

Jennie Harland reports on new research into flipped learning and identifies what this approach can offer students in terms of more active and personalised learning and improved progress

Flipping their learning

Another teacher explained how flipped learning had encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning and develop independent learning skills.



As this teacher reported: "Flipped learning is a really good way of getting students to be more independent. It encourages a culture of independence as the other students see those who 'get it' doing well and getting ahead and they want to do the same."

In addition, as a result of students coming to lessons with prior knowledge, lessons moved at a faster pace allowing students to deepen their knowledge

for the initial instruction their students receive on a topic. They prefer to retain responsibility for ensuring consistent explanations of topics and concepts and for tackling misconceptions.

Flipped learning can also be less successful if students are not used to participating in homework and independent learning. In this case, any potential saving of time in lessons can be lost if the teacher has to spend time recapping content for students who have not completed the preliminary homework task.

In addition, some students may lose confidence and interest if they do not understand a topic they are meeting for the first time at home, where they are unable to ask the teacher questions to clarify their understanding along the way.

The report concludes that, where flipped learning is implemented effectively and the challenges it presents are surmounted, there are a range of positive effects for teaching and student learning.

Most teachers in the study saw flipped learning as just one approach in a varied repertoire of teaching strategies and intended to continue using it in this way.

Implementing flipped learning

In addition to the practitioner's guide, produced as part of the research project, any teachers considering flipped learning and the issues and challenges it poses can turn to the research report itself for some "top tips". For instance:

- Consider the attitudes and capabilities of students: where students are less confident with taking responsibility for their own learning outside of lessons, teachers can first introduce the online resources in class in a more supported and guided environment.
- Encourage peer-to-peer learning: students who have not completed the homework, or are struggling to understand concepts, can be paired in lessons with those who have completed the preliminary homework or have a more secure grasp of the topic.
- Identify appropriate video/digital resources: resources that provide teachers with feedback and

data on student participation and performance can be used to plan and structure lessons, including differentiated activities for pupils with varying levels of understanding.

As a result of students coming to lessons with prior knowledge, lessons moved at a faster pace allowing students to deepen their knowledge and understanding

- Ensure access to technology: where pupils are unable to access the resources at home, school computer facilities should be made available in break or in after-school clubs.
- Encourage homework participation: teachers may need to place greater emphasis on homework completion, which is essential preparation for subsequent lessons in a flipped learning approach
- Manage the change to flipped learning: teachers need to plan for how they will capitalise on additional lesson time gained through students coming in more prepared.

Jennie Harland is a research manager at the National Foundation for Educational Research.

Further information

To download the report, practitioner guide and Khan Academy companion handbook and curriculum resources, visit <http://bit.ly/1RSIMDE>

With increasing and more demanding curriculum content, teachers face the challenge of how to make the best use of the time they spend with their students.

Some pioneering teachers have been harnessing digital technology to "flip" the direct instruction of new concepts from lesson time to homework time, thus freeing up lessons for more active learning, extension activities and individual support.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and Nesta were keen to understand more about the pros and cons for schools of using this innovative approach to teaching and learning.



To this end, they supported nine schools in England and Scotland to trial a flipped learning approach in mathematics with one of their classes of 11 to 14-year-old students.

The schools were provided with support and materials including, if they wished, free Khan Academy videos and exercises to incorporate into their mathematics curriculum teaching for half a term.

Researchers worked with the schools to qualitatively evaluate their experiences and explore the impact of flipped learning. What came out of this research was a report and a practitioner guide to support schools implementing a flipped learning approach.

Impact of flipped learning

The report concluded that, where flipped learning was implemented successfully, there were a range of benefits for teaching and learning. The time that students spent at home undertaking online instruction resulted in them coming to lessons with a higher level of understanding and knowledge of concepts and topics than in traditional approaches. This freed up time for teachers to spend on a range of other beneficial activities for students including:

- Practising and applying knowledge and skills.
- Collaborative learning.
- Independent and student-led learning.
- Individualised coaching support from the teacher.

One of the case study teachers explained how flipped learning helped her to make the best use of her time with students during lessons: "It makes better use of me. Rather than sitting here while they copy stuff off the board, they can ask questions about things they are struggling with and there is more discussion as a result of flipped learning."

and understanding, increase their confidence and, ultimately, make faster progress.

As one of the case study students explained: "The flipped learning approach means that you get more out of the lesson because you already have a bit of knowledge before you go in. The teacher would usually have to explain for most of the lesson if she's starting a new topic, so she doesn't have to do that as much, so we get more done and get onto harder questions."

Challenges of flipped learning



The report also sets out the challenges associated with flipped learning. Insufficient and inadequate access to technology is an obvious barrier to the success of this approach, which relies upon all students being able to access digital technology effectively at home, or out of scheduled lesson time.

There is an impressive wealth of digital resources available to support a flipped learning approach, particularly in mathematics (such as those used by schools in this study – Khan Academy, Hegarty Maths, MathsWatch, MyMaths, YouTube, BBC Bitesize, the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, and Mathsrevision.com).

However, teachers have a significant job to do in identifying which of these are appropriate to the curriculum they are teaching and to their students' learning needs, and which match their teaching style.

Another challenge that emerged was that some class teachers feel uncomfortable delegating responsibility

All change: A diagram from the NFER/Nesta practitioner guide showing flipped learning vs traditional classroom approaches

Traditional classroom	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher prepares and delivers instruction on concept/topic to the whole class • Students listen in class and make notes • Students complete tasks to develop their understanding • Homework is assigned mainly to consolidate understanding • Teacher's role is to lead the lesson/pass on knowledge • Learning activities are predominantly offline (textbooks and worksheets) 	
Flipped classroom	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher prepares/selects materials for students to access instruction on concept/topic outside of class • Students watch online/digital videos/do exercises as part of homework to prepare for lessons • Class time is devoted to active learning, extension activities and supporting individual students • Students receive support from teacher and peers as needed • Teacher's role is mainly to facilitate student-led learning 	


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Drawing on the work of more than 1,300 schools, new research into the Pupil Premium has identified the common successful strategies and the key 'building blocks' for their implementation. **Dorothy Lepkowska** reports

How to break down the cycle of underachievement by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and narrow the achievement gap has been an issue of debate for years. However, with the Pupil Premium funding came an element of accountability and an expectation that schools will use the money effectively to achieve the best outcomes possible for those most in need. But, with limited time and resources, how can schools be sure that a certain strategy or approach will work?

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has published a research report entitled *Supporting the Attainment of Disadvantaged Pupils: Articulating success and good practice*.

Commissioned by the Department for Education last year, the report found that schools had adopted an average of 18 different methods of trying to narrow this gap. It also identified common ground between schools on what strategies are effective, and highlights the experiences of the more successful schools.

Effective strategies

The report draws on the responses to a questionnaire sent out to school leaders about the strategies they have used. The most commonly used strategies were also viewed as the most effective and included:

- Paired or group teaching.
- Improving feedback between teachers and pupils.
- One-to-one tuition.
- Initiatives introduced earlier, allowing them to bed in to the ethos of the school.

Compared with less successful schools, more successful schools had introduced their most effective strategy earlier. More and less successful schools also differed in their implementation of similar strategies.

For example, when it came to small group teaching, one more successful school took pupils of similar ability out of non-core subjects for additional support. This contrasted with a less successful school which removed pupils from English lessons to use an online tool, supervised by teaching assistants who had no specific training.

Furthermore, as part of their feedback to pupils, the more successful schools had implemented detailed consistent marking schemes to recognise pupils' achievements and identify the next steps in their learning and time was set aside specifically for discussion between the pupil and teacher. The researchers found that the more successful schools emphasised teaching and learning alongside emotional and social support, too. They also had highly effective assessment for learning systems which were straightforward to administer, provided clear feedback for pupils and contributed to each pupil's tracking and monitoring.

Tailoring strategies by responding to the needs of pupils was another characteristic of more successful schools. The study found that these schools "had adapted interventions or developed new ones based on their experience and understanding of what they were trying to achieve". It continues: "Their adaptations and developments were based on clear use of evidence, direct experience and observations of the initiative in practice. Less successful schools were more likely to be using 'off the shelf' interventions and less likely to be deviating from the prescribed approach."

The effectiveness of approaches used by different schools was not, therefore, simply a matter of implementing targeted strategies but relied on them being "embedded in a whole-school ethos of aspiration and attainment".

The seven building blocks

Crucially, the study identified seven "building blocks" that are common in schools that have achieved more success in raising standards among disadvantaged pupils. The first is a whole-school ethos of attainment for all, which meant the avoidance of stereotyping disadvantaged pupils as having less potential to succeed or as having similar barriers in the way of learning.

The head of one less successful school said: "Whatever we throw at these disadvantaged children, some of them are still struggling to make that progress. They just haven't got it. That sounds awful, but it's a fact of life. So we don't throw loads at these children. They make the progress that I think they are capable of."

The building blocks of Pupil Premium success

The leader of a more successful school, however, said: "When I am talking about our disadvantaged students I am absolutely determined that I see each of them as an individual rather than generalising them and moulding them together."

The second building block is a clear strategy relating to behaviour and attendance, incorporating strong pastoral care in the form of social and emotional support and a quick response to non-attendance, as well as working closely with families.

The report found that "the features associated with less successful schools offer some potential insight into opportunities to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils: in particular, the finding that higher levels of pupil absence were associated with poorer outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in both primary and secondary schools".

More successful schools had designated staff to offer pastoral support and had employed strategies to ensure children attended school – such as calling home in the event of an absence, funding or sending out transport, and working with families, often in the home, to address the barriers they face in getting their children to school.

They also understood the link between behaviour and absence and emotional support, and had put extensive social and emotional support strategies in place including strong links with local mental health services.

Another building block is a commitment to high-quality teaching for all alongside consistently high standards and expectations of teachers and pupils, monitoring performance and sharing best practice in the school.

In the more successful schools, staff were able to meet the learning needs of individual pupils, which required them to know every child's challenges and interests, and to look closely at ways of supporting them to achieve their very best.

Rather than bolt-on strategies and activities outside school hours, in some more successful schools, pupils had bespoke timetables based on their needs. Children with specific learning needs were given the appropriate support, which might include group support for pupils with similar needs.

The effective deployment of teaching staff is seen as vital in raising standards among disadvantaged pupils, with the best teachers working with those who need most support, and using teaching assistants to support pupils' learning.

Appropriate training is deemed vital by the more successful schools, many of whom had trained a teaching assistant in pedagogy so they understood the drivers for educational practice, how to provide quality questioning and give appropriate feedback.

One school leader said: "Before, teaching assistants would simply follow around students on the SEN register from lesson to lesson. They were as transient as the students. What we did instead was we made every teaching assistant a subject-specific teaching assistant, so they only worked within one subject. They became deployed by the subject leaders and had high-level knowledge."

Effective use of data by staff and responding to evidence is a hallmark of more successful schools too and enabled teachers to identify individual children's needs, review progress regularly and swiftly address underperformance. Such schools were those with manageable assessment for learning systems, allowing teachers to give pupils clear feedback. Where schools used evidence to support their strategies they were able to make effective decisions about what worked best.

Successful schools monitored children regularly and scrutinised their progress. They also scrutinised the effectiveness of their strategies.

Finally, the most effective schools benefited from strong and clear leadership from headteachers who lead by example and set high aspirations. Senior leaders held their staff accountable, rather than accepting low attainment and variable performance. They shared their thinking and invested in staff training.

The report said: "Senior leaders in more successful schools said that deciding to alter or stop strategies that were proving ineffective was as important as deciding to adopt them in the first place."

The seven building blocks

The NFER research identified seven key building blocks for Pupil Premium interventions. They are:

- Whole-school ethos of attainment for all
- Addressing behaviour and attendance
- High-quality teaching for all
- Meeting individual learning needs
- Deploying staff effectively
- Data-driven and responding to evidence
- Clear, responsive leadership

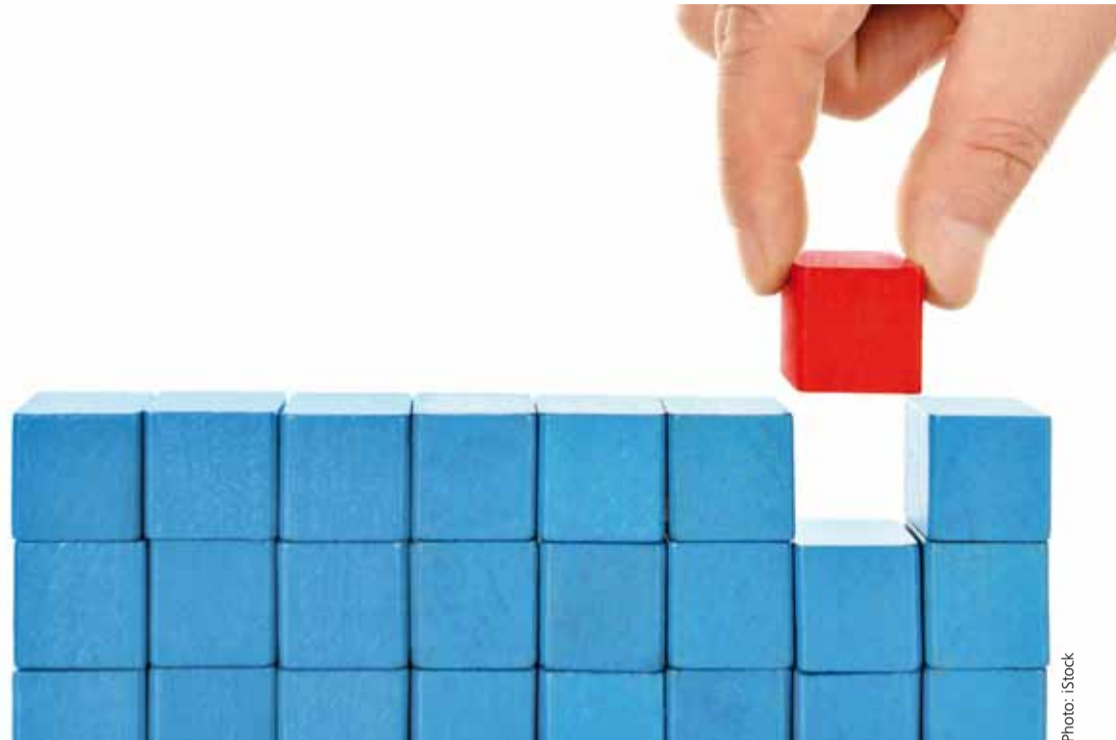


Photo: iStock

Conclusions

Overall, the report concludes that schools are able to improve disadvantaged pupils' performance and make a positive difference to their life chances. There is no single strategy that will make this difference. Schools need to select the strategies that work best for their pupils and their school's circumstances.

In doing so, they need to bear in mind that the quality of their implementation of strategies is as important as their choice of strategies. Even with all of these building

blocks, implementing change and reaping the benefits takes time. More successful schools reported that it took "around three to five years for changes to 'bed in' and lead to a sustained change in pupils' attainment". **SecEd**

• *Dorothy Lepkowska is an education writer.*

Further information

To download the full NFER research paper and findings, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/spp



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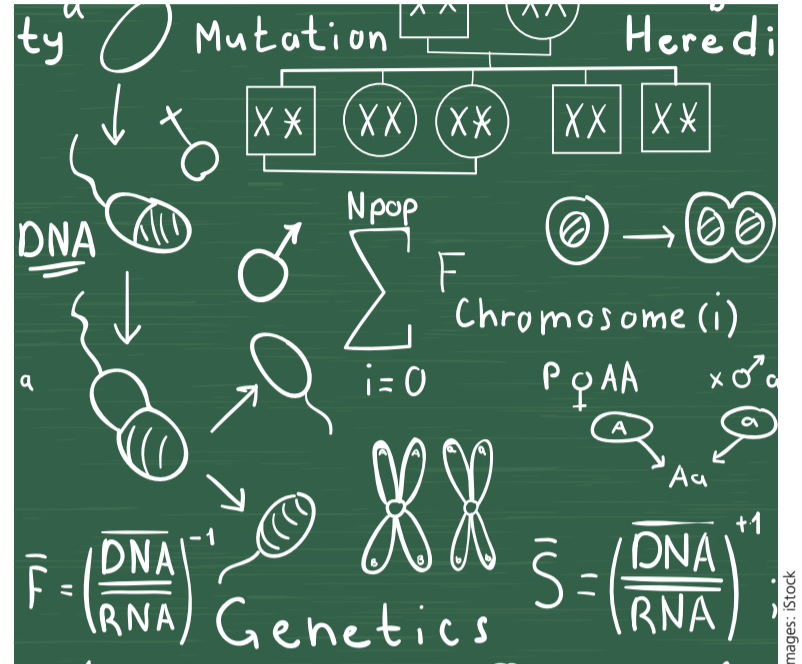
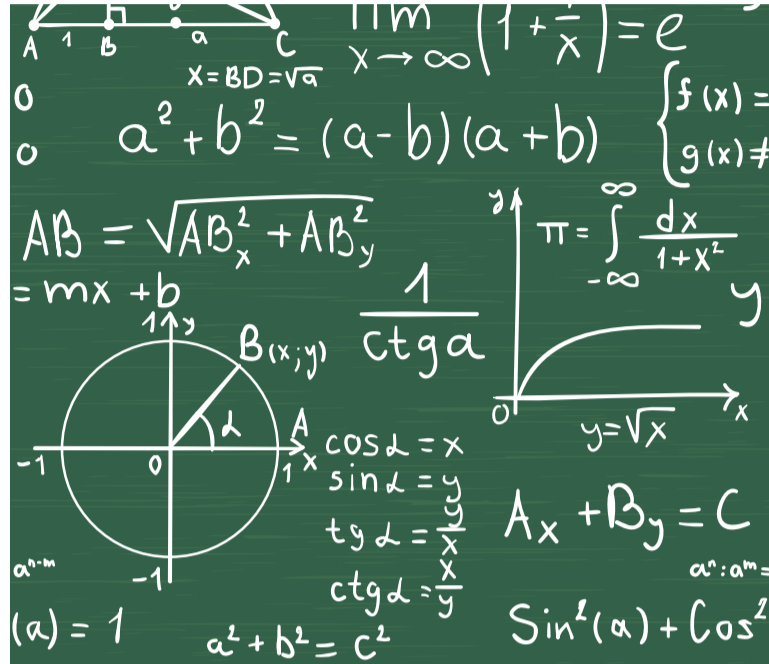
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Three new reports offer a range of teaching and learning strategies in maths and science, all based on international evidence. **Dorothy Lepkowska** takes a look

Teaching strategies for maths and science



International comparisons in performance between countries can tell us many things. Apart from the obvious – how we stand in core subjects in relation to other countries around the world – they may offer some insights into what teachers are doing right in the classroom, and what can be improved.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has recently published a series of three reports, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) offering strategies that teachers might use to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

These were based on analyses of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) findings for 2012, with input from a range of leading practitioners and experts in classroom practice.

Tackling low performance in maths

From previous PISA reports we know, for example, that achievement in mathematics in English schools is not significantly different from international averages, though the gap between the most and least able is relatively wide.

Among the lowest performers are girls, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are eligible for free school meals, and youngsters with special needs.

The report, *Tackling Low Performance in Maths*, finds that pupils who displayed lower levels of perseverance with maths were much more likely to be low performers in the subject. So equipping them with strategies to help them tackle difficult tasks and problems can be important in supporting them to achieve.

It is important for teachers to establish what pupils already know, but avoid direct question and answer sessions at the beginning and end of lessons as this can discourage lower achievers and promote disengagement

Leading practitioners recommend that one way of tackling low performance is to link maths to everyday activities so that it is meaningful and relevant, to promote engagement. If pupils understand why they are learning it and have some context to what they are learning, then they are more likely to persevere.

The report notes that "pupils tend to become more involved when they have been supported to guide their own learning, rather than when expectations are determined solely by the teacher".

It continues: "As a teacher this means continuously looking for specific ways to involve pupils in effective dialogue and to support them in this way in investing in owning and developing their own learning."

It is important for teachers to establish what pupils already know, but avoid direct question and answer sessions at the beginning and end of lessons as this can discourage lower achievers and promote disengagement.

Effective teaching and learning, the report adds, takes places where there is discussion, analysis and reflection, and the teacher differentiates tasks and activities so that learners of all abilities are supported.

Some pupils, for example, may thrive by working in groups where they can share their perceptions and insights with others, and learn from the views and opinions of their classmates.

All of these methods can engage learners more fully and so reduce low performance, not only in individual classes but throughout the school as a whole. Among the whole-school approaches to consider when trying to improve motivation and engagement might be the appointment of "learner engagement" champions – members of staff responsible for exploring good practice in this area within the school.

Schools may also ask some members of staff to research a range of engagement strategies and then feedback to colleagues on their effectiveness.

Cognitive activation in maths

Some of these strategies are explored further in the report *Cognitive Activation in Maths*, another of the documents in the series, which examines methods that encourage students to think more deeply about mathematics and how they find solutions to problems. The aim of this approach is to focus on the workings and method used to achieve the correct answer, rather than focusing on the answer itself.

Cognitive activation requires pupils to link new information to what they already know. In making connections between mathematical facts, ideas and procedures, it is hoped they will achieve enhanced learning and a deeper understanding of the concepts. The method has been found to aid learning and achievement across all abilities and socio-economic groups of pupils.

Deviating from tried and tested teaching methods can feel risky to some teachers, but the report contains some short, medium and long-term strategies aimed at introducing cognitive activation as a tool for teaching and learning.

For example, a maths problem being explored in the classroom can be related to a real-life scenario by asking questions such as "how would a mathematician tile my bathroom?" or "how would you work out if there was enough food for everyone in the world?"

Lessons could be punctuated with questions like "what if...?" or "does everyone think that...?", which might prompt pupils to explain how they arrived at a particular method, or to think of an alternative way to solve the problem. By working in small groups, students can also be encouraged to share and develop ideas.

In the medium and long-term, students can be asked for input into what strategies they found most effective, and similarly teachers can gather evidence to show the same. Over time, colleagues working in different subject areas could find links between them. For example, maths and geography departments could instigate a project to plan the layout of a town to minimise travel by residents to key locations.

Science and problem-solving

One area where England's average performance exceeds the international average is in science and problem-solving assessments. Only 10 countries performed better in the PISA science assessment, and only seven in problem-solving. It was also found that, overall, England had a greater proportion of high achievers compared with the international average.

It is here that important lessons might be learned about how improved performance might be achieved, with the evidence suggesting, once again, that there was a positive relationship between performance and pupil engagement.

The findings from the report, *What We Can Learn from England's High Performance in Science and Problem-solving?* suggest that, in general, "good attendance and a positive attitude towards school are strong indicators of the likelihood of a pupil being a high performer" and that the strategies employed by teachers in the classroom were a significant factor in promoting engagement both with learning and the school.

"It is therefore important to consider the pedagogical approaches that can be adopted by teachers in all subjects to increase the engagement of pupils of all abilities," the report states. Experts have found that adapting teaching to real-life situations helps pupils and students

to understand that what they were learning is relevant now and in the future.

They suggest that teachers consider making learning meaningful by showing pupils how it relates to their own lives. This might involve looking at their future careers and inviting employers in to deliver some of the content.

Enrichment and enhancement activities might also offer opportunities to those pupils who were particularly interested in science and wanted to know more about it.

Teachers should also listen to students, the report states, to find out what they already know and invite them to ask questions that might be addressed in future lessons. Open-ended tasks would allow young people to use their initiative and to be creative in their learning –

rather than working on activities designed to produce a right answer.

In order to achieve all of this, schools need to support teachers with CPD. The report says that staff who possess expert and up-to-date subject knowledge are "better equipped to support and encourage pupils' learning". Similarly, developing links with employers often helps to improve learning outcomes. SecEd

• Dorothy Lepkowska is a freelance education writer.

Further information

The three reports, published by the NFER in September 2015, are available via <http://bit.ly/1LYJd5O>


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Alcohol education is a challenging area for schools to tackle effectively.

Dorothy Lepkowska reports on an evaluation of the Talk About Alcohol intervention programme

Helping pupils to avoid risky behaviour in adolescence and into adulthood has always proved challenging for schools. Should teachers confront issues such as alcohol, drugs and sex head-on? Or does discussing them too early encourage experimentation and contribute to the risk?

One strategy for helping and supporting young people in making difficult decisions, based on information and knowledge, appears to be effective.

An evaluation of the Alcohol Education Trust's (AET) Talk About Alcohol intervention programme, carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) over three years (2011-2015), shows that the scheme has had a significant impact on delaying the age at which young people start to drink.

The evidence-based and peer-reviewed programme, aimed at 11 to 18-year-olds, provides teachers with a structured approach to discussing issues around drinking, and includes a 100-page paper and online teacher workbook of lesson plans, worksheets, information sheets, games and ideas which can be adapted to suit the knowledge and experience of the age group.

Teachers also have access to the 500-page website, with further games and quizzes and dedicated sections for staff, pupils and parents. Schools are encouraged to involve parents and a booklet is available to this end, with opportunities for the AET representatives to address parents in school on how best to support their children.

By this age, students in both groups were admitting that having a drink was a fun and sociable thing to do, suggesting that getting the right messages across was vital in the years leading to students leaving school

The evaluation, which began in 2011 and included a student questionnaire undertaken four times from year 8 to when the pupils were in year 11, examined the behaviour of two groups of pupils – one which had undertaken the programme (the intervention group) and a comparison group which had not, but might have acquired information in other ways.

The evaluation found that there was value in the early intervention approach of the programme and in returning to alcohol education at different stages in pupils' personal development as they become more likely, with age, to experiment with alcohol.

NFER researchers Sarah Lynch, Jack Worth and Sally Bradshaw found that students in the intervention group were significantly less likely to have had their first drink by the time they were 15/16-years-old – even though, by that age, knowledge about alcohol consumption and its effects on the two groups was roughly equal, with the comparison group having caught up with the intervention group.

Crucially, overall, the report said: "Fewer students in the intervention group than in the comparison group had ever been drunk or experienced binge-drinking, which is likely to be because more students in the comparison group had ever drunk alcohol."

However, when restricting analysis to those who had ever had an alcoholic drink, there was no statistically significant difference between the groups in prevalence of drinking to get drunk.

Across all students in the sample at age 15/16, 29 per cent of the intervention group and 37 per cent of the comparison group drank frequently.

The attitudes towards drinking were also marked between the two groups. The most common



experiences among 15/16-year-olds when drinking alcohol were feeling relaxed and outgoing (48 per cent of all intervention students and 65 per cent of all comparison students) and forgetting about problems for a while (34 per cent and 49 per cent).

The analysis found noticeable increases in the proportion of students who had experienced some negative consequences of drinking alcohol.

For example, a quarter of the intervention group compared with 32 per cent of the comparison group had ever had a hangover; 18 per cent compared with 24 per cent respectively had ever got sick, while 17 per cent compared with 21 per cent had ever done something they regretted because of drink.

The proportions of students across the whole sample having these experiences were greater in the comparison group, but this could have been because the analysis found that more young people in that cohort drank alcohol overall.

By this age, students in both groups were admitting that having a drink was a fun and sociable thing to do, suggesting that getting the right messages across was vital in the years leading to students leaving school.

It is not only facts about alcohol and its effects that are important, but some of the lesson activities helped young people to cope better with the potential pressures around youth and alcohol consumption, the NFER study found.

The findings also highlight the strong influence of the family on the age of onset of drinking, and suggested that schools need to consider strategies around parental engagement.

Students with greater numbers of siblings, a poor relationship with their father, and who lived with someone who usually drank alcohol in the home had an increased likelihood of ever having had a drink.

"This suggests the importance of the AET information for parents, to support them in making responsible decisions about their own alcohol consumption, acting as role-models for their children, setting boundaries and knowing where their children are and who they are with," the study said.

An earlier analysis of the programme, *Talk About Alcohol: An evaluation of the Alcohol Education Trust's intervention in secondary schools*, published in 2013, interviewed teachers who had used the resources.

It found that staff who had delivered Talk About Alcohol thought they were a comprehensive, "ready-to-go" package which worked well in series and that the resources offered a good range of materials to work from, and were accessible to students.

They were particularly impressed with the short films, scenarios and role play, which worked well in the classroom. Overall, the programme was found to be "straightforward", engaging for students and could be effectively delivered.

Two teachers mentioned that their school had conducted an end-of-unit review of the sessions and

they reported one or more of the following among students:

- Greater knowledge about alcohol and its effects on the body.
- Greater understanding of legal issues around alcohol e.g. buying alcohol by proxy.
- Greater awareness of drinking patterns among young people their age ("that not everyone is drinking").
- Feeling more prepared to avoid drinking if they want to.

The most recent NFER evaluation concluded: "The impact on delaying the onset of drinking is evidence that the Talk About Alcohol intervention is effective as an early intervention programme.

"The evidence suggests the value in a harm minimisation approach and in revisiting alcohol education at different stages – for example, via early

intervention before they begin drinking (the average age of first drink is 13), before young people begin to drink more frequently (around age 15), and as they approach adulthood.

"Giving young people the facts about alcohol is not the only factor likely to influence behaviour – helping young people to develop resilience, rehearsal strategies, and self-management skills to manage risk is also important. Messages about responsible drinking are important at this age."

• Dorothy Lepkowska is a freelance education writer.

Further information

You can view the full report at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/AETX01. For more about the Talk About Alcohol programme and its resources, visit www.alcoholeducationtrust.org

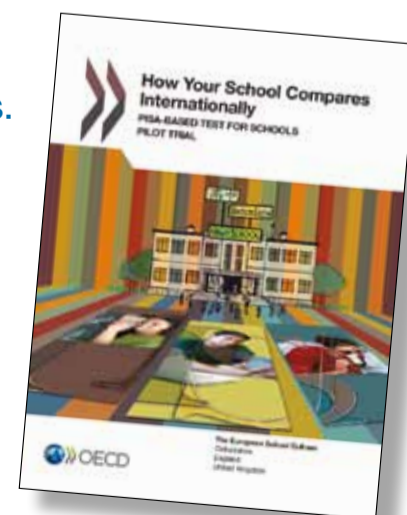

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How do parents choose a school?

What do parents look for and prioritise when it comes to choosing a school for their children? A research project has sought to answer this question. **Karen Wespieser** reports

As the end of the summer term approaches, schools across the country will begin thinking about the 2016 round of new pupil admissions. In doing so, you might like to consider NFER's new data on the factors that inform school choice. In particular, NFER has uncovered stark differences in what parents are looking for, dependent on their personal background factors.

Choosing a school is one of the key times when parents reflect on what is important to them in terms of their child's education. Some commentators hail this ability to choose as a key feature of our education

system – an important right valued by parents, and a way of driving up standards. But to what extent is this view shared by parents – do they feel they have a genuine choice, and if so how do they choose?

At the beginning of the year, NFER commissioned a nationally representative survey of 1,005 parents of children aged five to 18 to find out more.

Parents feel they have a genuine choice

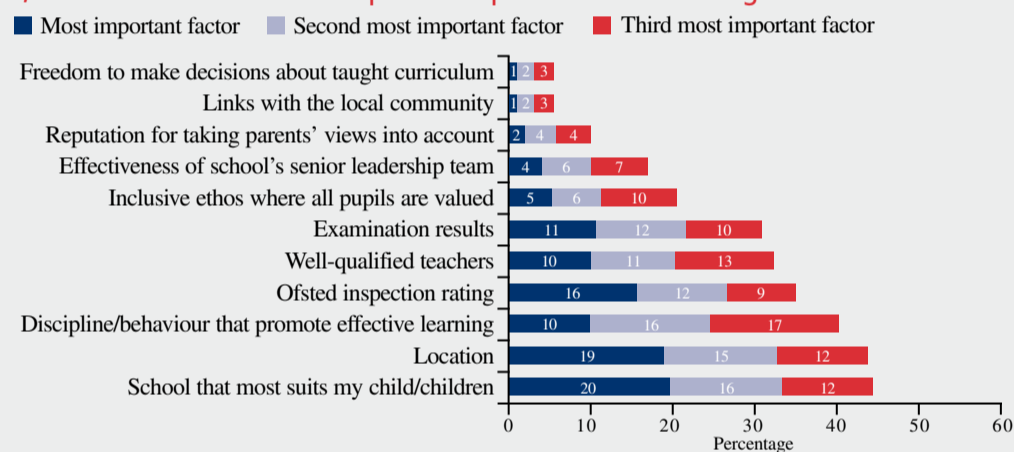
One of the first things we wanted to understand was whether parents genuinely felt they had a choice when choosing a school. In 2014, according to Department for Education (DfE) figures, nearly 90 per cent of parents got their first choice of school for their children. Most respondents to our survey (72 per cent) also felt they had a choice, although slightly fewer got their first choice – highlighting that in some instances there may only be one real option available.

However, it should be noted that while research has shown that although it appears that choice is supported in theory, the reality is more complex. For example, analysis of the British Social Attitudes Survey suggests that support for choice is counterbalanced by, among other things, opposition to vouchers, school diversity, and by strong support for the idea of sending children to the "nearest state school" (1).

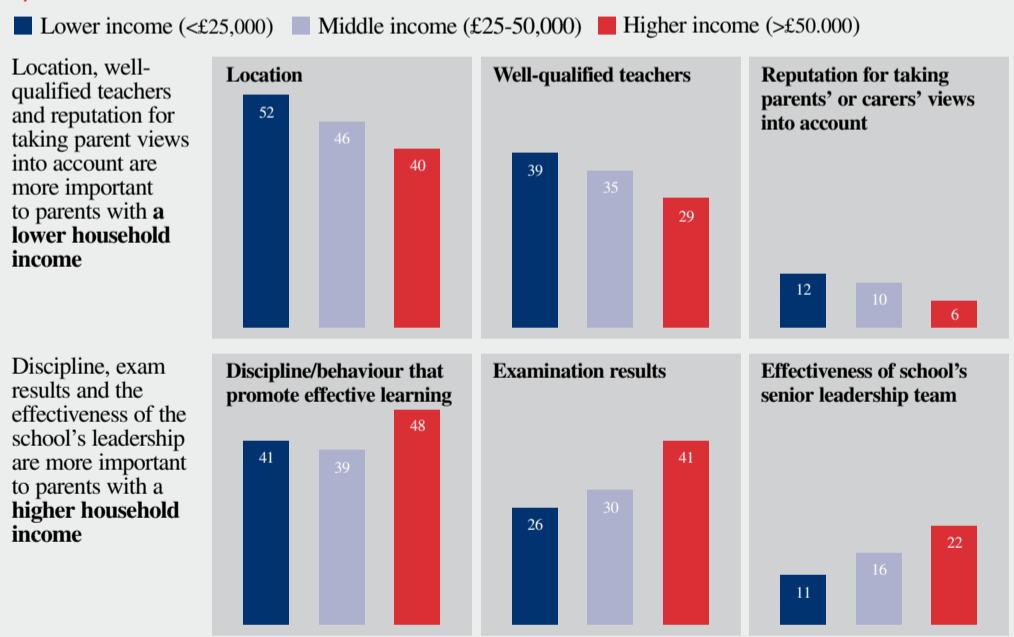
But local factors are the most important

We wanted to know what elements parents considered important when making their decision. In line with existing research we found that local factors are paramount – "school that suits my child" and "location" of the school were each identified by almost half of respondents to our survey (see below, graph 1).

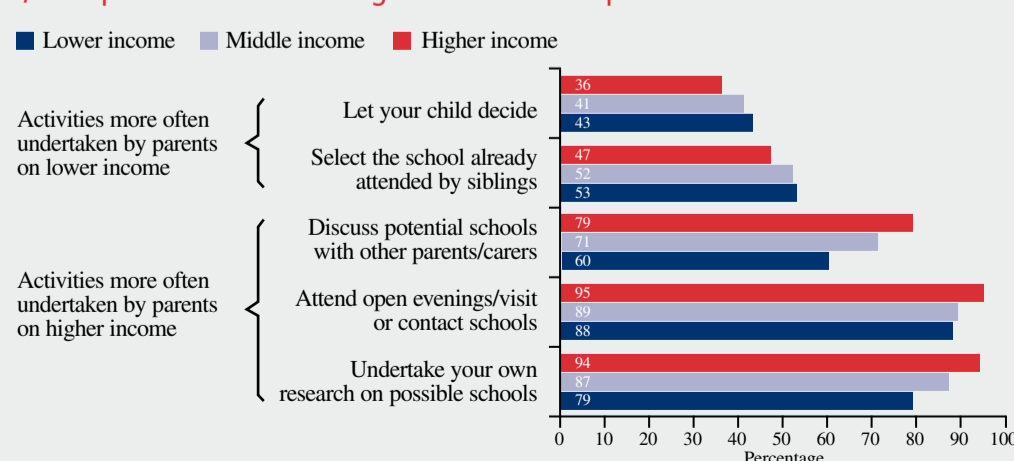
1, Local factors are the most important to parents when choosing a school



2, Household income affects school choice



3, Most parents undertake a range of activities to help decide on a school



Now, obviously there are some factors that schools cannot influence – you can't change the location of your school or its catchment zone. However, there are some things that may seem important to you – such as exam results – which this data suggests is less important to parents.

When talking to parents, writing your prospectus or updating your website, you may therefore want to think about how you describe the overall ethos of the school, and the extent to which this enables parents to make informed choices about how well this will suit their children. And where you have a strong record on discipline and behaviour, the responses to our survey suggest this is likely to be appealing to parents.

Looking more closely at the detail, the data also reveals some interesting differences between the importance attributed to different factors by parents with different levels of household income (see graph 2).

Location, well-qualified teachers and community links are more important to parents with a lower household income, while discipline, exam results and the effectiveness of the school's senior leadership team are more important to parents with a higher household income. Depending on the demographic of your local area, you may want to consider this when talking to prospective parents.

How are parents making these decisions?

Most parents undertake a range of activities to help decide which school their child should attend, in particular undertaking their own research and attending open evenings or school visits.

Headteachers should be heartened to see the high take-up of the opportunities provided by schools such as open evenings. It is well worth remembering the effectiveness of these activities when putting in the extra hours that many of these tasks require of school staff.

Again though, there are some differences by household income (see graph 3). Parents' on a lower income are more likely to let their child decide or select the school already attended by siblings. One of the activities where there is greatest disparity between income levels is the extent to which parents discuss potential schools with others. Facilitating these opportunities for parents – perhaps at open evenings – might be an interesting way to try to increase the use of this type of activity.

What are the wider implications?

The reality is that making a choice about a school depends on a myriad of local factors as well as a parents' understanding of their own child. Better understanding these factors could prove helpful to schools targeting limited resources at the best strategies for attracting applications. Our findings also have significant policy implications.

The new government backs changes to the School Admissions Code which will prioritise children eligible for the Pupil Premium. Yet this evidence suggests that parents of these children are least likely to take advantage of any increase in their school choice as they are more concerned with location.

The NFER is not the first organisation to raise these concerns. In 2013, the Sutton Trust reported that "those who adopt the choice behaviours anticipated by government policy ... are disproportionately, though by no means exclusively, middle class" (2). Similarly, a DfE report last year found that "lower socio-economic status groups may look for (factors that) ... may lead (them) to select themselves out of high performing schools" (3). The extent to which this is considered in any changes to the Admissions Code will be an important policy consideration for the new government.

Our research was based on a national sample, and so was not able to explore local variation in any detail. These issues are likely to vary considerably between areas, so why not undertake some local research of your own with existing and/or prospective parents to better understand what factors are most important to them?

Karen Wespieser is a senior research manager with the NFER.

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What makes for an effective work experience placement? **Dorothy Lepkowska** looks at the findings of recent research into overcoming common barriers to placements and innovative approaches

What makes work experience effective?



Effective regulation and monitoring of work experience was also found to be vital, as was the involvement of young people in real pieces of work or projects that were valued and used by employers, and reflected current workplace demands

The implementation of 16 to 19 study programmes two years ago was intended to improve the learning experience and prospects of post-16 students to enable them to progress successfully to employment, Apprenticeships or higher education.

School sixth forms and sixth form and further education colleges were expected to offer coherent programmes that were tailored to individual needs, education and employment goals.

This might include progress towards a GCSE at grade C for young people who had yet to achieve this in English and maths, at least one substantial qualification or a Traineeship or extended work experience for those not ready for more formal study, and non-qualification activity such as tutorial time and work experience.

The provision of work experience by schools and colleges has sometimes been a challenge, with efforts hampered by claims of bureaucracy, a lack of time and resources, and too few suitable placements being offered by local employers.

In her annual lecture in 2014, Lorna Fitzjohn, Ofsted's director for further education and skills, said most providers "didn't use work experience effectively", and added that despite the implementation of 16 to 19 study programmes there was "slower than expected progress at institutional level".

However, some institutions are creating innovative, purposeful and effective work placement experiences for their students, and have made them a key part of their overall learning provision – while also overcoming many of the challenges of running such a scheme.

as law, accounting, economics, business studies and mathematics and those on Apprenticeships in accounting, business administration and legal studies.

The PSA programme comprises a structured package of work enterprise and work placement activities that have been developed in partnership with local employers. It aims to ensure that students gain "hands-on" experience and develop the skills to meet employers' needs.

The NFER study also found that the creative development of work experience models, where programmes provide potential mutual benefits for all concerned – providers, young people and partners – are particularly effective.

It said that the active involvement of employers in preparing young people prior to sending them out on work placements enhances the whole experience for maximum effect.

This is particularly true of Oldham Further Education College, which has set up an Employers Advisory Board of 20 local businesses to work alongside its Digital and Creative Centre to strengthen relationships.

Prior to embarking on a work experience placement, students at the college work with employers on workshops, master-classes and other forms of employability-related support and guidance, to prepare them for placements. This includes employers asking students to submit CVs and be interviewed for their placements, to reflect the competitive nature of finding a job.

Effective regulation and monitoring of work experience was also found to be vital, as was the involvement of young people in real pieces of work or projects that were valued and used by employers, and reflected current workplace demands.

One student from St Brendan's College in Bristol, for example, evaluated the graduate trainee programme of the insurance firm with which he served a six-week placement during the summer holiday at the end of year 12.

Students from the college who are successful in applying for an internship are matched with a mentor, who acts as a critical friend, and are asked to complete a project that will provide something of value to the employer.

Meanwhile, at Chichester College, all student work experience is monitored, with hours of activity logged and every student having an on-line Enterprise Passport. This allows them to reflect on their achievements and the skills they have learned, and acts as a reference for job or university applications. Additionally at Walker Technology College in Newcastle, sixth form work experience placements are designed to mirror the "real world of work" as far as possible to achieve maximum benefit for students and employers.

And in the sixth form at Pimlico Academy in London, students are supported by a Raising Aspirations Team of staff, who create belief and help young people to develop self-confidence and broaden their horizons. Additionally they monitor and record impact of the work placements. The aim is for no student to rule anything out or to close any doors with the choices they make.

The best work experience, the NFER report said, is tailored to the needs of students and employers, and is backed up with dedicated staff or teams of staff who develop and monitor the programme across the institution to enhance the provision on offer.

SecEd

• Dorothy Lepkowska is a freelance education journalist.

Further information

- A top-tips document for senior leaders in schools and colleges, *How to Provide Meaningful Experience of the World in Work for Young People as Part of 16 to 19 Study Programmes*, can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA02/DFIA02_home.cfm
- The NFER report, with full details of the case studies, can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA01/DFIA01.pdf

The active involvement of employers in preparing young people prior to sending them out on work placements enhances the whole experience for maximum effect

A recently published report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), entitled *Sharing Innovative Approaches and Overcoming Barriers in Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes Principles*, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), examines work experience.

Effective and valuable work placement experiences, where these form an integral and formalised part of study programmes, are explored. In every case, the schools and colleges have developed distinctive features that meet the needs of students, as well as employers.

The report found that schools and colleges that offer the best provision for work-related activities are proactive in their response to the needs of local employers and show a willingness to establish relationships with leading firms. They have also developed structured programmes of work experience, enterprise and/or work placement activities.

One institution doing this effectively was Birmingham Metropolitan College, where every student is engaged in a World of Work programme, comprising both work experience and activities to help boost young people's employability skills.

To meet a local shortage of skilled workers in the professional skills industry, the college set up a Professional Services Academy (PSA), one of the first of its kind in the country, which is open to students studying AS and A levels in areas such



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