to take the further step towards becoming fully fledged zones, and to make provision for those zones to be evaluated properly.

In the previous decade, it might have been reasonable to expect that this agenda would be taken forward by some kind of national initiative, backed up by substantial funding; this is no longer the case. The

current government favours local over national initiatives and is working within such severe financial constraints that it is impossible to maintain existing service levels, let alone to allocate funds to new initiatives. The plethora of national interventions may have disappeared, but the problems they were designed to solve have not. In many ways this is a bleak picture – yet there are positives. Freed from the constraints built in to national initiatives, there is a real opportunity for local actors to come together in creative ways, learning from the experiments of the past but devising new solutions for the new context. Likewise, the shrinkage of public funds not only imposes a necessity for effective, coordinated use of such funding as there is, but creates opportunities for other funders – including corporate and philanthropic donors – to make a real difference.

And not all potential partners in children's zones are struggling to the same extent. Schools have access to significant amounts of pupil premium funding at a time when their overall budgets are – for the time being at least – less pressurised than those of other services. Currently the premium is distributed to individual schools, but the possibility is there for schools serving highly disadvantaged areas to pool their allocations and combine them with resources from other services in order to be able to do something substantial.

Conclusion

For generations England has struggled with how to help the most disadvantaged children in the poorest places. For all the gains that have undoubtedly been made, the life chances of those children continue to be blighted by repeated failures to find interventions capable of making a real difference.

We have no doubt that national policies to tackle poverty and improve the quality of child and family services are essential. However, even with such policies – and all the more so in their absence – the most disadvantaged areas need powerful local strategies. Currently, thousands of highly skilled and committed professionals and community members in these areas do their best to tackle one or other of the symptoms of disadvantage. Children's zones offer a way of taking the best of current practice, focusing it into a coordinated assault on underlying problems, and leveraging additional resources into the places that need them most. They are already desperately needed and long overdue. In the coming years, the need can only become more acute.

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11.

AFTER SCHOOL: PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE IN A LOCALITY

ANN HODGSON AND KEN SPOURS

The age 14–19 phase of education has become the crucible of social competition in education (Lumby and Foskett 2005). The process of selection, which previously took place at 11, has moved to 14 and 16+, with the spotlight on the role of GCSE and A-level qualifications in the ranking process of young people for jobs and higher education. In this chapter, we examine the problems of divisions within 14–19 education and training and suggest that while the issue of attainment is important, we need to look more longitudinally at how young people progress between the ages of 14–19 and how they make transitions to either further study, university or working life. We argue for a new partnership infrastructure – 14+ Progression and Transitions Boards – to champion the successful progression and transition of all young people in a locality.

The 'overlooked middle'

The development of universal participation and progression within upper secondary education and training (14–19) should be regarded as a fundamental principle (Hodgson and Spours 2012a) and is now being actively pursued through raising the participation age (RPA)[1] to 18 by 2015. Nevertheless, new challenges are emerging for 14–19-year-olds. Recent policy changes could endanger the progression opportunities of large numbers of young people. In particular, we would like to highlight the looming problem of the 'overlooked middle': a significant proportion of young people who lie between those on the 'royal route' of GCSEs and A-levels, those on Apprenticeships with jobs, and those classified as Neet (neither in education, employment or training) (Spours et al 2012). This overlooked middle could be estimated to be as high as 40 per cent of the post-16 cohort (Hodgson and Spours 2013a).

Pressures on this group arise from a number of policy changes. The introduction of the EBacc[2] measure, focused on the attainment of

1 See http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/participation/rpa

2 The English baccalaureate was introduced as a performance measure in the 2010 performance tables. It is not a qualification in itself.

'good grades' at GCSE in five traditional core subjects, could take attention away from the development of the post-16 progression skills required to be successful at the next level up and in particular for 'middle attainers'. Moreover, the prospect of more linear A-levels would remove the staging post of the AS and the possibilities of resitting modules, thereby reducing success rates and grades, and leaving some young people with nothing to show for a further one or two years' post-16 study. The government's strategy for vocational education is very much focused on apprenticeships, which currently cater for only six per cent of 16–18 year olds (DfE 2011) and are unlikely to increase significantly in the current economic context. Indeed, last year the number of school leavers starting an apprenticeship actually fell by 1.4 per cent (BIS 2013). Much less attention has been given to the broad vocational qualifications that lie between these two poles and that have a good record at increasing attainment outcomes by the age of 19.[3]

These qualifications policies are not such a problem for high attainers likely to succeed at A-level and for whom progression is relatively straightforward, usually involving a relatively seamless transition between school and sixth form and then sixth form and university. The young people at greater risk are the overlooked middle whose progression needs are more complex, who can end up in inappropriate post-16 provision and are more likely to drop out of two-year courses at 17+, and so find it difficult to attain level 3.[4]

These too are the people who have most to lose from the removal of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) and work-related learning at key stage 4, changes to arrangements for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), and the weakening of institutional collaboration that can facilitate the development of vocational progression pathways across an area. Increasing institutional competition and the encouragement of a more diverse range of providers for 14–19-year-olds makes a coherent approach to 14–19 provision at the local level far more difficult to arrange. It often leads to overprovision in A-levels and underprovision of vocational education, particularly at levels 1 and 2 (Fletcher and Perry 2008); a process that started under the previous government, but has intensified under the current administration.

3 Broad vocational qualifications add 15 percentage points to level 3 performance at 19 and this has been increasing in recent years. The contribution from A-levels has remained static at 37 per cent (DfE 2012).

4 An extensive local study, the Kingswood Area Progression Project, found that middle and lower attainers who had entered A-level were less likely to complete two years of study than high attainers; see http://www.ioe.ac.uk/Study_Departments/Post14_KAPP_13__1-9-11.pdf.

Problems with 14+ participation, progression and transition

The divided qualifications and institutional landscape has a profound effect on 14+ participation, progression and transition (14+ PPT). In this section we focus on four major issues in the 14–19 phase.

- **The gap at 16+ between level 2 and level 3 qualifications:** There is a well-recognised mismatch between the demands of GCSEs and A-levels, which has been exacerbated by the use of vocational equivalent qualifications at key stage 4 that are very different in their pedagogy and assessment. Achieving the benchmark of five GCSE A*–C grades and equivalent including maths and English does not automatically guarantee success in level 3 study. Statistics in 2008 (the latest possible) suggested that only 60 per cent of students who had attained this basic benchmark went on to succeed at advanced level, compared to more than 80 per cent who had attained eight or more GCSEs (DCSF 2009). For successful progression a much higher benchmark is required and strategies need to be put in place by schools at key stage 4 and by post-16 providers to support young people to succeed at level 3.
- **A-levels, 17+ drop-out and their effects on the middle attainer:** A related issue is that A-levels are highly popular with parents and young people. They are also the major offer in school sixth forms, particularly those belonging to the new academies. In a competitive market place, three factors combine to produce a 17+ drop-out – institutional self-interest to recruit as many students as possible whether A-level courses are appropriate for them or not; student and parental preference for high-status A-level courses; and the gap described above. Together, these factors result in many young people failing to achieve the grades at AS-level that allow them to continue to the full A-level,[5] and so they have effectively wasted a year and have no obvious next step in terms of progression. In addition, many of those on post-16 level 2 courses find it difficult to progress to level 3 and it is estimated that less than half who start level 2 post-16 programmes manage to move up a qualification level by the age of 19 (Spours et al 2009).
- **18+ transitions and declining opportunities:** The 'progression pull' of higher education (HE) appears to be weakening because of the hike in university fees. The two decades of year-on-year rises in levels of participation in HE by young people appear to have come to an end (HEFCE 2013). Moreover, apprenticeships and the youth labour market currently cater for no more than 25 per cent of 18 year olds (DfE 2010). In an era when there are nearly a million young people unemployed, 18+ destinations of young people have

5 AS non-completion rates average 25 per cent nationally (reported in Ofsted sixth form college report annexes, 2010).

become an increasingly important issue, not least because the decline of opportunity could diminish the appetite of 14-19 year olds to participate in education and training.

- **The removal of a supportive infrastructure for progression and transition:** 14–19 education and training is complex in terms of qualifications and providers. Those young people whose parents or carers are less able to support them either financially or with the information they require to make the right decisions about what and where to study are more likely to be negatively affected by the removal of a range of measures that together provided a supportive infrastructure for progression and transition – the EMA, an entitlement to impartial CEIAG and work-related learning, 14–19 partnerships between providers in a locality and the weakening of the role of the local authority as an advocate for all young people in their area.

14+ Progression and Transition Boards – a new local infrastructure

While national policy is highly influential, it is in the locality where decisions about young people's life chances are made and where strategies for 14+ PPT are enacted. Schools, colleges and work-based learning providers decide what provision to offer and which young people they will take. The local labour market provides the context for the apprenticeships and employment that are vital for many 16–19-year-olds, particularly for the lower and middle attainers. Education providers and employers both need to see themselves as key contributors to a collaborative local system for 14+ PPT within what we refer to elsewhere as a 'local learning ecology (Hodgson and Spours 2013b).

In this final section we lay out a strategy for building the type of local infrastructure to support 14+ PPT for all 14–19 year olds in a locality.

Research on 14–19 partnerships[6] indicates that links with work-based learning providers and employers is much weaker than collaboration between education providers. The new context demands that 14–19 partnerships move from lateral collaborations between schools and colleges to more vertically integrated networks that actively encompass a wider range of social partners, including employers, third sector organisations, regeneration agencies, local authority services and higher education institutions. These reformed partnerships we term 14+ Progression and Transition Boards (14+ PTBs).[7]

6 Research on 14–19 partnerships was extensively reported in the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training in England and Wales final report (see Pring et al 2009). See also Higham and Yeomans 2010, and Baird et al 2010.

7 We have been undertaking a two-year research and development study in north-east Lincolnshire, and have begun work in Hertfordshire, Luton, Bedfordshire, Lambeth and Camden; see http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/49007.html

The primary aim of a 14+ PTB, as its name implies, is promoting the progression of young people both within the education and training system and their transition to the labour market, apprenticeship, further and higher education. Given its range of partners and its greater focus on work-based and labour market transitions at 17 and 18+, a 14+ PTB has the capacity to facilitate better communication between the key stakeholders about the needs of all young people for education, training and employment opportunities *and* the needs of employers for better-prepared young local employees.

The major focus for the 14+ PTB should be joint initiatives to improve outcomes for young people, education providers, local and regional employers and to make an active contribution to the civic life of the area more generally. This could include:

- assisting in the formation of coherent pathways for all learners at 14+, with a particular focus on those who are not following a traditional GCSE/A-level route
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through professional dialogue between pre- and post-16 providers
- supporting the development of employability and entrepreneurial skills in all 14–19-year-olds with the support of local employers
- undertaking intelligence gathering and communication about progression and destinations for all learners, and about local and regional labour market opportunities
- securing greater opportunities for apprenticeships and employment
- developing systems for cost-effective, high-quality and impartial CEIAG and work-related activities
- establishing a convincing and motivational civic and economic narrative for the locality.

New approaches to local governance through a rebalanced state

Local authorities have an important role to play in these new formations as facilitators and independent advocates for young people, but in the area where we have been working most intensively to support a 14+ PTB, the emphasis has been on bottom-up partnership. Each of the stakeholders commits to the concept and sees how his/her organisation both contributes and benefits, but is fundamentally guided by a desire to secure the future for all young people.

This is an argument for a new 'democratic localism', which emphasises popular participation and co-production of services; the promotion of public value; effective, bottom-up feedback loops into national policymaking and the greater involvement of social partners in decision-making (Hodgson and Spours 2012b). Within a democratic model the main motivation is not simply responding to policy from above,

but collectively understanding what is necessary and determining appropriate local action.

This would require a process of rebalancing the state so that regional and local government and communities have the necessary tools to transform their localities and regions, but within a clear national framework that supports equity (Coffield 2008). The 14+ PTB conception is a small, but important practical example of how this new form of governance might work in relation to education, training and employment.

Conclusion

As Rebecca Hickman comments in relation to school admissions policies, new walls are being built around schools. The formation of more expansive partnerships to serve the needs of all 14–19-year-olds in a locality, however, requires active partnership between schools, colleges and other key providers. 14+ PTBs, therefore, have the potential to provide a framework of collaboration which encourages schools to lower their walls and to look outwards and to focus on progression as well as attainment. 14+ PTBs also offer local authorities a way of working with schools and colleges in order to fulfil their function as 'champions' for young people. It is vital that all social partners pull together to open up genuine educational and employment opportunities in every locality.

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