

Embargoed until 00.01 BST 11 May, 2016

National policies fuelling segregation in primary schools

National policies are preventing primary schools from responding effectively to increased diversity in the classroom, according to a [report](#) written by a team of researchers at The University of Manchester.

The report - commissioned by the [Cambridge Primary Review Trust](#) - concludes that national policies are creating further levels of segregation within the English primary education system, with children from minority and economically poorer backgrounds most affected.

The research team argues that the education system is failing to build on and share best practice that already exists in some schools, and blames narrowly focused national testing and schools increasingly working in isolation.

Written by Professors Mel Ainscow CBE and Alan Dyson, co-directors of [Manchester's Centre for Equity in Education](#), and their colleague Dr Lise Hopwood and Stephanie Thomson, the report is based on an analysis of recent research.

Professor Dyson commented: "Whilst it isn't a new phenomenon that schools themselves have had to find ways of educating children from very different backgrounds within the same institution and in the same classroom, rapid changes in patterns of diversity, whether they are attributable to migration, population growth, gentrification or any other cause, are important because they present immediate challenges – and opportunities – to the school system."

An increasingly fragmented school system is cited in the report as a major issue for schools struggling to keep pace with the educational challenges thrown up as "their profile of pupil diversity expands," and "substantial social segregation is reflected and reproduced".

As a result, the researchers found the support network for schools that need it is lacking, with schools more likely to be working in isolation, or as part of academy chains, federations and other networks that may or may not provide effective support.

Professor Ainscow commented: “There is an urgent need to create a system in which schools are no longer divided from one another and from their local communities.

“Whilst we believe it is encouraging that schools now enjoy an enhanced level of autonomy and are less beholden to central initiatives or constrained by the national curriculum, it is a double-edged sword because they are more likely to be operating independently of local authority oversight.”

The report says practitioners must be allowed to explore new ways of working without fear of the consequences, even if outcomes are not immediately improved. It suggests that this would encourage greater collaboration between schools in order to make the best practices available to a wider number of pupils.

“Those who are closest to children and their communities must have the space and encouragement to make decisions about how all their pupils can be best educated,” commented Dr Hopwood.

She added, “National accountability requirements are as powerful as ever and limit creativity and risk-taking. This stifles the radical new thinking that would encourage greater collaboration and experimentation across the education service.”

Notes for editors:

The full report, *‘Primary schools responding to diversity: barriers and possibilities’* is available [here](#) and the briefing is available [here](#).

Professors Mel Ainscow CBE and Alan Dyson are available for interview via the Media Relations Office.

The University of Manchester, a member of the prestigious Russell Group, is the UK’s largest single-site university with 38,600 students. It has 20 academic schools and hundreds of specialist research groups undertaking pioneering, multi-disciplinary teaching and research of worldwide significance. The University is one of the country’s major research institutions, rated fifth in the UK in terms of ‘research power’ (REF 2014), and has had no fewer than 25 Nobel laureates either work or study there. The University had an annual income of £1 billion in 2014/15. Visit www.manchester.ac.uk

The Cambridge Primary Review Trust is a not-for-profit company led by Professor Robin Alexander and dedicated to building on the work of the Cambridge Primary Review, the most comprehensive enquiry into English primary education since the 1960s. Further information: www.cprtrust.org.uk

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