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THE FEPG REVIEW

Contents:

FEPG Review Editorial team.

EDITORIAL

We hope you enjoyed a lovely Christmas, and from all the FEPG's committee Happy new Year!

The Autumn term was an interesting one with the publication of the eagerly awaited Curriculum and Assessment report. On Page 7 of this Newsletter there is an opportunity for you to write a blog regarding your opinion of the report's recommendations. We are devoting our March 23rd zoom meeting to discuss the report with a panel including Tony Breslin, our Chair Brian Hudson and senior colleagues at the NEU. More details soon. Additionally, this year we have the long-awaited White Paper on SEND to look forward to and to respond to in the resulting consultation.

As Fabians it is important we explore further far-reaching solutions for the DFE and the Education ministerial team to consider. The excellent articles we are publishing in our third edition do just that.

Mary Bousted introduces the recent Teaching Commission work on the analysis on the state of the teaching profession and its proposals to improve the professional status of teachers.

Stephen Gorard presents a summary of findings and their implications from a range of ongoing studies into the link between disadvantage and attainment at school. Stephen looks at how economic disadvantage can be best operationalised in order to explain attainment at school and assess the impact of the Pupil Premium policy in England.

Christina Preston and Stephen Hall with Mike Blamires explain the MESHGuide initiative that provides a different way to present educational research, designed to reach a wider audience including practising classroom teachers.

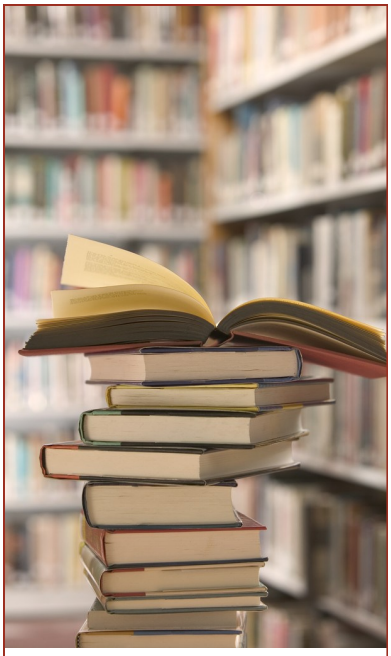
We are delighted, too, to include six book reviews in this edition from: Chris Weavers, Tianqing Bai, Helen Hendry, Megan Crawford, and Ian Davies. We also include our bi-annual newsletter.

We hope you enjoy our third edition of the Fabian Education Policy Group Review.

Chris Harris, Editor.

IN THIS EDITION:

- Inspiring Keynote speakers at our monthly Zoom Meetings.
- Articles by: Mary Bousted, Stephen Gorard ,Christina Preston and Stephen Hall.
- Reviews by: Chris Weavers, Tianquing Bai, Helen Hendry, Megan Crawford and Ian Davies.
- Our new website.



FEPG NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2026

Welcome colleagues to this New Year 2026 Fabian Education Policy Group newsletter. This edition gathers news and information that we are sure you will find interesting and useful.

As well as our round up of recent activities, the 'dates for your diary' and highlights section give a flavour of exciting events that are coming up in 2026.
This newsletter also contains our regular reminders about how you can share your ideas- whether it's writing a short essay or a blog piece or producing something longer for our new Fabian Education Policy Group Review publication. We really do want to hear from you and can provide a platform for your work.

Here's hoping you had a great Christmas and are looking forward to the New Year.

Why is there a teacher supply crisis and what can be done about it? – Mary Bousted.

Honorary Professor at UCL Institute of Education, London, and a fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching, an education consultant and commentator. Mary was the joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, the largest education union in Europe and third largest union in the TUC with over half a million members.

THE ROUND-UP FROM SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER

We held Zoom meetings in September, October and November.

In September **Dame Mary Bousted** chair of the Teaching Commission joined us to talk about the teaching supply crisis.

Mary said that in 2022, after Covid, she had published her book 'Support Not Surveillance' which addressed the problem of teacher-supply, but it was not widely read. As a result the NEU, supported by the Institute of Education and others setup the Teaching Commission to examine the problem. The Commission, composed of many policy makers, teachers and leaders, came up with many good ideas although some were not do-able.

Why is there crisis? 80% of teachers say they like the job, so why is there such a big rate of attrition? Large numbers of teachers leave within three years of entering the profession. The Commission concluded that current policies are failing to support teachers and are responsible for driving experienced teachers out of the sector.

Many questions related to this understanding were examined in detail e.g: causes of excessive teacher workload, lack of positive working cultures making best use of teachers' professional skills, effects of current accountability system and effects on teachers of growth of child poverty.

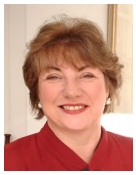
The key recommendation of the Commission is to transform teaching into an attractive and sustainable profession by improving teachers' working lives and increasing the status of the profession. Specifically, schools should adopt more flexible working practices, invest much more in professional development and career-linked training. In addition they should support developments in subject and phase specialisms and new pedagogical approaches.

Addressing disadvantage in school– Stephen Gorard.

In October we welcomed **Stephen Gorard** who spoke to the meeting on the subject of 'addressing disadvantage at school: evidence from a range of studies'

Stephen said he would focus on how household income affects school attainment. There was now a mass of data available from the Department of Work and Pensions linking income to a pupil data base for 2009-2019 - not perfect but offers 600,000 cases of pupil attainment for every year group to be linked with their family income. A question arose: is family income a better predictor of attainment than provision of free school meals (FSM). It appears that FSM was a better indicator at that time and still is.

In 2008 the government legislated for a 'Pupil Premium' - extra money to schools for each pupil on low family income as registered by FSM which was introduced in 2011. This motivated schools to get pupils registered for FSM. One purpose was to cut down clustering of low-attainment pupils, spread them out within a system and reduce divisions within a local district. Money moved with individual pupils as they changed schools, unlike the present-day Academies funding system where schools retain money in similar circumstances. Stephen's full analysis of this issue appears on p8 of this edition.



The Mapping Educational Specialist knowHow (MESH) :Christina Preston with Linda Devlin

In November we welcomed **Christina Preston and Linda Devlin.**

Dr. Preston said that MESH, a charity, provides a different way to present educational research, designed to reach a wider audience including practising classroom teachers. MESHGuides use digital mapping methods to present research results, an important tool for busy educators. There are two main types of maps: (i) Concept Maps, invented in the 1970's ; and (ii) Mind Maps, like tree charts. The Guides provide a knowledge exchange - research summaries and specialised knowledge in low-cost form replacing expensive printed matter. Over the years government departments, policy makers, universities and publishers have used the system as a way of promoting their publications. Currently there are 740,000 users from over 40 countries who have made I million transactions. Busy practitioners clearly find this a very valuable asset.

Linda Devlin introduced the initiative in 2011 at Wolverhampton University. She found that many people want to go further with their professional learning and wanted to get involved in research, but funding for these needs was not well organized. Those involved in teacher training needed to know about educational research and these numbers continue to grow. More people, who want to be good educators, are going in a doctoral direction in their studies and want to both own and share their knowledge.
Dr. Preston said that research summaries are available to everyone. She invited any interested Fabian members to join the project.

The MESHGuide initiative is a member of the UNESCO supported international Teacher Task Force.

FEPG's Meetings in 2026

Monday 26th January: Mick Waters, Marilyn Leask and David Jackson: *Open Schooling: an overview of government supported National Open Schools internationally – principles and purposes*

Monday 23rd February: Ellie Costello

The SEND White Paper

Monday March 23rd:

Reflections on the Curriculum and Assessment Review

Panel Discussion

Presenters:
Tony Breslin on *Citizenship Education*
Brian Hudson on *A Knowledge-rich Approach*
Matija Tomanovic-*NEU perspectives.*

Monday April 27th: Sinéad McBrearty: *Wellbeing and the Ofsted framework*

(Details of the following meetings will be announced soon)

Monday May 18th: 10th Anniversary of FEPG

Monday 22nd June:

Monday 6th July: AGM

Monday 29th September:

Monday 20th October:

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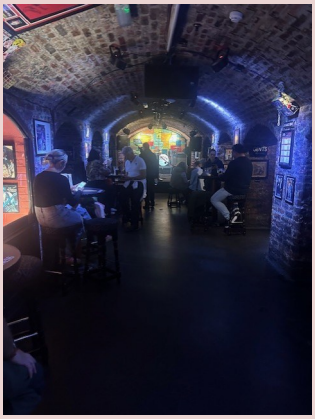
Monday 24th November: Sally Thomas Senior Policy advisor NEU.

House Of Commons: Tuesday 17th November- House of Commons seminar.

Pictures From The Labour Party Conference.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROMOTION

We continue to post promotional material for our seminars and zoom meetings on X. However, like many progressive groups we are mindful of the way this social media company is promoting values that are at odds with our core principles.

We have therefore set up a Bluesky social media account where we are migrating posts apart from essential information. Our handles are detailed on the back page of the review.

During 2026 we will develop an Instagram account.

THE LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE 2025

The Labour Party conference on Merseyside in September was as busy as usual with its keynote speeches and composite discussions in the main hall and its vibrant adjacent fringe events and exhibition hall. Political lobbyists, MP's and journalists scurry around vying for attention and coverage with the phalanx of broadcast media that have stands in the exhibition area. News media specifically line the corridor adjacent to the Mersey. The ACC complex is awesome.

Outside the complex, pop-up hospitality areas and food outlets jostle for custom with the large hotels that form part of the complex and provide participants with ample opportunity to mingle and network spilling out onto the concourse and the banks of the Mersey.

Through security at the gates, you are met with a friendly but vociferous series of campaigners on a whole range of progressive causes who thrust pamphlets and flyers to you as you walk through-some using megaphones to attract your interest.

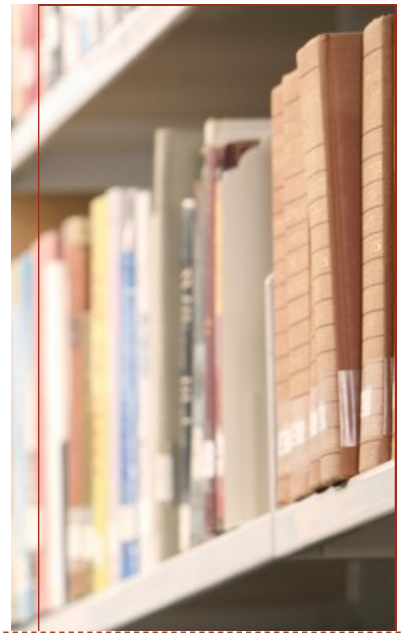
Albert Dock and the various museums pay host to further fringe events. At night small events are hosted by clubs like the world-famous Cavern (pictured) where Bridget Phillipson presented on 'Building a bright future for Children and Young people' in 2024. Further afield again in this vibrant and culturally exciting city the Fabians curated their Festival of Ideas in the Bluecoat building. I am not being biased but this event was fantastic with a plethora of ideas and engaging speakers culminating in an interactive and 'just in time' reflections on Keir Starmer's keynote address.

2026 in Liverpool– Yes please!

OUR NEXT HOUSE OF COMMONS SEMINAR

Our next House of Commons seminar is set for later in the year on Tuesday 17th November, 2026. It promises to be a very interesting evening with key guest speakers and excellent opportunities for discussion where participants can raise questions from the floor.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REVIEW: AN OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE A RESPONSE TO IT



The Curriculum and Assessment Review has been published, and we need your reflections on it for our blogsite. Please write a broadly 500-word post for inclusion in our upcoming blogsite series on the report. Whatever your take is or what you want to focus on will be great. Please send your blogs by the 20th of March to Chris Harris55@hotmail.co.uk. It will appear here when published.

This will be followed by a FEPG Zoom meeting on Monday 23rd March discussing the report with a panel including our chair, Brian Hudson; Educational author and honorary professor at the IOE, Tony Breslin; Oliver Mawhinney and Matija Tomanovic senior policy and campaigns managers at the NEU.

'The Fabians at the Labour Conference in Liverpool provided a great series of events that complemented the main conference at the ACC Arena– Chris Harris and Valerie Bossman Quarshie.

OUR NEW WEBSITE.

We are changing our website. It will now sit on the Fabian Society site which will give us more traction for our ongoing work. Our thanks to Miles Ward at the Fabians for producing it and General Secretary, Joe Dromey, for supporting the move.

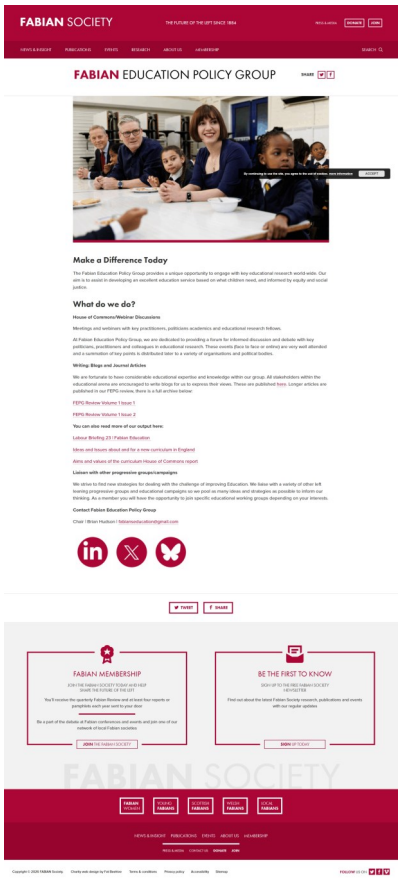
Our old website was very successful in growing our membership and our work-particularly perhaps when Labour was in opposition. It is lovely to move it when we received our best analytics ever in November 2025.

Some of the materials on our old website will migrate to google docs and social media but our main pitch and content will appear on the Fabian site. You can find our FEPG Review, important documents and research we have undertaken for the Labour Party and progressive causes and links to our X, Bluesky, and LinkedIn pages.

You can find our new website at:

Fabian Education Policy Group | Fabian Society

In with the new!



Out with the old (but with great memories!)

The state of the teaching profession and proposals to improve the professional status of teachers.

Mary Bousted is Chair of the Teaching Commission.

At the launch in the House of Lords of its report, 'Shaping the Future of Education' Report - Teaching Commission I presented the Teaching Commission's analysis on the state of the teaching profession and its proposals to improve the professional status of teachers.

The report concludes that teaching is a 'weakened workforce', drained by poor retention at every stage from early career, through to mid-career and leadership. Nearly ten per cent of teachers of working age left teaching in 2023, nine percent of which were of working age – the highest rate since this data were collected.

It now takes ten newly qualified teachers to replace every seven who leave the profession early. As experienced teachers leave the profession earlier in their careers, the pressure on early career teachers grows because they do not get enough timely support from mentors and from more experienced teachers who, if they remain in the profession are overworked and time poor, and if they have left, are unavailable.

Teaching is not immune from the inequalities in our society. Women in their thirties are the largest group, in absolute numbers, of leavers – because women, as primary carers, find the pressures of full-time teaching, combined with the lack of available options for part time and flexible work, to be too great. One young woman said to us: '*I never would want to put my kids before my pupils – but I couldn't work like I do now and put my kids last either.*'

But neither is teaching benefitting from the diversity of candidates who could bring so much to education. Black and Global Majority heritage teachers face discrimination at every stage of their career – from disproportionate rejections at initial teacher training, to reduced chances for employment and promotion. Thirty seven percent of the pupil population is from Black and Global Majority backgrounds – but only ten percent of teachers identified as such.

The causes of teacher flight from the profession are examined in the Commission's report. Central to its analysis is the concept of workload intensity. This is measured by three factors – the pace of the work done, the level of professional agency available to the worker and the suitability of the accountability measures by which work quality is judged.

Too many teachers work at high pace, with low professional agency and highly inappropriate accountability measures. This is a toxic combination perhaps best illustrated by the finding that only 22% of teachers and leaders felt that they had sufficient control over their working lives.

Teacher supply is, the Commission argued, a social justice issue because the students who most need experienced, well qualified teachers are the least likely to get them. Schools with the highest percentage of pupil premium students are the most likely to suffer from high teacher turnover, over-use of cover teachers, teachers

In eighteen sessions of witness evidence the Commissioners heard evidence from experts in pupil behaviour, the learners' experiences of learning, SEND teachers and leaders as learners, schools as the fourth emergency service, education funding and school accountability.

The teacher and leader members of the Commission, working alongside policy and research professionals brought the reality of the challenges facing teachers and leaders into strong contact with the research evidence in a way that is highly illuminating and powerful. The report is the most comprehensive, most detailed source of evidence of the state of the profession available.

Teachers and leaders are going through a period of profound change in their professional practice. The new Ofsted inspection framework is being rolled out in schools - it is a very clear departure from the previous framework moving away from a focus on the curriculum just as the proposals for the revised national curriculum have been published along with the government's response. In addition the white paper on special educational needs provision is keenly awaited which will lay the ground for wider inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools.

A strong education profession is the rock on which the success or otherwise of these important reforms will be built. A weakened workforce will result in these reforms being implemented in ways which focus on compliance (getting it done) rather than success (making it happen in ways which ensure lasting and positive impact),

The Teaching Commission recommendations are aimed at two key audiences. One is the government which must do more to secure better funding and working conditions, and more appropriate and effective, accountability measures by which education quality can be judged.

But equal in importance are the Commission's recommendations to the profession itself. In particular to school leaders: How can they create the conditions in their schools whereby teachers' professional competence can be valued, their judgement respected, their professional opinions sought and their work satisfaction increased?

These are serious questions. They are not asked enough. The Commission did not shy away from this enquiry, nor from the far reaching recommendations to secure better working lives for teachers, better career retention in the profession, and much improved teacher supply – particularly to the pupils who most need the most qualified and most experienced teachers if they are to overcome the disadvantages they encounter in their lives outside their school gates.

The Teaching Commission's has now started its next enquiry into the necessary conditions for the successful implementation of the revised national curriculum. Updates on its work will be found at

https://teachingcommission.co.uk/

Evidence on addressing disadvantage at school

Stephen Gorard

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Abstract

This paper is a summary of findings and their implications from a range of ongoing studies into the link between disadvantage and attainment at school. The paper looks at how economic disadvantage can be best operationalised in order to explain attainment at school, and assess the impact of the Pupil Premium policy in England. More details on the background, methods, and results can be found in Gorard et al. (2022), Gorard (2023), and Gorard and Siddiqui (2025). Examples used here are from Key Stage 1 (KS1), KS2 or KS4, but we have published results for all KS elsewhere.

The poverty gap and segregation

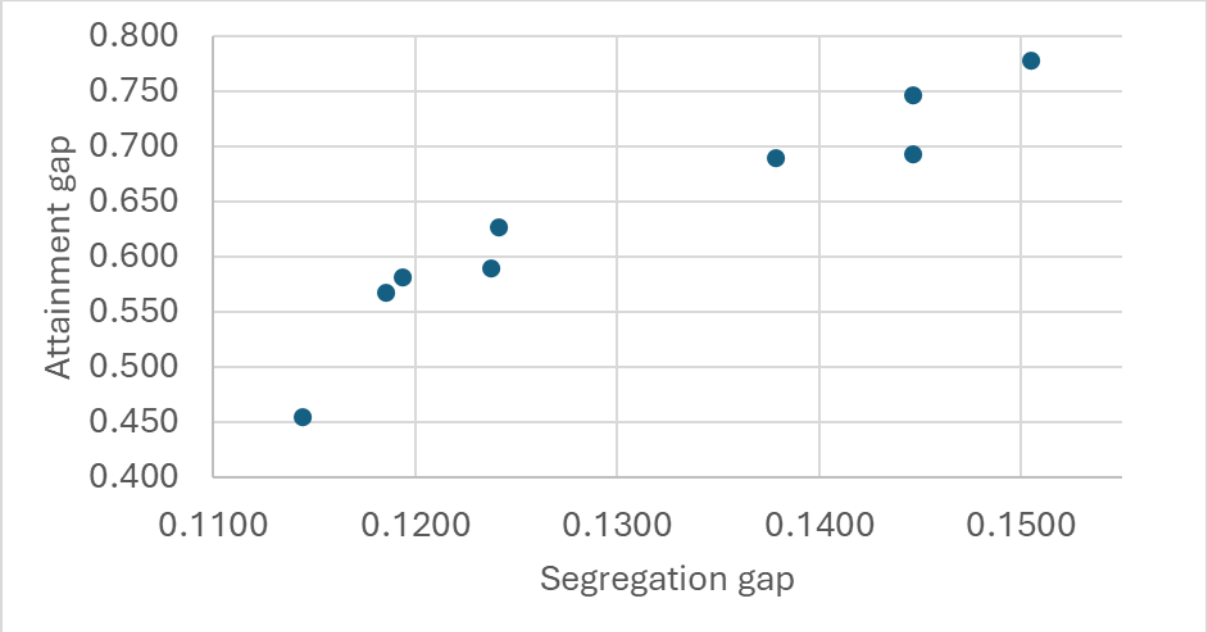
On average, socio-economically less advantaged students in any school system have lower attainment outcomes at school, and poorer opportunities for continued education once they have left school (Cooper and Stewart 2021). On average (and only on average), disadvantaged pupils can present the schools they attend with greater challenges to successful teaching. This may be due to a variety of factors including health, learning difficulties, having other priorities, and having fewer relevant resources at home. This can then lead to an attainment and opportunity gap with their peers based on relative poverty and other indicators of disadvantage.

Less advantaged students also tend to be clustered together in specific schools or types of schools (socio-economic segregation). Schools with high levels of disadvantage then tend to have lower attainment outcomes. These differences in outcomes are often mistaken by policy-makers and other commentators for differences in school or teacher quality, and as showing that different types of school are more or less effective than each other. There is little or no evidence for such claims (Gorard and Siddiqui 2019). Diversity of schooling makes no clear difference to differential attainment, but it does tend to segregate students by their background characteristics. Selection segregates students by poverty, faith-based schools segregate by ethnicity, and so on.

This kind of clustering, of students with indicators of potential disadvantage, is linked to many undesirable outcomes. It is associated with higher degrees of social reproduction (Reichelt et al. 2019), worse behaviour (Papachristou et al. 2021), lower aspirations (Horgan 2007), decreased trust in people and public institutions (Molina and Lamb 2021), and reduced national and regional social and ethnic cohesion (Hewstone et al. 2018).

There is also a strong link between the segregation of pupils by poverty and the poverty attainment gap. This link appears over time and place. Figure 1 shows a cross-plot for the Economic Areas of England from the 2014 KS2 cohort, as an example. The figures for segregation and the poverty attainment gap at regional level correlate with R=+0.95. Clearly, areas with less segregation have correspondingly low attainment gaps between the long-term poor and the rest, and *vice versa*.

Figure 1 - Scatterplot of segregation (y axis) by attainment gap (x axis) for Economic Areas



Pupil Premium policy

The Pupil Premium policy in England, implemented in 2011, tried to address both segregation and the attainment gap. It provided additional funding to schools in proportion to the number of disadvantaged students that they took. Disadvantage was largely defined in terms of eligibility for free school meals (FSM). The funding was significant, and offered an incentive to schools to admit students who might be harder to teach, on average, so reducing segregation. And it gave schools the funds necessary to provide additional programmes to help those students who were harder to teach, so addressing the poverty attainment gap.

However, it is difficult to evaluate whether the policy has been effective in either way, because using FSM to define disadvantage has several problems. Some pupils who might be eligible are not registered for FSM (Campbell and Obolenskaya 2021). It is also unable to distinguish between families with no earned income and others, or those who have been poor for a long time and others. Governments have made this worse by not using current FSM eligibility but instead whether a child comes from a family that has been officially poor over the past six years (EverFSM6).

The biggest problem is that the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM at any time depends on the economy (and a range of other factors), meaning that some pupils are only temporarily eligible. There is a clear gradient of scores linked to the number of years a student has been known to be poor/FSM-eligible by the end of KS4 (Table 1). The students facing the longest-term disadvantage tend to have the worst attainment scores, by some margin. They have lower points scores, and they even have worse value-added progress scores (which are meant to be independent of raw-score attainment). So, in years when more pupils become temporarily FSM eligible because of an economic decline or a change in policy, the apparent attainment gap between FSM-eligible pupils and the rest (the official attainment gap) will tend to reduce, because these short term disadvantaged pupils have higher average attainment than the core group of long-term disadvantaged pupils. If this factor is not taken into account, changes in the apparent attainment gap due to economic events or changes in the law will be mistakenly attributed to the work of schools, as has been done by DfE and others.

Table 1 – Outcome measures by length of FSM-eligibility, all years 2006-2019 combined

Years FSM-eligible by KS4	KS4 Capped points z-score	KS4 value-added Residual
0 years	+0.16	+0.10
1 years	-0.43	-0.29
2 years	-0.54	-0.37
3 years	-0.63	-0.43
4 years	-0.70	-0.48

N = 7,895,115

In our work we overcame this problem by comparing the attainment of those students in England who are permanently eligible for free school meals throughout their time at school, with everyone else at school. This creates two stable groups, and the disadvantaged group would clearly have been disadvantaged in any era under any economic or policy circumstances. Some of the results of this analysis are shown below.

Disadvantage and household income

In late 2025, HM Treasury (2005, p.235) revealed that the UK government planned to use low household income to define educational disadvantage, and so determine which students attracted extra funding for their schools. In many ways, the use of a continuous variable like income sounds attractive, and could solve the issues with FSM. But would it work?

We were asked by the Department for Education (DfE) in England to look at a new dataset – the Parent Pupil Matching Dataset (PPMD), and to use it substantively to compare with our earlier findings that the Pupil Premium policy had been associated with a marked decline in socio-economic segregation between schools and, to a lesser extent, in the poverty attainment gap.

PPMD links household income provided by DWP to the National Pupil Database (NPD) and so to

pupils in the Key Stage 2 (KS2, 11 year olds) and KS4 (16 year old) cohorts from 2009 to 2021. This is the first time that such a dataset has been made available by the DfE for research, and so the project involved considerable preliminary consideration and cleaning. The years after 2019 were not used because school examinations were cancelled or partial because of Covid.

There are around 600,000 cases in each cohort in the PPMD, with about 30,000 NPD cases per year not linked to household income. The totals represent the number of any records, and so the maximum number of cases possible for any measure of income. As soon as any restriction is placed on cases, such as that they have complete information about family structure, the number of cases drops. For example, fewer than 60% of cases have a known family structure (number of adults and children) and a known income for all adults in the household. The proportion of complete cases tends to decline with each cohort.

PPMD contains several income measures, but many have missing values. Earned income is the most relevant to the allocation of benefits like FSM and so Pupil Premium. In order to combine earned incomes for households, it is key to have information about family structure – most notably the link between adults 1 and 2. Some individuals are listed as coming from a known one-parent family. Some cases with adult 1 income not from a one-parent family also have an adult 2 income. Others appear to be not one-parent families but with only one adult with known income. Therefore, the main disadvantage of using all cases is that it involves assuming that where no adult 2 is linked then there is no adult 2 or that adult 2 has no income. And where adult 2 is linked but the income is not known then that is treated as zero income. This is likely to underestimate the income for a subset of families. While these and other issues complicate the use of income for research purposes, they surely make it impossible to use for real-life policy until the data improves.

We created 20 equal sized earned income bands, for each year group, so that the 5% lowest income households were in band 1. As would be expected, FSM-eligible pupils were more likely to be found in low-income bands. However, there are also a few FSM-eligible cases even up to band 20. Using PPMD data alone, it is not clear why this is.

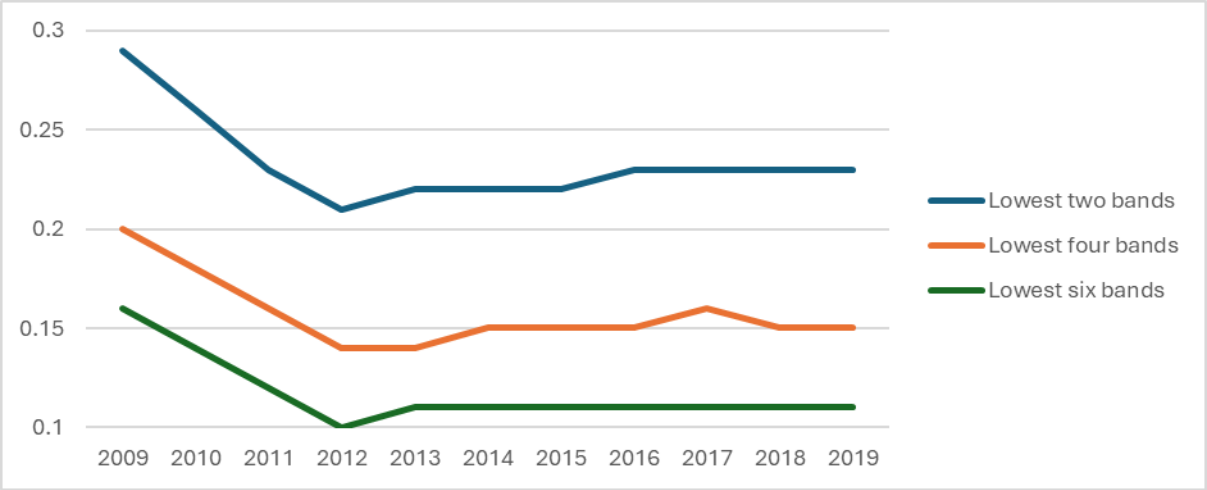
Segregation

Based on a fair comparison of two stable groups of those always eligible for FSM and the rest, there is evidence that the policy has made a difference to school intake segregation (Figure 2). For as long as data is available, and until 2010, SES segregation remained stable for entry to primary school. Once Pupil Premium funding came into play, segregation dropped to its lowest level. This would be what would be expected if the Pupil Premium funding, introduced in 2011, was linked to a change in the "attractiveness" of disadvantaged pupils to schools, when new school places are being allocated.

Figure 2 - Change in "effect" size for the gap between FSM-eligible pupils and the rest, FSM Segregation in Year 1, 2006-2019

Using KS2 to illustrate our analyses with income bands, Figure 3 shows that the clustering of the poorest children within schools dropped dramatically from 2009 to 2012, and then remained low until at least 2019 (Figure 3). This could have been due to Pupil Premium funding making disadvantaged pupils more attractive to schools after 2010, but the drop seems to predate that. This is not like the drop in segregation noted for long-term disadvantaged pupils (above) which occurred from 2011 onwards but not before.

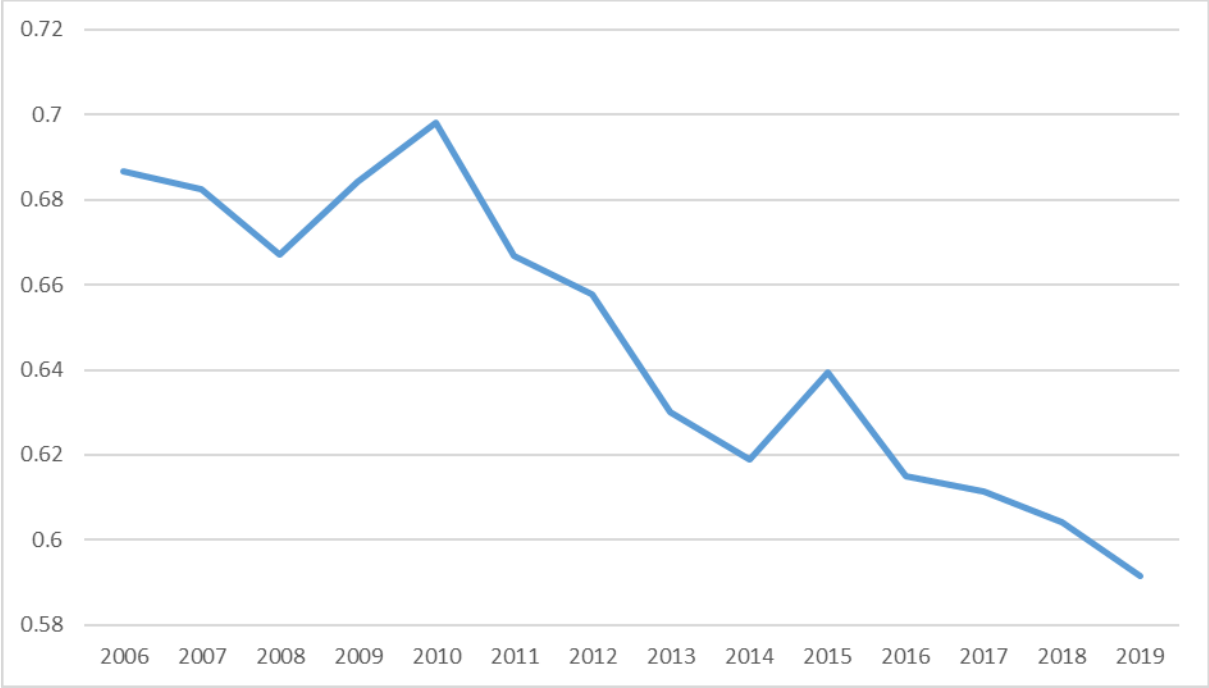
Figure 3 - National segregation by poverty, KS2, 2009-2019



Attainment gap

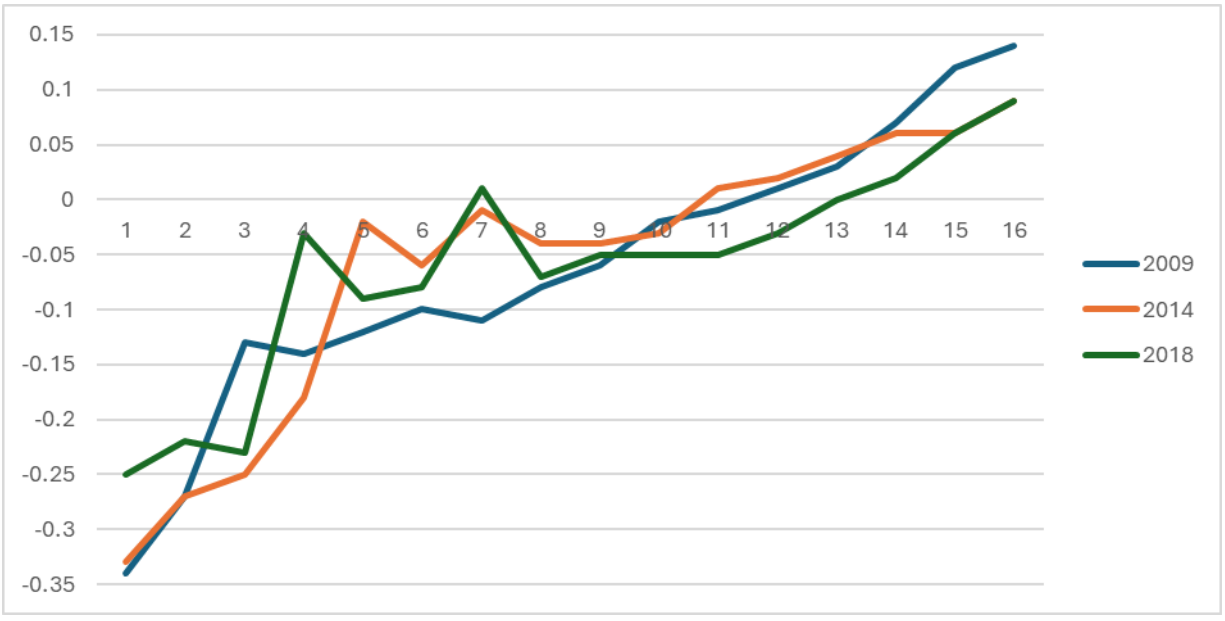
Figure 4 shows the Key Stage 1 attainment gap over time (for pupils who would be disadvantaged for all six years while at primary school). It is very similar to changes in the segregation gap in primary schools (above). KS1 assessments in literacy and maths took place at the end of Year 2 in primary schools, up to 2019. The figures show a period of slight volatility from 2006, with no overall pattern until 2010. There was a widespread boycott of KS assessments by teachers in 2010, and so the result (a sudden apparent growth in the gap) for this year may not be directly comparable with others. Nevertheless, after 2010 there is a substantial decline in the attainment gap, with the gap at its lowest ever level in 2019. As with the pattern for segregation, this is consistent with the era of Pupil Premium funding, and we have failed to explain it in terms of economic or other changes over the same period (Gorard et al. 2022) This improvement in equity occurred at the same time as an improvement in KS1 scores for both groups, which is important. It represents levelling up, not down.

Figure 4 - Change in "effect" size for the gap between long-term disadvantaged pupils and the rest, KS1 Points, 2006-2019



Using KS4 for illustration of the link between attainment income bands, Figure 2 shows no gain since 2009 for pupils from higher income households. However, attainment for the lowest income households increased in 2014, and again in 2018, compared to 2009. The gains were largest for income bands 4 to 7 – with very low but not zero earned income. This is what the Pupil Premium policy was intended to achieve.

Figure 2 – KS4 attainment by equal size income bands, 2009, 2014, 2018



Discussion

The use of income data is fascinating for research, and earned income bands appear to be better predictors of school attainment than binary FSM-eligibility or not. However, it is far from clear that data on household income is yet clear or complete enough to use as an alternative for real-life policy.

Using income bands, our new research confirms our previous findings that socio-economic segregation between schools has declined since the onset of Pupil Premium funding in a way that has not happened before. Poverty segregation between schools can be further reduced or held in check by not reinforcing residential housing segregation through allocating over-subscribed school places on the basis of where people live. It can be minimised by not encouraging school diversity, and moving away from intake selection, whether by ability or faith. An even distribution of disadvantage between schools makes the whole school system fairer, and allows individual schools to focus their energy where it is most needed. There is also worldwide evidence that average attainment is higher in the most mixed school systems.

Our new analysis also shows that the poverty attainment gap, assessed by comparing two stable groups, has declined, though more slowly and erratically than segregation. Shifting the attainment gap is harder than balancing school intakes. It requires there to be robust evidence on what will work, and for schools to understand and use that evidence correctly. There is increasing evidence on school, family and classroom interventions/resources that can help reduce the attainment gap (Gorard et al. 2017). But it seems that schools are still too often using funding on programmes and activities that are meant to improve attainment but are either known not to do so, or for which there is currently no clear evidence. Given scarce and limited educational resources, these are approaches that money should not be spent on at present, while there are more evidence-led approaches available.

Schools in England are increasingly encouraged to ensure that the programmes they invest funding in are "backed by evidence". We need more robust evidence, and much more and better research on how to get that evidence into use most appropriately (Gorard and Chen 2025).

Acknowledgements

The work with income data is ongoing, in cooperation with my colleague Nadia Siddiqui.

The work contains statistical data from ONS, which is Crown Copyright. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets, which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

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- **Keeping professional knowledge independent of changing governments**

Christina Preston retired Professor of Education Innovation and

Stephen Hall, University Of Staffordshire with Mike Blamires

MESH Initiative: Research to Practice in Education

The independent MESH initiative (Mapping Educational Specialist knowHow) MeshGuides was established by international educators following the Tory government's unapologetic closures of websites like the TDA (Training and Development agency) and BECTA (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) in 2010 that offered knowledge and research developed by educators for educators. As a result, the educators who had developed these websites established a charity to continue this work, focusing on creating research summaries to help educators deal with the sheer volume of available academic articles.

The charity is called Education Futures Collaboration (EFC). The charity oversees the MESH initiative (Mapping Educational Specialist knowHow) as an independent charity (gaining status in 2014). The charity is responding to a recognized global crisis in ensuring that teaching practice is informed by evidence and research.

The creation of MESH was driven by a convergence of long-standing systemic failures in knowledge management within the education sector, coupled with specific political and policy changes in the United Kingdom and global mandates set by international organizations.

A global, peer-reviewed Knowledge Exchange platform

Today, MESH is a global, peer-reviewed Knowledge Exchange platform that connects research with educational practice. MESHGuides, its key output, are utilized by a wide global network of educators, providing a sustainable, low-cost solution to help teachers apply the latest evidence in classrooms and therefore are our attempt to address some of the following systemic failures and international policy mandates:

• Disengagement from Core Issues: Government policies across many countries often focused on the structural elements of schooling rather than the more complex dynamics of learning and teaching. This disengagement from problems of teaching instruction was termed a "fundamental malady".

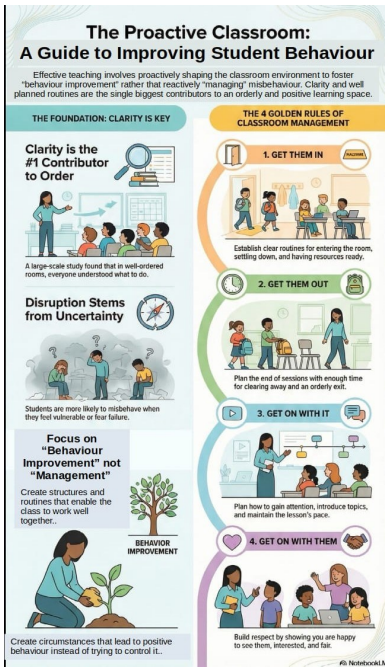
- Lack of Knowledge Management (KM): The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) consistently highlighted that the education sector was "far from being a knowledge industry", noting that its KM standards and practices lagged significantly behind other sectors like medicine or engineering.

- The Global Challenge: International reports (such as the OECD's TALIS and the McKinsey Reports) indicated that improving the quality of educators is more important than increasing financial investment. The OECD identified the challenge as creating "knowledge rich, evidence-based education systems".

- UNESCO Priorities: The goal of improving education systems worldwide is a UNESCO priority. MESH directly aligns with and addresses the challenges posed by UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4c, which calls for substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers and ensuring high-quality teaching globally by 2030.

- Information Overload and Inaccessibility: Despite considerable investment, teachers struggled to access the professional knowledge base. Practitioners face a "surfeit of data", and the sheer volume of research makes it nearly impossible to keep up. Research often resides behind academic journal paywalls, restricting access to university staff and preventing teachers from having their practice informed by research.

- Need for Synthesis: The volume of research meant there was a critical issue of knowledge management, lacking the "synthesis challenge" envisioned decades earlier (Stenhouse, 1975.)



The Conceptual Inspiration and Modelling of MESHGuides

The specific nature of the MESHGuide initiative—using "translational research" to create summaries—was inspired by models outside of education.

• **Translational Research**: MESH pioneers the concept of "Translational Research (TR)" in education, which is a systematic approach to turn research knowledge into practical applications.

• **Inspiration from Medicine**: The approach was inspired by successful inroads made by other professions, particularly medicine, in making research accessible to practitioners. MESH took inspiration from initiatives like the Cochrane Collaboration and the Map of Medicine (used by UK NHS professionals).

• **Addressing Practitioner Needs**: The founders recognized the need for a collaborative, open-access, and sustainable system. They set out to find a low-cost, sustainable solution, using existing resources already in the education system, to provide quality-assured, research-informed professional knowledge summaries.

The resulting EFC/MESH initiative, which is still led by founding members Professors Marilyn Leask and Sarah Younie, aims to provide an innovative, sustainable, and internationally coordinated approach to mobilizing and translating research knowledge to support evidence-based teaching. Our MESHGuides 'research into practice' model is explained very effectively through practitioner Karen Blackmore's MESHCast. where Karen outlines how she uses MESHGuides as a tool to aid learning.

Marilyn and Sarah continue to take leading roles in the publication of books and articles which feature the work of MESH and the impact of MESHGuides and are sought after for keynote speeches and presentations at international and domestic conferences. Both Marilyn and Sarah can be heard explaining the work of MESH and MESHGuides in a conversation with one of our key partners, VoicEd Radio in Canada, when founder and chief catalyst at VoicEd, Stephen Hurley interviewed some of the EFC/MESH trustees and members of the executive committee. The recording can be listened to as one of the range of MESHCasts on the EFC/MESH website.

Working collectively, cooperatively and collaboratively with strategic partners forms an increasingly important part of MESH members' voluntary work. The EFC/MESH initiative has established a diverse range of key global partnerships across intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic institutions, and professional associations to facilitate its **knowledge mobilisation** strategy and ongoing developmental work.

This is characterised, in particular, by MESH being asked to co-lead the **UNESCO Teacher Task Force 2030** Digital Teaching and AI thematic group which brings together educators from all over the world to explore and share how we can use AI to help and support teachers and education in general.

The resulting EFC/MESH initiative, which is still led by founding members Professors Marilyn Leask and Sarah Younie, aims to provide an innovative, sustainable, and internationally coordinated approach to mobilizing and translating research knowledge to support evidence-based teaching.

The future for MESH

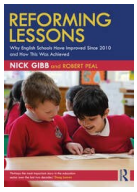
Our intention is to try to influence government policy in this country towards a more community-centric model of education rather than a commercially driven model. We believe that through the introduction of a more cooperative and collaborative approach to education that pushes back against the centralised and competitive model that has resulted in the fractured and dysfunctional system that currently exists, we can put trust, equity and autonomy back into education in this country as a model for other countries to follow.

Ultimately, the overarching **vision** of EFC/MESH is to create **a world of free access to education and learning for teachers** where knowledge about best practice is shared. This vision dictates that decisions about how to most effectively facilitate and support learning for teachers are informed by high-quality, relevant, and up-to-date synthesized research evidence.

Reviews:

***Reforming Lessons. Why English schools have improved since 2010 and how this was achieved*, Nick Gibb and Robert Peal (2026), Routledge, 248 pages, ISBN 9781032875941, p/bk, £18.99**

Reviewed by Chris Weavers chris_weavers@hotmail.com



In *Reforming Lessons*, Nick Gibb and Robert Peal set out a comprehensive defence of the Conservative education reforms introduced in England from 2010 onwards. Combining memoir, policy justification, and strategic advice to future reformers, the book argues that England's recent improvement in international attainment is the result of a decisive break with what the authors characterise as a progressive, child-centred orthodoxy.

Their central claim is that English education was held back not primarily by material conditions but by ideas. In this account, universities, local authorities, quangos, and teacher unions sustained an ideology resistant to evidence and hostile to high standards. The Conservative response, they argue, was to replace this settlement with one built on three pillars: school autonomy through academisation and free schools; high accountability via reformed assessment and inspection; and a pedagogical shift towards knowledge-rich curricula, systematic synthetic phonics, teacher-led instruction, and firm behaviour policies.

The book is clearly structured and purposefully argued. Early chapters diagnose what the authors terms "Peak Progressivism", followed by chapters that justify structural disruption as necessary "creative destruction". Later sections celebrate the emergence of multi-academy trusts as the primary engines of improvement and the growth of a teacher-led reform movement aligned with evidence-based practice. The conclusion leaves little doubt about the authors' intent: the post-2010 settlement should now be entrenched and protected from reversal, particularly by the Labour government elected in 2024.

For Fabian readers, Reforming Lessons is valuable precisely because of this clarity. It provides a candid insight into how Conservative reformers understood both the problems they were trying to solve and the resistance they encountered. Gibb and Peal are explicit about their belief that politics should now step back and allow a self-improving, MAT-led system to continue its work with minimal democratic interference.

However, from a Labour and Fabian perspective, the book raises important concerns. Evidence is treated selectively and often rhetorically. Improvements in international league tables are presented as proof of causation, with little sustained engagement with alternative explanations or with evidence on inequality, exclusions, SEND pressures, teacher workload, or retention. These issues are acknowledged but consistently

framed as secondary challenges rather than as central tests of system success.

Equally problematic is the book's treatment of professionalism and democracy. Teacher autonomy is defined narrowly as the freedom to implement sanctioned practices, rather than as the exercise of professional judgement within diverse contexts. Local democratic accountability is portrayed as an obstacle rather than a value. Disagreement is frequently characterised as ideological obstruction, making it difficult to see how legitimate pluralism or democratic debate about education's purposes might be accommodated within the system Gibb and Peal defend.

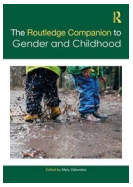
Perhaps most revealing is the book's asymmetrical treatment of ideology. While progressive education is depicted as dogmatic and evidence-blind, the authors' own position is presented as pragmatic and neutral, despite the consistently moralised language of battles, orthodoxy, and enemies. For a Fabian readership committed to evidence-informed policy alongside social justice, participation, and democratic accountability, this claim to post-ideological reform is unconvincing.

Reforming Lessons is therefore best read not as a settled account of "what works", but as a statement of what its authors believe must now be protected. It offers a clear articulation of the Conservative education settlement and, in doing so, provides Labour thinkers with a useful starting point for asking whether improvement, equity, and democratic legitimacy can be more productively held together than this account allows.

Chris Weavers is Head of Campaigns and Communications at NASUWT – The Teachers' Union. He specialises in communications, governance and effective delivery in member-led organisations, and has extensive experience of political campaigning and education policy.

The Routledge Companion to Gender and Childhood. Mary Zaborskis (Ed.). (2025). Routledge, pp. 476, ISBN 978-1-032-55711-3, hbk, £172.50p.

Reviewed by Tianqing Bai (University of Nottingham) Tianqing.Bai@Nottingham.ac.uk. https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0009-0009-5646-0122



The Routledge Companion to Gender and Childhood (2025) brings together thirty-five articles around the role of gender in shaping children's lived experiences. These include the ways in which gender norms have been constructed and manifested across different contexts, and how children exercise agency when they respond to, resist, or challenge these norms. This volume is divided into six sections, covering topics including gendered histories of pathologisation and trauma, trans and queer youth's imagined futures, national projects of citizenship training, material and digital cultures, cultural representations, and adult perspectives on children.

In addition to its thematic explorations, the volume stands out for the richness of its contexts, offering concrete illustrations of gender and childhood across various temporal and spatial dimensions. Temporally, it includes

analysing visual or textual materials from historical files or newspapers, as well as modern technological platforms such as YouTube. Spatially, the collection encompasses research from both the Global North and South, featuring countries such as New Zealand, Japan, China, Mauritius, Turkey, the Philippines, among others.

This diversity in contexts is particularly valuable in responding to the discussions of children's agency. The new sociology of childhood posits that childhood is socially constructed and that children should be regarded as active agents of change in society (James & Prout, 2015; Corsaro, 2017). However, some scholars (e.g. Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007; Bordonaro, 2012; Sutterlüty & Tisdall, 2019) have challenged this view for portraying children's agency as universally positive and possible, without questioning how it may differ across social and cultural contexts. Consequently, scholarship emphasizes that agency should be understood relationally, and localized within specific socio-cultural settings and shaped through cross-cultural interactions between majority and minority worlds (Edmonds, 2019; Punch, 2016). In this regard, the volume's rich contextual detail provides compelling illustrations of how children's agency emerges, is constrained, or is negotiated under traditional gender norms and processes of pathologization.

Across educational, cultural, and media domains, the collection shows how gender is socially constructed in different contexts. For example, through analysing history textbook (Chapter 15), girls' games and toys (Chapter 20), and girl characters in literature (Chapter 30), one of the most persistent portrayals of girlhood is revealed— 'future wives and mothers. While for boys, local costume featuring superhero(Chapter 22) or aggressive characters in video games (Chapter 23) foreground dominant hypermasculinity. Such representations reinforce a binary framework that shapes children's understanding of appropriate gender behaviour in their everyday lives and activities, as well as their possible roles as agents to reproduce such binaries. Consequently, under the structural influence of heteronormativity, many children are pathologized. For instance, girls whose behaviours were deemed unfeminine could experience psychiatric interventions in Canada between 1890-1930 (Chapter 1). Daughters were concealed as illegal 'black' children to secure the legitimatized personhood of a later son under the one-child policy in China (Chapter 2). Moreover, beyond these historical cases, queer children, including transgender children or intersex children, are often pathologized for their failure to fit into the gender binary, experiencing different types of traumas (Chapter 6, Chapter 8).

Building upon these discussions of gender norms and pathologisation, this volume also explores how children negotiate this structure through various forms of agency. Girls from pastoralist background in Kenya could become political leaders with the support from their mother as role model and school as a place for redefining gender roles (Chapter 19). Latina girls who are portrayed as perpetually troubled could resist the depiction and take pride in their cultural background (Chapter 34). Also, there are examples of children's agency not being asserted, such as the migrant boys in China, despite moving to urban areas where gender equality is more promoted, they still perform the traditional hegemonic masculinity for it defines their worth in the eye of teachers (Chapter 16). And examples when agency could not be asserted under strict structural power, such as the non-gender conforming girls who were admitted to Canadian asylums can only resist the patriarchy to the extent their contexts permitted (Chapter 1). These diverse examples demonstrate that children's agency is never absolute but always negotiated within structural constraints, which vary across cultural and institutional settings.

Finally, the volume could have been more insightful with more inclusion of empirically based studies. Among the thirty-five articles, only six (Chapter 2, Chapter 6, Chapter 16, Chapter 19, Chapter 21, Chapter 32) employ methods such as interviews, observations, or auto-ethnography, while the majority rely on textual or material analysis of children's literature, poetry, textbooks or games and costumes. Although these studies provide valuable cultural insights, they are Sometimes less convincing in illustrating children's lived experiences and agency.

In summary, I highly recommend this volume to scholars interested in exploring children's everyday lives with a gendered perspective. It also serves as a timely call for researchers in other contexts to engage in issues related to gender and childhood with similar approaches and perspectives.

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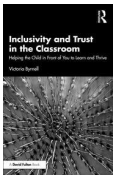
Inclusivity and Trust in the classroom. Helping the child in front of you to learn and thrive. Victoria Byrnell (2025) Routledge, David Fulton, 151 pages, ISBN 978-1-032-73960-1 p/bk, £18.99



Reviewed by Helen Hendry helen.hendry@open.ac.uk orcid.org/0000-0001-9615-1652

Victoria Byrnell has based this book on her longstanding experience as a teacher in both mainstream and specialist schools and her research into 'relational trust' as a significant underpinning driver of effective inclusive education. At the heart of the writing is a strong personal conviction that relationships between staff and pupils, leadership teams and staff are key to changing individuals' experiences of school for the better. Byrnell's passion for a more just system, and her understanding that the most disadvantaged children are at highest risk of underachievement and exclusion are repeating themes. Byrnell agues throughout, that awareness of relational trust and changing how staff and pupils understand one another should shift school approaches at all levels including approaches to planning, behaviour management and leadership. She highlights the importance of adapting teacher responses to the needs of individuals, considering their histories, and advocates for staff self-awareness of their own responses to children and one another which may be based in fear.

The book is essentially structured as a reflective tool, which could be used by school leaders to discuss and shape their own approaches, or equally by a student or class teacher who might also begin to review and question some of the received 'standard practice' witnessed in many schools. Part 1, the first ten chapters, focuses on issues for individual educators and each ends with 'Try these…' bullet point statements for practice that are collated in the appendices to the book. Whilst Part 2, chapters eleven to thirteen take a leadership focus. Some chapters also offer vignettes of practice from Byrnell's experience. The volume draws on a wide variety of professional sources and ideas from thinkers for example including quotes from Martin Luther King and referring to work on leadership from Senge as well as meta-analyses or smaller scale research studies. This mixture of sources makes for an eclectic collection of influences, and to an academic and researcher sometimes analysis of the relative weight and rigour of sources is missing. There is a danger that Byrnell's synthesis could be reduced to 'education light', where the ideas are taken on with little grasp of their grounding in research. That being said, the text is readable, accessible and thought provoking and could be dipped into- with a focus on specific topics or read from beginning to end with equal levels of understanding .

Chapters 1-4 set out challenges to inclusion in terms of lack of time, funding and support and suggests that relationship breakdown or dysfunction in schools impacts on teachers and children. Byrnell disputes the status quo, for example problematising the notion of belonging, by highlighting children's need for belonging, and being authentically accepted rather than conforming. Similarly, she examines the difference between systemically vulnerable children, and practitioners developing their own and their pupils' 'capacity to be vulnerable' as part of building relational connections.

Much of these early chapters resonated with my own professional experience of teaching from Primary to Higher Education and my recent research work on engaging children in reading for pleasure (Cremin et al., 2025) drawing on Ryan and Deci's concepts of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2017) but Byrnell relies heavily on the work of Brené Brown- an Amercican academic in the field of social work. Consideration of empathy is important and Byrnell advocates for trying to see things from a students' perspective as well as a flexible approach to behaviour management and consideration of the impact of shame on pupil behaviour which I found interesting (Chapter 5, Shame Talk).

Despite the interesting and important points throughout the book, I found some elements problematic, or frustratingly under-developed. Chapter 6 (Safety Issues) drew very heavily on another author's tips for teacher presence (Salter, 2016 a, b) and I felt there was some contradiction between the genuine relational emphasis in earlier chapters and these which seemed to focus on a 'performance' of teaching which I found uncomfortable and incongruous. At times I felt as though the arguments were presented as fact with insufficient consideration of counter views and limited detail of studies. I was concerned about one instance of what appear to be some gendered generalisations taken from Brown's work without critical discussion. Chapters 7,8, 9 were short in length so important and valid points e.g. about engaging children and developing gratitude could have been developed further. Chapter 7 provided a limited discussion of play and creativity, including some rather reductive suggestions of how to incorporate these into lessons and none of the earlier vignettes of real practice which I had found illuminating in the earlier chapters. Byrnell offers sound ideas about peer and teacher support in Chapter 10 and I especially liked suggestions for enabling children to ask for help in different ways, the specific focus on children with ADHD was interesting but might have warranted a separate chapter.

Later chapters such as 'Gritty Governance' (Chapter 11) and 'Leadership Learnings' (Chapter 12) broaden out in focus. Chapter 11 reviews some systemic and policy issues including historical perspectives, it argues for changes to national regulating powers, which may be legitimate, but I was unconvinced that the rationale offered was strong. In Leadership Learnings (Chapter 12), Byrnell offers sound points about leadership bullying, compliance and control and argues for an alternative empowering leadership, drawing on previous ideas about vulnerability and relational trust. Leading inclusion (Chapter 13) brings together some good points about providing support for adaptive teaching and a curriculum based on multi-disciplinary knowledge and skills. Byrnell suggests additional training and peer mentoring for practitioners and adaptive behaviour management as well as collaborative leadership involving SENDCOs and middle leaders

The appendices offer a form of provocation for practice and reflection and to be used effectively would need depth of discussion and a whole school approach- with support for teachers and student teachers. For example, Appendix C offers some helpful examples of small changes that could support children's behaviour such as adapting instructions rather than resorting to confrontation. To make this actionable, some further work with teachers beyond the text would be needed on implicit elements such as tone of voice and body language.

There is much that I admire in principle about ideas in this book and the practice for which Byrnell advocates. It has value as a way of troubling some teachers' thinking and offering some alternatives to raise the bar in terms of inclusive practice, although some critical engagement with sources and alternative perspectives is required on the part of the reader to ensure ideas are not engaged with superficially. The combination of ideas with toolkit prompts and examples of practice are real strengths which could enable reflection and discussion about the ways in which approaches to including all children can be more responsive and relational.

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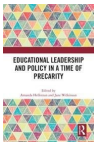
Educational Leadership and Policy in a Time of Precarity

Amanda Heffernan and Jane Wilkinson (Eds)

Routledge (2024), 125pp, ISBN 13:978-1-032-58819-3, p/bk, £38.99



Reviewed by Megan Crawford, megan.crawford@coventry.ac.uk orcid/0000-0001-8422-3372

This book examines the concept of precarity and its impact on both educational leaders and educational policy. The authors base the book around three main themes: supporting and preparing students for a precarious future; the experiences of education workers in precarious employment; and broader notions of precariousness concerning education reforms. This is a useful guide for the reader, although it does not relate to particular sections, just overall themes.

Originating from a special issue of the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, the book brings together seven chapters. This genesis is both a strength and a limitation. It is advantageous in that it presents a multiplicity of perspectives, enriching the discussion. However, it can also be distracting when the text refers to the "Issue" and "papers," which underscores its journal origins. Nonetheless, the breadth of work offers an excellent entry point for readers newly engaging with the concept of precarity, providing numerous avenues for further reading.

Inevitably, in such a selection, there are chapters which will appeal more than others to the academic reader, and many of the authors are based in Australia. The contextual issues are not a problem for me, as the notion of precarity, especially in academic life, goes across boundaries and contexts. For this review, I will just briefly mention

the chapters that I found particularly relevant to myself and my context. Smithers et al on ethical responsibilities of tenured academics supervising non-tenured researchers looks at the global phenomenon of precarity in academic work, and highlights research which focuses on the ethical issues involved. This is now a global issue, and one where the ethical issues need to be studied and addressed. Another issue that is often underdeveloped in leadership work is to do with further education (FE). The book offers a chapter by Entwhistle, which draws upon Bourdieu to suggest lenses for some of the taken-for-granted assumptions when studying FE. He draws upon a case study to examine notions of trust in such settings. Finally, I found Joplin and Harness's embracing vulnerability very relevant to my own research on emotion and leadership. Based on their research in England, they discuss the role of trust and argue for supporting leaders in recognising vulnerability as a potential strength rather than a weakness in today's accountability-driven school cultures.

Overall, this volume offers a useful and diverse exploration of precarity in education, spanning policy, practice, and leadership. While its origins as a journal special issue create some structural inconsistencies, the multiplicity of perspectives enriches the discussion and broadens its applicability. The book is particularly relevant for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand the ethical, relational, and cultural dimensions of precariousness in educational contexts. Its case studies and theoretical lenses invite deeper reflection on the ways precarity can be addressed in navigating the challenges of an uncertain educational landscape.

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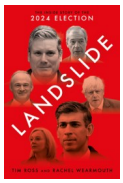
Landslide. The inside story of the 2024 election. Tim Ross and Rachel Wearmouth (2024). Biteback Publishing. Xiv + 364, ISBN 9781785909474. H/bk, £20.



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Following a brief introduction, this book has four main parts. The first section ('the legacies') deals with the build-up to the 2024 UK general election in which all parties had to deal with their own political baggage; the second ('the strategies'), is about election plans; the third ('the campaign') deals with attempts to win power; the fourth ('the election') "tells the dramatic story of the night of unprecedented upheaval … on 4 July. The final chapters (an epilogue including a chapter titled 'government' and 2 appendices showing the results and key dates of the election) reflect on what the outcome means" (p.xiii).

The authors are very well qualified to write this book. Ross has already done something similar following previous elections (Ross 2015, Ross and McTague 2017) and both are experienced journalists.

Books of this type are immediate. In part, they are valuable for the intimate portraits of key people and events. There is contextual material but events in politics unfold very quickly and this is not a book of in-depth historical or philosophical reflections. At points, the 'colour' is perhaps a little too much. We get to learn how Ed Davey felt about bungee jumping and what Morgan McSweeeny's identified as his favourite sandwich. But there is also a good deal of fascinating material based on insider accounts of what happened at key moments and, crucially, that detail is used as the basis from which to explore strategy.

Reflections about strategy are always important but perhaps particularly so in relation to 2024. Labour won 63% of seats with only 34% of the votes cast. It was "officially the most disproportionate result in history. It was almost the most volatile contest on record …That means more voters switched parties this time than at any previous election over the past sixty years" (p.324). It is important to know how and why this happened and Ross and Wearmouth declare that the three key factors that shaped the result were the legacies the parties inherited, the leadership at the top of the campaigns and luck. They claim that Sunak's significant mishaps included the revelations that some well-placed Tories had, prior to the official announcement, bet on the date of the election; that the election was called at the wrong time; and, that his leaving the D-Day commemorative events early was especially damaging. The role of Reform is discussed, particularly regarding the taking of votes from the Tories. Digital communication is explored with interesting points made about Labour's determination to move away from so-called vanity metrics which allowed attention to be paid to actual impact on a target audience as opposed simply and unhelpfully to identifying how many people have seen information distributed by the party. The actions and reactions of party donors are discussed. And, there is discussion about the ways in which the Labour party followed the ideas of the American academic Bernard Ferrari who has suggested that effective communication involves listening for 80% of the time and speaking for 20%.

This is unlikely to be a classic in the UK that could be compared to other high-profile work in other locations (e.g., Plouffe 2009) but it is an important book. There is a need to understand how people win in politics and this book is a well written, detailed account of what happened in 2024 with valuable insights on strategy. It is an educational book.

References:

Ross, T. (2015). *Why the Tories Won. The inside story of the 2015 election*. London, Biteback.

Ross, T. and McTague, T. (2017). *Betting the House. The inside story of the 2017 election*. London, Biteback.

Plouffe, D. (2009). *The Audacity to Win. The inside story and lessons of Barack Obama's historic victory*. New York, Viking.

***On Leadership. Lessons for the 21st Century*. Blair, T. (2024). Hutchinson Heinemann. Xxi + 341, ISBN 9781529151510. H/bk, £25**

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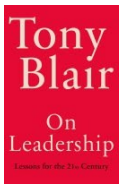

Following an introduction titled 'leadership and the science of governing', there are seven sections ('taking power'; 'delivery'; 'policy lessons'; 'keeping up with a changing world: the 21st century technological revolution'; 'foreign policy'; 'communications in a new media environment'; and, 'you the leader'.

Blair is, of course, very well qualified to write a book about leadership. Ten years as Prime Minister, followed by about 20 years of advising many governments around the world through the Tony Blair Institute, has led to his identification of the three stages of the 'journey': they know nothing and listen; they think they know it all; and for some, with maturity and humility, they listen and learn. "This book is about how, by studying the lessons and science of governing, Leaders can shorten the learning curve, steepen it and get to stage three faster and in better shape" (p.xii).

There is little that is explicit about education and yet his belief that "the attributes of leadership are the same whatever the leadership position" (p.xvii) makes at least parts of this book relevant to every Secretary of State of Education as well as every teacher, Headteacher, NGO chair and so on. Obviously, the sections on foreign policy will not be of immediate relevance to educationalists in their professional roles, but his positions on things like how to run a meeting, negotiate, deal with criticism and so on as well as the heavy emphasis on the use of technology, will be of value to most leaders.

The style of writing is instantly recognizable. There are examples of the Blairite verb-free sentences. He aims to persuade through brief, anecdotally-rich, well phrased sentences and chummy phrasing (e.g., the repeated use of "OK" to signal that he is aware of alternative perspectives but intends to carry us along despite any reservations we may have). In pithy chapters, we are given very many specific examples that are logical, seemingly reasonable, relate to our feelings as well as our more intellectual perspectives and are made to fit into a very well-crafted narrative. Articulate, highly intelligent and emotionally informed, Blair aims to lead us to simple (not simplistic) formulas of, for example, needing to pay attention to the 4Ps: prioritization (i.e., deciding

what to pay attention to), policy (i.e., coming up with the right answer), personnel (i.e., getting the right people in place) and performance management (i.e., getting things done). He is explicit about the need for humility (while being honest about how much he wants to be a leader – interestingly, going so far as to explain so often about the leader's role in leading people to a better world that he declares at one point "Back to Moses again" (p.255)). At the risk of understatement, I feel this sort of allusion risks undermining somewhat his many carefully constructed claims to humility.

The book is not just a follow up to his autobiography (Blair 2015), but I was reminded of Steve Richards' (2019) conclusion that a Prime Minister must be able to educate the public, helping them to understand how they want the world to be seen. Whether Blair can be seen truly as an educator rather than 'just' a highly skilled communicator is a matter of personal opinion. His argument that tactics are important but dynamic future-oriented strategy is vital for delivery seems sensible. The characterization of politics as both a "crude retail business" and also "an intensely intellectual exercise" (p.26), within which partnership is vital, is a constructive challenge to leaders in education. Much of his fundamental position seemed to me to be reminiscent of Crick's (1962) characterization of politics as activity in which differing interests are conciliated, and as such of direct relevance to all in education. Blair characterizes ideology as a form of dogmatism and prefers to focus on ideals and principles, and for policy over politics (i.e., for just getting what is better rather than starting from a politician's perspective). It's hard to disagree with the idea that "if we're debating education, think about it as a parent" (p.26) rather than focusing on what might work in short-term party political terms. He is to my mind persuasive on the need for leaders to avoid outdated slogans that appeal principally to a small group of activists.

And yet, I admit to some irritation with the vacuity of some of his generalizations and more importantly of his characterization of "the plague of ideology" (chapter 16). I sense a good deal of what some would regard as ideological commitment by Blair in general terms but also in relation to specific actions. I wonder if it has really been useful, as he claims, to allow "schools independence from local government control, enabling them to form partnerships with the private sector and giving them much greater freedom to hire and manage staff as they saw fit" (p.70). There is a very clever ideological position being presented in this book.

In general terms, this is a book from which many in education could learn a great deal. Blair is a highly intelligent and skilful strategist and communicator. He was - and is - a winner who did some very good things – and that counts for a very great deal. His ideology-free ideology, emotional rationality and specific actions for the human face of a technology-led delivery require very careful consideration.

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Richards, S. (2019). *The Prime Ministers: Reflections on Leadership from Wilson to May*. London, Atlantic Books.

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