

Breakthrough for schools now possible

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A long running study has found that the English education system has the potential to turn around problems endured by schools in areas of high deprivation.

Researchers at The University of Manchester say little noticed aspects to Government policy are now making it easier for local communities to work together, offering an unprecedented opportunity to achieving greater equity.

The findings go against most existing research – which is more pessimistic -though the report does outline policies which create barriers to progress.

Over three years, the Centre for Equity in Education team has worked closely with communities in three deprived areas to examine the effects of government education policies.

Professor of Education Alan Dyson says the project's third report gives an accurate - and this year optimistic - representation of the national picture.

However, the evidence also shows that the desperately needed collaboration between schools, local government, social workers, health and law enforcement professionals - among others - comes to an abrupt end when it compromises their ability to achieve targets.

A problem, he said, which must be tackled by ministers.

He said: "We have found a whole range of emerging local initiatives in which something different is we believe starting to happen, as local communities come together to respond to complex inequities.

"On the basis of our evidence we argue that there is currently more potential than ever before to achieve greater equity within the English education system.

"Local Area Agreements, Local Strategic Partnerships, Every Child Matters and integrated Children's Services Departments mean that there is now a tremendous opportunity to support local needs and efforts."

He added: "But the challenge now is to ensure that local structures can deliver – and the local voices we report provide a powerful steer for achieving this.

"Their message is clear: ministers must stop trying to drive reforms through targets, structures and new initiatives.

"The target culture creates disharmony between partners: they absent themselves from meetings, fail to invite others, or just follow their own agendas.

"At worst, suspicion and hostility make the prospect of collaboration seem remote.

"These problems are marked in education, where semi or fully autonomous schools are driven by mutual competition and by the dire consequences of failing to meet targets.

"In some areas too the introduction of new Academies is making cooperation between schools more difficult

“So ministers must work much harder to create the conditions in which a credible model for local reform, focusing on the underlying causes of educational inequity, not just its symptoms can truly be established.”

Source: The University of Manchester

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