

## **FWF-Project: School Quality and Teacher Education Paper accepted for AERA 2020 San Francisco**

### **Title: Research-Based School Improvement: How highly effective and improving schools in England apply research**

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#### **Objective**

Outcomes attained by disadvantaged students in London schools have improved considerably in recent decades (Greaves et al., 2014; Blanden et al., 2015). The current implementation of government-designated 'Opportunity Areas' represents an attempt to extend this 'London Effect' to other regions of England with large numbers of schools in difficult circumstances (Department of Education, 2018). This paper explores the views of headteachers in highly effective and improving schools in London and in the 'Opportunity Areas' about strategies for supporting processes of school improvement and fostering better outcomes for disadvantaged students in particular.

#### **Theoretical framework**

The paper draws on the growing field of educational effectiveness and improvement research (EEIR) –including earlier research on school effectiveness and improvement. Its conceptual basis derives from the theoretical models of educational effectiveness developed by Creemers and Kyriakides (2008, 2010, 2012): The Dynamic Model and the more recent Dynamic Approach to School Improvement (DASI). These models seek to study schools and their improvement as an inherently dynamic process (rather than adopting a static perspective).

#### **Methods**

We drew a sample of non-selective, highly effective and improving schools in deprived local authorities in London and the 'Opportunity Areas' based (1) on the inspection judgments of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the national inspection agency in England; (2) on the Progress 8 score – the measure of the progress made by pupils between the age of 11 (when they complete primary school) and the age of 16 (when most undertake public examinations across a range of subjects; and (3) on the proportion of disadvantaged students in the school, as measured by numbers receiving free school meals. We conducted face-to-face interviews with 22 headteachers and senior leaders from 11 highly effective schools in difficult circumstances in London and the Opportunity Areas, exploring how these school leaders understood and developed school quality and what they thought worked in raising outcomes, especially for disadvantaged students. The project was approved by the University's Central Research Ethics Committee.

#### **Data**

Interviews were fully transcribed and the interview data was subjected to content analysis. The central dimensions in the answers were identified and explored.

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### **Results**

The data shows that the research literature on school effectiveness and improvement had an emphatically inspiring effect on heads of highly effective and improving schools in difficult circumstances. Use of research on effective teaching and learning played an important role in all the schools analysed. Heads placed strong emphasis on research-based professional development. Raising student and staff aspirations, the use of data and whole-school behaviour management systems also appeared in the findings as key factors in improvement.

### **Significance**

This research increases our understanding of successful school improvement by exploring the perspectives of headteachers with successful track records in enhancing outcomes for disadvantaged students in particular. In so doing, it provides practically-relevant stimuli with the potential to inform decision-making at different levels in education systems.



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### **Project School Quality and Teacher Education funded by the Austrian Science Fund**

The project School Quality and Teacher Education (SQTE) is based at the School of Education at the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg, and it is partly being conducted within a Visiting Research Fellowship at the University of Oxford, department of education. The project examines how head teachers and teachers in highly effective and improving schools in England understand and develop school quality and how their experiences and knowledge can be made useful for quality development in schools and curriculum development for initial teacher education and continuous professional development in Austria and England. In this context, special attention is given to schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged students and with pupils who don't speak English as a first language in the city of London ("London effect") and in the so called "cold spots" or opportunity areas in England.

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