

Schools Research News

December 2007



This monthly newsletter is produced by the Chief Adviser on School Standards Unit at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The research for practitioners section is supported by [The Innovation Unit](#). The newsletter is intended to help keep policy and field staff, practitioners, teacher educators and others with an interest in education up to date with recently published research, forthcoming events, and research for practice news. If you would like to be added to, or removed from, the circulation list please email research.summaries@dcsf.gov.uk. The newsletter can also be viewed online at The Research Informed Practice Site (TRIPS) www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research. TRIPS is sponsored by The Innovation Unit.

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1. Summaries of recently published schools research

[Building Schools For the Future – First annual report](#) (PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP) DCSF Research Report RW032

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Building Schools for the Future (BSF) is the largest single capital investment programme in schools in England in 50 years. It is aimed at rebuilding and renewing all of England's 3,500 state secondary schools where there is a need, in order to ensure improved learning environments which will support current and future generations of young people to achieve their full potential. The first annual evaluation report was based on a literature review, a survey of 1,918 schools and visits to 25 schools.

Key findings from the report:

The literature review showed there was a clear link between the condition of school buildings, the quality of school design, and levels of pupil attainment. Newer and better school buildings contributed to higher levels of attainment, and a positive effect resulted from improving buildings in poor condition.

User participation was found to have a positive impact on school design and build by ensuring that the new or refurbished school meets the needs of all stakeholders, including staff, pupils and the wider community.

Nine out of ten heads surveyed indicated that BSF would lead to improvements in personalised learning and the overall quality of teaching and learning. Three fifths of heads thought that BSF would improve pupil behaviour.

The current condition of the school estate was generally considered by both heads and pupils to be of a poor or an average condition. For example, only one fifth of heads believed that their existing buildings raised pupils' aspirations, and one tenth of pupils indicated that the buildings and grounds lifted their spirits.

Around three-quarters of heads questioned disagreed or strongly disagreed that teaching spaces were flexible (78%), or that working spaces for the school workforce were flexible (74%). Specific issues around flexibility included generically designed classrooms, traditional layout and inappropriate space for practical lessons.

Less than one-quarter of pupils indicated that they felt proud of their school buildings and only one-fifth of pupils agreed that the furniture in their classroom was comfortable.

Learning in the visual arts and the worldviews of young children (University of California, Los Angeles, USA) Article published in Cambridge Journal of Education, volume 37, number 4, December 2007, pages 543-560

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This study looked at the effects of sustained visual arts teaching on nine year olds in disadvantaged areas of two cities in the US. Participating pupils attended an arts centre for lessons over a 20 to 30 week period and took part in a range of activities including drawing, painting and sculptural work. They also participated in English lessons focusing on areas such as vocabulary building and oral language development (e.g. through learning to critique each other's work, and writing poetry to describe each other's art works). Some 103 pupils took part in the arts classes and their outcomes were compared to 79 similar pupils who were not in the programme.

Key findings from the study:

Pupils who took part in the arts programme made significantly higher gains in beliefs about their self efficacy i.e. they were more confident in themselves as learners compared to pupils not involved in the programme. Participating pupils also made significant gains compared to their counterparts in their belief that they could generate many original solutions to respond to education problems.

Those teachers of classes participating in the programme perceived an increase in collegiality among their pupils. They also said that they found it easier to formulate connections with their pupils following their involvement in the programme.

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This inspection report evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of poetry provision in primary and secondary schools. The study was based on data from 86 English subject inspections between September 2006 and July 2007.

Key findings from the study:

Provision for poetry was at least satisfactory in all the schools visited and good or very good in around two thirds. However, it was weaker than the other aspects of English inspected, suggesting that poetry remains an area for development in many of the survey schools.

All pupils in the survey read and wrote poetry and most enjoyed it. However, the quality of provision varied greatly in the schools visited. Teachers' good use of active approaches increased enjoyment and the quality of pupils' responses to poetry.

Many teachers, especially in the primary schools visited, did not know enough about poetry and this was reflected in the limited range of poems studied. Classic poems and poems from other cultures were rarely studied and too many of the poems chosen lacked sufficient challenge. Weaknesses in subject knowledge also reduced the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils on the poetry they had written.

Very few pupils wrote poems in English lessons during their GCSE course. In general, pupils' experience of poetry did not prepare them well for A-level study in English literature.

The lack of focus on poetry in the end-of-key-stage national tests limited the range of poetry covered in the curriculum in Years 6 and 9 in the schools visited.

It was common for pupils to write poetry in imitation of specific genres or particular poems but they had insufficient opportunities to write independently. Planning poetry teaching around the needs of writing also limited the range of poems pupils read.

The best schools worked effectively with poets and encouraged pupils to contribute to competitions, local festivals and school reading groups to extend good quality work. They used poetry successfully across the curriculum.

Effective subject leadership in the schools visited had a significant impact on the quality of pupils' experience of poetry, particularly in the primary schools where many teachers were not English specialists.

Creative Partnerships (CP) is a Government programme, funded by the DCSF and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to enable schools particularly in deprived areas to work in partnership with other professionals including architects, dancers and musicians to develop a curriculum that fosters creativity in schools and the community. This report presented findings from the national evaluation of the first two years of the programme (2002 -2004) and is based on data from 151 schools at the end of the first year of the programme (02/03) and data from 266 schools at the end of the second year (03/04).

Key findings from the evaluation:

Approximately 61,000 pupils were involved in Creative Partnerships activities in 2002/03 and around 83,000 pupils from 374 schools were involved in the programme in 2003/04, including some pupils who had continued in the programme from the first year.

Even though the vast majority of schools taking part in the programme were regarded as facing challenging circumstances, almost all (91%) felt that their pupils already had 'a range of opportunities to express their creativity' prior to involvement in the project. In spite of this the vast majority were very positive about their involvement in CP. After two years of involvement in the programme 45% of schools described the experience as stimulating and exciting and 29% described it as visionary or innovative. Twelve percent of schools described their experience in CP as disappointing or frustrating.

After the first year involvement in the programme 83% of schools agreed that their staff had specific opportunities to express their creativity at work, compared with 75% prior to Creative Partnerships. The majority of schools agreed that CPs had helped staff to: develop their own cultural awareness (58%); identify and develop each young person's talents (82%); and to believe that developing young people's creativity is important (90%).

Participating schools identified a wide range of impacts of the initiative on pupils. They felt that CPs had improved pupil confidence and self-esteem and given them the opportunity to work with 'experts'. The impact on school staff included developing new approaches to teaching creative subjects.

This study looked at music services provision in England. The survey collected data relating to the implementation of the Wider Opportunities Programme designed to provide every primary school child with the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. The survey also collected data relating to specialist instrumental provision at Key Stage 1 and 2, and built on previous surveys undertaken in 1999, 2002 and 2005.

Key findings from the study:

Twenty two percent of Key Stage 2 children were involved in a Wider Opportunities Programme in 2005/06, rising to 32.6% in 2006/07 and a predicted 50.6% in 2007/08.

Five percent of KS1 children were involved in a Wider Participation Programme in 2005/06, rising to 7.7% in 2006/07 and a predicted 12.5% in 2007/08.

Seventy two percent of responding music services reported having whole class instrumental tuition and 40% whole class vocal tuition in 2006/07. These were the most common strategies planned for 2007/08. Thirty five percent of music services indicated that they intended to increase the number of schools participating in the Wider Opportunities Programme in 2007/08, while 30% planned to introduce special projects.

The most important sources of support for implementing Wider Opportunities were government funding (reported by 71% of music services), supportive head teachers and the high profile of music education (51% each).

At KS2, the average percentage of pupils receiving specialist instrumental or vocal tuition in addition to those participating in Wider Opportunities Programmes was 13%. At KS1 this figure was 4.5%.

At KS2 the reported percentage of White British children in receipt of specialist tuition was 72% compared with a national figure of 77%. Children from minority ethnic groups were over represented amongst those receiving tuition.

More girls than boys were receiving specialist instrumental tuition at KS1 and KS2: 57-58% as opposed to 42-43% of boys. This represented a small increase in the number of boys playing, although compared with national data (49% girls, 51% boys) there were still proportionally more girls playing instruments.

The barriers to widening participation most frequently mentioned were the recruitment of or having insufficient staff (68%), the lack of instruments (67%), conflict with other priorities (58%), timetabling difficulties (57%), inadequate accommodation (56%), and the lack of expertise of primary school teachers (55%).

The most common instruments learned were violin (19.2%), acoustic guitar (18.3%), keyboard (85) and flute (7.7%).

The quality of teaching sessions observed by school or LA music services personnel was judged to be at least satisfactory with most sessions being good or better.

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This is an interim report which presents findings at the half-way point of a three year study focusing on understanding the critical relationship between school leadership and improved pupil learning outcomes.

Building on the literature review completed during the first phase of the research, a survey of 740 head teachers and 1775 key staff was carried out in 2006/07. This was supported by case study visits to 20 schools where a survey of pupils was also carried out.

The key findings arising from the survey were:

The majority of heads indicated that they had increased their efforts over the past three years to encourage staff to develop an overall sense of purpose for their work in the school.

Around three quarters of senior and middle leaders indicated that their heads had provided assistance to staff in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning.

The vast majority (92%) of senior and middle leaders indicated that their heads demonstrated high expectations for pupil behaviour.

The leadership of the head played the pivotal role in the way teachers thought about the leadership and management of their teaching and learning practices.

The headteacher was the key factor in encouraging others to lead change and in creating cultures which combined high expectations of staff and students with high levels of care.

The majority of heads and other senior managers reported that they expanded the curriculum beyond the confines of the traditional academic subjects, in order to foster pupil engagement in school.

The creation of new 'distributed' leadership roles and patterns was a consistent feature of effective schools. Survey respondents believed that distributed leadership cultivated a sense of ownership and agency, among staff, and increased staff understanding and responsibility for whole-school issues.

Making a difference in challenging, high-poverty schools: successful principals in the USA, England and Australia (University of Buffalo, SUNY, USA and University of Melbourne, Australia) Article published in: *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, volume 18, number 4, December 2007, pages 361-381

This study examined the characteristics of headteachers and their leadership who made a difference in challenging schools serving disadvantaged communities. The work was based on a literature review and case study visits to four schools each in Australia and the USA and five schools in England.

Key findings from the report:

Successful headteachers of challenging schools were found to have a number of characteristics in common:

- They set and maintained a direction for their schools and exerted a very strong influence on practitioners' willingness to follow their lead.
- They initiated changes in the physical environment, making the school building more attractive and safe by limiting access and screening visitors in order to reduce disruption to teaching and learning. At the same time, heads fostered a school environment that was more open to parents, carers and other professionals.
- They recognised that for staff to improve in teaching and learning, it was necessary to build intellectual and experiential capacity within their schools. Heads maintained a visible presence in classrooms to remind staff of the focus on teaching and learning and modelled where possible specific examples of good pedagogic practice, or provided opportunities for staff to observe experts in given fields.
- They were passionate about making a difference in the lives of children.
- In most cases the heads knowingly assumed leadership of schools in disadvantaged areas and thought creatively and flexibly about use of resources to make a difference in the schools.

[Systematic review of the effectiveness of interventions to promote mental wellbeing in primary schools – report 3](#) (University of Warwick)

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This systematic review of research looked at the effectiveness of school-based programmes that aimed to promote mental wellbeing amongst children in primary education. The review was undertaken to support new National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance in this area and specifically focused on violence and bullying prevention programmes.

Key findings from the review:

Programmes which focused on a combined approach to promoting mental well-being yielded positive impacts on pupils' mental well-being. The programme components included: boosting pupils' social skills (e.g. through peer mentoring), teacher training in managing pupils' behaviour and parenting education. The outcomes from these programmes included: reduced aggression in the playground; reduced pupil reports of violence; and improved long term outcomes including fewer arrests as adults.

Programmes tended to have more effect on boys than girls; more effect on white children than black children; and more effect on high risk pupils than low risk pupils.

[A systematic literature review on how training and professional development activities impact on teaching assistants' classroom practice \(1988-2006\)](#)

(University of Leicester, Newman College, and Bishop Grosseteste University College, TDA EPPI-Centre review group)

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This systematic review looked at the impact of training and professional development on primary and secondary teaching assistants (TAs) and their ability to support pupils' learning and engagement.

Key findings from the review:

Overall, TA training was found to be very patchy and its impact little understood with little co-ordination across programmes.

Where training was available, programmes such as the Specialist Teaching Assistant in the UK were perceived as being effective in developing TAs' confidence and subject knowledge, as well as their instructional skills. However, exactly how such impacts were achieved was not clear.

The report concluded that while training of TAs is important stronger evidence is needed from new studies as to what forms of training work well and why.

New reports from the Primary Review

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The Primary Review www.primaryreview.org.uk/ is an independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. It runs from October 2006 to late 2008. The following reports are among the review's latest publications.

Children's Cognitive Development and Learning (University of Cambridge and University of Oxford)

The report reviewed research on primary age children's cognitive development over the last thirty years. It considered key aspects of child development, thinking and learning in the primary years, and identified areas of consensus about the development of children's learning, thinking and reasoning.

Key findings from the report:

Learning in classrooms can be enhanced by developing metacognitive strategies (self help thinking strategies for solving problems), self-reflection and self control (not going off task) in children. These skills can be taught.

Learning and memory improved when the teacher adopted a conversational style, amplifying and evaluating what the child said. This elaboration helped children to make sense of the sequence of their learning experiences i.e. how they had developed.

There was evidence to suggest that teachers should praise effort rather than performance as children who believed that their intelligence was fixed were less likely to make an effort to learn, whereas those who believed that their intelligence could grow tried harder when faced with a learning challenge.

[Children and their Primary Schools: pupils' voices](#) (University of Sussex and Institute of Education, London)

This report reviewed research on what pupils think of their primary schooling, focusing in particular on their perceptions of the purposes of primary education and their views on learning, teaching, the curriculum and assessment.

Key findings from the report:

Pupils saw the purposes of primary schooling in mainly instrumental terms: to prepare them for eventually getting a job; to prepare them for what is seen as the more serious business of secondary schooling; and to equip them with the life-skills they will need when they leave school. Pupils also viewed primary schools as a place where they could meet their friends and where there may be, as a consequence, more entertainment than at home.

Pupils felt that they must respond to, and obey, the head teacher and teachers without question. However, as children moved through the primary school they began to question, and sometimes challenge, such authority.

In the early years of schooling pupils felt positive about teachers looking at their work because they believed that it would be evaluated sympathetically. However, as children moved through the primary school they became less eager to show teachers their work as they were worried about the consequences of 'getting it wrong'.

Pupils believed that teacher assessment could help teachers to determine whether pupils could remember what they have been taught.

Does the gender of the teacher really matter? Seven to eight year olds' accounts of their interactions with their teachers (University of Glasgow, Roehampton University, London Metropolitan University, Newcastle University)
Article published in Educational Studies, volume 33, number 4, December 2007
pages 397-413

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This study investigated 300 seven to eight year olds' perceptions of their teachers with a particular focus on gender issues.

Key findings from the study:

The majority of pupils (74%), irrespective of gender, felt that their teachers encouraged them and wanted them to work hard, whether men or women. However, boys' responses suggested that their levels of academic engagement may have been slightly higher when taught by men (80%) rather than by women (71%). In comparison, the teacher's gender appeared to have no discernable impact on the responses of girls.

Some 83% of girls and 72% of boys indicated that their teacher treated them fairly. There was no observable difference between male and female teachers in this respect.

Overall, the researchers concluded that there was no evidence of significant difference between pupils' views of male and female teachers.

[Making effective use of curriculum flexibility in primary schools](#) (HMIE Scotland)

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This Scottish inspection report looked at best practice in primary schools' use of flexibility within the curriculum to improve pupils' learning experiences. The report was based on visits to 34 primary schools and seven local authorities. Increasing flexibility in the curriculum is part of the Curriculum for Excellence programme of education reform in Scotland. The programme specifically aims to provide: increased freedom for teachers; greater choice and opportunities for pupils and; a single coherent curriculum for 3 to 18 year olds.

Key findings from the report:

Examples of good practice in the use of flexible time included:

- Improving library services to support pupils' development of independent learning skills, literacy skills and reading for pleasure. This work included: study sessions in public libraries teaching information literacy and research skills; pupils' use of 'homework collections' within public libraries; developing 'junior book groups' in regeneration areas; and using online resources such as Booksp@ce which provide a forum for children's librarians to promote interactive reading and writing.
- Adjusting class timetables to enable each class to work together to put on a well-planned school production every year. All pupils were involved in the production and activities including: script-writing; directing; set-design; performance and reviewing. The project was designed to promote different areas of the curriculum including maths, PE, art and music. Pupils reported that involvement in the project improved their memory skills e.g. through learning lines for a play or dance routines. In addition, some pupils chose to join arts clubs within the community as a result of being in the project.
- Designing a six week cross-curricular history project to enhance pupils' learning through co-ordinating teaching activities across a range of subjects e.g. English language, drama and history. Pupils were fully involved in planning their own learning from the start and worked in mixed ability groups to organise the order, time-scales and approaches to the tasks. The project was found to have a positive impact on pupil attainment particularly in the area of extended writing.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), organised by the OECD, is a survey of educational achievement of 15 year olds in science, maths and reading across 57 countries. This is the third such study. The others were in 2000 and 2003 and this year the emphasis was on Science where as in 2000 it was reading and 2003 the focus was on maths. The England national report was based on data from 4935 pupils from 169 schools.

Key findings from the England report:

In science, seven countries performed significantly better than England, 13 countries performed about the same and 36 countries scored significantly lower than England.

The average score for science in England was higher than the OECD average.

Of the seven countries with higher average scores than England, four were members of OECD (Finland, Canada, Japan and New Zealand) and three were non-OECD (Hong Kong-China, Chinese Taipei and Estonia).

England had a wide spread of attainment compared with other countries.

As well as having the third highest proportion of pupils who achieved top science scores, England had a substantial 'tail' of low achieving pupils. Only two countries had a wider spread than England (New Zealand and Israel).

Pupils in England perceived science as being useful for helping them to understand the world and improving living conditions. However, they also thought that science was less valuable to them personally as individuals than it was to society. However, they did acknowledge that it was important for them to perform well in science.

A sub-sample of pupils were also assessed in maths and reading, but in less depth than in science. The mean score for reading in England was slightly above the OECD average, while the mean score for maths was similar to the OECD average.

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PIRLS is an international study comparing the reading attainment and attitudes of 10 year olds (Yr 5 equivalent) across 41 countries which was conducted in 148 schools in England in 2006 by the National Foundation for Educational Research on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

NFER and the Department have produced a national report for England which is available free of charge from <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/pirls>

Key findings from the study:

Pupils in England achieved significantly above the international mean in PIRLS 2006 but significantly lower than some major European countries, including Italy and Germany.

The three highest achieving countries in PIRLS 2006 were the Russian Federation, Hong Kong and Singapore.

In almost all countries, including England, girls achieved significantly higher mean scores than boys.

As in 2001, there was a wide spread in the scores of the most able and the weakest readers in England. The wide range in performance is a feature of other English-speaking countries and confirms a finding from PIRLS 2001.

The performance of the three highest attaining countries in 2001, (Sweden, the Netherlands and England), was significantly lower in 2006. Of the ten highest achieving countries in 2001, seven saw a fall in 2006 and three saw a rise.

Attitudes to reading of 10-year-old children in England are not as positive as those of children in many other countries, and have declined slightly since 2001. Girls are generally more positive than boys.

There were strong negative associations between social deprivation and performance on PIRLS.

Performance in reading and writing at age 7 was positively associated with PIRLS reading attainment.

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This eight year project reviewed research on cognitive and brain science with the aim of providing new insights into how children learn. The work particularly drew on research from new brain imaging techniques to show how the brain develops and operates at different stages in life and how the brain is involved in acquiring skills such as reading and counting. This project was co-funded by the DCSF.

Key findings from the project:

There are optimal or “sensitive periods” during which particular types of learning are most effective. For sensory stimuli such as speech sounds, and for certain emotional and cognitive experiences such as language exposure, there are relatively tight and early sensitive periods. Other skills, such as vocabulary acquisition, do not pass through tight sensitive periods and can be learned equally well at any time over the lifespan. It is not known yet whether there is an optimal period for learning numerical skills.

Neuro-imaging shows that the adolescent brain is not mature, and that it undergoes extensive structural changes beyond puberty. Adolescence is an extremely important period in terms of emotional development partly due to a surge of hormones in the brain; the still under-developed pre-frontal cortex among teenagers was thought to be one explanation for their unstable behaviour. The researchers described this combination of emotional immaturity and high cognitive potential as “high horsepower, poor steering”.

Biological characteristics associated with specific mathematics impairments have been found. These suggest that in the future it will be possible to develop targeted interventions to tackle deficient neural circuitry underlying dyscalculia, a condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills.

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This study looked at the outcomes of the Department's schools Federations Programme (2003-2007) which was designed to raise standards, find new ways of approaching teaching and learning, promote inclusion and build capacity between schools. Thirty seven federations were established as part of the programme which either involved a group of schools working together with a formal remit or the creation of a single or joint governing body committee across two or more schools. The evaluation was based on a survey of 27 federations, ten case studies and an analysis of KS2 and KS3 national test results and absence rates for federated schools compared to non programme schools.

Key findings from the evaluation:

The Federations Programme was found to provide an overarching structure which promoted shared understanding of the possibilities for restructuring and revising cultural aspects of the education system. The support of different types of federation allowed schools to explore different purposes and degrees of collaboration pertinent to their particular needs and priorities.

Federations generally placed a high premium on respecting and maintaining each school's autonomy. Changes to governance were limited to what was necessary to achieve specific objectives. Chairs of governors were frequently very involved and supportive.

The key factors identified as being important for the success of federations were leadership and collegiality. Federation directors and head teachers, together with chairs of governors in a number of cases, were the key personnel responsible for leadership.

Nine out ten head teachers specified raising standards as their main goal and over half of heads also specified as inclusion as a main focus for their federated school.

Both heads (93%) and chairs of governors (85%) judged the federation to have been somewhat or very successful in raising achievement, although only about a quarter in each case rated it as very successful.

Head teachers judged their federations as being somewhat or very successful in reaching goals relating to inclusion (91%), Gifted and Talented education (76%), improving attitudes towards teaching and learning (82%) and behaviour (68%).

Analysis of national datasets revealed no statistically significant difference between schools in the Federation Programme and non-programme schools with respect to pupil achievement at KS2 and KS3, or in the percentage of pupils gaining 5A* - C. However, project schools recorded a higher percentage of pupils gaining 5A* - G compared to non-programme schools (93.6% compared to 91.3%) which was a statistically significant outcome. Programme schools also showed a significantly higher contextual value added score than comparison schools.

There was no consistent pattern between schools in the Federation Programme and non programme schools with respect to absence data.

[What strategies are effective in encouraging high post 16 participation of ethnic minority groups? A review of international intervention studies](#) (York Post-16 EPPI review team)

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This systematic review of research looked at what strategies are effective in encouraging high post-16 participation of minority ethnic groups. The review was based on the findings from ten evaluations of programmes implemented in the US.

Key findings from the report:

There was strong evidence of effectiveness for monetary incentives (a monthly amount depending on age and the amount increasing with age) given to high achieving pupils from disadvantaged minority ethnic families provided they achieved specified levels in specified subjects.

Post-16 participation rates also improved among minority ethnic groups when pupil performance was systematically monitored with follow up interventions with a guidance counsellor for individuals if problems occurred.

There was some evidence to suggest that work-based learning improved post-16 participation of the target group. Work-based learning provided pupils with the opportunity to learn generic and occupation-specific skills.

Strong evidence was found for the effectiveness of mentoring pupils at risk of dropping out of post-16 education.

[The development and impact of young people's social capital in secondary schools](#) (Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning)

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This study looked at the impact of learning outcomes on pupils' ability to develop social relationships and networks with their peers and other members of the school and wider community on their learning outcomes. The ability to form such relationships is seen as a desirable characteristic of communities more widely as the trust and reciprocity they promote (known as social capital) are seen to promote social cohesion and mitigate disruptive behaviour and crime. The study is based on surveys and interview data from pupils and teachers in two multicultural secondary schools in London.

Key findings from the study:

The study focused on three kinds of social capital: sense of school belonging; access to social support networks; and attitudes towards social diversity. The study found that pupils with one form of social capital also tended to have another.

The greater the extent of pupils' involvement in networks and relationships at school then the more likely it was that they had high self esteem, good self-control, self efficacy and self concept of ability. These attributes and particularly self-concept of ability were positively associated to educational achievement.

White boys from lower socio economic backgrounds were found to have the lowest levels of social capitals.

[Languages in secondary school](#) (CILT, National Centre for Languages, Association for Language Learning and the Independent Schools' Modern Language Association)

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CILT has undertaken an annual survey of languages in secondary schools since 2002. Its 2007 survey was based on a survey of 860 schools from the maintained and independent sectors.

Key findings from the survey:

While most schools reported that fewer than half their pupils were studying a language in Key Stage 4 the decline seen in previous years of the survey seemed to be stabilising. The proportion of pupils studying a language in Year 10 was about the same as in 2006 and in around one quarter of schools there were higher numbers of pupils studying a language in Year 10 than in Year 11. Figures for Year 11 showed a small decline since the 2006 survey.

Only 17% of schools surveyed which offered languages options in Key Stage 4 had set a benchmark for participation in languages. This proportion showed no increase from the 2006 survey. For those schools with the lowest participation rates the percentage having set a benchmark was lower at only 13%.

There was a growth in the use of alternative accreditation to GCSE. In particular the percentage of maintained schools using Asset Languages had risen to 14% from 9% in 2006.

Primary science teacher confidence visited: ten years on (Queens University, Belfast and Aberystwyth University) – Article published in Educational Research, volume 49, number 4, pages 415-430

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This study sponsored by the Wellcome Foundation investigated primary teachers' confidence in teaching science and the impact of science initiatives taking place in UK primary schools. The study included a telephone survey and focus groups with a total of 300 primary teachers from the UK. The findings from the teacher interviews were compared to a similar study of primary teachers' confidence to teach science undertaken ten years ago.

Key findings from the study:

When teachers were invited to indicate the main issues impacting on primary science teaching, half the respondents identified teachers' confidence and ability to teach science as the main issues.

Younger teachers were less likely than older ones to highlight lack of confidence in primary science as a major issue. Between 50% and 60% of teachers in the age range 30s-60s identified lack of confidence as a problem compared to only 23% of teachers in their 20s. There were no appreciable differences in the responses of female and male teachers, teachers who had received or who had not received professional development in science, or teachers of different year groups.

Teachers rated their confidence to teach science higher than for teaching history, geography and ICT but lower than for teaching maths and English. This result indicated that teacher confidence in science teaching relative to other subjects had improved compared to a similar survey undertaken in 1995, in which science was rated the eighth most difficult subject to teach out of 11 subjects.

Teachers' confidence in developing pupils' specific science skills ranged from a high proportion (80%) who were confident in helping pupils to learn how to record data to a lower proportion (66%) who felt confident to help pupils relate science to their everyday lives.

Eighty percent of teachers were confident in developing children's skills in recording data. This figure was 78% for observation, 77% for fair testing, and 67% for interpreting findings and how science affects every day life. This rank order was similar to a survey undertaken in 1995.

In relation to confidence in their own science teaching skills, most teachers (86%) were highly confident about questioning, 77% were confident in practical work, and 44% of teachers were confident in using ICT for science teaching.

Professional development was the most important factor reported by teachers to influence confidence in science teaching.

The key issue resulting from the teacher focus groups was a lack of confidence in relation to participants' own scientific knowledge and the acknowledgement of the need for clear and supportive teaching materials to facilitate delivery of the curriculum.

'Bridging work' and its role in improving progression and continuity: an example from science education ((University of York) Article published in British Educational Research Journal, volume 33, number 6, December 2007 pages 905-926

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This study was funded by AstraZeneca and looked at the use of "bridging work" in science as a way of improving progression and continuity of teaching and learning from Year 6 to Year 7. Pupils' and teachers' views of bridging lessons were collected and data on pupils' performance before and after bridging lessons were compared. 44 primary schools in one LA in the north east of England were involved in the project. The primary schools taught Year 6 pupils the same module on *fizzy drinks*, which gave them an opportunity to learn practical science skills. Then at the start of the next school year nine secondary schools in the same catchment area taught the now Year 7 pupils a related unit on *bread*.

Key findings from the study:

Participating primary teachers were very positive about the bridging work with most agreeing that the teaching strategy provided pupils with a sound foundation in science and good preparation for further study. They particularly liked the use of a whole-class planning poster which pupils contributed to by completing post-it notes.

Eight out of the nine schools' KS3 co-ordinators thought that the bridging work was of value and that pupils enjoyed undertaking it. However, four KS3 co-ordinators noted that pupils' science practical skills were no more advanced than they would have been if they had not participated in the bridging work.

Pupils made very positive comments about their experiences of bridging work. Their most common statements were: that it provided a sense of comfort and familiarity at the start of secondary school; that bridging work improved their confidence in Year 7 as a result of prior experience of practical techniques and prior knowledge gained in the work at primary school; and that the secondary school module built on the primary school module but did not duplicate it.

The overall pattern in pupils' performance on questions about scientific enquiry from testing at the end of Year 6 and the retest in Year 7 was one of regression. However pupils who participated in the bridging units regressed less than pupils not involved in the programme. Analysis of pupils' performance by question type showed that for 'ability to plan scientific investigations' both groups of pupils progressed, but those taking part in the bridging units made more progress in this area than non participants.

Ofsted's annual report draws on evidence from inspection and regulation covering the year September 2006 to August 2007.

Key findings from the report:

Of the maintained schools inspected during the academic year 2006/07, 94% were judged to be at least satisfactory in overall effectiveness and 60% of schools were assessed to either good or outstanding. These figures were similar to those for 2005/06 but the proportion of outstanding schools rose to 14%, from 11% in 2005/06, and the proportion judged inadequate fell from 8% to 6%. This was the case for all types of maintained school except for pupil referral units (PRUs) and special schools, in which there have been slight increases in the proportion judged inadequate.

In the vast majority of schools, pupils' personal development and well-being were at least satisfactory and in most they were good or outstanding.

Teaching and learning was good or outstanding in 61% of all schools, and in 52% of secondary schools. They were satisfactory in 35% of all schools. In the most successful lessons, teachers were enthusiastic and knowledgeable and encouraged pupils to be independent learners and to think for themselves. Information and communication technology was often used well to support this work and to engage pupils. Teachers had high expectations and used assessment information about individuals and groups well to provide challenging tasks for all and so ensure that individual progress was rapid and secure. In weaker lessons, tasks were often mundane, providing little scope for thought provoking work. As a result, behaviour often deteriorated and achievement suffered.

Leadership and management were at least satisfactory in the overwhelming majority of schools, and good or outstanding in 65%. Schools which were assessed to be more effective also tended to have strong leadership and management. This association was strongest in primary schools.

The role of the headteacher was crucial in establishing a shared commitment to improvement. Outstanding leaders shared key responsibilities with senior staff, established high expectations and engaged support for their vision from the staff as a whole.

During 2006/07, 276 schools which had been given a notice to improve in 2005/06 were re-inspected, a year after being placed in the category. On re-inspection, 92% had made sufficient progress to be judged at least satisfactory overall, and 13% of these were then judged to be good schools. A very small minority (5%) of the re-inspected schools continued to require a notice to improve, and 3% were made subject to special measures because they had not made the necessary improvements.

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The TellUS2 was a survey of 111,325 pupils across England asking their views about their local area, education and the five Every Child Matter outcomes.

Key findings from the survey:

On frequency of being bullied at school over the last four weeks, 70% of pupils said they had not been bullied, 17% said they had been bullied a couple of times and 8% had been bullied at least two to three times a week.

Fifty seven percent of pupils indicated that their school dealt with bullying quite to very well. However, 30% thought that their school did not deal with bullying well.

On enjoyment of school, 58% of pupils reported that they enjoyed school at least most of the time, 34% said that they enjoyed it some of the time, and 9% of pupils said they did not enjoy school.

Eighty one percent of pupils indicated that they tried their best at school at least most of the time, 17% said that they sometimes tried their best and 3% never tried their best.

When pupils were asked to indicate what would help them to do better at school, the vast majority (79%) said that making the lessons more interesting or fun would make a difference. Forty percent of pupils also thought that more help from the teacher would make a difference as well as a better behaved class.

When asked about pupil voice in their school, 43% of pupils indicated that they had voted in a school, class or year group election over the last 12 months, and 14% reported having been a member of the school council over the same period.

Pupils were asked how much their school listened to the views of young people. Fifty two percent said that their school listened at least a fair amount to pupil voice, 38% of pupils thought that their school did little to encourage pupil voice and 11% said that they did not know.

[The impact of school fires – a study of the wider economic and social impacts on schools and the local community](#) (NFER)

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This study looked at the impact of school fires on schools and the wider community. The research was based on a literature review and case study visits to four schools which had suffered fires in recent years. The work was commissioned by the Local Government Association and the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association.

Key findings from the study:

Findings from the literature review:

The review found that there were between 1400 and 1800 school fires each year.

Over the ten years ending 2005, the cost of school fires had risen from £49m pounds in 1995 to £67m pounds by 2005, although there was a drop in cost between 2004 and 2005.

A survey in 2006 by the Arson Control Forum of 938 schools found that 43 percent had suffered at least one fire in the last three years.

One in eight schools suffered a serious arson attack and 75% of school fires were the result of a fire being deliberately started.

The education of around 90,000 pupils was disrupted by school fires each year with those from disadvantaged backgrounds being affected the most.

Findings from the case study schools:

School staff had been satisfied with information and guidance they received on fire safety and precautions, but three of the four schools realised they needed a more comprehensive incident recovery plan as this would have saved time and extra work after the fires.

The schools all emphasised the importance of morale building immediately after a serious fire, by acknowledging loss, but also looking to the future and ensuring the whole schools was kept together if a long-term accommodation move was necessary.

The schools reported that adaptability on the part of the pupils and flexibility and good will amongst staff had contributed to dealing effectively with the aftermath of the fires.

Although school staff sought to ensure continuity in teaching and learning, and minimise any impact, the schools had experienced some negative impact on teaching and learning and on assessment outcomes especially for pupils in years 6 and 11, despite having prioritised resources for pupils' in these years.

The emotional impact of the fire on staff, pupils and the local community was one of the main effects of the fire and was still felt years later. In response staff had focused on supporting pupils through work on the fire in lessons and through special PSHE provision.

Exclusion in schools in Northern Ireland: the pupils' voice (St Mary's University College, Belfast and University of Ulster, Northern Ireland) Article published in Research Papers in Education, volume 22, number 4 December 2007 pages 407-424

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The Department of Education in Northern Ireland recently reviewed its procedures for suspending and expelling pupils from school. To inform this work the Department commissioned a series of focus groups with 114 pupils aged 11-16 drawn from a random sample of schools.

Key findings from the study:

Pupils were asked to comment on the best ways of dealing with young people who misbehaved in schools. The most frequent response was that young people should be given a detention for behaving badly. Other responses given in order of frequency were: pupils should be given additional homework; letters should be sent home to parents; teachers should talk to the pupil to see if the problem could be solved; and the pupils' report card should be noted.

The most frequent response pupils gave on how schools should deal with young people who display aggressive or violent behaviour was that they should be suspended from school. They believed that a suspension would be a way to ensure that the young person realised the seriousness of his or her actions. Other pupils thought, however, that there was a danger that the young person could regard a suspension as a holiday and it would therefore not have the desired effect i.e. to help them re-engage with learning. Pupils also believed that suspended students should be given work to do at home and that it was important to find out the cause of the aggressive behaviour. They also believed, however, that if the aggressive behaviour persisted then the young person should be permanently excluded from school.

Some participants commented that although they had been informed of the rules and regulations of their school e.g. through assemblies and school posters, they were not made aware of what would happen if these rules were broken. An awareness of the consequences of rule breaking was seen as helpful in order to act as a deterrent.

Collaborative philosophical inquiry for schoolchildren: cognitive gains at 2-year follow-up (University of Dundee and Clackmannanshire Education Authority, Scotland) – Article published in British Journal of Educational Psychology (2007) volume 77, pages 787-796

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This study looked at the long term effects of a philosophical inquiry programme on primary pupils' cognitive skills after they had completed the course and transferred to secondary school. Seventy one pupils who had taken part in one hour Philosophy for Children lessons for 16 weeks were tested for cognitive outcomes at the end of the programme and then two years later when they were at secondary school. Their results were compared to a similar group of pupils who did not take part in the programme.

The philosophical inquiry lessons involved developing 'communities of enquiry' in which the teacher and pupils collaborate with each to develop deeper understanding of education topics as well as the personal and ethical world around them. There is a strong emphasis on pupils developing hypotheses, deep questioning skills, reasoning skills and connections with other pupils' ideas.

Key findings from the study:

Pupils participating in the philosophical inquiry programme scored significantly more highly in cognitive ability tests at the end of the 16 week programme than non-participating pupils. These gains were maintained towards the second year of secondary school with higher attaining pupils being slightly more likely to maintain the gains than others.

Pupils who did not take part in the programme showed a slight (but not statistically significant) down-turn in their scores on the cognitive ability tests compared to when they sat the test two years previously.

[Education and schooling for asylum-seeking refugee students in Scotland: an exploratory study](#) (Institute of Education, London)

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This study was commissioned by the Scottish Government to review the education of asylum-seeking refugee pupils in Scotland and identify good practice. The study was based on a survey of LAs and six school case studies in Scotland and England.

Key findings from the study:

Examples of good practice in the education of asylum-seeking refugee pupils included:

- The use of buddying and 'class friend' systems for both primary and secondary age pupils to help the settling in of target group pupils and especially help them to make friends.
- The establishment of school clubs to encourage socialising among all pupils.
- Clear and consistent classroom routines.
- Being educated in the mainstream from day one, with appropriate support as required.
- Recognition that cultural and linguistic diversity are valuable resources in the classroom.
- Display of 'welcome wall' in school entrance with a map of the world, marking out where new arrivals to the school come from and photos and information about pupils including details of their home language and class.
- Use of drama productions on refugee experiences with scripts written by pupils.
- LA supply of sample translated letters and forms to schools to help with enrolling pupils.

[The Impact of 14 to 16 Year-olds on Further Education Colleges](#) (NFER)

This project involved case-study visits to five FE colleges with extensive experience of providing courses for 14-16 year-olds, and face-to-face interviews with senior managers and teaching staff, 14-16 year-old, 16-19 year-old and mature students.

Key findings from the study:

Older learners in the colleges were largely unaffected by the presence of younger students, as most rarely came across them, and if they did, their reaction was generally positive. Adverse comments concerned noise and immature behaviour, usually out of class.

Teaching 14-16 year-olds was becoming accepted practice in the colleges and was seen as having benefits for the young people themselves, the college and its wider community.

An appropriate and transparent selection process was necessary to ensure that the 'right student was on the right course'. Close liaison with schools, committed lecturers and adequate support for the students were also essential for success.

Outstanding concerns included health and safety issues and the need to balance increasing demand for places with preserving the FE ethos

2. Statistical reports

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Funding per pupil

This report covers per pupil funding including: revenue only; revenue and capital; and capital only. The revenue data cover education formula funding plus all school related revenue grants in the DCSF Departmental Expenditure Limit across all publicly funded school pupils aged 3-19. Between 1997-1998 and 2007-08 total revenue and capital funding per pupil has increased by £2,550 (88 per cent) in real terms.

Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2007

This report provides provisional statistics on looked after children at a national level. This is an update of the Statistical Volume that was published on 31 March 2006. It includes details on overall numbers of looked after children at 31 March 2007, the number of children adopted in the year, the number of adopters, the number and qualifications achieved by care leavers aged 16 and over, the activity of 19 year old former care leavers, the number of looked after girls who are mothers, information on the distance between home and placement and the method of participation used during the statutory reviews

For more DCSF statistical reports go to: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/>

3. Forward Look

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This section includes recently new research, work in progress and studies which will be published shortly.

Recently commenced research

Aspirations of children and young people (Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning)

This DCSF study will review existing research on the aspirations of children and young people with respect to learning, achievement and life expectations. It will consider the following issues: the definition of aspirations and how they differ from expectations; the determinants of aspirations e.g. in relation to socioeconomic status and other background effects; and the relationship between aspirations and learning outcomes. The expected completion date for the review is March 2008.

[Approaches to working with children, young people and families for Traveller, Irish Traveller, Gypsy, Roma and Show people communities](#) (NFER)

The aim of the study is to conduct a literature review and supplementary investigation of the range of issues around and approaches to working with Travellers, Irish Travellers, Gypsies, Roma and Show people, and the support, training and other programmes available to staff involved. The study will reflect the wider range of services working with children and families, including education services. The work has been commissioned by the Children's Workforce Development Council and the expected completion date is April 2008.

Forthcoming publications

[What are we learning about...Every Child Matters leadership?](#) (NFER)

The aim of this study is to review evidence on issues of ECM for school leaders. These will be synthesized into key findings for school leaders, especially those relatively unengaged in ECM. The report is due for completion in January 2008.

www.ceruk.ac.uk

The CERUK database contains details of current or on-going research in education and related disciplines. It covers a wide range of studies including commissioned research and PhD theses, across all phases of education from early years to adults. The site is free to use. In addition, researchers can submit details of their research for inclusion on the database. The CERUK database is maintained by NFER.

4. Research digests for practitioners

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The following digests have been written specifically with practitioners in mind and draw out implications from research for practice

Sustaining pupil engagement in literacy lessons (Innovation Unit and DCSF TRIPS site)

This digest looks at how can teachers keep pupils on-task during literacy lessons. It is based on research undertaken in the US which analysed literacy lessons in classes of children aged 5-8 years from 13 primary schools and examined why some pupils in which there was considerable off-task behaviour. A number of key factors led to low engagement. These included pupils experiencing lack of choice, challenge, control over their own learning, and opportunities to work with other pupils. Off-task behaviour was particularly apparent during lessons in which pupils were expected to conform to certain prescribed procedures and undertake closed tasks. Such lessons also had an adverse effect on pupils' feelings of success and the teachers' relationships with their pupils.

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/literacy/sustainingpupil/>

Challenging underachievement in boys (Innovation Unit and DCSF TRIPS site)

DCSF Year of gender

The study identified a number of factors which proved to be helpful in overcoming relative underachievement in boys. The key factors identified are curriculum organisation, performance monitoring, school ethos (high expectations and inclusiveness), and staff providing positive role models, and involvement from parents. The study found that there is no single educational model which can guarantee success in improving performance among boys of any ethnic or social background. However, it did identify two distinctive approaches. These two approaches can be broadly distinguished by: an emphasis on targeting weaker groups and pupils; or, a more universal commitment to treating all groups equally.

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/gender/challengingunderachievement/>

Transforming learning through ICT (GTCE Research of the Month)

The latest GTCE Research of the Month focuses on the 'Pedagogies with E-Learning Resources' (PELRS) project where teachers planned learning events for their students which allowed the students to decide on their own learning activities and to choose resources to help them from books and e-learning materials, including the Internet. The students then created presentations. The approach exploited pupils' own knowledge and fascination with ICT, and changed the teachers' role from being 'founts of knowledge' to being facilitators of learning. At the same time, it gave the children the opportunity to be creative and take responsibility for their own learning.

http://www.gtce.org.uk/research/romtopics/rom_teachingandlearning/ict_nov07/

5. Research on practitioners' engagement in and with research

Practitioners & Evidence: Designing research and development to influence practice (CfBT)

This literature review on practitioners and evidence was commissioned by CfBT. It specifically looked at different aspects of practitioners' use of research including the level of activity, who undertakes it, the kinds of evidence practitioners' use and what helps and hinders in the process of practitioners using research.

<http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/default.aspx?page=375>

Making Research Make a Difference. Teacher Research: a Small-scale Study to Look at Impact (NFER)

Teacher research is relevant, manageable and does make a difference. This is the conclusion of a study into research activity in four Essex schools. The study found that research by teachers has the potential to make a real difference to pupils, staff, the whole school and the wider community. This short report explains the impact of research engagement in each school, explains how this came about and identifies some clear action points for other schools wishing to maximise the impact of teacher research. This report was funded by the DCSF and Essex local authority.

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/other-publications/downloadable-reports/making-research-make-a-difference.cfm>

5. Research dialogue opportunities for teachers, leaders and those working with schools

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Please note with the Christmas break there will be no new dialogues this month – but we will be running these as usual from the next edition where the focus will be on gender issues.

6. Practitioner research: getting started and sharing outcomes

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The Innovation Unit in partnership with the DCSF has dedicated a research area on talk2learn to practitioner research. The site provides an opportunity for practitioners to ask members of the Innovation Unit community about getting started on research e.g. deciding on what questions to ask and how to collect data etc. The site also provides a place where practitioners can post findings from their own research and invite comments from the Innovation Unit Community.

Please, e-mail [Jacqui Hall](#), E-Learning facilitator for more information and to register for the service.

7. Places for practitioners, teacher educators and students to find research

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The following websites contain summaries of research written specifically for stakeholder groups:

The Research Informed Practice Site www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research

Sponsored by The Innovation Unit in partnership with the DCSF, this site provides a searchable database of summaries of research written for practitioners. The digests cover a wide range of topics including: mathematics, English, behaviour, inclusion and thinking skills. The site offers a range of facilities including the ability to send digests to a friend option.

Research Of the Month www.gtce.org.uk/research/romtopics

Research Of the Month articles are summaries of full length research studies written specifically for school staff. They include case study examples of how the research works in practice and a list of where to find out more information. ROM is sponsored by the General Teaching Council for England.

Teaching Training Resource Bank www.ttrb.ac.uk

The TTRB acts as a portal for a wide range of research on topics of relevance to teacher educators, practitioners and student teachers. All materials on the site are quality assured through a process of academic scrutiny and monitoring is undertaken by a team of teacher educators from across the UK. TTRB also provides a [free e-librarian service](#) for teacher educators, practitioners and field staff who are looking for specific education research. TTRB also provides specific advice on research on behaviour, diversity and Special Educational Needs through its specialist networks with Higher Education Institutes. More about these networks can be found on the main site.

National Teacher Research Panel www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp

The National Teacher Research Panel website provides resources for practitioners interested in undertaking research in their own schools and class rooms. These include summaries of practitioner research and guidelines for using research as part of CPD activities.

Eurydice www.eurydice.org

Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. The Network provides comparable information on education systems and policies throughout Europe.

National Centre for the Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics
www.ncetm.org.uk

The National Centre for the Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics is funded by the DCSF and provides a range of resources and research evidence to support teaching and learning in mathematics.

Educational evidence portal (EEP) www.eep.ac.uk

eep – the educational evidence portal is an online resource dedicated to and for educational professionals and lay people. It brings together research and evidence from multiple sources into one searchable database therefore cutting down the need to search on different sites. eep is funded by CfBT education trust.

Ready to Learn? – The Experiment

A major scientific investigation for schools from Teachers TV

Have you ever wondered if your pupils are as ready to learn as they could be?

Teachers TV is teaming up with The BA (British Association for the Advancement of Science) to bring schools the opportunity to take part in a significant nationwide experiment being run during National Science and Engineering Week 2008.

Every teacher knows that however good the preparation, material and delivery, effective learning can only occur if the students are in the right frame of mind.

Ready to Learn? – The Experiment is designed to find out how ready to learn schoolchildren are, and what can be done to improve this. It will investigate, via an on-line test and survey, how diet and exercise can influence their memory and concentration. Run by teachers in schools, the experiment, open to children aged 5-16, will be quick and easy for them to complete.

Pupils will get their test scores, as well as tips on how to increase their readiness to learn. Teachers and their schools will receive a full set of their own data and the national results. They will also be able to continue using the software after NSEW to run their own experiments and test different variables against pupils' readiness to learn.

Ready to Learn? – The Experiment can be integrated into the curriculum at every Key Stage. A set of lesson plans providing examples of how to do this will be available in January from Teachers TV, followed in February by television programmes demonstrating these in action.

This is a great opportunity to get the whole class involved in this fascinating and important piece of educational research, with results that are personal to them, and beneficial to teachers and schools.

To register your interest and find out more, email experiment@teachers.tv.

