



Unclear impact for very low cost based on insufficient evidence.

WHAT IS IT?

By aspirations we mean the things children and young people hope to achieve for themselves in the future. To meet their aspirations about careers, university, and further education, pupils often require good educational outcomes. Raising aspirations is therefore often believed to incentivise improved attainment.

Aspiration interventions tend to fall into three broad categories:

1. interventions that focus on parents and families;
2. interventions that focus on teaching practice; and
3. out-of-school interventions or extra-curricular activities, sometimes involving peers or mentors.

The approaches used in these interventions are diverse. Some aim to change aspirations directly by exposing children to new opportunities and others aim to raise aspirations by developing general self-esteem, motivation, or self-efficacy. For interventions that focus on self-efficacy and motivation specifically in a learning context (for example, growth mindsets interventions) please see [Metacognition and self-regulation](#).

KEY FINDINGS

1. The current evidence base on aspiration interventions is extremely weak. The lack of studies identified means that an impact in months progress is not communicated. Schools should carefully monitor the impact on attainment of any interventions or approaches.
2. The existing wider evidence suggests that the relationship between aspirations and

attainment is not straightforward. In general, approaches to raising aspirations have not translated into increased learning. Approaches linked to gains in attainment almost always have a significant academic component, suggesting that raising aspirations in isolation will not be effective

3. Most young people have high aspirations for themselves. Ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to progress towards their aspirations is likely to be more effective than intervening to change the aspirations themselves.

4. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that surround aspirations in disadvantaged communities are diverse, so avoid generalisations.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE APPROACH?

The lack of studies identified that tested aspiration interventions mean that there is not enough security to communicate a month's progress figure.

It is important to acknowledge that wider evidence indicates that the relationship between aspirations and attainment is complex, and there are many reasons why aspiration interventions may or may not impact upon attainment.

Some studies have shown that most young people already have high aspirations, suggesting that much underachievement results not from low aspiration but from a gap between aspirations and the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required to achieve them. Where pupils do have lower aspirations, it is not clear whether targeted interventions have consistently succeeded in raising their aspirations. Also, where aspirations begin low and are successfully raised by an intervention, it is not clear that an improvement in learning necessarily follows.

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The evidence base on aspiration interventions is very limited. More rigorous studies are required, focusing on both student-level and school-level interventions. There are no empirical studies of interventions to raise aspirations that report impact on achievement or learning.

Existing studies have looked at two variables, parental engagement and teaching methodologies, while investigating students' motivation and aspirational thinking. Focusing on high quality teacher-student and parent-student interaction may have a positive impact on students' intrinsic motivation.

Empirical studies are highly needed to explore aspiration interventions and its impact on students learning and achievement in the Arab world.

CLOSING THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

Whilst pupils eligible for the pupil premium are likely to have lower academic attainment compared to their more advantage peers, the assumption that poorer pupils have lower aspirations for their education and adult life is less clear.

Studies in England suggest that different socioeconomic groups have similar levels of aspiration for their future outcomes and that differences in participation rates in higher education are largely driven by academic attainment. Given the broad range of attitudes, behaviours and beliefs surrounding aspirations in communities with higher rates of poverty, schools should avoid generalisations.

Aspiration interventions without an academic component are unlikely to narrow the disadvantaged attainment gap. Teacher expectations play a role in shaping pupil outcomes and teachers should aim to communicate a belief in the academic potential of all pupils.

HOW COULD YOU IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SETTING?

Aspiration approaches are diverse and may focus on parents and families, teaching practice or out-of-school interventions or extra-curricular activities involving peers or mentors. When implementing aspiration interventions, schools might consider including:

- Guidance on the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required to achieve future goals.
- Activities to support pupils to develop self-esteem, motivation for learning or self-efficacy.
- Opportunities for pupils to encounter new experiences and settings.
- Additional academic support.

Given the limited evidence base, it is particularly important to monitor the impacts where aspiration approaches are used as a method of improving attainment.

Aspiration interventions range in duration and may include within class approaches delivered by teachers, after school clubs, out-of-school programmes, or mentoring led by paid staff or volunteers. Mentoring and parental interventions are typically delivered over an extended period of time (often at least the length of an academic year) in order to build effective relationships.

When introducing new approaches, schools should consider implementation. For more information see [**Putting Evidence to Work - A School's Guide to Implementation.**](#)

WHAT DOES IT COST?

Costs vary widely and are hard to estimate precisely, but overall, they are estimated to range between very low and moderate depending on the approach. After school clubs typically costs about £5 to £10 per session, so a weekly programme lasting 20 weeks might cost up to £200 per pupil. The median costs of implementing parental engagement programmes are estimated as very low to moderate, with greater costs where schools cover additional staffing costs.

The median cost of a mentoring intervention is estimated as moderate. The costs to schools are largely based on mentor training, salary costs (for non-volunteer mentors) and resources. Some programmes also include continuous training and support for mentors which may increase costs.

Alongside time and costs, school leaders should consider how to maximise the effectiveness of approaches by including a significant academic component and avoid approaches that aim to raise aspirations in isolation which may not be effective.

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As yet there is no information about local costs.

HOW SECURE IS THE EVIDENCE?

The security of the evidence around aspiration interventions is rated as extremely low. For topics with extremely low evidence, a month's progress figure is not displayed. Only 3 studies were identified that met the pre-specified inclusion criteria.