

LSE Works: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) public lecture

## Making a Difference in Education: what the evidence says

### Professor Robert Cassen

*Visiting Professor, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE*

### Professor Sandra McNally

*Professor of Economics, University of Surrey  
Director of the Education and Skills Programme  
Centre for Economic Performance, LSE*

### Professor Howard Glennerster

*Chair, LSE*

### Professor Anna Vignoles

*Professor of Education  
University of Cambridge*

### Professor Steve Strand

*Professor of Education,  
University of Oxford*



# Making a Difference in Education

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

ROBERT CASSEN, SANDRA MCNALLY  
and ANNA VIGNOLES



# The problem

- Free School Meal (FSM) pupils are half as likely to get 5 A\*-Cs as non-FSM.
- Begins before school: cognitive gaps between disadvantaged and better-off children as early as age 3, and gaps in vocabulary at age 5.
- Bright children from disadvantaged backgrounds fare worse at primary age than less bright children from better-off homes.
- The social gap widens by age 11, and further by age 16
- Many comparable countries do better than we do in coping with educational disadvantage.

# The evidence base

- What constitutes evidence?
  - Different approaches in different disciplines
  - Focused on quantitative - causal where possible
  - Not restricted to Randomised Control Trials
- Big gaps remain
- How evidence is used ?

# Table of contents

- How did we get here? A selective history
- The early years
- Parents and parenting
- Schools: organisation, resources and effectiveness
- What makes a good teacher?

# Table of contents

- Reading and writing
- Numeracy and mathematics
- Special educational needs
- ICT in the classroom
- Vocational education

# Early years and parenting

- Early years are critical: the impact of families and their environments starts young
- Supporting parents to improve parenting is key and needs to be more openly discussed
  - Educated parents with higher aspirations
  - Warm and authoritative parenting
- Good evidence that targeted intensive investment programmes work
  - Quality of quality provision is not measured by staff child ratios!
- Later investment is needed to reap the benefits of early investment

# Schools

- (1) *Does more money make a difference?* Yes, but disagreement as to the magnitude. More important for disadvantaged children.
- (2) *Importance of choice, competition and accountability.* Strengths and limitations of providing information; ambiguous effects of competition
- (3) *School type:* School Academies; grammar schools; independent schools.

# Numeracy

- Numeracy skills are a big problem for about one fifth of young people (long-standing problem but has got worse over time).
- Large returns to numeracy skills in the labour market
- Reviews of evidence find that teaching strategies matter but not curricula. Big need here for high quality, long-term studies on 'what works'.

# Reading

- Some 60,000+ pupils leave primary school every year not reading properly, or about 18 for each secondary school. Including those who cannot write well, there are 100,000+ children every year not truly literate. Research shows with best teaching, and individual support where needed, poor readers can be brought down to around 1.5%, not 10% as now.
- Individual support: Reading Recovery works (but its ring-fenced funding was reduced in recent years). Expensive but worth it. High cost of not learning to read.
- ‘Get London Reading’ seems to be successful. But why was it left to the *Evening Standard*?
- Some helpful ICT: ‘Assistive technologies’ for those with learning disabilities; Accelerated Reader, Lexia Reading ...
- Phonics – much debated, probably essential but not to be exaggerated. Need ‘phonics plus’. Programmes like Power of Reading, and Building Communities of Readers help teachers know what books pupils will like and encourage reading of books (not least for boys).

# Teaching

- Improving teaching is the best way to improve outcomes.
- Ofsted has found a majority of teachers ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’.
- But obviously can do better, with large numbers leaving the teaching profession every year, shortages of teachers for specific subjects ...
- Initial Teacher Training.
  - No hard evidence to say which path to teacher qualification is better: the university–based route to a PGCE, with part-time teaching experience, or the School Direct route, based more heavily in schools.
  - Ofsted and other studies give preference to former, but no evidence base to judge the different routes.
- Expand Teach First: seems to be doing well, enhancing attractiveness of teaching profession and some modest evidence that Teach First teachers raise outcomes. But quite a small programme, plan to expand to 2,000 a year by 2015.

# Teaching

- Only 35,000+ new teachers per year, and the whole teaching force is 400,000+. So need Continuing Professional Development: fairly good research.
- Key seems to be to transmit skills within schools to teachers who need improvement, with outside help when necessary, or with the collaboration of school partnerships. Actual practice in pursuing CPD is highly variable.
- Performance-related pay? Some evidence that it is effective; but difficult for schools to measure performance.
- Need to reduce burdens on teachers, certainly not make things worse by frequent changes to curriculum, administrative requirements, testing and marking ...

# Vocational

- Can be valuable in the labour market
- But employers value basic skills, so low level vocational education is not a substitute for gaining good skills at school
- Early specialisation is not supported by the evidence
- Need genuine employer engagement
- Evidence base does not tell us much about how to up-skill those who leave the school system with very little skill.
- This is THE problem in the system.

# Education policy would look different if it followed the evidence...

- Sustained investment in early years and parenting **and** beyond
- **Less** emphasis on school structures and governance
- **More** emphasis on teachers and teaching
- Fewer policy initiatives, properly evaluated in terms of their cost (at least in terms of teachers' time) and impact
- There **is** scope to redirect educational spending to achieve better results, and make a bigger impact on narrowing the social gap.

LSE Works: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) public lecture

## Making a Difference in Education: what the evidence says

### Professor Robert Cassen

*Visiting Professor, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE*

### Professor Sandra McNally

*Professor of Economics, University of Surrey  
Director of the Education and Skills Programme  
Centre for Economic Performance, LSE*

### Professor Howard Glennerster

*Chair, LSE*

### Professor Anna Vignoles

*Professor of Education  
University of Cambridge*

### Professor Steve Strand

*Professor of Education,  
University of Oxford*

