

Institution: Plymouth Marjon University		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: Educational Isolation: Transforming understanding and support for schools challenged by place		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2017-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Tanya Ovenden-Hope	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Education and Provost	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1 September 2017 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Plymouth Marjon University research on Educational Isolation identifies schools in areas that are geographically remote, socio-economically disadvantaged, and culturally isolated to enable targeted support for school improvement through access to resources limited by location. The research has had conceptual and instrumental impact, contributing to understanding of place-based school challenges and influencing the development of policy and practice with enduring connectivity. Reach extends to the schools' regulatory body, school leaders, educational charities and public policymakers, who have applied the concept of Educational Isolation. Impact includes: influencing the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework, increased access to quality CPD, improved teacher retention, participation in externally funded initiatives and restructuring of school support. The beneficiaries of this research in England are found to be at a systemic and individual level and are significant, including government agencies, schools, teachers and students.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Professor Ovenden-Hope began her research in 2010 as a response to the poor performance and challenges for teacher recruitment and retention she observed in schools in disadvantaged coastal areas of England. The Coastal Schools research project (2010-19) was designed to explore whether there was a link between place and school performance. Working with Dr Rowena Passy (University of Plymouth), the project comprised three qualitative studies that applied the novel definition of a 'coastal school' to identify the case study schools. Data collection took place during 2010-17, 2012-13 and 2014-15, examining all publicly available data on the schools and from teachers and school leaders using annual semi-structured interviews. The seven-year study also interviewed students annually. The findings provided insights into the specific elements of the place-based challenges experienced by coastal schools; it contributed to continued analysis of the area [3.1] and led to an emerging idea of Educational Isolation that was used in two subsequent projects [3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5].</p> <p>Transforming understanding of educationally isolated schools: Three place-based elements that limit access to resources</p> <p>The Educational Isolation research project (2017-2019) used a national survey of school leaders in England, enhanced through follow-up interviews and case studies, to corroborate the lived experience of Educational Isolation and refine the concept [3.2, 3.3]. It broadly defined Educational Isolation as 'A school experiencing limited access to resources for school improvement, resulting from challenges of school location' [3.2 p.4]. The golden thread in the underpinning research was confirmed as the three place-based elements - geographical remoteness, socio-economic disadvantage and cultural isolation - that when combined limit a</p>		

school's access to specific resources, making it educationally isolated. For the first time, 'isolation' within an educational context was identified as more than geographical remoteness. The concept of Educational Isolation explained the differences in outcomes for schools in similarly deprived urban areas by recognising their geographical and cultural connectedness and how this increases access to resources. **This way of conceptualising Educational Isolation is new and innovative** (as recognised by nomination for the Grawmeyer Education Award 2019): **it has considerable significance because it enables a school's 'place' to be contextualised and understood as a key factor that can limit access to the resources needed for improvement [3.2, pp.4-7].**

Transforming support for educationally isolated schools: Improving access to resources

RETAIN, an EEF-funded project led by Prof Ovenden-Hope, designed, delivered and evaluated a research-informed intervention to improve early career teacher retention in coastal-rural schools (2015-2017). The project findings from semi-structured interviews with teachers, leaders and mentors and surveys of teachers' self-efficacy, were used as primary data for an analysis of effective CPD for retaining early career teachers in educationally isolated schools (2017-2020) [3.4; 3.5]. **This research demonstrated that access to school support/CPD through externally funded initiatives is essential in the development and retention of a high-quality workforce [3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5] and thus, significantly, that targeted support can mitigate place-based limitations in accessing resources in educationally isolated schools.**

The robust findings of the underpinning research – geographical remoteness, socio-economic deprivation, and cultural isolation as the three place-based elements that together limit a school's access to key resources required for improvement, namely a high-quality workforce, school support and externally funded projects – is significant. Understanding the relationship between place and access to resources enables policymakers, agencies, organisations and school leaders to recognise and target support to mitigate the challenges of educationally isolated schools [3.1,3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5].

3. References to the research

- 3.1** Passy, R. and Ovenden-Hope, T. (2019, 13 February) 'Exploring school leadership in coastal schools: "Getting a fair deal" for students in disadvantaged communities'. *Journal of Education Policy* (2020): 222-36. Published online 2019. [listed in REF2]
- 3.2** Ovenden-Hope, T. and Passy, R. (2019) 'Education Isolation: A challenge for schools in England. Plymouth Marjon University and University of Plymouth'. Plymouth, Plymouth Marjon University. [access at <https://www.marjon.ac.uk/educational-isolation/Education-Isolation-Report.pdf>]
- 3.3** Ovenden-Hope, T. and Passy, R. (2020) 'Understanding the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention for 'educationally isolated' schools in England. In *Exploring Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Contextual Challenges and International Perspectives*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis. [listed in REF2]
- 3.4** Ovenden-Hope, T., Blandford, S., Cain, T. and Maxwell, B. (2018) 'RETAIN: The teacher retention programme for early career teachers in England'. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 44, issue 5: 590-607. [listed in REF2]
- 3.5** Ovenden-Hope, T., Blandford, S., Cain, T. and Maxwell, B. (2020) 'RETAIN: A research-informed model of continuing professional development for early career teacher retention'. In *Exploring Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Contextual Challenges and International Perspectives*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis. [listed in REF2]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

The underpinning research has conceptual and instrumental impact, developing a new shared, deep understanding that has influenced policy and practice of why schools in predominantly coastal, rural and ex-industrial areas have failed to thrive in England. **Educational Isolation is a transformational concept that has reach and significance.** It has changed policy and practice at a systems, school and individual level to benefit

government agencies, schools, teachers and students by targeting schools for support that have limited access to resources caused by location:

Ofsted: Contextualised inspections

Ofsted's more recent focus on educational underperformance of vulnerable children in coastal towns led to recognition of the underpinning research. Professor Ovenden-Hope was invited to present the keynote address to South West HMI (Her Majesties Inspectorate) in September 2018, to develop understanding of the concept of Educational Isolation across the Inspectorate. This, in turn, had **instrumental impact as it 'influenced how educationally isolated schools are perceived within Ofsted', with the concept considered at 'an early stage of the development of the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) published in 2019'** [5.1]. The EIF increased the emphasis on curriculum quality, and Ofsted carried out 'deep dives' into subject areas, with **'over 11,000 deep dives...in state-funded schools'** made so far [5.2, p.9], **indicating the reach of the research. The significance of the research is shown as 'HMI consider the context of educationally isolated schools and report according to the new Framework'** [5.1]. **'Inspectors are often recognising the challenges that these schools face'**; for example, *'inspection outcomes show that schools with deprived intakes are more likely to be judged outstanding for the effectiveness of leadership and management than schools with less deprived intakes'* [5.3]. Thus, educationally isolated schools' non-traditional, creative approaches to planning and delivering a high-quality, rich curriculum are now positively recognised by Ofsted [5.1]. Further, Ofsted uses discussions with school leadership in schools found to be 'Inadequate' to enable headteachers to achieve this goal [5.1].

Thus, **the underpinning research beneficiaries extend beyond Ofsted to reach every educationally isolated school, school leader, teacher and pupil in England, because Ofsted '...enhanced their inspection work in such schools; by extension, it has also led to nuanced changes in how inspectors respond to underperformance in these schools in their communications with them and in the reports they produce'** [5.1] **There were 21,100 Ofsted visits and inspections in 2019-20 (first year of new EIF), there will be more in 2020-21, demonstrating reach and enduring connectivity.**

Multi-Academy Trust: Structural organisational change

The CEO of a **19-school Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) with coastal and rural primary schools spread across Cornwall** was aware of the challenges for school improvement due to the combined effects of socio-economic disadvantage and rural/coastal isolation. This prompted interest among the leadership team in the underpinning research and **led to conceptual and instrumental impact via an understanding of Educational Isolation applied to their schools. The research informed a structural organisational change, with reach throughout the MAT, via a new grouping of schools by 'place' to account for geographical remoteness, socio-economic disadvantage, and cultural isolation and 'directly led to the adoption of our current hub model' in 2019** [5.4].

The new hub school model demonstrates the significance of the research, enabling the MAT to achieve more for its students and staff [5.4] by improving efficiency, accountability, communication, and collaboration. The MAT's CEO states this change *'enabled effective monitoring across schools within the Trust'* and better opportunities to *'discuss issues and concerns, share solutions locally, take significant concerns to the larger organisation'* [5.4]. It also enhanced staff's access to resources. Sharing of staff development and physical resources across educationally isolated schools within the MAT both alleviated these schools' limited access to them and ensured training was more successful and cost effective [5.4]. Sharing of teachers within hubs during lockdown allowed for a longer rotation pattern, resulting in increased wellbeing among teachers and students [5.4]. **The underpinning research also led to an increased focus on teacher recruitment and retention within the MAT:** they now understand how crucial developing, supporting and retaining teachers is to overcome Educational Isolation through school improvement. Thus, *'from September 2020...we have at least one student [teacher] teaching in each school'* in order to develop a pathway for NQTs into the MAT [5.4]. **The MAT, its 19 schools, the leaders, teachers and students are**

beneficiaries of the research through improvement in practice, of practitioners and in policies adopted.

International and national policy: Understanding conditions for a high-quality workforce

The research **has had conceptual and instrumental impact at policy level internationally** in how to retain teachers to sustain a high-quality workforce in educationally isolated schools. In December 2018, the **University of Queensland made a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Australia, that cited the analysis of RETAIN [3.2] and recommended RETAIN as an effective Early Career Teacher Support Framework for policy change [5.5, p.2]** in support of measures that were later introduced to improve conditions for recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce for Australia. This **demonstrates reach into Australian schools and significance to governments, schools and teachers internationally.**

Further conceptual impact and national influence is demonstrated through the 2019 House of Lords Select Committee report for Seaside Town Regeneration (2019) [5.6, ch. 4, para. 154,156], which made the following recommendations to government citing evidence from the underpinning research [3.4] presented by Prof Ovenden-Hope: *‘the Government undertakes a bespoke review to examine what can be done... to attract teachers to seaside towns and communities and to incentivise healthy levels of retention’*, and *‘launches a targeted investment and improvement programme for both primary and secondary schools in coastal communities’*.

Further reach at local and regional school level is illustrated by the headteacher of **two schools in Cornwall**, Trenance and Foxhole, who came early to Educational Isolation research. The headteacher had participated in CPD delivered by Professor Ovenden-Hope based on the underpinning research, and her schools were selected for the RETAIN project. Following initial success in applying the research in practice, she asserts that **Educational Isolation and the later RETAIN research led to conceptual impact, contributing to an understanding of how best to retain teachers and, when applied, capacity building impact resulting in significant benefit to the school and its pupils.** *‘In the past, the school struggled to retain their teachers; now they stay’* [5.7]. Further, **the underpinning research was used in Trenance’s successful application to become one of 34 national English Hubs in 2018 and has extended school reach through its use in enabling them to support 150 schools across Cornwall to improve the quality of their teaching.** The research continues to have conceptual impact, informing practice and opportunities and **‘was fundamental’ to their current application to become the Teaching School for West Cornwall [5.7].** *‘This research has made a difference to me as a headteacher seeking to understand the challenges of my schools, my staff and my pupils and has allowed me to make changes that improve their experiences, opportunities and outcomes.’* [5.7]

Education organisations: Targeting resources for social equity

The Talent Tap, a **London-based national charity working to close the social mobility gap** through providing *‘access to work experience opportunities, support and networks’* to talented, disadvantaged school leavers [5.8], became aware of Educational Isolation in 2019 through their own research. According to the CEO, **understanding of the concept ‘[resulted] in the honing of our message, a policy shift to focus on coastal and rural social mobility coldspots in England and the development of a specific set of criteria to select the schools we work with,** together with the associated work of raising awareness of disadvantage due to Educational Isolation and providing concrete opportunities to overcome it’ [5.9]. The Talent Tap have demonstrated the capacity building impact of the research by **targeting their externally funded provision at educationally isolated schools, and this reach has provided opportunities for the benefit of young people that would not have been available otherwise.**

In July 2020, four Cumbrian-based educational organisations jointly responded to a call for evidence by the Parliamentary Education Select Committee, bringing to their attention

Educational Isolation and the role of place as a limiting factor in accessing resources. **The conceptual impact of Educational Isolation is reflected in the organisations' understanding of the underpinning research [3.2], which directly informed their response to the impact of COVID-19 on disadvantaged pupils in their communities [5.10, pp.1-2]. Many of their recommendations addressing current post-COVID-19 challenges target educationally isolated schools for specific training, networking opportunities and funding for outreach work [5.10, pp.7-8], directly benefitting schools, school leaders, students and their communities and shows regional school-level reach.**

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Statement of Impact, Regional Director, South West, **Ofsted**, UK.
- 5.2 Ofsted (2020) **The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2019/20**, HC 972, 1 Dec 2020 (London: HMSO).
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939834/Ofsted_Annual_Report_2019-2020.pdf
- 5.3 Ofsted (2019) **Ofsted Blog: Schools, Early Years, Further Education and Skills**, 16 Dec 2019. <https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2019/12/16/our-latest-statistics-a-first-look-at-the-eif/>
- 5.4. Statement of Impact, CEO, Kernow Learning **Multi-Academy Trust**, Cornwall, UK.
- 5.5. University of Queensland, Australia (2018), **Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training**, Re: Status of the Teaching Profession, No. 13, 17 Dec 2018.
- 5.6 House of Lords (2019) **The Future of Seaside Towns Report**, Report of Session 2017-19 - published 4 April 2019 - HL Paper 320 (London: House of Lords).
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/32002.htm>. See also Ovenden-Hope's written evidence (RST0032) under Appendix 2: List of witnesses, esp. at citation [1] – NB. This cited entry is a draft form of output 3.4 prior to publication.
- 5.7 Statement of Impact, Headteacher, Trenance **Learning Academy** and Foxhole **Academy**, Cornwall.
- 5.8 The Talent Tap website, **Mission Statement**, <https://www.thetalenttap.com/>
- 5.9 Statement of Impact, CEO, **The Talent Tap**, Soberton, UK.
- 5.10 Dropzone Youth Projects, Furness Academy, University of Central Lancashire and West Lakes Academy (2020), **Response to Parliamentary Select Committee Call for Evidence**, LBP0028, July 2020. Cites 3.4 at p.2.