Tackling NEETs early

The vital work to help tackle the number of young people who are NEET – not in education, employment or training – starts in our primary schools, research shows

ith around one million young people considered NEET, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Research Programme has highlighted the role that primary schools can play in helping to tackle this situation.

While secondary schools are undoubtedly in the front line for this work, many decisions by young people, conscious or unconscious, about their future are heavily influenced by experiences early in their schooling. Primaries have an early impact on pupils regarding career choices and the steps needed to get there.

More and more evidence is being produced about ways of addressing the issues around young people who are NEET and this gives some valuable pointers as to the strategies and tactics primary schools and their headteachers can best deploy in order to help.

A range of recent publications in the Research Programme's *From Education to Employment* theme presents four substantial reviews that establish what recent research says about ways to help those pupils at risk of becoming NEET. Here are some of the key messages for primary schools about young people at risk of disengaging, alongside some practical examples of how they can help.

The earlier the better

Look to make early interventions with pupils wherever practical, and as early as possible. Examples of the aspects to look for and act on include: early misbehaviour and absence patterns; reducing barriers to learning in the home environment; addressing early literacy and numeracy deficits; and boosting confidence and inter-personal skills at a young age.

"While secondary schools are undoubtedly in the front line for this work, many decisions by young people, conscious or unconscious, about their future are heavily influenced by experiences early in their schooling. Primaries have an early impact on pupils regarding career choices and the steps needed to get there"

Parents

Parents need help to be effective partners in ensuring their children's progression from the start – and leading eventually to their further education or employment choices. Increase your school's early support for this by ensuring that parents are positively involved in choices and decisions, and understand their own roles in any interventions. School-home support workers can help here.

Early action: Research shows that primary schools have a key role to play in tackling the number of teens who become NEET



Careers education

A conscious "careers education perspective" at primary level will help prepare the ground for early information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision at the start of the secondary phase. Such a staged, consistent approach throughout the school journey helps to shape pupils' growing sense of goals and gives them a grasp of the routes to realise their ambitions as they move towards age 18.

You can help this coherent careers-aware dimension in all key stages of a pupil's school experience by enhancing awareness of the world of work among your staff. This may come through working with local employers and parents, plus there are free resources available from many industries: media and voluntary organisations are often good sources of these. You can even make links with secondary school staff on subject and theme-specific curriculum ideas.

Involve local employers working with pupils to develop a sense of purpose for their learning and a better understanding of the world of work. Find out about the work-related opportunities they can offer – such as workplace visits or speakers in the school. That can make early contributions to children's life-skills, ambitions and eventual employability.

Avoid replicating social and other divides if you match your pupils with such work-related opportunities, within the school and beyond it. Look to challenge their stereotypes and expectations as well as those of other people. This can be even more important with those learners who show early signs of being disruptive in school.

Relationships

Identify and encourage a positive relationship between each of your pupils, particularly those at risk of disengaging, and at least one trusted adult role-model somewhere in the school. This need not be solely with teachers. Even a single such connection can help those who are most "at risk" of being NEET in later years. Staff members who take co-ordinating and supporting roles for this across the school can be very helpful.

Pupils taking responsibility

Encourage innovative experiments with teaching and learning that mean even very young pupils take some responsibility and control. Find new and different settings: the workplace or the community, for example. Learning which differs from traditional schooling – both in style and location – is vital for creating pupil enthusiasm and commitment, especially in those at risk of disengaging.

Also, engage more of your pupils, more often, in designing and monitoring their own learning. This can boost motivation, commitment, attendance, behaviour – and indeed the quality of the learning itself.

Help your pupils to manage any independent learning more effectively, to avoid early feelings that they might be falling behind, or otherwise struggling – especially when there's been significant absence. "Catch-up sessions" outside normal class hours can help.

Understanding diversity

One feature underpinning all the NFER reviews is a new segmentation of young people who are NEET that gives us a better understanding of the diversity of this group. The research identified three sub-categories within the NEET population likely to benefit from different forms of intervention:

- "Open to learning NEETs" young people with relatively high attainment and positive attitudes to education, and thus more likely to re-engage.
- "Sustained NEETs" who have multiple disadvantages and more negative attitudes to education and low attainment and therefore are more like to remain NEET.
- "Undecided NEETs" a sub-group dissatisfied with the educational and training options available, and/or their ability to access them even if their experience and attainment means they're similar in attainment and attitude to the "open to learning" sub-category.

The four reviews concentrate particularly on the first and third groups and look at effective general approaches to supporting pupils at risk of becoming NEET, the best use of careers professionals, relevant curriculum and qualifications strategies, and the best use of employer involvement.

Practical guides for headteachers

For each of these areas, free materials are available to download from the NFER website including a detailed research review paper, summary of the key findings, and a practical guide for headteachers that offers advice based on the evidence from the review.

The practical guides are cross-referenced wherever possible to the new $\,$



Ofsted inspection framework. They show the potential connections from the tips and ideas offered to the main grading aspects of achievement, quality of teaching and learning, behaviour, leadership and overall effectiveness.

Key questions

So, what are the key questions for primary schools that emerge from these NFER reviews? They include:

- What helpful distinctions are there in the segmentation of NEET young people and thus in the characteristics and long-term experiences of school pupils at risk of becoming NEET and what can that tell us about the needs of our own pupils?
- What support, during the years of compulsory schooling, can help keep different groups "on track", and thus eventually to progress constructively into further education, training or work?
- How can heads focus their resources to provide a positive impact on reducing NEET figures?
- How in a period of growing independence married to increasing external scrutiny can schools ensure their work in preventing at risk pupils from disengaging is recognised as effective?

The issues around young people who are NEET are long-standing and complex, and this needs long-term and multifaceted solutions throughout the education system. Heads of all kinds should take a range of strategic approaches and practical steps both within their schools and alongside their stakeholders and communities.

Further information

Set up in 2011, the NFER Research Programme targets key areas of education, highlighting gaps in existing evidence and conducting new research to fill the gaps. Current areas of focus are: From Education to Employment, Developing the Education Workforce, and Innovation in Employment. For more information on the programme or to download any of the reports and guidance documents, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/ete1



attitude surveys

Use NFER attitude surveys to gather valuable feedback from your pupils, parents or staff to help in your improvement planning and to be prepared for Ofsted questionnaires. Prices from £255 + VAT



Creative thinking

Gareth Mills looks at how engaging teachers in research to inform best practice can unleash untapped creativity and bring about sustainable improvement in schools

Schools in England are entering a period of professional freedom unlike anything that has been seen since the introduction of the first national curriculum. Academies, for example, have no requirement to follow the national curriculum and those schools that do have been promised less prescription and more scope to innovate. How will we make the most of these freedoms?

The old adage "if you do what you always did you'll get what you've always got" presents both a challenge and opportunity to those hoping to use these new flexibilities to design more compelling learning.

In education, as in all other fields of human endeavour, there are always new ways to enhance what we do. How as teachers, for example, do we respond to the emerging evidence about how the brain works? How do we design learning to equip young people for life in an interdependent globalised world? How do we exploit the creative potential offered by technology?

With increased freedom, however, comes increased responsibility. As professionals we need to act ethically and rationally in the best interests of learners. This is why, I believe, we are seeing a growing call for more evidence-based practice and for new opportunities for teachers to engage in and with educational research.

It is important that education change is not

driven by opinion or passing fad but by the informed expertise of professionals. Perhaps one of the most droll observations made by Professor John Hattie in his book *Visible Learning* is that a selective reading of research would suggest that "everything"

seems to work"

"It is important that education change is not driven by opinion or passing fad but by the informed expertise of professionals"

Everyone, politician, parent and teacher, can find a justification for why their particular view about teaching is likely to be successful. However, as a result of 15 years' work and a synthesis of more than 800 meta-analyses of research studies, Prof Hattie has built up an authoritative evidence-informed picture of the key influences on student achievement. Teachers engaging with his work can make informed judgements about teaching strategies based on a credible weight of evidence.

Andreas Schleicher is not a household name in the UK, yet in a speech this year education secretary Michael Gove suggested that he could be one of the most important figures in world education. Dr Schleicher is the special advisor for education at the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and is passionate about using evidence to support school improvement. Earlier this year he published *Building a High Quality Teaching Profession: Lessons from around the world*.

Looking at international best practice in teacher development, Mr Schleicher notes that high quality is most likely to be achieved when teachers are "active agents in school reform, not just implementers of plans designed by others". He calls for "a culture of research and reflection in schools so that teaching and learning can be based on the best available knowledge". His work shows that while you may mandate compliance, you need to unleash excellence.

So how might it be possible to engage teachers as active agents in innovation and enquiry, unleashing their energy and imaginations to create better learning for children and young people?

There are a number of professional development programmes helping teachers bring innovation into the classroom and inspire learners. An increasing number of schools in the UK are using enquiry-based methods as an important part of their approach to CPD and school improvement. These schools are engaging with action-research, not as an academic exercise, but as a means of developing teachers as reflective professionals and driving improvement in lessons and learning.

Among those supporting this growing trend, is Futurelab at National Foundation for Educational Research where we have developed a practical seven-step toolkit for managing school-based enquiry and evidence-informed practice. And evidence is emerging that schools joining this "Enquiring Schools Network" are beginning to see the benefits of using research-based methodologies.

Enthusiastic staff at City Academy Norwich have chosen very different areas to research – from enquiry-based drama to the development of Assessment for Learning techniques. All the staff have identified success indicators, and in order to document any change they are looking at where the pupils are now and what differences they want to see. Once their ideas are put into action in the classroom, they will be guided in looking for evidence of improvement and links to current research.

Hannah Swain, a teacher at the academy, has found the experience useful. She explained: "The programme is helping me to focus on teaching and learning in a new way. The format has given me a powerful structure for innovating and tracking the impact of change. I am really valuing the opportunity to take a step back from my routine practice and spend time reflecting on where we can improve. It has given me the confidence to move our curriculum forward in new and exciting ways. It is having a hugely positive impact on my practice and on the development of our team."

At Copland Community School, enquiry-based research is being used not only to improve standards and transform teaching and learning within the school, but across its challenging location in inner city London. Headteacher Graeme Plunkett said: "Copland is improving on a number of fronts and the work we have done with the Futurelab programme is central to our mission: to transform learning and teaching by engaging students. There is so much potential here that has, in the past, been untapped, but now the ingredients are in place to create something innovative and unique."

Alongside a robust methodology, it is important to feed research evidence into a school's development programme in a timely and accessible way. This is why it is important to have a credible research organisation as a partner. Schools can move forward reassured that their innovations, whatever their particular priority, are incorporating strategies "most likely" to have an impact on pupil outcomes. Educational research can often be dense and full of academic jargon so it is important to produce "research insights" that capture the key ideas in an accessible way for busy teachers.

The test of true professionalism, in teaching as in medicine, says Professor Robin Alexander, is that the practitioner "is able to justify his or her actions by reference to evidence, aims and principles".

Similarly, Professor Dylan Wiliam, a member of the National Curriculum Expert Panel, cautions that "too often, education policy, and teachers' practice, is driven by fads and fashions. Research can never tell teachers what to do, but it can suggest the directions that are most likely to lead to improved student outcomes".

Ûndoubtedly, the movement for evidence-informed practice is growing. At a time when schools have a real opportunity to innovate it is important that we are guided, not by narrow dogma or the unsubstantiated claims of the "salesmen", but by research and the evidence of successful professional practice.

Engaging in and with research will increasingly be seen as an important part of what it means to be a professional educator. Here at Futurelab and across our family of enquiring schools everyone is a learner – and that means teachers as well as students.

• Gareth Mills is head of learning and innovation at Futurelab at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

Further information

www.futurelab.org.uk



"So how might it be possible to engage teachers as active agents in innovation and enquiry, unleashing their energy and imaginations to create better learning for children and young people?"

The NFER Research Programme

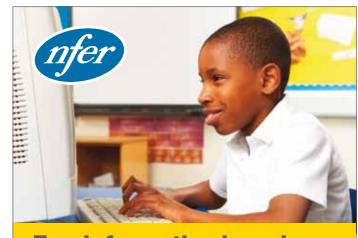
Research-led practice is one of the types of teaching development featured in the NFER Research Programme's report, What Leads to Positive Change in Teaching Practice?, published in June 2012.

This report is one of a pair of studies that consider creating change in schools through workforce development. It presents the findings of a study in which NFER maps the key research evidence about what leads to positive change in teaching practice in schools.

A number of recent reports have emphasised effective teaching as a crucial element in securing positive outcomes for young people. NFER will be trying to evaluate the impact of such practice in schools in a more formal way and is interested in hearing how others have tackled this.

Developing the Education Workforce is one of three themes in the NFER Research Programme that focuses on important undeveloped research areas within education where it feels its research skills and depth of subject expertise offers a valuable insight.

If you would like to read What Leads to Positive Change in Teaching Practice? or find out more about The NFER Research Programme, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/rcsh



Fun informative learning

Using enjoyable online challenges, NFER's formative assessment service provides a detailed picture of children's understanding and progress in reading, maths and science at key stages 1 and 2. Instant results and reports aid teacher's assessment.



For more information call 01753 637007 email products@nfer.ac.uk visit www.nfer.ac.uk/fasr



are not going to be used by teachers, they should reconsider doing them. It can become more of a habit to ask children to complete an assessment than an educationally sound activity that gives useful information for their next steps in learning"

"If the outcomes from assessments

assess what is intended and that they fit the use to which the results will be put. Your school's assessment policy can reflect this by outlining good practice, as well as expectations about when and how to assess.

- When choosing assessments it is good to bear the following in mind: Ask yourself whether a given activity truly probes understanding of the relevant aspect of the curriculum or gives the pupil a chance to demonstrate his/her skills.
- Consider whether a pupil could respond in a way that might suggest competence or understanding where none really exists (for example, by mimicking a response from another pupil or using key phrases without understanding).
- Develop questioning techniques or activity outlines that encourage expanded responses so you can evaluate the true extent of pupils' achievement or understanding.
- Adapt assessment methods when assessing pupils with SEN or English as an additional language, but the same underlying principles
- Some pupils find it hard to record their achievements in writing. This does not mean that you cannot assess these achievements, it just means that you may need to use other media - audio, visual or observational.
- Remember that good practice in assessing pupils with particular needs can also benefit other pupils, so consider using these methods more widely.

than depend on the core subjects of English, maths and science.

A child may demonstrate sophisticated data handling skills in a science of biographical writing in history.

If the outcomes from assessments are not going to be used by teachers, they should reconsider doing them. It can become more of a habit to alu children to complete an assessment at the end of a phase of learning than an educationally sound activity that gives useful information for their next steps in learning.

If teachers are not making use of the outcomes from assessments specified by others, they should think about ways that they might make these more useful. Asking children to work on their own or with a peer to review a piece of work and identify how it could be improved may be of more value than a teacher grading the work and reporting back to the pupil.

Encourage teachers to share their ideas. Assessment is easier when subject knowledge is solid. All teachers have strengths and weaknesses and no-one can master all subjects taught in a primary school. Ask your subject leaders to assist others or provide mentoring sessions.

• Rebecca Clarkson and Liz Twist are members of the Centre for Assessment at the National Foundation for Educational Research. Both are former teachers and have been involved in the development of statutory and non-statutory assessments for use in all key stages.

Supporting assessment in schools

demonstrate suitable commitment to setting and maintaining a gold standard of teaching and learning. In this context, assessment is a vital tool, as a measure not only of current standards but the basis for improvement. Some resources which could help are listed below.

- The *Getting to Grips with Assessment* leaflets are a useful starting point. This series provides information and advice for practitioners. They address formative and summative assessment methods, how to handle performance data and teacher assessment of performance, and how to make best use of test and other data. Wider issues such as how to put together and implement an assessment policy for a school and how to communicate assessment information are also covered. See www.nfer.ac.uk/schools/getting-to-grips-with-assessment
- NFER has launched a new suite of summative tests in reading and mathematics for years 3, 4 and 5, in response to calls from teachers for an up-to-date alternative to many of the tests widely used in key stage 2. The tests can be used to help monitor pupil progress and identify an individual's strengths and weaknesses, so support can be better tailored to meet their needs. Visit www.nfer.ac.uk/schools/nfer-tests
- If you are interested in formative assessment, a demonstration of NFER's online formative assessment service is available. Designed for primary schools, it is an online tool based on regular, short paired tests in reading, maths and science. It features summative and formative reporting in line with the new Ofsted framework. Visit www.nfer.ac.uk/schools/nfer-formative-assessment-service

Further information

- For further information on the NFER Centre for Assessment, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/what-we-do/assessment/
- For more on the work of NFER, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/htu

When and what should be assessed?

Teachers should aim to assess only when it is needed and make sure that outcomes are fed back into future teaching plans. They should try to collect assessment evidence from several areas of the curriculum, rather

investigation, for example, or the ability to construct an extended piece

The rapidly changing inspection landscape means there is more pressure than ever on schools to keep themselves and their pupils on track, with some even risking the loss of their "outstanding" rating if they cannot

CPD Workshop The Flipped

10 July and 16 October 2012

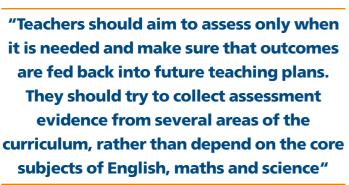
Modern technology has spurred a new trend in education: flipped classrooms. Students watch lectures at home so classroom time can be used for rich, interactive learning. Explore this new concept for your own classroom.

For more information and programme details visit www.futurelab.org.uk/events

Futurelab at NFER The Mere, Upton Park Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ

info@futurelab.org.uk





based advice on ensuring that your assessment practice is effective

he year 1 phonics screening check, a new grammar test, changes

to assessing writing at key stage 2, a forthcoming new curriculum - the assessment arena is changing. So what should teachers be

Within this changing context, it is useful to remind ourselves what

assessment is. Many people think that assessment means taking a test,

but effective assessment should consist of much more than that. It is

likely that both of the main assessment types – summative and formative

(also referred to as Assessment for Learning) outlined below - take

place in your school. A summative assessment can be a written test, an

doing in your school?

Assessment advice

Assessment in primary schools must be appropriate to the learning context and the learner's needs.

Rebecca Clarkson and Liz Twist consider what good assessment looks like and offer their research-

observation, a conversation or a task. It can be recorded in a variety of

ways: through photographs or other visual media, through an audio

achieved by a pupil at the end of a certain time period. The period of time

will vary, depending on what teachers want to find out. There could be an

assessment at the end of a topic, at the end of a half-term or a term, at the end of the year or, as in the case of the national curriculum tests, at the

Formative assessment takes place during learning, allowing teachers

If teachers understand what has been achieved to date, it is easier to

to assess progress on the learning journey. It begins with diagnostic

assessment, indicating what is already known and what gaps may exist

plan the next steps. As the learning journey unfolds, further formative

assessments indicate whether teaching plans need to be amended to

Formative assessments can also be recorded in a variety of ways, or

may not be recorded at all, except perhaps in the lesson plans drawn up

The methods of assessment that teachers use in your school should be

fitted to the learning context and, most importantly, the learners' needs.

It is essential that the assessments chosen are valid. This means that they

So what constitutes good assessment practice?

Whichever medium is used, the assessment will show what has been

recording, the teacher's note or as a written product.

end of a key stage.

reinforce or extend learning.

to address the next steps indicated.

Research Insights



You must get participants' consent and it is essential to be clear with them about how the information they provide will be used now and in

Consideration and protocols around safeguarding and disclosures must be decided at the outset, even when the research topic is not deemed "sensitive". Additional ethical considerations must be applied when working with vulnerable people and those with disabilities, learning difficulties or SEN.

Action research

Action research is very common within schools settings, with teachers and students carrying out their own research on a live topic. Action research is a way of investigating a situation, relationship or problem that strives to seek a better understanding in order to bring about improvement.

Action research enables the person or people carrying out the research to be part of the process and encourages reflection and change through its process. It is carried out in collaboration with the research participants and is not "done to" them. Essentially, action research follows the principles outlined in the graphic below, which can be very useful for schools trying

Research with young people

Getting pupils to carry out their own research can be a great way of unearthing the real issues facing young people at school and in the wider world, as more often than not youngsters are more willing to talk openly with their peers – particularly around personal or sensitive topics.

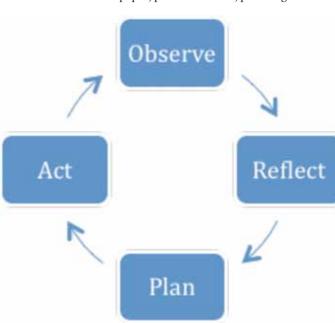
Developing young people to become researchers can help engage gifted

It can help build confidence and provides the opportunity to develop new skills such as teamwork, communication and analytical thinking. For schools and teachers, working with students to carry out their own research offers authentic insights into the real issues facing them, helps build positive relationships, and enhances professional development.

As part of a case study for NFER, one deputy headteacher said: "It's something every school should do. It's very powerful and changes lots of things in a school when children do it. Children see things adults don't."

Attitude surveys

Gathering such information at a wide and local level can help schools to evaluate the views of pupils, parents and staff, providing data for the





to self-evaluate and improve.

and talented pupils or conversely those that are disengaged in education as it helps them find their "voice", feel listened to and empowered.

Within many schools, research organisations are commissioned by the schools themselves or local and national government to carry out research on a larger scale. National surveys are carried out to provide an overview of issues within a local authority, region, or at a national level. These provide a snapshot of an issue in time across different contexts.

While providing a national picture, attitude surveys for pupils, parents and staff, for example, can also offer schools an efficient way to consult effectively where schools are given direct feedback on their setting's

school's self-evaluation based on objective evidence. Furthermore these surveys, when carried out across a wider population, can help provide

other settings by which to compare results. Surveys provide:

- Impartial results to help schools to identify areas of strength and weakness as part of their ongoing improvement.
- Data to help prepare for inspection.
- Opportunities to track effectiveness compared to other schools in supporting improved outcomes for children and young people.
- A less time-consuming way of collecting information for schools.

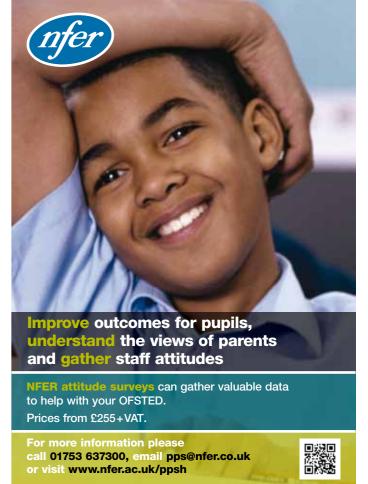
Getting an external body to carry out research provides independence to the results and enables schools to receive the findings without needing to carry out their own analysis and reporting.

The prospect of embarking of data-gathering and research can be daunting, but is unquestionably worth the effort in terms of the potential benefits at a pupil, teacher and school-wide level. In some respects, schools do not really have a choice but to undertake evidence-gathering, but putting some time and effort into considering which methods will work best in each individual context will reward you with the right information to feed into the life of the school.

• Claire Easton is a research manager at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), with special interest in participative research, the empowerment of children and young people, school improvement, and conducting research to support children's services

Further information

- For further information on carrying out action research in education see the NFER report Action Research: Making a Difference in Education (Volume 1) by Alison Lawson: www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/yoy01/
- For a research tool-kit The How-to Guide from Practical Research for Education - by Alison Lawson, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/ publications/33301/
- For more information on the work of NFER, visit www.nfer.ac.uk/htu



Claire Easton looks at the importance of gathering evidence to help self-evaluation and school improvement and offers best practice guidance

Data for self-

evaluation

nannounced inspections, a new framework, no more selfevaluation form (SEF) - the Ofsted landscape is changing rapidly, with more pressure than ever on schools to keep track of what they are doing, and how well they are doing it, through on-going self-assessment and reflection.

An "outstanding" rating can be won or lost over the quality of evidence showing a school's commitment to improving outcomes for its pupils, which makes collecting this information more critical than ever.

Why collect evidence?

Research Insights

It is not possible to know what pupils, teachers and school communities think about school life, to know how and where improvements have been made, and can be made in the future, without collecting the evidence and

Not only is this information necessary to support inspection processes, but perhaps more importantly it helps drive improvement, raise standards and ultimately provide better outcomes for pupils. Research evidence also develops understanding of efficient and effective ways of working and can help justify, promote and explain decisions around policy and practice. This will become increasingly important for schools in an era of greater autonomy.

How to collect evidence

There are a number of methods for collecting information or data, which broadly speaking fall into two categories: qualitative and quantitative.

Qualitative data lends itself to exploring issues in detail and in greater

'why" questions through qualitative methods. Planning is essential – be clear about what you are exploring and why. You should refer back to your research questions and aims throughout any research period or project to ensure the focus throughout remains

on its intended topic area. It is easy to get distracted by new, interesting,

depth than quantitative methods allow. Qualitative research most often

involves interviewing, generally with small numbers or groups of people;

it tells you the reasoning and answers the "why" questions, but does not

tell you how many people think the same thing and cannot be used to

"Not only is this information necessary

to support inspection processes,

but perhaps more importantly it helps

drive improvement, raise standards

and ultimately provide better

outcomes for pupils"

Quantitative methods, such as surveys, provide an overview of

"what" and "how many". Quantitative research does not tell you why

something is the case, it just tells you what the situation is. Often research

organisations will employ quantitative methods to provide a rounded

picture of what is happening within a population and then follow up the

unexpected and emerging issues.

make generalisations.

Ethics must be considered when carrying out any research, regardless of whether it is an in-house exercise or has been commissioned externally.