

# The impact of excellent prep schools on pupils' progress



## What does the research evidence say about the impact of high-quality education in the early part of a child's schooling?

With the imposition of VAT on school fees making it harder for families to access an independent education, it is becoming ever more important for prep schools to demonstrate the educational value created by investing in the best schooling available at this crucial stage in a child's development. This short paper summarises some of the academic evidence that will support Heads in their conversations with the parents of potential pupils.

The core message of the research is that great teachers (and, where many are assembled together into a staff, great schools) have a significant and lasting impact on future outcomes, and that the earlier this begins, the greater the impact.

Early exposure to a high-quality educational environment in the primary years has an impact that can still be identified in GCSE outcomes at age 16.

The effect is most strongly observed as an output of the first year of schooling (Reception - amounting to 0.23 and 0.18 standard deviations in English and Maths respectively<sup>1</sup>), but subsequent years of effective education as children progress through the primary age range also have an independent impact.

What is more, these impacts 'stack' - a child who experiences a high-quality first year of schooling, followed by a second similarly good year (and so on) will achieve greater outcomes at 16 than one who only has a single high-quality year at an early age.

Repeated high-quality years are a definition of an effective school, membership of which in KS2 has an impact of 0.23 and 0.26 standard deviations in English and Maths at GCSE five years later.

Of equal importance is the impact that the very nature of the prep experience has on the character and wellbeing of pupils, such is the impact on ongoing engagement with and performance at senior school.

The ability to behaviourally regulate, to focus the attention, to experience positive relationships with other children and simply enjoying school in the primary age range are strongly explanatory of success in later years<sup>2</sup>.

There are many things that influence pupils' outcomes at 16 (e.g. ethnicity, parental education, gender<sup>3</sup>) but the choice of a high-quality school which can reliably deliver year on year of effective teaching is a rare example of a factor that is open to parental influence.



If you would like to listen to Simon Gould (Head of Hurlingham School) in conversation with Dominic Norrish (IAPS CEO) on this topic, please check out this episode of Simon's podcast, 'Heads Talks'.

[1] Tymms, Merrell and Bailey (2018) 'The long-term impact of effective teaching' in 'School Effectiveness and school improvement', 29 (2) pp 242-261. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09243453.2017.1404478>

[2] Gutman & Vorhause (2012) 'The impact of pupil behaviour and wellbeing on educational outcomes'. DfE. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a747ef340f0b604dd7ae609/DFE-RR253.pdf>

[3] Sammons et al (2014) 'Influences on student GCSE attainment and progress at age 16'. DfE.