

Poor children 'fall behind classmates after two years of school' ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Despite billions spent attempting to boost social mobility under Labour, academics found the gap between rich and poor pupils widened throughout early education.

The study - based on a major analysis of children born in the first two years of the millennium - suggested that social class remained the biggest barrier to success at school.

Academics said the number of books in the home, parental qualifications, regular mealtimes and bedtimes, the state of housing and the quality of early childcare all had an impact on children's education.

But Dr Alice Sullivan, senior lecturer at the University of London's Institute of Education, who led the research, said Government policies designed to improve parenting skills were not enough to address chronic under-performance among deprived pupils.

She suggested that welfare reforms - including access to housing and jobs - would have a bigger impact on school standards.

"Our research shows that while parenting is important, a policy focus on parenting alone is insufficient to tackle the impacts of social inequalities on children," she said.

"Redistributive economic policies may be more effective than policies directly addressing parenting practices."

As part of the latest study, academics tracked the performance of more than 11,000 seven-year-olds in reading and maths. They also analysed teachers' assessments of children's abilities in other subjects such as speaking and listening, writing, science, maths, PE and creative arts.

The report - part of the Millennium Cohort Study, an on-going analysis of children across the UK born between 2000 and 2002 - compared education standards with pupils' family backgrounds.

It found the children of parents in professional and managerial jobs were around eight months ahead of those with parents who were long-term unemployed.

The study found this gap had widened over the last two years. A similar test carried out when pupils started school aged five found that the gap was just four months - half as wide.

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