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Overall school effectiveness and type of school

ramesh kapadia

Institute of Education, London, United Kingdom

Background

Inspection data over the most recent cycle of inspections (2005-09) by Ofsted of maintained schools has classified all schools into one of four categories: outstanding; good; satisfactory; inadequate. A relatively high proportion (about a quarter) of schools are deemed to be outstanding and a relatively low proportion (about a tenth) are deemed to be inadequate. This data rarely features in research analysis on effective and ineffective schools. This paper will look at one specific aspect of the categorisation of schools into these four categories to test the extent to which the analysis has rigorous research validity.

Research Questions

The focus is on primary schools. A higher proportion of primary schools are characterised as outstanding in comparison to secondary schools. There are also significant differences in the classification of different types of primary school. There is a higher proportion of infant schools which are deemed as outstanding and a higher proportion of junior schools which are deemed as in a category of concern; all-through primary schools fall in between these two extremes. The paper will explore why the proportions vary so much and whether the differences are in accord with the effectiveness of different types of schools or are linked to the Framework being applied by Ofsted.

Methods

Literature on school effectiveness (Ferguson 2000, Sammons and Mathews 2004, Chapman 2009) is reviewed to discuss definitions of school effectiveness and thereby assess the extent to which the Ofsted view of school effectiveness is linked to the viewpoint of researchers. The usual definition of an effective school is one that performs better than similar schools; this can be linked to the recently available measures of contextual value-added. However, there are no contextually value-added scores for nursery and infant schools; this may account for the differences in how Ofsted judges the effectiveness of different types of primary school. The paper explores these differences in classification by analysing data in a few selected local authorities where there are a significant number of infant, junior and all-through primary schools. Inspection findings (Ofsted 2006/2007/2008) will be combined with test results for the same school and also for linked infant and junior schools.

Frame

Statistical analysis is undertaken to test the correlation between test results, value-added analysis, and inspection findings. This is being undertaken by using a variety of suitable techniques, including hypothesis testing and regression analysis. Two hypotheses will be investigated, as to why infant schools are judged to be more effective than junior schools.

- Hypothesis A: Key Stage 1 results in infant schools are inflated because teacher assessment is too generous, or because there is a stronger focus on them achieving as well as they can by the age of 7. In all through primary schools Key Stage 1 results are under-estimated in order to boost value added in Key Stage 2. This is then reflected in the perceived effectiveness of junior schools.
- Hypothesis B: The differences between phases are due to the use of the common Framework across phases; the availability of relevant data varies in terms of range and

validity, as well as reliability, and consistency. In particular in infant schools there was no contextualised analysis of assessment results in 2005-08. However, there are contextualised test results (CVA), based on progress from KS1 for junior and primary schools.

Research findings

The initial findings are:

1. Nursery schools are judged more effective than infant (and every other category including special); 90% of nursery schools are good or outstanding and none is inadequate. (Nursery schools may be more effective than other phases, but this is not explored here. In fact there are few nursery schools, they were seen as models of excellence and used to have slightly more favourable staffing ratios. Some authorities have no nursery schools and those which have kept them may only have kept the better ones.)
2. Infant schools are judged to be more effective than junior schools and better than all through primary, though not as good as special; over 70% of infant schools are good or better and only 4% inadequate.
3. Junior schools are judged to be less effective than all through primary, and much less effective than infant and their performance is similar to secondary schools; there is an eight percentage point difference between the proportion of junior schools that are good or outstanding and that for all through primaries, and a 24 percentage point difference between junior and infant schools.
4. About one junior school in seven is judged to be inadequate, a similar proportion to secondary schools, compared with one in 25 in infant, and one in 11 for all through primary.
5. Primary schools as a whole are judged to be more effective than secondary schools: there is a similar proportion of outstanding schools, but ten percentage points more of good in primary; one in seven secondary schools are judged inadequate compared with one in 11 primary schools.

The paper will present further findings relating to the relative performance of types of primary schools, using data from several local authorities, to throw light on the hypotheses noted above. There are differences between actual results, value-added scores and the inspection grades obtained. This has been done by comparing data about each school from various sources. The paper also shows differences in the inspection grades for linked infant and junior schools, making it possible to allow for differences in intake. This paper uses the vast and virtually untapped Ofsted database to explore and test the robustness of the classification system of schools by Ofsted.

References

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