



LITERATURE REVIEW

School effectiveness and equity: making connections

Executive Summary

Pamela Sammons

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Introduction

“What are the main messages from SER for practitioners and policy makers concerned to create more successful schools?”

*‘As a rule, schools which do the kinds of things the research suggests make a difference, tend to get better results (however these are measured or assessed).’*¹

This executive summary of the full report highlights key features and findings of school effectiveness research (SER). It identifies some of the issues involved in measuring effectiveness and identifying more effective schools. What are the main messages from SER for practitioners and policy makers concerned to create more successful schools? Many leading researchers in the field have

sought to address this topic during the last two decades.² This summary, and the full report that supports it, seeks to ‘map the terrain’, exploring the contribution SER studies have made to our understanding of school performance and the implications for school improvement. It identifies strong links between school effectiveness and the promotion of greater equity in education; this is important given the increasing attention paid to education as a means of promoting wider policies of social inclusion and reducing the achievement gap in many countries.³

The complex causation of varied attainment levels

“Research has drawn attention to the influence of family **cultural capital**, particularly the powerful impact of the child’s home learning environment...”

There are several factors associated with variation in attainment. The factors can be divided into broad categories, including **individual characteristics** (age, birth weight, gender), **family socio-economic characteristics** (particularly family structure, parental background: qualification levels, health, socio-economic status, in or out of work, and income level), **community and societal characteristics** (neighbourhood context, cultural expectations, social structural divisions especially in relation to social class). Research has drawn attention to the influence of family **cultural capital**, particularly the powerful impact of the child’s home learning environment, especially in the early years, as a predictor of attainment. **Educational experiences** constitute one of several factors.

School effectiveness research has focused on exploring the role of educational experiences and influences but does not seek to ignore or marginalise the role of other factors,

particularly family background. Indeed the development of early SER arose through a concern to promote greater equity in outcomes for ‘at risk’ groups in disadvantaged urban areas and much of the knowledge base is especially relevant to schools in such contexts. In the US and UK the chief stimulus for SER was the publication of influential studies during the 1960s and early 1970s which claimed that the particular school attended by a student had little influence on their educational outcomes in comparison with factors such as IQ, ‘race’, and socio-economic status (SES).⁴ The focus was thus on structural inequalities rather than on the influence of schools. These studies suffered from a number of limitations and the subsequent SER studies conducted in the US, UK and a growing number of countries have pointed to the existence of significant *school effects*, while acknowledging the important influence of student background.⁵

¹ Gray (1990) p 214

² Creemers (1994); Reynolds (1995); Mortimore (1998); Sammons (1999); Scheerens & Bosker (1997); Gray *et al.* (1999); Teddlie & Stringfield (2000); Reynolds, Hopkins & Gray (2005)

³ For further discussion of the definition of equity in education see Sammons (forthcoming)

⁴ Coleman *et al.* (1966) and Jencks *et al.* (1972)

⁵ Edmonds, (1979); Goodlad *et al.* (1979); Rutter *et al.* (1979); Madaus *et al.* (1979); Willms & Cuttance, (1985); Mortimore *et al.*, (1988); Smith & Tomlinson, (1989)

Measuring school effectiveness and identifying effective schools

“ How can we try to measure the influence of schools...? ”

The central focus of SER concerns the idea that ‘schools matter, that schools do have major effects upon children’s development and that, to put it simply, schools do make a difference’.⁶ How can we try to measure the influence of schools, and by implication, of teachers, on their students? This deceptively

simple question lies at the heart of SER, which seeks to disentangle the complex links between the student’s ‘dowry’ (the mix of abilities, prior attainments and personal and family attributes) which any young person brings to school, from those of their educational experiences at school.

Definitions of effectiveness

An effective school has been defined as *one in which students progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake. An effective school thus adds extra value to its students’ outcomes, in comparison with other schools serving similar intakes.* In order to assess value added, measures of individual students’ prior attainment are needed to provide a baseline against which subsequent progress can be assessed. Other factors such as gender, socio-economic status, mobility and fluency in the majority language used at school

have also been shown to affect progress. In addition to prior attainment, SER studies seek to include such factors in assessing the impact of schools.⁷ School effectiveness does not seek to measure the impact of schooling as a whole; instead it examines differences in the impact of one institution in comparison with another, taking account of intake. It is recognised that there can be internal variation in effectiveness at the department or class level, and teacher effects tend to be substantially larger than school differences.

Size of school effects

A number of studies have sought to quantify the size of school effects on student outcomes. Effect sizes are generally found to be much greater in studies of developing countries and seem to reflect a greater influence of resources, and variability in the availability of trained teachers and textbooks and materials. On average, schools account for around 5–18% of the achievement differences between students after control for initial differences. The research that generated this finding also indicates that classroom level or teacher effects tend to be substantially

larger than school effects.⁸ Teacher effects emerge strongly in primary school studies. For example in Australia the percentage of variance in value added measures of achievement, controlling for intake differences in students’ prior attainments and background characteristics, put the class contribution at 55% for mathematics and 45% in English at the primary level.⁹ The combined school and teacher effect may vary between 15% and 50%, depending on the outcome and sample studied. A recent international review argues that school effects are ‘moderately large’.¹⁰

⁶ Reynolds & Creemers (1990) p 1

⁷ Saunders (1999) provides a detailed analysis of the development of the value-added concept.

⁸ See Scheerens & Bosker (1997)

⁹ Hill & Rowe (1998)

¹⁰ Van Damme (2006) p 16

More and less effective outliers

Another way of considering the size of school effects is to consider the difference between *outliers* (significantly more or less effective schools) in terms of their impact on average attainment in public examinations. A large longitudinal study of secondary schools in Lancashire showed that, for a student of average prior attainment at age 11 years, the difference in total GCSE points score was 14 points (equivalent to the difference between

obtaining 7 grade B or 7 grade D GCSEs) between the most and least effective schools.¹¹ In the *Improving School Effectiveness* study in Scotland, the difference reported was equivalent to six Standard Grades at Grade 3.¹² These differences can be important in shaping life chances; it should be noted that Grade C at GCSE and Grade 3 at Standard Grade are seen as necessary for higher study in the UK.

Competing definitions of good schooling

“The study of a broad range of student outcomes – cognitive, social and affective – is needed to provide a satisfactory picture of school effects.”

A variety of criticisms of SER have been made, particularly during the last decade. Criticism has been particularly marked in the UK where the pragmatic concerns of SER with identifying ‘what works’ in education, and a perceived lack of attention to theoretical concerns and the influence of social structure have been attacked. There has also been disagreement about the purposes, and therefore the outcomes of schooling. The response of the SER researchers is that they seek to make a distinctive contribution to the debate about educational quality by the careful identification and study of different aspects of school life and their relationships to a range of student outcomes (including academic and affective and social behavioural) about which there is fairly widespread agreement. Rather than attempting to define ‘good’, and thus by implication ‘bad’ schools, SER research focuses deliberately on the narrower concept of effectiveness which concerns the achievement of educational goals using specific measures of cognitive progress, social or affective outcomes. It is argued that *effectiveness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for any acceptable definition of a ‘good’ school.*¹³

The study of a broad range of student outcomes – cognitive, social and affective – is needed to provide a satisfactory picture of school effects. As well as being important in their own right, evidence indicates that social and affective measures of student outcomes such as attendance, attitudes to school, behaviour, motivation and self-esteem can act as intermediate outcomes which affect, and can themselves be influenced by students’ attainment and progress. Thus the promotion of better cognitive outcomes should never be seen as an alternative or in some way a barrier to concern with social and affective outcomes or vice versa. Relationships are likely to be reciprocal. Improving a student’s attainment and learning can improve self-esteem, engagement and attitudes to school and vice versa.¹⁴ While the relationships between school effects on social, affective and academic outcomes may not be very strong at the individual level (except for behaviour and attainment) correlations are usually in a significant and positive direction. In relation to school effects there is also evidence of weak positive associations between effectiveness in academic and affective domains.¹⁵ Students’ perceptions or

¹¹ Thomas & Mortimore (1996)

¹² MacBeath & Mortimore (2000)

¹³ Sammons (1999)

¹⁴ Rutter *et al.* (1979); Mortimore *et al.* (1988); Louis & Miles (1992); Knuver & Brandsma (1993); Lee *et al.* (1993); Smyth (1999); Opdenakker & Van Damm (2000)

¹⁵ Sammons (1996); Knuver & Brandsma (1993)

feelings of school 'connectedness' have been shown to account for 13–18% of the variation in adolescent emotional distress in the US.¹⁶ Other US research has drawn attention to the relationship between students' sense of their school as a community and lower involvement in 'problem behaviours' such as drug use and delinquent behaviour. Such studies have concluded that where schools are experienced as communities, students' psychological resilience may be enhanced.¹⁷ Links between positive features of school organisational climate and adolescent health and health risk behaviours have been reported.¹⁸

The question of whether school effects differ for specific groups of students is important to the promotion of social inclusion and equity'. The monitoring of differences in educational outcomes helps to focus attention on the size of the equity gap and is a necessary backdrop to attempts to identify and raise the achievement of 'at risk' groups, particularly for ethnic minority and low SES students. A major systematic review of SER concluded: '*Schools matter most for underprivileged and/or initially low achieving students. Effective or ineffective schools are especially effective or ineffective for these students*'.¹⁹

Effective school processes

“ A range of studies have sought to identify the 'key characteristics' of effective schools... ”

A range of studies have sought to identify the 'key characteristics' of effective schools through statistical analyses of measures that are found to be significant predictors of differences in student outcomes, after taking into account intake differences. In addition contrasting case studies of outlier schools, those identified as particularly effective or ineffective, has often been used to illuminate understanding of what makes a difference and helps such schools to be more effective.

A number of reviewers have identified common features concerning the processes and characteristics of more effective schools based on studies conducted during the last 30 years. These include: **achievement oriented teachers with high expectations; sound educational leadership; good consensus and cohesion within the school team, a**

high quality curriculum; ample opportunity to learn; a favourable, orderly and safe school climate; a considerable evaluative potential in the school; a high degree of parental involvement; a favourable class climate; high effective learning time through excellent class management; structured instruction; the encouragement of autonomous learning; differentiation (adaptive instruction) and frequent sound feedback to students about their work.

The correlates of effectiveness identified by researchers have been mapped and distilled into nine process areas (Panel 1).²⁰

Case study research of highly effective and highly improved schools has tended to identify similar features of successful practices.

¹⁶ Resnick *et al.* (1997)

¹⁷ Battistich *et al.* (1995); Battistich & Hom (1997)

¹⁸ McLellan *et al.* (1999); Vuille *et al.* (2001)

¹⁹ Scheerens & Bosker (1997), p 96

²⁰ Teddlie & Reynolds (2000)

Panel 1: The processes of effective schools	
Processes	Components of the process
1. The processes of effective leadership	Being firm and purposeful Involving others in the process Exhibiting instructional leadership Frequent personal monitoring Selecting and replacing staff
2. The processes of effective teaching	Unity of purpose Consistency of practice Collegiality and collaboration
3. Developing and maintaining a pervasive focus on learning	Focusing on academics Maximising school learning time
4. Producing a positive school culture	Creating a shared vision Creating an orderly environment Emphasising positive reinforcement
5. Creating high and appropriate expectations for all	For students For staff
6. Emphasising responsibilities and rights	Responsibilities Rights
7. Monitoring progress at all levels	At the school level At the classroom level At the individual level
8. Developing staff skills at the school site	Site based Integrated with ongoing professional development
9. Involving parents in productive and appropriate ways	Buffering negative influences Encouraging productive interactions with parents

Features of ineffective schools

“It is generally recognised that ineffective schools are not merely mirror images of those that are more effective.”

It is generally recognised that ineffective schools are not merely mirror images of those that are more effective. Rather than simply lacking the key features of effective schools, they are likely to share specific features and problems that have a particular link with culture and staffing. A review of studies concerning the characteristics of ineffective schools highlights four aspects: lack of vision; unfocused leadership; dysfunctional staff relationships and ineffective classroom practices.

Such ineffective classroom practices, in turn, are often characterised by inconsistent

approaches to the curriculum and teaching. There are generally lower expectations for students of low socio-economic status (SES). Classroom activity often involves an emphasis on supervising and communicating about routines, with low levels of teacher-student interaction and low levels of student involvement in their work. Students in these ineffective classrooms tend to perceive their teachers as people who do not care, praise, provide help, or consider learning as important; and in these classrooms there is more frequent use of criticism and negative feedback.²¹

²¹ Stoll & Fink (1996)

The importance of school culture is increasingly being recognised in SER. A negative culture is often found to contribute to the poor performance of less successful schools. 'The ineffective school may also have inside itself multiple schools formed around cliques and friendship groups ... there will be

none of the organisation, social, cultural and symbolic tightness of the effective school'.²² Such tightness appears to be a particular requirement for academic effectiveness in the context of the inner city.²³ Recent research in the Netherlands on under-performing schools has drawn similar conclusions.²⁴

Leadership

“ School effectiveness research has drawn attention to the importance of school leadership...”

School effectiveness research has drawn attention to the importance of school leadership as a key characteristic of effective schools. Leadership judged to be poor is a well-documented feature of ineffective schools according to inspection evidence in the UK.²⁵ School improvement research has highlighted the headteacher's or principal's role in the turn-around of ineffective or failing schools and its importance for schools in disadvantaged contexts and a major review for the National College of School Leadership highlights 'strong claims' about school leadership, including the following:

- School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
- Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
- The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
- School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.²⁶

The centrality of teaching and learning

SER studies repeatedly draw attention to the centrality of teaching and learning and of classroom processes in determining schools' overall academic effectiveness.²⁷ The quality of teaching and teacher expectations has the most significant role to play in fostering students' learning and progress.²⁸ Despite this, whole-school processes, including leadership processes, remain influential because they provide the overall framework within which teachers and classrooms operate. Research on organisational learning, for example, has shown relationships between principals'

transformational leadership and organisational learning, which influence teachers' work and student outcomes.²⁹

Reviews of teacher effectiveness literature have identified a number of characteristics of effective teachers:

- They teach the class as a whole.
- They present information or skills clearly and animatedly.
- They keep the teaching sessions task-oriented.

²² Reynolds (1995), p 61

²³ Sammons *et al.* (1997); Hopkins (2001)

²⁴ Van de Grift & Hootven (2006)

²⁵ Matthews & Sammons (2004); Mulford, Silins & Leithwood (2004)

²⁶ Leithwood *et al.* (2006)

²⁷ See Creemers (1994); Scheerens & Bosker (1997); Hill & Rowe (1998).

²⁸ Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore (1995)

²⁹ Mulford & Silins (2001)

“ The teacher’s role in creating an ‘excellent classroom climate’ is stressed. ”

- They are non-evaluative and keep instruction relaxed.
- They have high expectations for achievement (give more homework, pace lessons faster and create alertness).
- They relate comfortably to students (reducing behaviour problems).³⁰

The features of ‘structured teaching’ have been identified as particularly relevant to promoting cognitive attainment in the basic skill areas especially in schools serving higher proportions of socio-economically disadvantaged groups.³¹ Recent reviews of constructivist approaches to teaching in comparison with more traditional approaches indicate that there is little evidence that these boost attainment levels and results indicate that such approaches may be less appropriate for younger, low attaining and low SES groups tending to widen the achievement gap.³²

Research on teacher effectiveness in the UK has developed a model which links three

factors (professional characteristics, teaching skills and classroom climate) to progress. The teacher’s role in creating an ‘excellent classroom climate’ is stressed. In primary schools outstanding teachers scored more highly in terms of behaviours related to high expectations, time and resource management, assessment and homework. At the secondary level the biggest differences were in high expectations, planning and homework. Three factors were identified as important in shaping learning opportunities in the classroom: lack of disruption; encouragement to engage; and high expectations.³³

Much SER has stressed the importance of a positive school climate or culture as a key feature that is associated with better student outcomes and effectiveness in value added terms. The key aspects of an effective school and departmental culture include:

- order – behaviour, policy and practice
- academic emphasis
- student-focused approach.³⁴

Effective and improving schools serving disadvantaged communities

A recent review of improving schools in disadvantaged settings suggests that such schools focus on:

- teaching and learning
- enhancing leadership capacity
- creating an information rich environment
- creating a positive school culture
- building a learning community
- promoting continuing professional development

- involving parents
- engaging external support.³⁵

While the challenges facing schools serving disadvantaged communities may be greater, the characteristics of successful schools in such contexts are not radically different from those that have been reported in the SER as a whole, although approaches to teaching may benefit from greater use of structured approaches and direct instruction, and more use of observation and professional

³⁰ For example, Joyce & Showers (1988)

³¹ Scheerens (1992); Muijs & Reynolds (2005)

³² van der Werf (2006)

³³ HayMcBer (2000)

³⁴ Sammons, Thomas & Mortimore (1997)

³⁵ Muijs *et al.* (2004)

development for teachers related to the improvement of classroom practice.

A set of 12 case studies of successful low-SES secondary schools in Canada drew a number of conclusions about what aspects seemed to contribute to their success in difficult environments. Discussion of this research concludes that these secondary schools helped reduce social inequalities by stressing clear expectations and supportive structures and services which motivated their students. Structured classroom instruction and 'traditional' standards of behaviour, plus a respectful, secure school climate with warm relationships are also noted. 'High expectations coupled with support and warm relationships are especially effective in schools serving at-risk populations'.³⁶ Further broadly comparable findings and conclusions have been outlined using 21 High Performing High Poverty schools in the US.³⁷

A recent set of 18 primary school qualitative case studies of high attainment Welsh primary schools in disadvantaged settings³⁸ provides

further evidence of the important role of leadership as at the core of these schools' success and in creating a learning and achievement centred culture with a strong moral purpose. It focuses on the important and original concept of 'mindset' as a feature of core culture in relation to effectiveness. This includes a confident, problem solving group attitude, coupled with proactive optimism, a high level of reflectivity, high ideals and expectations and a culture of praise, warmth and care.

In the US, case studies of schools that have achieved high levels of success with students from low SES backgrounds indicate that the schools place a high priority on the importance of raising and maintaining standards, recognise the need for improvement and have a strong moral purpose. They have a strong collective belief that all students can succeed (high expectations). The principals demonstrate strong leadership and recognise that this includes all levels in the school, including the classroom. There is an emphasis on building strong teams within the schools.³⁹

Implications for school improvement

School improvement efforts require a particular focus on the processes of change and understanding of the history and context of specific institutions, and depend upon the active support and engagement of practitioners.⁴⁰ SER can help provide the necessary knowledge base to inform and stimulate the development of policies and practical initiatives to improve schools and the quality of students' educational experiences.

A comprehensive analysis of highly successful improvement programmes demonstrates a number of shared principles or features. Effective school improvement programmes:

- focus closely on classroom improvements;
- utilise discrete instructional or pedagogical strategies, i.e. they are explicit in the models of teaching they prescribe;
- apply pressure at the implementation stage to ensure adherence to the programme;
- collect systematic evaluative evidence about the impact on schools and classrooms;
- mobilise change at a number of levels within the organisation, including the classroom, departmental and school level;
- generate cultural as well as structural change;

³⁶Raham (2002) p 9

³⁷Carter (2001)

³⁸James *et al.* (2006)

³⁹Cawelti (1999)

⁴⁰See Louis & Miles (1991); Fullan (1993); Ainscow & West (1994); Stoll & Fink (1994); Gray *et al.* (1999); Joyce, Calhoun & Hopkins (1999)

- engage teachers in professional dialogue and development;
- provide external agency and support.⁴¹

Approaches differ between those that are seen to be organic (suggesting broad principles or general strategies for improvement) and those that are seen to be more tightly structured and specific. More tightly structured research based programmes tend to have a stronger and more lasting influence and to be associated with greater change in student outcomes; these are sometimes termed mechanistic programmes.⁴² The need for a close degree of 'fit' between programme and the developmental needs of the school has been emphasised by some authors. They distinguish three types:

Type 1 – strategies that assist failing schools to become moderately effective. They tend

to need a high level of external support and involve a clear and direct focus on a limited number of basic curriculum and organisational issues to build confidence and support to continue. Often the identification of 'failure' acts as a catalyst for change.

Type 2 – strategies that assist moderately effective (more typical) schools to become effective. Such strategies are less likely to involve external support or intervention and are more likely to be school initiated.

Type 3 – strategies that assist effective schools to remain so. Here external support may be welcomed or even sought out but is not necessary.⁴³ The momentum for improvement comes from within these already effective schools.

School improvement interventions based on SER

Some researchers have played a key role in the design of improvement interventions that draw upon the SER tradition.

1. *Improving the Quality of Education for All* (IQEA) offers schools a developmental approach which blends school improvement and effectiveness methods in fostering positive change. This ongoing development and research informed project involves a large number of schools in England and has been operating for nearly two decades.⁴⁴ The approach involves Higher Education consultants working in collaboration with schools which have opted to participate in an improvement project.⁴⁵ Features include:

- Setting a clear and unifying focus for the school's improvement work.

- *The collection of data on its performance* as a precursor to initiating an improvement strategy.
- *Creating a School Improvement Group (SIG)* at an early stage to carry forward the school's development agenda.
- A considerable emphasis on *staff development*.

2. *The 'High Reliability Schools' (HRS)* concept was created in the mid-1990s as an answer to global calls for school reform, in which many other projects had failed. A HRS encourages the success of all of its students' learning and public examination performance through support, feedback and evaluation. It depends upon research-based significant bodies of knowledge to assure instruction effectively supports

⁴¹ Harris (2002) p 29

⁴² Harris (2002)

⁴³ Hopkins *et al.* (1997); Harris (2002)

⁴⁴ Hopkins, Ainscow & West (1994); Hopkins (2002)

⁴⁵ Harris (2000)

student learning. The most important bodies of knowledge in this area are: teacher effectiveness, school effectiveness, middle management effectiveness, teacher professional development and enquiry, data-richness, specific intervention and school improvement. The fundamental characteristics of HRSs are a school-wide focus on a small number of goals, combined with a commitment to implement any reform with unusually high reliability. Specific reforms may be chosen by the faculty and administration either through an examination of prior research, or through analysis of 'best practice'.

In HRS schools, the efforts of its administration, teachers, and students focus on developing a limited number of core activities that have demonstrated consistent, high levels of student learning. The school also encourages

support and commitment from parents and agencies for the goals of the school. To attain these consistent high levels of success, the HRS school faculty includes in their core goals a commitment to high levels of student attendance and support and expectation for the academic success of all students. The inclusion of these two goals is based on repeated research findings that students learn best when consistently attending a school that expects the students' best efforts academically. To support these goals, the HRS school works to create standard operating procedures (SOPs) and a system of monitoring these procedures to assure the school is reliably working to attain the goals. A system is also established to assess the effectiveness of the standard operating procedures and for identifying flaws in them and validating appropriate changes.⁴⁶

Comprehensive school reform

The systematic approach found in IQEA and HRS is more common in the US where so-called Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models have received considerable attention and investment. They are school improvement programmes that have been specially developed and tested and are intended to be replicable in different contexts. Funding and training are key components along with a high level of school staff commitment to the programmes. A major meta-analysis of CSR in the US concluded:

- CSR models were effective across the range of school poverty levels;

- the strongest evidence of effectiveness was found for three different CSR models: *Direct Instruction*, *School Development Program*, and *Success for All*. All can be seen as examples of detailed, structured, research based improvement programs rather than loosely structured approaches;
- the successful expansion of CSR shows that research based models of improvement can be brought to scale across many schools and varying contexts.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Teddlie, Kochan & Taylor (2000)

⁴⁷ Borman *et al.* (2003)

Conclusions and key messages

“ Though schools certainly matter, health, housing, income and the home learning environment remain powerful influences... ”

In conclusion, the SER tradition has not attempted to define and identify ‘good’ or by implication ‘bad’ schools. SER focuses, instead on the narrower concept of effectiveness in fostering better educational outcomes for students. Within this framework, an emphasis on students’ social and affective as well as cognitive outcomes is necessary to obtain a rounded picture of effectiveness.

A number of common features of effective schools and effective teaching have been identified in research conducted in a range of countries. SER, therefore, provides an important evidence-base on the correlates of effective schools and teachers and has stimulated school improvement initiatives at national and local level. The SER knowledge base appears generally applicable but is particularly relevant to schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

School effectiveness and improvement literature highlights the importance of school (and in secondary schools, departmental) culture. The impact of leadership by key individuals, usually the principal, in promoting the change process is also evident. A clear focus on a limited set of aims shared by staff is associated with more successful improvement initiatives, in particular increasing the school’s focus on the teaching and learning process. Linking whole school planning and specific classroom pedagogical approaches to improvement is likely to have a greater impact on student outcomes than strategies which focus on just the school or on just the classroom level in isolation. It must be recognised that successful school improvement cannot be externally mandated but involves careful and realistic planning and the conscious commitment and involvement of teachers and leaders in schools.⁴⁸

Messages from research, development projects and evaluations suggest that by

focusing on school culture, addressing the quality of teaching and learning and by monitoring students’ academic progress and their social and affective outcomes, schools can work towards improvement.

Though schools certainly matter, health, housing, income and the home learning environment remain powerful influences and ‘joined up’ policies aimed at combating social exclusion are called for. It has been concluded that *‘significant educational reform is more likely to occur when school and home are jointly addressed.’*⁴⁹ Multi-agency approaches are receiving increasing attention in a number of countries with the development of full service, extended and new community schools. The way school influences may either reduce or alternatively compound the powerful impact of social disadvantage requires further investigation by SER.

Education cannot remedy social exclusion by itself but remains an important means of implementing policies intended to combat social disadvantage. Interestingly the biggest estimated impact in the research tends to be in early years schooling and the smallest in secondary.⁵⁰ The social empowerment argument is a vital one, because over three decades of SER research suggests that the life chances of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in particular are enhanced by effective schools, those which foster both cognitive progress and promote social and affective outcomes including motivation, self-esteem and student involvement. An analysis of the positive effects of schooling concluded that: *‘Although the differences in scholastic attainment achieved by the same students in contrasting schools is unlikely to be great, in many instances it represents the difference between success and failure and operates as a facilitating or inhibiting factor in higher education. When coupled with the promotion of other pro-social*

⁴⁸Stringfield, Ross & Smith (1996)

⁴⁹Hopkins, Reynolds & Gray (2005) p 6

⁵⁰Hopkins, Reynolds & Gray (2005) p 22

*attitudes and behaviours, and the inculcation of a positive self-image, the potential of the school to improve the life chances of students is considerable.*⁵¹

This review of SER and the implications for school improvement suggest that a greater emphasis needs to be given to developing policies and creating schools systems that:

- encourage collaboration and create a positive culture for learning with high expectations;
- recognise that schools serving disadvantaged communities are likely to need extra support to attract and retain good teachers and leaders;
- ensure that planning for improvement is seen as the norm, encourage reflective practice and institutional self-evaluation;
- maintain an emphasis on fostering students' progress and promoting other important affective and social, behavioural and educational outcomes and recognise that the two are complementary;
- monitor equity in outcomes for different student groups and focus on reducing the achievement gap, with greater attention to the benefits of early intervention;
- celebrate, study and spread successful practice;

- use both research and inspection evidence to promote improvement;
- do not regard widespread failure for specific student groups as inevitable and ensure that disadvantaged groups are offered the highest quality educational experiences;
- recognise that schools do make a difference, that good teaching matters and that we already know much about strategies and practices which foster success for all students.

The full report that accompanies this summary is not intended to suggest that SER is a universal panacea, but it is intended to 'map the terrain', by summarising and making more widely accessible the current knowledge base and its potential as a resource for practitioners and policy makers seeking to bring about improvement. It provides an illustration of how this tradition of enquiry can inform, empower and challenge educators to make schools more successful for more students, more of the time. The challenge for the future remains for countries to improve educational access and enhance the quality of education experienced by all students but particularly that of 'at risk'/disadvantaged/minority student groups, to promote greater equity in outcomes, enhance life chances and encourage the development of informed, active citizens.

⁵¹ Mortimore (1998) p 143



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