

Improving schools with better management

Evidence has revealed that the quality of education varies widely between and within countries. Educational standards can be negatively affected by a number of issues - with school management identified as one of the key factors.

The Department for Education has recently introduced new guidance aiming to improve school governance. Governing bodies are expected to function more as non-executive strategic leaders similar to corporate boards, and appointments of school governors in local authority-run schools will prioritise candidates' skills in driving school improvement.

Research at the ESRC Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) shows that school management practices are strongly linked to pupil achievement. CEP researchers Renata Lemos, Nicholas Bloom, Raffaella Sadun and John Van Reenen have analysed the quality of management in 1,800 schools from a range of developed and developing countries – including the UK and three other European countries, the United States, Canada, Brazil and India.

The survey collected data on how schools used performance monitoring, operations management, target-setting and talent management in day-to-day activities. These were fed into a school management index.

Findings show that management practices are strongly linked to pupil outcomes, and have a greater effect than class size, competition or teaching quality. The quality of school management is related to school ownership, governance and the leadership traits of principals.

Key findings

- Management practices are strongly associated with pupil outcomes such as test scores and CVA (Contextual Value Added performance measurement).
- Uptake of basic managerial practices is fairly limited in schools; the average management scores are considerably lower than in other sectors of the economy.
- Differences in management across countries are more pronounced in education than in other sectors.
- Moving from a school in the bottom quarter to the top quarter of the management quality distribution is associated with an increase in school performance of approximately 15 per cent.
- Autonomous state schools (such as academies) have higher management scores compared to regular state schools and private schools – largely due to better governance and principal leadership.

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Policy relevance and implications

- Investments to improve school management practices should be prioritised, in order to raise school standards. There should be an initial assessment to identify well-performing and under-performing areas of schools' management (eg performance monitoring, target-setting and human resources).
- Giving schools greater autonomy is beneficial, so long as there is a strong monitoring system (good information on performance, a coherent inspection regime, rigorous national exams). Allowing the expansion of autonomous state school networks is also positive.
- In order to reap the benefits of autonomy, it is vital to develop policies that enforce strong accountability of principals to external governing bodies.
- Targeted training interventions to improve leadership skills of school principals and teachers can have major effects in improving school performance.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Researchers at the ESRC Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) analysed the quality of management in 1,800 schools from eight developed and developing countries. The findings show that school management practices are strongly linked to pupil outcomes, and that the quality of management is related to school ownership, governance and the leadership traits of principals.

In brief: Does management matter in schools?
Web: http://cep.lse.ac.uk/_new/publications/abstract.asp?index=4434

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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