

## Written evidence submitted by Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope

This written response by Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope, Provost and Professor of Education at Plymouth Marjon University to the call for evidence from the Education Select Committee on 'the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services'.

### Summary

This is an individual response based on primary research undertaken by the respondent with Dr Rowena Passy, and her experience of working with, coastal, rural and small schools in England (including an Education Endowment Foundation funded intervention called RETAIN). This response focuses on the effect of disadvantage groups in education. Coastal and rural schools are much more likely to experience educational isolation, which limits the schools' access to resources. The children in these schools are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and their schools reduced access to resources has typically resulted in opportunities for school improvement. Understanding educational isolation can support contingency planning to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency.

The locational (place-based) challenges experienced by educational isolated schools were present pre-COVID-19 and will be exacerbated as we emerge from the pandemic due to current government educational policy funding being metrocentric in order to achieve reach. Multiple indices of deprivation as an indicator of average deprivation by area does not account for the place-based challenges experienced by schools in areas of average wealth e.g. Cornwall. Education policy to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds should consider the school location and context, targeting resources to educationally isolated schools to provide the additional resources required to support school improvement and COVID-19 recovery in pupil outcomes and school workforce requirements.

1.1 Educational isolation<sup>1</sup> (see figure 1) is a challenge common to schools in many seaside towns and rural communities. Educational isolation includes, but extends beyond, the schools' **remote geography** to include **socio-economic deprivation** and **cultural isolation**. These three factors result in a limited access to resources required for school improvement. The key resources that educationally isolated schools have trouble accessing in the same way as most urban schools, are a high quality workforce, externally funded interventions and school support (including continuing professional development).

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<sup>1</sup> Ovenden-Hope, T and Passy, R.(2019) [Educational Isolation: A challenge for schools in England](#). Plymouth Marjon University, University of Plymouth. .

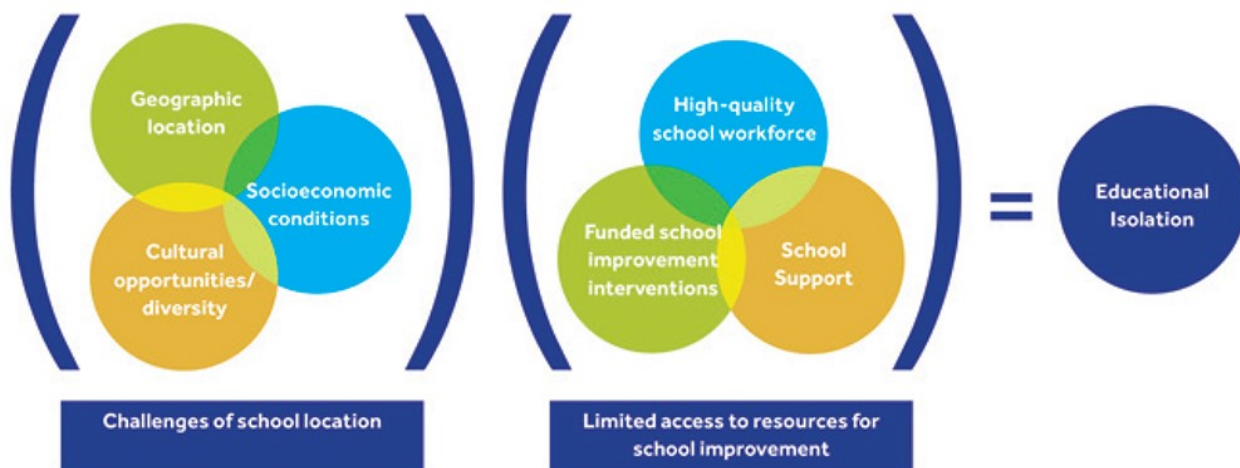


Figure 1: Conceptualising educational isolation for schools. Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2019)

1.2 In our research of coastal schools starting in 2010 (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015<sup>2</sup>; 2016<sup>3</sup>, 2017<sup>4</sup> and 2019<sup>5</sup>) we identified specific and common challenges for coastal schools over time:

- Lack of targeted investment and improvement programmes (that inner-city schools have benefitted from for over ten years, for example the London Challenge and engagement from large corporations with nearby headquarters).
- Difficulties with staff recruitment (attributed this to their coastal location, characterised by geographical isolation, poor transport links, limited employment prospects for partners and long commutes from affluent areas)
- Difficulty engaging students and families (schools reported problems engaging with students and families, citing child protection issues and a lack of motivation due to family members' poor experiences at school)
- Poor quality of teaching and learning (lack of accessible continual professional development, high rates of staff sickness, poor student assessment structures, poor data management, poorly trained staff in key positions and low staff morale)
- Failing local primaries (smaller number of primaries in coastal areas means Year 7 intakes are significantly affected by low-performing feeder schools, leading to teachers having lower expectations of the entire cohort that negatively define students' time in secondary school)
- Change in politics and educational policy (changes to performance measures, academy organisation, the curriculum, assessment and exams led to significant challenges for teachers trying to improve grades)

<sup>2</sup> Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) [Changing Cultures in Coastal Academies](#). Cornwall; Plymouth University, The Cornwall College Group.

<sup>3</sup> Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2016) ['The Challenge of School Improvement in Coastal Regions in England'](#), in symposium 'Recruitment, Retention and Region: The new three R's challenging education in England' Howson, J., Ovenden-Hope, T., Passy, R. and Gorard, S. British Educational Research Association Conference, Leeds University, September 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ovenden-Hope, T. and Passy, R. (2017) [Class of 2010: A seven year study of a coastal academy in England](#). Plymouth, Plymouth Marjon University.

<sup>5</sup> Passy, R. and Ovenden-Hope, T. (2019) [Exploring school leadership in coastal schools: 'Getting a fair deal' for students in disadvantaged communities](#). Journal of Education Policy. London, UK: Taylor and Francis.

- 1.3 Teacher recruitment and retention is challenging for educationally isolated schools (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2016; 2015 and 2020) . Coastal schools (particularly secondary schools) are typically isolated from other schools, which not only impedes easy access to school to school support, but also opportunities for professional progression. Primary schools within locally organised Multi Academy Trusts (MAT) are working hard to establish in-MAT opportunities for staff development and progression, with school collaboration being key to student attainment (Muijjs, 2015 , Social Mobility Commission, 2017; Ovenden-Hope, 2018 ). This mitigates some of the requirement for teachers and school leaders to move house for promotion and progression, which in sequestered schools is sometimes the only option. It does not solve all the issues for teacher recruitment and retention in rural communities, with difficulties for networking remaining due to size and distance of schools (Ovenden-Hope and Luke, 2020 ; Church of England, 2018)
- 1.4 Housing is an issue for school recruitment and retention of teachers in coastal and rural areas. Housing costs can be at both ends of the spectrum depending on the ‘idyll’ the rurality presented to second home owners and gentrification; or the socio-economic deprivation on seasonal/low/no employment opportunities. Both high and low house prices in coastal communities present a problem to school teacher recruitment and retention. High house prices and rental costs make it challenging for early career teachers to move to teaching positions in the countryside. Low housing costs typically indicate a socio-economically deprived and culturally isolated community, which may ‘put off’ (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015) teachers and senior leaders in investing in a new home/moving to these areas.
- 1.5 The issue with house prices, particularly low house prices, can also result in lack of ‘churn’ (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015; Ovenden-Hope and Passy 2017) in educationally isolated schools. Established teachers are often retained in coastal schools for longer periods than would be expected; the challenge being selling a property to afford relocation for a promotion in another school not geographically close.
- 1.6 Newly qualified teacher turnover is high in educationally isolated schools (DfE, 2016) , isolation from social opportunities and access to affordable and/or appropriate housing proving a real challenge to retaining early career teachers.
- 1.7 It is also difficult to attract middle and senior leaders to schools in coastal and rural areas where there are few opportunities to earn a dual income for family members (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015 ; 2016 and 2020 ). Lack of employment opportunities within a reasonable travelling distance for the spouse of a teacher can result in poor recruitment in rural areas.
- 1.8 The challenges to school improvement and the consequential effects on children in schools in socio-economically deprived coastal areas are similar to those of children in in socio-economical deprived rural areas (see Education references in the House of Lords reports (2019)<sup>6</sup> on [Seaside Towns and Rural Economy](#)). These challenges are not experienced by

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<sup>6</sup> House of Lords (2019) Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities, HL Paper 320, Report

children in urban areas, such as London, where externally funded interventions and school support are well established.

- 1.9 While an attainment gap for children from socio-economically deprived backgrounds in urban areas, such as London remains, children in educationally isolated schools attainment continues to be below their urban peers (see research by Whitty and Anders, 2017<sup>7</sup>). Children in schools in London from socio-economically deprived backgrounds are in schools that are not geographically remote or culturally isolated. The well-developed transport infrastructure and diverse high density community with well-resource cultural opportunities supports a high quality workforce, externally funded interventions and school support.
- 1.10 London, and other urban settings, experienced a transformational shift in educational outcomes between 2003 and 2016 (Hayes and Gul 2017 ). The role of the Department for Education’s London Challenge in supporting the rise of London as an education superpower, succeeding despite high levels of deprivation, cannot be underestimated. Other factors also played a role in London’s sustained success in terms of educational outcomes, such as the relationship between local and national government; the growth of academies and school accountability; school-to-school support in close proximity; investment in facilities; and changes in teacher training
- 1.11 Any attainment gap growth identified during COVID-19 recovery will be more challenging in educationally isolated schools. As the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#) identified in 2009, rural deprivation is a real issue affecting pupil attainment and the question needs to be asked ‘Are there different challenges inherent to addressing poor attainment amongst deprived pupils in different contexts, for example rural compared to urban deprivation, or a majority deprived area compared to isolated pockets of deprivation in an affluent community?’ (DCSF, 2009: 115)<sup>8</sup>. These contextual questions have yet to be addressed and the ‘isolated pockets’ that are educationally isolated schools need to be targeted for support.
- 1.12 There is evidence in performance data that shows differences in attainment for coastal schools e.g. at Key Stage 2. Less disadvantaged, non-isolated schools that are outside coastal areas have 3 percentage points higher Level 5 attainment rates and 0.02 National Curriculum Levels’ better progress than those in coastal areas (Centre Forum, 2016) . SchoolDash, which analyses education data, examined the performance of coastal schools for 2015 GCSE results showed that pupils in coastal schools were on average achieving 3% lower results than inland schools, based on the benchmark five A\*-C GCSEs including English and maths. The figures also show that coastal schools have a more deprived intake, with 3% more pupils eligible for free school meals - a figure similar to the achievement gap.

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of Session 2017–19 The future of seaside towns. London: House of Lords. Accessed at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/320.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Whitty, G and Anders, J. (2017) ‘Closing the achievement gap’ in English cities and towns in the twenty-first century. IoE UCL, London accessed at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1536095/1/UrbanEdFinalSub.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> DCSF (2009) Deprivation and Education: The evidence on pupils in England foundation stage to Key Stage 4. Schools analysis and research division. Department of children, schools and families. Accessed at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/9431/1/DCSF-RTP-09-01.pdf>

- 1.13 There are exceptions, however. The SchoolDash data 2015 shows that places such as North Tyneside and Lancashire coastal schools outperform their inland counterparts, and there are some coastal areas which are conspicuously affluent. But the national picture shows a trend of overall lower performance in coastal schools. Thomson (2015) reported that there was a lower rate of relative progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 among Pupil Premium pupils attending coastal schools, predominantly white British pupils in disadvantaged areas.
- 1.14 School leaders have attempted to implement strategies to address the challenges that are school based in educationally isolated schools, however the infrastructural issues need to be recognised and resolved in order for children in these schools to perform in a way similar to peers in more affluent and urban areas. COVID-19 has presented an opportunity for the government to consider interventions that support children from persistently disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing support to 'close the gap'. Children in educationally isolated schools should be considered for targeted support based on their schools previous limited access to resources. This would include incentives to attract and retain a high quality workforce, use on emerging free online platforms for CPD and positively recruiting these schools to externally funded interventions, such as the previous SSIF or new EEF project, with the allocation of project managers from the stakeholder to support application.
- 1.15 *"Isolated rural and coastal towns and former industrial areas feature heavily as social mobility coldspots. Young people growing up in these areas have less chance of achieving good educational outcomes, and often end up trapped by a lack of access to further education and employment opportunities."*<sup>9</sup> (SMC, 2017: 2).

This is evidence that educational provision in coastal, rural and less densely populated urban areas is not good enough. COVID-19 present an opportunity to contextualise and target resource through more sensitive identification of schools in need as a way to address the attainment gap.

- 1.16 As the last Ofsted Chief, Sir Michael Wilshaw, articulated, problems for schools can stem from "isolation", and he acknowledged that as well as being physically isolated, too often coastal schools are cut off from the help they need (access to school to school support and professional development opportunities) and the pressure to do better (local competition). COVID-19 poses the risk of further isolating these already educationally isolated schools, with resources being deployed to socio-economically deprived children in the high density populated areas.

*"These schools [coastal] are deprived of effective support when times are bad."* (Michael Wilshaw, cited in Weale, 2015<sup>10</sup>).

<sup>9</sup> 2 Social Mobility Commission [SMC] (2017) State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain, London. (2017:2). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2017>

<sup>10</sup> Weale, S. (2014) Ofsted to warn on rising number of pupils taught in failing secondaries, Guardian, 10 December. Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/dec/10/ofsted-warns-rising-number-pupils-taught-failing-secondary>.

Ofsted Annual Report (2016)<sup>11</sup> identified issues for schools in isolated and deprived areas:

*“There is also considerable evidence that it is schools in isolated and deprived areas where educational standards are low that are losing out in the recruitment stakes for both leaders and teachers.”*

As did the latest Ofsted (2020) report on how ‘stuck’ schools are overcoming isolation<sup>12</sup>.

- 1.17 Education isolation should be included in all discussions on COVID-19 school support and particularly support of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. With the education policy focus on the conversion of all local authority schools to academies, schools now constitute businesses within the coastal and rural economy. Supporting coastal and rural schools, regardless of size, is crucial to school improvement and closing the attainment gap. The school is the heart of the community, providing education for future community members who will contribute to the economy of that community in the future. Coastal and rural communities deserve a well-resourced, easy to access, high quality primary, secondary and post-16 education.
- 1.18 The government must consider the schools’ location and the challenges this brings for educationally isolated schools in raising pupil attainment. COVID-19 recovery presents a chance to think differently about the way in which schools for support are identified. Region and area identifiers (such as the multiple indices of deprivation used for the Opportunity Areas) are too broad a measure to provide a valid representation of schools in need of support. The schools’ performance watchdog Ofsted (Ofsted, 2013<sup>13</sup>) stated that coastal and rural areas have ‘felt little impact from national initiatives designed to drive up the standards for the poorest children’ (Ofsted, 2013). Children from white British socio-economically deprived backgrounds do better in London and the cities than they do in coastal and rural communities.
- 1.19 Further evidence based and research informed information on educational isolation can be found at <https://www.marjon.ac.uk/educational-isolation/> and <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/schools/education/coastal-schools-and-educational-isolation>

July 2020

<sup>11</sup> Ofsted (2016) Ofsted Annual Report 2016. London: HMI.

<sup>12</sup> Ofsted (2020) Fight or flight? How ‘stuck’ schools are overcoming isolation: evaluation report. Accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fight-or-flight-how-stuck-schools-are-overcoming-isolation/fight-or-flight-how-stuck-schools-are-overcoming-isolation-evaluation-report>

<sup>13</sup> Ofsted (2013) Ofsted Annual Report 2013. London: HMI