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PUPIL ATTAINMENT, WELLBEING, AND TEACHER PRACTICES DURING THE PANDEMIC: FINDINGS FROM AN EVIDENCE AND GAP MAP

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings on Pupil Attainment (based on 19 studies) were as follows:

- Pupils' learning progression was hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is echoed across studies that examined the perspectives of pupils, parents, and teachers.
- There were socio-economic differences in the learning progression of pupils, whereby pupils from more deprived backgrounds were reported to be doing less well than their peers. Learning progression was measured by teacher reported indicators including pupils returning set work and pupils' standard of work.
- The average time spent on learning by primary and post-primary pupils was negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- There was no consensus in the studies included in this summary on whether socio-economic background affects the time spent on learning.

- Vulnerable pupils were exposed to heightened risk factors that negatively affected learning outcomes (for example, loss of specialist support).
- Vulnerable pupils reflected lower engagement rates in learning than their peers.

The key findings on Pupil Wellbeing (based on 12 studies) were as follows:

- There is evidence that school closures had a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and young people. For example, pupils and young people scored lower than normal on wellbeing measures.
- However, there is also evidence that school closures and remote teaching had a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of pupils. For example, spending more time with family and being removed from difficult relationships in school.
- The positive and negative effects of school closures and remote teaching on pupil wellbeing impact different areas of mental health. For example, independence, writing creatively and adapting new learning strategies were positively impacted, whereas loneliness, social interaction and anxiety were negatively affected.
- There were also mixed findings on the impact of school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic on the social and emotional wellbeing of pupils. There was evidence that socio-emotional wellbeing was positively influenced by increased opportunities such as playing with siblings. However, there was also evidence of a negative impact such as the lack of social interaction and loneliness.
- These mixed findings on mental health and wellbeing, and social and emotional wellbeing were also evident among studies examining the impact of school closures and remote teaching during the pandemic on vulnerable pupils.
- One study also examined the welfare of vulnerable pupils during school closures in the pandemic. A higher proportion of senior leaders and teachers in the most deprived schools were concerned for the welfare of vulnerable pupils compared to those in the least deprived schools.
- Senior leaders in post-primary schools were also more concerned for the welfare of vulnerable pupils than those in primary schools.

The key findings on Teacher Practices (based on 16 studies) were as follows:

- The most common tasks conducted by teachers during their working day were contacting pupils/parents and creating distance learning resources for pupils.
- Post-primary teachers were more likely than primary school teachers to set work for pupils using an online platform. The methods of online teaching also varied between schools with primary school leaders more likely to report the use of educational websites or apps than post-primary leaders.

Teachers understood the need to be flexible with their pedagogical practices during remote teaching.

- There was variation in the level of teacher contact with pupils according to the school deprivation level. A smaller proportion of pupils from the most deprived schools were in regular contact with teachers. In contrast, senior leaders in the most deprived schools were more likely than those in the least deprived schools to make telephone or video calls with pupils.
- There was variation amongst schools in the teaching practices used with vulnerable pupils. For example, one study reported that vulnerable pupils attending the most deprived schools were more likely to receive pastoral support than curriculum content when compared to those attending the least disadvantaged schools.
- One study provided policy recommendations on how remote teaching practices could be more effective in the future. Teachers reported that better provisions of IT equipment and facilities for both teachers and pupils, and training in remote learning strategies and virtual learning environments would improve their practices.

INTRODUCTION

1. This research briefing outlines a recent project funded by the Department of Education (DE), which reviewed the evidence related to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequent school closures, on pupil and teacher outcomes.
2. The project was completed in two stages: the creation of an Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) and the production of three evidence summaries on pupil wellbeing, attainment, and teacher practices. Together, the EGM and evidence summaries identify, collate, and synthesise the evidence available during the first 18 months of the Covid-19 pandemic (until June 2021). This is an important period as the full extent of the impact of Covid-19 on educational outcomes was not, and still remains, unknown.
3. This briefing provides an overview of the study context and its key findings.

CONTEXT

4. From the start of 2020 teaching and learning changed considerably for pupils and teachers as classrooms moved from school to the home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many statutory exams were cancelled, and technology and parents played a major and unprecedented role in children's learning. There is now considerable concern and uncertainty for children and young people with respect to their educational outcomes and trajectories, particularly for those who are at disproportionate risk of poor outcomes (for example children from disadvantaged backgrounds). The impact of the public health measures, such as periodic and prolonged school closures, on children and young people is, and will continue to be, both wide- and long-ranging.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

5. The overall aim of the project was:
 - To create and potentially also keep up to date for a limited time (i.e. within the life of the project: five months from the start date), a database that collates published educational research pertaining to Covid-19 and its impact on pupil outcomes. Specifically, studies included in the database will be those that explore the effect of the pandemic on pupils' academic and wellbeing outcomes, including their experiences of learning during lockdown, and as they return to school post-lockdown, after a period of school closure.

6. The objectives of the project were as follows:

Phase One:

- To create a database that collates published educational research pertaining to COVID-19 and its impact on pupil outcomes.
- To use the database to create a broad up-to-date map of the evidence of Covid-related education research to increase the discoverability of relevant studies for those accessing the database.
- To identify clusters of studies that have researched similar topics for example: effectiveness studies evaluating school-based programmes for addressing a range of wellbeing and attainment outcomes potentially affected by Covid-19 school closures.
- To identify the areas in which there is an evidence base of primary research and thus suitable for synthesis.
- To identify areas where primary research is lacking (the gaps), which can be used to inform research priorities.
- To produce a short interim report describing how the map was constructed and how it can be used will be provided alongside the html version of the interactive map.
- To agree a set of priority research questions that can be addressed by synthesising the evidence identified within the map.

Phase Two:

- To produce summaries of research evidence based on the research questions agreed with DE.

CONCLUSION

7. The EGM provides a visual representation of educational research conducted during the first 18 months of the Covid-19 pandemic.
8. The map clearly identifies where evidence exists, the nature of that evidence, and where there are gaps in the evidence base. This, along with the scope to conduct evidence syntheses on priority areas identified in the map (as demonstrated) provides a robust basis for evidence-informed policy and practice decision making.

METHODOLOGY

9. The research team undertook a two-stage approach:

Evidence and Gap Map

10. An evidence and gap map (EGM) was created. The EGM contains all published and unpublished education research (from January 2020 to June 2021) relating to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on pupil and teacher outcomes. The map was created using robust search, retrieval, and methodological approaches to minimise potential sources of bias. Consequently, the EGM contains over 500 education studies, employing a range of research methods, from across the globe.

Evidence Summaries

11. Based on the research collated within the map, this project produced evidence summaries on three priority areas in the UK and Ireland: pupil attainment, pupil wellbeing and teacher practices. Each evidence summary draws particular attention to research conducted with vulnerable groups (including pupils with special educational needs) and concludes with a series of key messages.

THE PROJECT

12. The project was undertaken by a research team led by Professor Sarah Miller (Campbell UK & Ireland, QUB) and funded by the Department of Education. The total cost of the project was £15,000.
13. The full research report entitled 'Pupil Attainment, Wellbeing, and Teacher Practices during the Pandemic: Findings from an Evidence and Gap Map' is available on the Department of Education website at [DE Website - Research Publications](#).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESEARCH BRIEFINGS (2005 TO DATE)

Traveller children's experiences in mainstream post-primary schools in Northern Ireland: a qualitative study	RB 1/2005
The nature of Youth Work in Northern Ireland: purpose, contribution and challenges	RB 2/2005
Parental attitudes to the statutory assessment and statementing procedures on Special Educational Needs	RB 3/2005
A study into current practice and potential models for the effective teaching of Personal Development at Key Stage 3 in Northern Ireland curriculum	RB 4/2005
Language Development Programmes – coverage and effectiveness of Provision in Northern Ireland (0-36 months)	RB 1/2006
Attitudes of the Socially Disadvantaged towards Education in Northern Ireland	RB 2/2006
Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI)	RB 3/2006
The Development of Inclusive Schools in Northern Ireland: A Model of Best Practice	RB 4/2006
Department of Education Funded Research 2005/06	RB 5/2006
The recruitment and retention of teachers in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland	RB 6/2006
An evaluation of the need and early intervention support for children (aged 2-4 years) with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Northern Ireland	RB 1/2007
Alternative Education Provision (AEP) in Northern Ireland	RB 2/2007
The Nature and Extent of Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland	RB 3/2007

Department of Education Funded Research 2006/07	RB 4/2007
An investigation of youth work, as a process of informal learning, in formal settings	RB 1/2008
E-Consultation with pupils – A pilot study	RB 2/2008
Good practice in literacy and numeracy in British and Irish cities	RB 3/2008
Department of Education Funded Research 2008/09	RB 1/2009
The Special Education Needs of Bilingual (Irish-English) Children	RB 2/2009
Audit of Counselling and Therapeutic Interventions in Primary school and Special Schools in the North of Ireland	RB 3/2009
Effective Pre School Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) Pre-School Experience and Key Stage 2 Performance in English and Mathematics	RB 1/2010
School governors: the guardians of our schools	RB 2/2010
PISA 2009: Achievement of 15-year olds in Northern Ireland	RB 3/2010
Study into how the education system can improve the attendance of looked after children at post-primary school	RB 1/2011
Research into the Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland	RB 2/2011
Needs assessment and feasibility study for the development of high level diagnostic tools in Irish for children with special educational needs in the Irish medium sector	RB 1/2012
Research into Improving Attendance in Schools Serving Deprived Areas	RB 2/2012
Taking Boys Seriously: A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland	RB 3/2012

PIRLS 2011 and TIMSS 2011: Achievement of Year 6 Pupils in Northern Ireland	RB 4/2012
Student achievement in Northern Ireland: Results in Mathematics, Science and Reading among 15-year olds from the OECD PISA 2012 Study	RB 1/2013
Exploring the characteristics of education systems which are successful in science	RB 1/2015
Dissemination of Best Practice in Teaching and Learning Research	RB 1/2017
Post-primary school experiences of 16-21 year old people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGB&T)	RB 2/2017
Attitudes to Shared Education: Findings from the 2018 Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times surveys	RB 1/2020
Attitudes to Shared Education: Findings from the 2020/21 Young Life and Times and Kids' Life and Times surveys	RB 1/2022

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Analytical Services Unit
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
Co Down
BT19 7PR

Telephone: 028 9127 9401

Fax: 028 9127 9594

e-mail: statistics@education-ni.gov.uk

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