

ABSTRACT

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To Bridge the Gap? Philanthropy and fundraising in primary schools

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Abstract:

Philanthropic action has long played a role in state education in England and beyond. Indeed, Parent Teacher Associations are one of the most common forms of charitable organisation in England. However, education policy, driven by a growing free-market discourse and policy initiatives such as Big Society and localism, is increasingly pushing for greater philanthropic involvement. This paper explores the distribution of voluntary action for primary schools (for children aged 4 to 11) in one county in England and the political and practical questions that uneven distribution presents.

This paper takes a mixed methods approach. Quantitative primary data comes from 114 online questionnaires completed by head-teachers, alongside quantitative secondary data from the financial records (2013/14) of 380 primary schools. Qualitative primary data was conducted through stakeholder interviews with three case study schools with low socio-economic profiles which have been able to successfully attract significant fundraised income.

The research shows that although two thirds of primary schools are actively trying to increase their fundraised income, some primary schools are significantly more successful in attracting additional funds than others, resulting in a significantly uneven dispersal of voluntary action between schools. These disparities are related to factors including school size, location, leadership ideology and the socio-economic profile of the school and area. The consequences of this uneven distribution are that schools in wealthier, more affluent areas are more likely to have additional resources than those in poorer areas.

These findings pose significant political and ethical questions about the role of philanthropic support in education. While this debate is relatively well developed in the United States (see Reich, 2007; Ingram et al., 2007), in England there has been little academic attention paid to the potential outcomes of an increased emphasis on philanthropic support for schools. Within this paper we question the extent to which schools are expected and encouraged to fundraise for additional income. Furthermore, drawing on international comparisons, we discuss the potential for policy to support or inhibit this activity, alongside the benefits and pitfalls of this approach.

Most important references:

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