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# SHAPING EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS AMONG 13 YEAR OLDS AND THEIR PARENTS

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## **WHAT INFLUENCES YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS?**

Girls hold somewhat higher expectations than boys. Mother's education is found to have a stronger impact than social class or household income, with much higher expectations among young people whose mothers have undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. Those with a special educational need are found to have much lower expectations than their peers. In addition, young people's views are shaped by both their primary and second-level school experiences. Those who developed better reading and mathematical skills at primary level as well as those who were more confident in their academic abilities have higher expectations at 13. In contrast, lack of engagement with Maths and Irish as primary school subjects emerges as a driver of lower expectations later on. Parental expectations when the child was nine are predictive of the young person's expectations four years later, even comparing like with like in terms of social background and levels of achievement.

Second-level school experiences also make a difference, with the quality of relationships with teachers having a strong effect; young people who have more positive interaction with their teachers in the form of praise or positive feedback have higher expectations, all else being equal, while those who have negative interaction (being reprimanded frequently) hold lower expectations. Settling into second-level school without difficulty, being allocated to a higher ability group and finding their school subjects manageable also enhance expectations for the future.

## **WHAT INFLUENCES PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS?**

Parents hold much higher expectations for their daughters than their sons. Parental expectations are even more strongly differentiated by social background than those of their children, with a very large difference between mothers with a postgraduate degree and those with Junior Certificate or lower qualification. Parents of young people with a special education need hold much lower expectations for their children than the 13 year olds do for themselves.

Not surprisingly, mothers are less influenced by school factors than their children. Nonetheless, they appear to rely on a number of signals from the school in shaping their view of their child's potential. Mothers hold higher expectations where their child has higher academic achievement at primary level and where they have been allocated to a higher ability group at second level. Disengagement from Maths and more frequent teacher reprimands help to dampen parental expectations, most likely because the latter results in contact from the school about their child's behaviour.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Young people at 13 are in the flux of moving to second-level education and experiencing self-doubt about their capacity as learners but are required to make decisions about subjects and subject levels which will influence the options open to them at senior cycle and beyond. Insider knowledge of the educational system coupled with high expectations for their children are likely to heighten the importance of middle-class parents as a source of advice and support in helping

their children navigate the complexity of these educational pathways. The findings therefore highlight the importance of early access to school-based guidance in order to foster high expectations, especially for those without family educational resources. School climate, as reflected in day-to-day interaction between teachers and students, emerges as playing a crucial role in shaping young people's views on the possibilities open to them for the future and, in keeping with previous research, these findings support the need for schools to move towards a climate characterised by positive reinforcement rather than reprimand.

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