

What works for reducing educational inequalities?

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What works for raising
attainment for low attainers?

Introduction

- We've learnt about the patterns of educational inequality
- And that inequality in schooling matters for:
 - Inequality in income and life-chances
 - Social mobility
- And we know COVID-19 made all pre-existing inequalities worse

- Levels of schooling also matter for growth and prosperity so raising attainment of low attainers would also raise national productivity.

Context

- Resources: not likely to be much money for expensive reforms
- Many proposals need more staff, but:
 - Teacher recruitment and retention crisis – England, Germany, ...
 - Also shortage of qualified staff for Early Years settings
- Also:
 - Pupil absence crisis – England, US, ...
- But: Resources of another type ...

Resources

- Resources of knowledge:
- How to raise attainment of disadvantaged and/or low attaining pupils is a widely considered and much studied issue
- Many institutions
 - Eg Education Endowment Foundation, NBER, more ...
- Many individual scholars

Different approaches to the problem

- Look at three different groups of things that might work:
 - Specific Interventions
 - small or large scale, well-defined acts in a pupil's learning environments
 - Reallocations
 - Pupils and/or teachers
 - Systemic factors
 - “Rules of the game”

Causal evidence

- Many and varied types of evidence are useful, even essential, for describing and understanding a social problem
- But for a policy question there has to be evidence sufficient to support a statement about causality:

“If we do policy action X, this will result in outcome Y”

- No technical detail here, but the leading case is removing possibility that a statistical relationship is just correlation.

Specific Interventions

- A leading case:
 - **Education Endowment Foundation** <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>

“We're an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. We do this by supporting schools, colleges, and early years settings to improve teaching and learning through better use of evidence.”
 - Funded over 150 research projects, mostly RCTs, explicitly aimed at asking what works to raise attainment for disadvantaged students aged 2 – 19.
- We now know a lot about what works and what doesn't

Some EEF recommends and not-recommends

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>



The following examples all in secondary schools ...

Interventions can be for pupils, also for teachers, parents/carers ...

Things that work to raise attainment for low attainers

For more, and for details, see

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>

Feedback

Very high impact for very low cost based on extensive evidence.



+6

Homework

High impact for very low cost based on very limited evidence. Homework



+5

Mastery learning

High impact for very low cost based on limited evidence.



+5

Metacognition and self-regulation

Very high impact for very low cost based on extensive evidence.



+7

One to one tuition

High impact for moderate cost based on moderate evidence.



+5

Small group tuition

Moderate impact for low cost based on moderate evidence.



+4

And things that don't ...

For more, and for details, see

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>

Aspiration interventions

Unclear impact for very low cost based on insufficient evidence.



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Learning styles

Unclear impact for very ed on insufficient evidence.



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Outdoor adventure learning

Unclear impact for moderate cost based on insufficient evidence.



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Repeating a year

Negative impact for very high cost based on limited evidence.



-3

School uniform

Unclear impact for very low cost based on insufficient evidence.



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Setting and streaming

No impact for very low cost based on very limited evidence.



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Education Endowment Foundation – some evidence collections

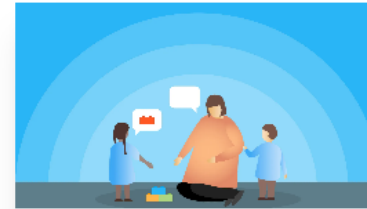
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence>



Evidence and resources

Early years

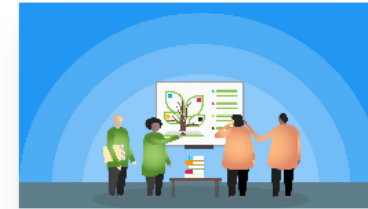
Support great learning and development opportunities for two-to-five-year-olds.



Evidence and resources

Primary

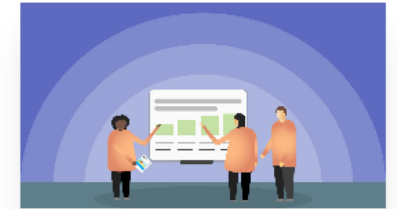
Support great teaching and learning for five- to 11-year-olds.



Evidence and resources

Secondary

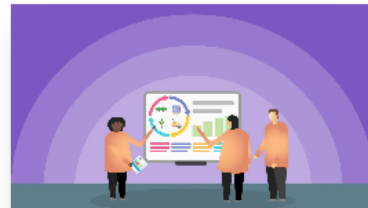
Support great teaching and learning for 11- to 16-year-olds.



Evidence and resources

Post-16

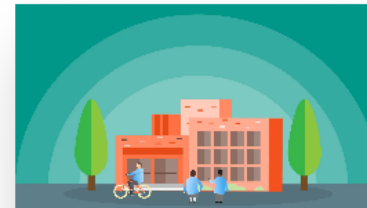
Support great teaching and learning opportunities for five-to-16-year-olds.



Evidence and resources

Training and support providers

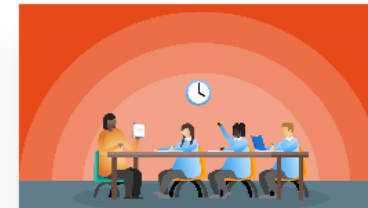
Support great teaching and learning opportunities for two-to-19-year-olds.



Evidence and resources

Leadership and planning

Support great teaching and learning opportunities for five-to-16-year-olds.



Evidence and resources

More resources and support

Support great teaching and learning opportunities for two-to-19-year-olds.

Reallocations

- Pupils are assigned to schools by the school admissions system
- We know that highly effective schools are more important for disadvantaged pupils than for advantaged pupils
 - Jackson et al (2024) <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/724568> and others before
- Teachers are assigned to schools by the labour market (in the UK)
- We know that highly effective teachers are more important for low attaining pupils than for high attaining pupils
 - Burgess et al (2021) <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/712997> and others before

Systemic factors

- High quality universal Early Years / Pre-school provision
 - Study of the “medium-run effect of Sure Start on academic outcomes, finding large benefits, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds”
 - Carniero et al (2024) IFS <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/short-and-medium-term-impacts-sure-start-educational-outcomes>
- School accountability
 - Strong school accountability has a more positive effect for low-attaining than high-attaining pupils.
 - For example, effects of the Welsh Assembly abolishing school performance tables
 - Burgess et al (2013) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272713001291>
- Overall resources for education

What works for reducing educational inequalities?

- Maybe you are doing many of these things already ...
- The evidence suggests high priorities would be:
 - Get more low attaining pupils into highly effective schools.
 - School admissions reform
 - Get more highly effective teachers in front of low attaining pupils.
 - Teacher assignment bonuses?
 - Strengthen school accountability, especially for less effective schools.
 - School accountability reform
 - Pilot some of the well-evidenced education interventions
 - Educational improvement missions