

Improvements required in Schools

Research on causes of educational failure

In October a major study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹ showed how England's 16 to 24-year-olds are falling behind their Asian and European counterparts. Young adults in England scored among the lowest results in literacy and numeracy tests in 24 industrialised countries. England was 22nd for literacy and 21st for numeracy.

The Centre for Social justice (CSJ) has published a report 'Requires Improvement'², funded by the Kusuma Trust, which looks at the major causes of educational failure in the UK. Requires Improvement, part of a wider State-of-the-Nation report, considers factors that hold children back, educational reform and improvements required to the education system to raise educational attainment. The findings cover areas such as family and home environment, school readiness, teaching and leadership.

The working group guiding the research is chaired by Sir Robin Boshier, a former primary school head teacher who now leads the Harris Federation of academy schools. He said in his forward: "Educational failure is too common in our current system. It affects disadvantaged children and makes reform urgent."

The working group identified that children with low levels of social development in the early years are at an immediate disadvantage when starting school. Findings showed that some children at the age of four have a level of development expected of a child 12-18 months old. Children from families with low levels of aspiration are more likely to do poorly or gain no qualifications. The report suggests that the most important school-based factor is the quality of teaching and that this is especially important for disadvantaged children. The Report notes that it is difficult for schools to recruit good teachers in key subjects in some parts of the UK and that a head teacher providing strong leadership is essential to ensure excellent education for children.

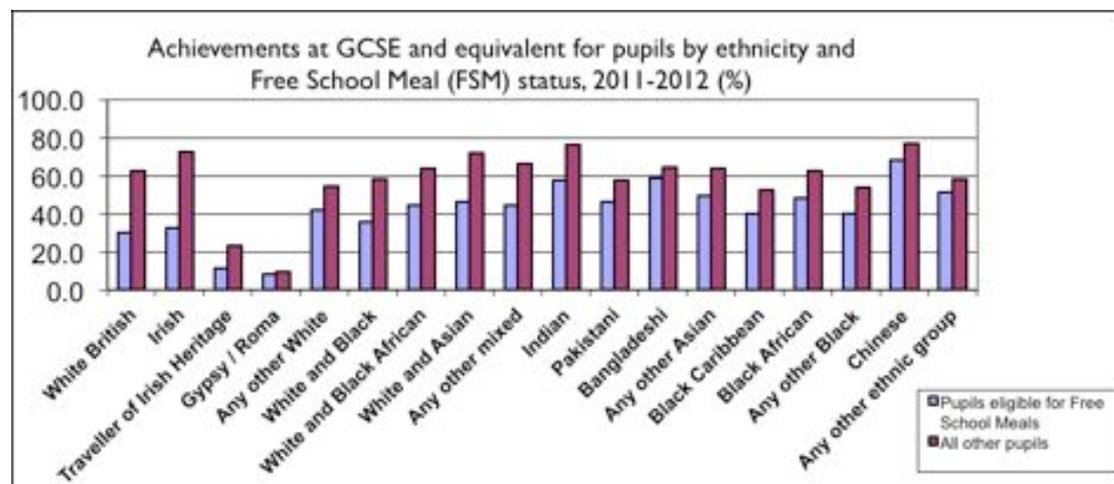
"Poorer children who are eligible for Free School Meals face multiple barriers to learning, including having less home support, weaker language and communication skills, and difficulties in basic literacy and numeracy"

Report recommendations to tackle educational failure include directing funding for disadvantaged children who need it most and providing more targeted support for children and their families prior to their arrival at school. The Report questions what can be done to encourage academies to move to areas of the UK in greatest need and how teaching and leadership can be improved.

¹<http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/boosting-skills-essential-for-tackling-joblessness-and-improving-well-being.htm>

²<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/publications/requires-improvement-the-causes-of-educational-failure>

The Pupil Premium: making it work in your school, Oxford University Press, 2012



An analysis of GCSE results by ethnicity and FSM status in England taken from the Requires Improvement report



Research Fellows selected

In partnership with the International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS) in Mumbai, five Fellows were selected for the Kusuma Research Fellowship to carry out education research projects in Kusuma's focus districts of Sambalpur in Odisha and Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh.

The Fellows include a secondary school teacher, two M.Phil research graduates, a PhD student and a statistician. Research topics the Fellows will explore include barriers to effective English language teaching in rural schools, comparative analysis of education systems and the impact of adolescent health education in secondary schools. Fellows will receive training and mentoring at IIPS from November 2013.

School annual priorities

All 50 schools involved in the Kusuma Schools Partnership Initiative (KSPI) have completed school improvement plans and identified priorities for 2013-2014. Head teachers and School Management and Development Committee (SMDC) members worked with the Kusuma Foundation team in 25 secondary schools in Sambalpur and 25 secondary schools in Hardoi to address the most important requirements for school improvement. School priorities include advocacy with district education authorities, teacher recruitment, professional development for teachers, provision of safe drinking water and resources for schools. KSPI priority activities will begin in each school immediately.

Volunteer teacher lends a hand

An SMDC member has volunteered to teach at Government Inter College, Hardoi, to help fill a vacant teaching position. Ms Sadhana, a qualified teacher but not employed or paid by the school, volunteers her time as the school has no funds to fill the position. The head teacher of the school is delighted by the support offered by Ms Sadhana who teaches Art and Design in an interactive way to her students.

The Kusuma Trust is exploring innovative ways to fill teacher vacancies in its focus districts of Sambalpur and Hardoi through volunteering and the establishment of a substitute teachers' pool.



Ms. Sadhana teaching a lesson at Government Inter College, Hardoi. Photo: Kusuma

Cleaner drinking water

Recent testing of drinking water in schools in Sambalpur revealed that poor quality drinking water is a major problem. Testing in all 25 KSPI intervention schools revealed that 17 of the schools have extremely hard water with potential bacterial contamination. The Kusuma Foundation has brought the findings to the attention of the water and sanitation department in Sambalpur. By working with the district authorities to treat and improve the quality of water in the intervention schools, it is hoped that provisions for cleaner water can be made at a district-wide level.
