MODERATORS OF THE FSM ACHIEVEMENT GAP: BEING MORE ABLE OR POOR IN AN AFFLUENT SCHOOL

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Background

Recent years have seen an increased focus on the association between socio-economic deprivation and educational achievement, as indexed by the gap in performance between those students entitled and those not entitled to a Free school Meal (FSM). The Pupil Premium Grant has been introduced, the FSM gap for every school is published in performance tables and there is a greater focus on the FSM gap in OFSTED inspections. This paper analyses national test and examination results for over 30,000 students in a large Local Authority in the South-East of England. It establishes that a substantial FSM achievement gap exists, and that this gap tends to widen over the course of both primary and secondary schooling (age 7-11 and age 11-16). The point of departure for the paper is an analysis of the interaction of the FSM with both student prior attainment and with school deprivation as measured by the % students in the school entitled to FSM. Both interactions were substantial indicating the FSM pupils with high prior attainment, and those attending relatively more affluent schools, are most at risk of poor progress.

Methods/data

Student level data were collected over three cohorts (2010-2012) for 16,000 Y6 and 16,000 Y11 students. Pupils' prior attainment scores were also collected along with a range of pupil background variables. Multi-level regression modelling was used with pupils (level 1) grouped within schools (level 2).

Results/conclusions

- A substantial FSM achievement gaps exists and this gap tend to widen over the course of both primary and secondary schooling (age 7-11 and age 11-16).
- There was a strong interaction between FSM and prior attainment (PA). The FSM gap in progress age 7-11 was four times as large for students with high as opposed to low PA, while the FSM gap in progress age 11-16 was 50% greater for students with high as opposed to low PA.
- There was a strong interaction between FSM and school %FSM. Students entitled to FSM in low deprivation schools made particularly poor progress age 7-11, not only relative to non-FSM students in these schools but also in relation to pupils on FSM in more disadvantaged schools. This offers empirical support to the contention that there is a particularly strong impact for being poor in a relatively affluent setting (DCSF, 2010).

References