



Addressing Poverty Through Action on Curriculum and Ability Groups

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Introduction

We know teachers consider their classroom environment and lessons so they can support all their pupils to thrive, which includes ensuring a stimulating curriculum and classes organised with the pupil's outcomes in mind. This can be challenging with a diverse range of learning needs,

Within schools' ability grouping is a common way of teaching; it can give pupils a curriculum tailored to their current needs (Hodgen et al., 2022). However, it can lead to issues with pupils' self-esteem and negatively impact those in lower sets (Francis et al., 2017). This document will help guide you to options to use in conjunction with the unique needs of your school.

Alongside the class structure, the content taught and experiences gained can impact a child's future. An **experience-rich curriculum can increase confidence, support social interaction, and build aspiration**; this is particularly important for disadvantaged pupils who may not get these opportunities outside of the education setting (Donnelly et al., 2019). Due to barriers, children from **disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities**, practical physical activity, and music (Ward et al., 2021). Use this document to understand how your school can ensure equal access to opportunities.

In the Poverty Proofing© the School Day Bradford sample by Children North East, they raised several points that need further work within this area.

In **53%** of school's **ability grouping** was used – 'Friendship is based mostly on sets.' (pupils)


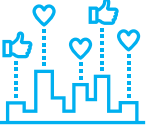
In **30%** pupils said negative comments about ability groups – 'Not good enough.' (pupil) 'We are in the dumb set.' (pupil)

In **38%** of school's pupils **miss swimming if no kit** – 'I forgot my swimming kit and the spare kit was the wrong size, so I missed out.' (pupil)

In **30%** of school's pupils were unable to take home musical instruments to practice



Questions To Ask Your School

	Question	Page
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does your school have policies around allocating and mixing ability/attainment groups that consider pupils' views of themselves and others?• Do the pupils have positive attitudes and feelings towards each other and their work assignments?	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are pupils given the resources to cultivate their skills and talents in and out of school time?• Is the curriculum broad and dynamic so pupils gain valuable life skills and experiences that can carry forward in life?	6



Ability and Attainment Groupings

What Citizens Say



'The table at the front don't do the hard challenges they only do the easy work.' (pupil)

'Blue table doesn't even know 1+1.' (pupil)

'I would like to do the same work as everyone else.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Guidance

When **markers show pupils the ability groups** in the classroom, pupils might feel they are seated somewhere because they are not 'smart' enough.

'The children at the front aren't as smart as the children at the back.' (pupil)

- **Remove indicators** such as coloured tables and seating charts based on ability groups.
- Consider how placements within the classroom affect pupils' **self-esteem**.
- **Changing seating** charts, colour markers, and placements regularly.

Pupils know **what ability groups** they are in based on work difficulty.

- Consider how **work and assignment differences are discussed**.
- Does this impact **pupil's attitudes toward each other?**

Pupils feel that people are in a class together because of **behaviour, 'chattiness,' concentration,** and the **need for additional support**, such as someone whose **first language is not English**.

'It's because they're naughty.' (pupil)

- **When pupils are aware** of purposeful placements, ensure the reasons are felt to be **positive and beneficial**.
- *'They mix us around to make sure we keep concentrating on our work.'* (pupil)
- *'It creates good partnerships, not just friendships'* (pupil).

Pupils **miss their break time** because they have not completed the same work as their peers.

- **Consider the timing of when work is finished**.
- Way up the value of the child finishing work with the **social and physical benefits of break time**.

Pupils miss out on enriching lessons such as music due to group reading or 1:1 support.

- **Consider the timing of these sessions**.
- If these sessions cannot be moved, are there **other ways they could engage in the enriching activities?**



Case Studies

Bradford Schools



One school has a policy of mixing attainment groups for **every year and every lesson**.

'I enjoy working with lots of children in my class.' (pupil)

Most students state they all do the same work, but where different work is allocated, it is framed as being **presented in a different format rather than is easier or harder**.

'No such thing as easy or hard work, there is just work presented in a different way to help everybody learn.' (pupil)

One school, which does not have a setting policy, has Year 4 **students who would say 'mean things,'** and there was a **wide discrepancy** in the work assigned.

'They are lower than us.' (pupil)

The same school in other years had **better relations** between students, with Years 5 and 6 **consistently citing that they were not put into ability groups**, even though they were in sets. This demonstrates variations within schools.



Community Needs Based Curriculum

What Citizens Say



'I'd like to be a vet but I'm not sure how school can help me.' (pupil)

'Breaktimes are fun because we get to use the skateboards – there's a lot to choose.' (pupil)

'Everyone has a go. I like [music] lessons as it's a different skill to learn.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Guidance

Pupils do not know **what they want to be when they grow up**.

- Create opportunities that **inspire children** to think about the future.
- Talk about ambitions.
- *'We had a talk from 'A Boss' who told us about their job. I really enjoyed it.'* (pupil)
- **Entrepreneurial opportunities**: This could be a club or led by pupils.
- **Ventures** and **Rethink Food** have programs that support entrepreneurial opportunities.

Pupils **do not feel like they can achieve what they want to be** when they grow up. They do not know how to get there.

- Have people from the **local community or people they relate to share their stories**.
- Support in **developing the skills** to reach their goals.
- Have a variety of **leadership opportunities** for pupils.
- Look at the **Pupil Voice Toolkit** for more support on leadership opportunities.

Pupils **do not have musical instruments at home to practice** as families cannot afford them.

- **Provide opportunities** for pupils to practice instruments at school.
- Could you **lend pupils instruments** to take home?
- Contact **Bradford Music Education Hub** for additional opportunities.
- *'We get to have practice in the music room at lunchtime once a week.'* (pupil)



Barriers

Pupils who **do not have kit think they will miss out** on activities such as swimming costumes, football boots, or wellies.

'I forgot my swimming kit, and the spare kit was the wrong size so I missed out.' (pupil)

Pupils worried they could not complete a task because they had not had the experience. For example, they are asked to **write about a trip to the beach, but they have never been**, show and tell or weekend reflections.

Pupils cannot relate to stories used in lessons, as they do not see themselves in the characters.

Guidance

- When kit or materials are essential to participate, have **spares**.
- Have spares **accessible in a way that does not highlight the pupil** to other children.
- Spares that are **good quality and various sizes** so children feel comfortable.
- *'We have to wear wellies and if we forget, then the school have some.'* (pupil)

- Being mindful of the **difference in experiences across pupils**.
- Explore a **range of experiences in and beyond the classroom**, for example, having a sandpit and water station.
- Use the **local environment for tasks** and connect this with knowledge learned in the classroom.
- **Remove activities highlighting differences in material possessions, such as** show and tell.

- **Reflect on the curriculum taught.** Does it represent the pupils and families in the school setting?
- **Use a wide range of role models** from various backgrounds and ethnicities and people with various physical and learning difficulties.

Case Studies

Bradford
Schools



Students notice the **quality and availability** of required materials to participate in activities offered (including free of charge swimming lessons). Materials mentioned included swimming kit, wellies, and P.E. kit.

Multiple schools offered P.E. kit, with one school ensuring staff and students wore the same kit, encouraging unity and pride within the school.

'The kit is nice and even the teachers wear it.' (pupil)



Staff ensure that pupils are **provided with a rich and varied curriculum**, in order to help them expand on their experiences and broaden their education. This is particularly evident in the **performing arts** provision at the school and the excellent facilities such as the **climbing wall** which all children access regularly.

'We have played so many musical instruments I can't even remember them all.' 'The teachers can spot if you have a real talent and they push you on. I played the clarinet quite well so they let me have a go at the saxophone.' (pupil)



Appendix

Links Referenced

Ventures	https://participateprojects.org.uk/enterprise-in-schools/
Rethink Food	https://www.rethinkfood.co.uk/the-programme/
Pupil Voice Toolkit	https://mylivingwell.co.uk/schools/support-directory/resources/
Bradford Music Education Hub	https://www.bradfordmusiconline.co.uk/site/

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Ward, S, James, S, James, K, Brown, C, Kokotsaki, D, & Wigham, J (2021) The benefits of music workshop participation for pupils' wellbeing and social capital: the In2 music project evaluation. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 124(1), 37-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2021.1903640>



If you have any feedback on this document or good practice that your school is doing, **we would love to hear from you.**

Please email schools@mylivingwell.co.uk.

