

Evaluating 'Excellence in Cities'

Excellence in Cities has improved educational outcomes in our most disadvantaged urban schools

The government's Excellence in Cities

policy has improved the educational outcomes for secondary school pupils in disadvantaged areas, according to new economic research by Stephen Machin, Sandra McNally and Costas Meghir. But the study also shows that the educational benefits are not equally distributed: the most disadvantaged schools benefit and the effect is concentrated among pupils of medium to high ability.

Excellence in Cities (EiC) has been one of the government's flagship education policies. Initially introduced in 1999 in an effort to turn around the fortunes of inner city schools, it has since been expanded to cover a third of all secondary schools. Its three core strands involve funding for 'learning mentors' to help pupils overcome educational or behavioural problems; 'learning support units' to help difficult pupils; and a 'gifted and talented' programme to provide extra support for 5-10% of pupils in each school.

The CEP/IFS economic evaluation of the programme compares the outcomes of pupils in EiC schools with those in a comparison group outside the programme. It finds that:

- The rate of improvement in EiC schools has been higher than that of other LEA-maintained schools. This is true even after controlling for different pupil and school characteristics, such as prior attainment and pupil numbers.
- EiC has led to an improvement of 1.9 percentage points in the number of children reaching level 5 or above in key stage 3 mathematics. The estimate is higher in schools that have been in the programme the longest but still evident in schools that came into the programme later.
- There is no evidence of an effect on attainment in English after controlling for pupil and school characteristics. But the effects are positive for school attendance: EiC has raised attendance by the equivalent of one day per pupil in the first group of schools to enter the programme.



- The positive effects of EiC have increased over time. The effects are higher for more disadvantaged schools (as measured by eligibility for free school meals) and negligible for more advantaged schools.
- The effects of EiC are higher for pupils of medium to high ability (as measured by attainment at age 11). For example, it has delivered a 2.9 to 4.8 percentage point increase in the number of pupils achieving level 5 or above in key stage 3 mathematics for the most able pupils in schools with the highest rate of deprivation. This raises the question as to whether even bigger effects might be generated if it were possible to target resources more carefully.
- The big question is whether the overall benefits of EiC can be justified in terms of the per pupil cost. To know this for sure requires observing pupils as they progress through the education system and into the labour market. But initial estimates suggest that the EiC policy is potentially cost-effective. The relatively low cost of the policy – £120 per pupil on average for each year – suggests that the benefits do not have to be very large to generate a positive outcome.

The policy has raised attainment in maths and improved school attendance

'Excellence in Cities: Evaluation of an Education Policy in Disadvantaged Areas' by Stephen Machin, Sandra McNally and Costas Meghir is the final report of the economic evaluation of EiC for the Department for Education and Skills. The study was joint work between CEP and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). For the full report on EiC, which includes analysis by educationalists and economists, see: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR675A.pdf>