Educational Isolation:
A challenge for schools in England

February 2019

Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope

Dr Rowena Passy

Contents

Acknowledgements

Foreword

I am delighted to have this opportunity to introduce this publication on Educational Isolation. It has been both a privilege and challenge to work for nearly twenty years in a school and community that shares many similarities with the *"coastal and rural schools"* at the heart of this research. These educationally isolated schools, and the hard working school leaders within them, deserve recognition, consideration and specific support.

As you read the Educational Isolation Report I would urge you to give deep consideration to the authors' definition of educational isolation. It brings together: geographical location, socio-economic disadvantage as well as disadvantage due to limited diversity or access to cultural resources. These are multipliers of isolation rather than summative elements. Their definition begins to delve the absolute depth of the challenge facing these schools and their communities.

This report is being published at an interesting juxtaposition; alongside the Department for Education's Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, the soon to be announced Comprehensive Spending Review and Ofsted's New Inspection Framework consultation. There is an opportunity here for education policy makers to really consider the situation of educationally isolated schools and ask *'To what extent will the recruitment and retention strategy begin to address the issues raised in this report? Will the Comprehensive Spending Review address and reverse the decades of chronic underfunding these educationally isolated schools have endured? Will the new inspection framework have any relevance to these schools' improvement journey?'*

Not without justification, these educationally isolated school leaders are frustrated by those that control resources without truly understanding the 'context' the school has to work in. Currently our accountability system is too narrow and unforgiving. What is required is a far greater understanding of the different improvement journeys required by these schools. Decades of limited access to school improvement resources – high quality workforce, school to school support and funded school improvement interventions – has led to educationally isolated schools feeling like they have been forgotten. They arguably have and it's time for this to change.

This report offers a series of proposals for consideration by policy makers, funding agencies/organisations and stakeholders that begin to move the debate towards a more bespoke, coherent and cogent place-based school improvement process. We must now move to school improvement for all; we owe it to all our children and young people, no matter where fate determined they would be born and brought up.

Stephen Tierney
Chair, Headteachers' Roundtable

1. Executive Summary

Understanding educational isolation

Educational isolation is complex, grounded in location, situated in access to resources and results in reduced agency for schools. The aim of this report is to provide an understanding of this complexity through a considered definition of 'educational isolation' and an examination of what this means in practice. Our recommendations to policy makers, funding agencies/organisations and stakeholders are intended to support schools in accessing resources for school improvement.

Part of the complexity is that educational isolation is experienced by schools in different ways within the commonality of location-related challenges. This fluidity makes definition difficult, and the one presented here is purposefully broad to encompass the many combinations of challenges of location and consequential limited access to specific resources.

Educational isolation is therefore defined as:

A school experiencing limited access to resources for school improvement, resulting from challenges of school location.
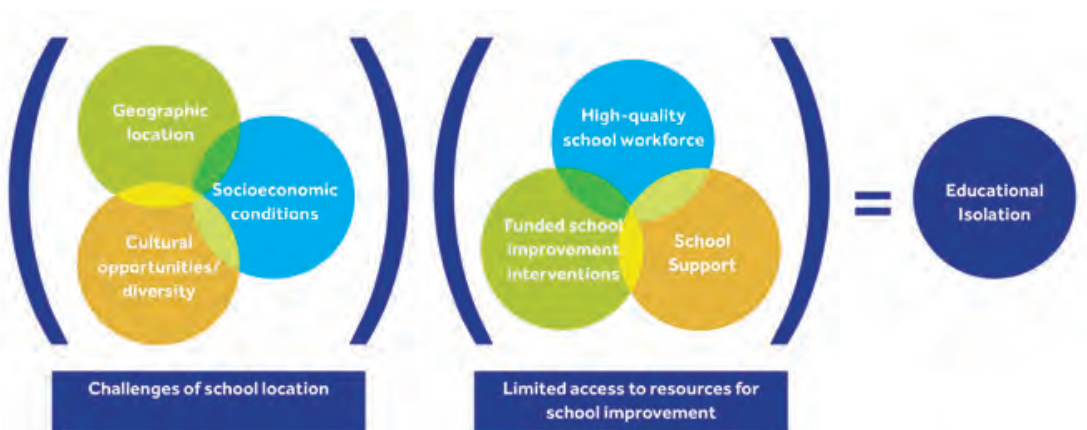
This definition is illustrated below:

Figure 1: Conceptualising educational isolation for schools

Key Findings

Rural and coastal schools - the challenge of location

The challenges of schools' geographical location, socioeconomic conditions and/or cultural opportunities and diversity in the community were identified by rural and coastal schools to a much greater extent than by urban, or coastal-urban schools.

The main challenges of location for educationally isolated schools were:

- **Geographic remoteness** - Rural and coastal school leaders indicated the highest levels of geographical isolation from another school. They reported limited access to public transport, and the high cost of travel and long journeys were seen to have a negative effect on teacher recruitment and retention, and on parental/community engagement with the school.

- **Socioeconomic disadvantage** - Rural and coastal school leaders indicated the highest levels of perceived isolation in relation to economic and social indicators.
  - Few large-scale, innovative employers resulted in an impoverished type of careers advice that was without reference to new or potential forms of employment in a fast-changing world.
  - High levels of seasonal and poorly-paid employment were reported by school leaders in rural and coastal areas. These employment conditions were seen to limit young people's expectations from employment and reduce their motivation to work hard at school.
  - The absence of sound employment prospects, particularly when combined with austerity measures, was seen to have a devastating effect on socioeconomically deprived and isolated communities. Students were reported as 'experiencing a lot of trauma'.

- **Cultural isolation** - Rural and coastal school leaders indicated the highest levels of perceived isolation in relation to cultural opportunities, such as museums and theatres, and cultural diversity.
  - Interviewees reported that schools needed to invest considerable time, money and effort in introducing children to different ethnicities and lifestyles; comparison was drawn with more populated areas that have a diverse population and in which cultural diversity is part of everyday life.
  - Interviewees suggested that children in rural and coastal areas had a less rich educational experience than those attending multicultural schools.
  - The disparity in school funding between London and more remote areas was seen as a major barrier to encouraging children to experience cultural diversity.

It is important to consider, however, that these challenges may not result in educational isolation if schools have access to the necessary resources for school improvement. Urban inner-city schools can have high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, but the research shows that they generally have greater access to resources that support school improvement.

Location can limit access to resources for school improvement

The key resources for educationally isolated schools limited by the challenges of location are:

- **A high quality school workforce** - Rural and coastal school leaders identified greater difficulties with all types of staff recruitment and retention than coastal-urban or urban schools.
  - A significant barrier was the high cost of housing in areas that attract second home owners and holiday lets.
  - High levels of staff churn can mean ongoing staff development. needs through inexperience, and/or issues with teacher quality. Schools that find it difficult to recruit staff to work with challenging children tend to employ experienced teachers rather than newly-qualified teachers with potential, resulting in a 'coastal churn' in which underperforming teachers move to a different school in the area.
  - At the other end of the retention spectrum, a static staff can mean inward-looking school improvement and/or a high percentage of staff leaving at the same time due to retirement.

- **School support** - Coastal-urban schools were relatively well-connected, while urban schools were likely to be part of a multi-academy trust (MAT). Similar proportions of rural and coastal schools were part of a MAT and/or a Teaching School Alliance (TSA). A relatively high proportion of rural and coastal schools indicated that they had university partners.

  Nonetheless rural and coastal schools indicated higher levels of isolation in terms of teacher continuing professional or leadership development.
  - One interviewee described how being part of a MAT or TSA does not necessarily mean high quality school support, particularly if all schools are graded 'inadequate' by Ofsted.
  - Long travelling times can inhibit opportunities for school improvement and networking.
  - The cost of sending staff to conferences in major urban centres can be prohibitive.

- **Externally funded interventions** - School leaders from urban and coastal-urban schools demonstrated greater connectivity to national funding streams than those in rural and coastal schools.
    - o The absence of national funding streams in rural and coastal locations was seen to exacerbate disparities in school funding. Deprived areas in cities or towns were seen to receive 'far more resources'.

Recommendations

We suggest that, drawing on the evidence presented and cited in this report, and on our definition of 'educational isolation':

Policy makers
1. Review current education policy in relation to priority areas and target schools, and revise as appropriate.
2. Consider the implications of educational isolation for school improvement and provide relevant, contextual and focused support to schools that are educationally isolated.
3. Work with rural and coastal school stakeholders, including the House of Lords Select Committees in these areas, to acknowledge factors affecting educationally isolated schools' performance.
4. Recognise the contribution school leaders have made at a local level in solving issues of educational isolation and make sure they are resourced at a national level.

Funding agencies/organisations
1. Work with school leaders of educationally isolated schools to develop a full understanding of areas that require extra funding to support school improvement.
2. Review Invitation to Tender (ITT) documents for national educational interventions to ensure that educationally isolated school leaders can complete the ITT within the allocated timeframe, and have access to the technology infrastructure required to use online portals.
3. Consider the challenges for school leaders experiencing educational isolation and provide specific and/or additional support to enable them to have the capacity to complete ITTs.

Stakeholders
1. Review all schools' performance indicators and consequential judgement criteria to include challenges of educationally isolated schools.
2. Consider the task school leaders of educationally isolated schools have in delivering school improvement and support collaborative practices with other schools locally, regionally and nationally.
3. Work creatively with schools experiencing educational isolation to maximise the advantages of rural and coastal locations for school improvement, such as learning outdoors.

2. Introduction

2.1 Situating the research: Why is 'educational isolation' an issue?

The image of an idyllic country or seaside life, with strong community support for the local schools [1] has prevailed until very recently. But this is not necessarily the whole picture; some rural and coastal areas have high levels of deprivation, their schools can be isolated from different kinds of support for teaching and learning, and community members do not always support their local school. These are among a number of factors that affect school performance. A powerful indicator of the challenges that can be faced in coastal and/or rural location is seen in an analysis of the 2014 GCSE outcomes of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, which demonstrated that, as schools' relative geographical isolation increased, so the average attainment of disadvantaged pupils decreased [2]. And a more recent report showed that this has not changed:

> *For a given level of deprivation, the attainment levels of pupils living in rural areas were lower than for pupils living in urban areas with a similar level of deprivation.*

DfE, Rural Education and Childcare, 2018 [3]

The government's focus for schools has been predominantly on densely populated and often disadvantaged urban areas [4] which, in turn, have encouraged educational researchers to focus on the same areas; the difficulties faced by schools in rural, coastal and isolated locations have been relatively under-researched. The aims of this report are to offer a new definition of 'educational isolation' that is drawn from projects undertaken between 2010 – 2018, to demonstrate the complexities and challenges of educational isolation, and to provide recommendations for policy makers, funding agencies/organisations and stakeholders.

2.2 Understanding the terrain

The report's authors have worked together and separately on four different projects that contribute to this report. These are:

1. The Coastal Schools Research, 2010 – 2017 (Tanya Ovenden-Hope, Plymouth Marjon University and Rowena Passy, University of Plymouth), consisted of four linked but separate studies.

---

[1] Cloke, P. J. (2003) Country Visions. Harlow, UK: Pearson/Prentice Hall. [2] Future Leaders Trust (2015) Isolated schools: Out on a limb, www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/blog/isolated-schools-out-limb. [3] Department for Education (2018) Rural Education and Childcare. London: DfE, p.5. [4] Central Government education policies, such as the London Challenge. [5] National Challenge was established in 2008 and aimed to ensure that, by 2011, all mainstream secondary schools in England had 30 per cent or more of their pupils achieving five or more equivalent GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including maths and English, at the age of sixteen. At the time of the launch, it was calculated that 638 schools (21 per cent) did not reach this threshold. Those schools that failed to improve quickly could be closed and re-opened as academies or trust schools (DCSF, 2008, National Challenge: A toolkit for schools and local authorities, Nottingham: DCSF, pp.14-16).

o   Class of 2010. This qualitative longitudinal project explored developments within a 'National Challenge' [5] coastal secondary school that converted to academy status in 2010. The researchers interviewed the Principal and four teachers each year, examined publicly-available documents, and followed a cohort of 15 Year 7 students (aged 11 in 2010) as they progressed through the school [6].

o   Two extensions to the Class of 2010 project, first to three (2012) and then to a total of six (2014) academies. Participating schools were secondary academies (i.e. for students aged 11 to 16 or 18), located in deprived coastal communities, had changed to academy status from National Challenge or underperforming schools, had different sponsors and were located in different parts of England. The research approach used in the 'Class of 2010' project was extended to other participating schools with the exception of involving students, which funding levels did not permit [7].

o   Tanya Ovenden-Hope collaborated with the Future Leaders Trust in further research on leadership in coastal schools. The project report illustrated how challenges to school improvement had been tackled successfully by a number of school leaders [8].

2. **RETAIN:** Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for early career teachers (ECTs) of Key Stage (KS) 1, 2015 – 2017 (Tanya Ovenden-Hope, Plymouth Marjon University, Sonia Blandford, UCL Institute of Education and Tim Cain, Edge Hill University. This project, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, was a one-year professional development programme for ECTs working in schools with high levels of disadvantaged pupils in rural and coastal schools in Cornwall [9]. The project had three core elements that were research informed and included taught modules, in-school coaching and professional learning communities, and had a particular focus on enhancing teacher self-efficacy through the development of knowledge and skills in teaching disadvantaged children through an enhanced understanding of pedagogy and practice in literacy.

[6] Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2017) Class of 2010: a seven-year study of a coastal academy in England, https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/schools/education/class-of-2010. [7] Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England, https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_Passy.pdf. [8] The Future Leaders Trust (2015) Combatting isolation: why coastal schools are failing and how headteachers are turning them around, https://www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/blog/combatting-isolation-coastal-schools/. [9] Ovenden-Hope, T., Blandford, S., Cain, T. and Maxwell, B. (2018) RETAIN early career teacher retention programme: evaluating the role of research informed continuing professional development for a high quality, sustainable 21st century teaching profession, Journal of Education for Teaching. DOI: 10.1080/020607476.2018.1516349.

3. Tanya Ovenden-Hope was invited to work with school leaders in Cornwall by the Kernow Teaching School Alliance in 2016 and 2017 through their school improvement continuing professional development (CPD). The focus for this CPD was 'The challenges for school leaders on the coastal strip'.

4. The Educational Isolation Project (EIP), 2017 – 18, described in Section 3.

2.3 A definition of 'educational isolation'

We first used the term 'educational isolation' in 2015, in relation to 'the infrastructural challenges to cohesive working towards school improvement' [10]. Since that time our different studies and interventions have developed our thinking and led us to conceptualise educational isolation as a complex phenomenon, experienced by schools in three specific ways that are related to their location; geographical remoteness, local socioeconomic disadvantage and/or limited cultural opportunities and/or diversity. These three challenges can then be exacerbated through limited access to resources for school improvement; difficulties attracting a high-quality workforce, finding school support and the absence of national funded interventions. The complex interaction of these elements means that educational isolation is experienced in different ways by different schools. Our conceptualisation of educational isolation is summarised in the definition below and in Figure 1:
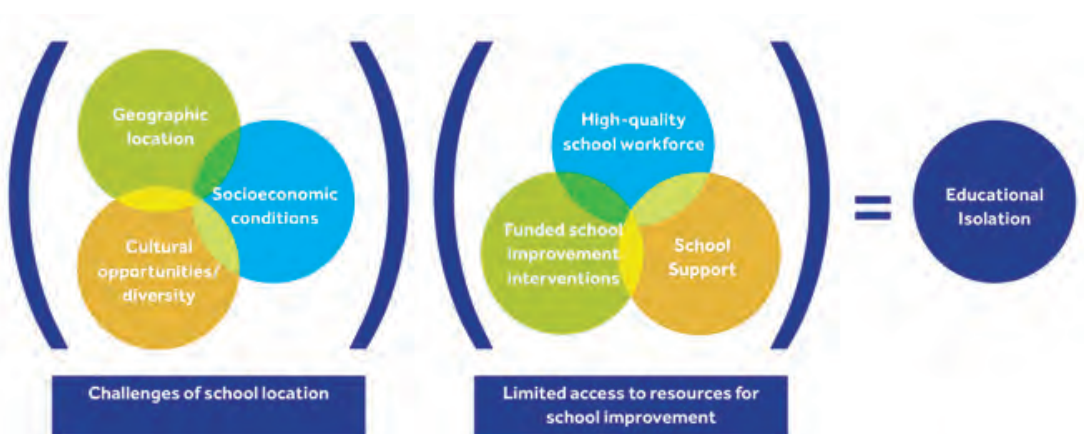
Figure 1: Conceptualising educational isolation for schools

---

[10] Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England, https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_Passy.pdf, p.12.

Educational isolation can be defined as:

A school experiencing limited access to resources for school improvement, resulting from challenges of school location.

2.4 Report structure

In this report we first describe the Educational Isolation Project (EIP). Drawing on the data for this project, we then discuss the challenges of school location and limited access to resources for school improvement. We bring in findings from our other research as exemplification where appropriate. In the final section we discuss our definition of educational isolation, and conclude with recommendations for policy makers, funding agencies/organisations and stakeholders.

3. The Educational Isolation Project

The Educational Isolation Project (EIP) is the most recent phase of our research, and aimed to examine how the broad challenges identified in the Coastal Schools Research were perceived and experienced by school leaders in all types of school in England. The hope was to draw on the findings, in association with our wider research, to provide a more sophisticated definition of educational isolation that incorporated its range of complexities and challenges.

3.1 Research methods

The research methods comprised two data collection techniques: an online semi-structured questionnaire to collect data from school leaders of all types of school in England and case-study, semi-structured interviews with an opportunity sample of school leaders who offered to participate in the interviews as a response in the survey.

The questionnaire consisted of 38 questions that invited participants to indicate their location, levels of pupil deprivation, pupil examination performance and progression aspirations, sources of school support including teacher and leader development, external interventions, school staff recruitment and progression opportunities, local unemployment levels and employment opportunities, levels of parent and community involvement and challenges experienced. The penultimate question asked all respondents if they considered their school to be isolated from 15 different elements of education or to select the option of 'no isolation' (see Appendix II). Bringing together respondents' perception of place, situation and experience – whether from leaders who felt that their school was isolated or not – would enable us first, to establish different aspects of isolation and how they interacted to affect school improvement and secondly, to come to a considered definition of educational isolation.

The project ethics application was approved by the Plymouth Institute of Education Research Ethics and Integrity Committee. The invitation to participate, explanation of the research, participant information sheet and link to the online questionnaire were sent to school leaders in partner schools of the research team's respective institutions (all education phases) in October 2017 by email and through social media (Twitter). This resulted in an estimated sample size of 1500 by email and Twitter reach of 300 (based on school leaders' engagement with tweets). An estimated sample size of 1800 suggests a low response rate of 3.38 per cent. Participation via the Twitter link was very limited, and 'email only' participation suggests a 4.06 per cent response rate. Two email reminders were sent out in November, and the final number of responses was 61.

The research does not claim to be representative of all schools, but reflects the views of those who were included in and/or motivated to respond to the survey invitation. Almost all school leaders answered all survey questions, which suggests that the issues we raised were relevant to school leaders' current experience of education. The research team are grateful for their generous participation.

The case study research arising from the survey was undertaken in the summer term of 2018 and was conducted by Katie Theobald and Bobbie Mills, researchers from Ambition School Leadership (ASL). The school leaders who expressed willingness to participate were approached via email, which included an explanation of the research for the case study. Of the five school leaders that responded, two proceeded to interview and became the case studies for this research. For each case study, the headteacher or principal was interviewed and then nominated a member of their senior leadership for a separate interview. It is notable, however, that interviewees from Case Study 2 stated that the school was not educationally isolated, even though the school leader had identified the school as being educationally isolated in the questionnaire responses. This changed perception of the school's isolated position was from an urban school and resonates with our research findings that urban schools experienced less educational isolation than rural and coastal schools.

We have also incorporated findings from three case-study telephone interviews from ASL's Talented Leaders Programme in this report. Interviews were conducted in early 2018, with participants selected by positive change in school outcomes. Data from these interviews do not represent an evaluation of the programme, but provide examples of the ways in which other school leaders have experienced and responded to educational isolation and have been included for this reason.

The case-study profiles for both the Educational Isolation Project and the Talented Leaders Programme are shown in Table 1.

Case Study	Phase	School status	Roll	Location type	% FSM	Performance
Educational Isolation Project						
1	Primary	In a MAT	301+	Coastal	26-50	All pupils perform below average
2	Primary	LA	201-300	Urban	26-50	All pupils perform below average
Talented Leaders Programme						
3	Secondary	In a MAT	1000+	Urban	11-25	No performance data available
4	Secondary	In a MAT	Up to 700	Coastal	11-25	All pupils perform below average
5	Secondary	In a MAT	Up to 700	Coastal	11-25	All pupils perform below average

Table 1: Case study profiles for Educational Isolation Project and Ambition School Leadership's Talented Leaders Programme. Findings from all have been used in this report.

3.2 Data Analysis

The survey data were analysed in relation to the schools' reported location. Survey participants were asked to select their school's location from the five options of urban, coastal-urban, rural, rural-coastal and coastal. In the analysis, we placed the schools from rural, rural-coastal and coastal locations together (n=33) in order to compare responses from more remote locations with those from the more densely-populated urban (n=22) and coastal-urban (n=6) locations. Survey comments were analysed thematically.

The case-study data were recorded and then transcribed semi-verbatim. Transcripts were manually coded, using an inductive approach and analysed thematically: first across both cases, and secondly within each of the two case studies.

3.3 Profile of responding schools

From the 61 school leader responses to the survey, 31 were from primary, 28 from secondary and two from all through schools. Primary school leader responses were predominantly from the South West; secondary school leader responses represented all the regions in England apart from the North East. Twenty-six schools were part of a multiple academy trust (MAT), 22 were local authority (LA) schools, 12 were academies or their variants (free/studio schools) and one was an independent school. They ranged in size from fewer than 110 pupils to over 1000. Further details can be seen in Appendix 1.

3.4 Schools indicating educational isolation

The table below shows how school leaders responded to the invitation to consider if their school were isolated from 15 different elements of education, or to select the option of 'no isolation' (see Appendix II). The notable feature of these responses is that leaders from rural and coastal locations selected a greater number of elements of isolation (EoI) than those from urban and coastal-urban locations.

	No EoI	1-5 EoI	6-10 EoI	11-15 EoI	Average
Urban *	5 (23%)	14 (64%)	3 (14%)	0	3
Coastal-urban**	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	1 (17%)	0	2
Rural and coastal***	0	14 (42%)	13 (39%)	6 (18%)	7

Table 2: Elements of isolation selected by survey respondents
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

3.5 Schools not educationally isolated

The seven schools that indicated no educational isolation had a number of commonalities, including:

- Location in urban or coastal-urban areas.
- Location in areas with perceived medium- or low-unemployment.
- Location within two miles or ten minutes' travel of another school. Participation in a range of collaborative partnerships with other schools or schemes (e.g. with Teaching School Alliances, Multi-Academy Trusts) and/or participation in national, externally funded schemes such as Opportunity Areas.

The responses seen in Table 2 and above, although not generalisable, highlight the importance of location as an essential element of connectedness to other schools and activities. The schools that reported no educational isolation were in well-populated areas, and they had established access to educational resources, particularly support from other schools and externally funded interventions.

In what follows, we have included the data from all 61 responding school leaders to illustrate the full range of responses; apart from the observations above, we have not undertaken separate analyses for schools reporting educational isolation/no educational isolation.

4. Challenges of school location

4.1 Introduction

In this section, we consider the effect of geographic location, socioeconomic conditions and cultural opportunities / diversity on schools' experience of educational isolation.

4.2 Geographic location

EIP survey school leaders were purposefully not asked to identify if their school was in an isolated location, but instead to identify the area in which their school was located: coastal, coastal-urban, rural, rural and coastal or urban. This would avoid the preconceived notion that educational isolation was related entirely to geographical remoteness, and enable us to explore different aspects of isolation through the survey responses.

The largest single category of school location was urban (defined as >10,000 in Local Authority District population) by 22 school leaders, followed by rural (defined as <10,000 in Local Authority district population) (11 school leaders), coastal (defined as within five miles of the coast) (11), rural and coastal (11) and coastal-urban (6) (see Figure 2). All 31 West Country school leaders placed their schools either in the 'rural' or 'coastal' categories.
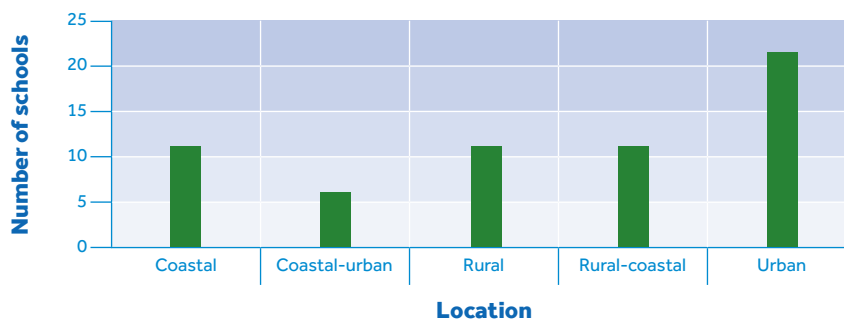

Figure 2: Location of responding schools (n=61)

In the question that asked about schools' isolation (see Appendix II), school leaders indicated 'isolation from other schools, due to geography', as follows:

- Urban – 1 respondent
- Coastal-urban – 0 respondents
- Costal, rural and rural-coastal – 14 respondents

This isolation caused reduced access to public transport in comparison to urban areas, which makes schools reliant on transport commissioned by service providers for pupil transport, and on teachers having their own transport to undertake their job. A rural primary headteacher illustrated how poor transport links can be isolating:

> *West Cornwall is geographically remote from all areas. Local roads tend to be small, rural lanes and so getting anywhere takes time. In summer months the main arterial roads tend to be extremely busy with holiday traffic, meaning that trips out have to be carefully planned in terms of ease of getting there.*
>
> Survey Respondent, rural primary school

A secondary school leader, from a different coastal location, described how the elements of poor transport links and poor economic opportunities were fundamental aspects of experiencing isolation:

> *Coastal town with poor transport links and declining industry. This causes all of the above [elements of isolation list in questionnaire].*
>
> Survey Respondent, coastal secondary school

A leader of a rural-coastal school, who reported 14 EoI, argued that 'isolated' was too strong a word for the experiences in their school, but identified the challenges of their location:

> *Isolated is probably too strong a word, but definitely reduced opportunities due to cost, travel time and impact of staff being away from school for longer periods. As many students have long bus journeys to get in, school can seem further away for parents / the community*
>
> Survey Respondent, rural-coastal secondary school

The leader of a secondary rural-coastal school on the Talented Leaders Programme spoke about difficulties with local transport, which had an impact on recruiting and retaining a high quality workforce – a fundamental educational resource for school improvement:

> *As an isolated school our staff face challenges in travelling in and this has a knock-on effect on recruitment and retention … I think our travelling challenges are unique in our area. Teachers in [town] probably travel for about half an hour, whereas our staff that travel in from [city] are travelling an hour. When you say that in London you think it's not too bad — but actually that's a journey in a car on a single-track road. If you get delayed then it becomes problematic quickly.*
>
> School Leader, Case Study School 4

There was also the issue of travel cost:

> *I think we also struggle in terms of getting quality staff because we're … remote … An awful lot of teachers that live and work in [local city] would be going 'Oh, I don't want to … commit to that finance [for travelling] every day'.*
>
> Principal, Case Study School 1

The Prince's Countryside Fund reported on issues for schools in rural remote areas that were caused by their geographical location:

> *Remote rural schools are at on-going risk of closure, with limited educational choices, particularly for those aged 16-18 with the associated costs of travel. There is an additional issue of "academic remoteness", whereby "serious tech, science, engineering research and development" is something that happens "elsewhere" rather than in remote rural areas.*
>
> Prince's Countryside Trust, 2018 [11]

---

[11] *Skerratt, S. (2018) Recharging Rural: Creating sustainable communities to 2030 and beyond, http://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/ research/recharging-rural-2, p.19.*

These issues of geographic isolation can be compounded in areas in which a diminishing number of young people in the local population (and therefore on the school roll) contribute to staff reductions and low morale, and where local employment prospects offer school leavers little incentive to aspire to further or higher education. An coastal-urban school leader in the Talented Leaders Programme commented on how these circumstances had led to a poor Ofsted rating and the school's 'bad reputation', echoing findings from the Coastal Schools Research and illustrating the further challenges of geographic location:

> *In an isolated coastal community with decreasing numbers of young people, I found the school with a community with no aspirations for their children. Morale amongst staff was low.*
>
> Headteacher, Case Study School 5

These socioeconomic challenges are discussed in the section below.

4.3 Socioeconomic conditions

The Coastal Schools Research explored the challenges for schools located in an area of high socioeconomic deprivation, with multi-generational low and/or unemployment, and local parents/carers who had often had poor experiences of education. There were very high levels of students recorded as pupil premium/ever 6 free school meals, demonstrating persistent disadvantage as the common denominator for students in the school [12]. The EIP survey built on this foundation by exploring different aspects of participating schools' socioeconomic context.

4.3.1 Employer engagement

We asked school leaders to indicate if they considered their school to be isolated from employer engagement, economic opportunities (such as large employers) and social opportunities (such as accessing leisure facilities and restaurants). In Table 3 below we show how school leaders in the different types of location responded.

---

[12] *Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England. https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_Passy.pdf, pp.9-11.*

	Employer engagement	Economic opportunities	Social opportunities
Urban *	2 (9%)	10 (45%)	4 (18%)
Coastal-urban**	0	2 (33%)	0
Rural and coastal***	8 (24%)	28 (85%)	16 (48%)

Table 3: Socioeconomic elements of isolation
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

Rural and coastal school leaders reported the highest levels of perceived isolation in relation to economic and social indicators. The Coastal Schools Research reported few manufacturing and/or professional employment opportunities in the area that, alongside seasonal and/or minimum wage local employment, compounded isolation from economic affluence and expected social opportunities. This type of isolation also had a practical effect on pupils' experience; one of the case-study interviewees explained how the absence of large employers in the area meant that schools were unable to attract the types of funding and support offered in more densely-populated locations that could be used for new and potentially motivating experiences for pupils:

> *For example to get the … car racing going which they do [locally] … it is above £1000 to get the kit together. Most schools would go to the local company and say, 'Can you fund that?' You know, I've got a friend up country, an engineer who is working with four schools in the area and, you know, I'm thinking we don't have that, a company that can work with four schools.*

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

Few local large employers also meant an impoverished type of careers advice to current pupils that was without reference to new or potential forms of employment in a fast-changing world:

> *We can get a doctor to come and talk to them [pupils] or a dentist in to talk to them, but it's almost reinforcing the stereotypes … of what jobs you can have. Like you can be a mechanic, you can be a, those sort of things. We don't have any big businesses that come in and say that, 'This is a job you can have in the future'.*

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

4.3.2   Types of employment

School leaders were also asked about the perceived level of unemployment, and levels of seasonal and poorly paid employment in their area. Here the rural and coastal school leaders indicated a higher level of seasonal and poorly paid employment, and similar levels of high unemployment to urban school leaders. The results are shown in Table 4 below.

	Low	Medium	High	Seasonal	Poorly paid
Urban*	6 (27%)	10 (45%	5 (23%)	3 (14%)	8 (36%)
Coastal-urban**	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	0	2 (33%)	3 (14%)
Rural and coastal***	7 (21%)	10 (30%)	8 (24%)	23 (70%)	21 (64%)

Table 4: Perceived unemployment levels in responding schools' area
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

One survey respondent pointed out how Service employees were generally drafted in from other areas, and how rising levels of employment within the care industry has intensified the trend of low-paid employment within the area:

> *The largest employer locally is the Royal Navy but that tends to have people who are posted here from other areas rather than employing locals. Local employment tends to be agricultural, seasonal (tourist attractions) shop/ retail (e.g. supermarkets, etc.) or public services (e.g. NHS, schools, or, increasingly, care work which is usually subcontracted out to low paying private companies).*

Survey Respondent, rural primary school

These employment conditions for rural and coastal locations were seen to be demotivating for the young people attending local schools, illustrated by the Principal of Case Study School 1.

Without much work out there, and what work there is typically low-paid, low-skilled work. Not always but typically: low-paid, low-skilled work which is often seasonal, often to do with tourism trade or agriculture: you know picking the daffodils etc. That means there's not much money at home. And there's not much incentive for folks, you know parents, to say, 'Look if you work hard you can get on and get a good job in [the town]'.

Principal, Case Study School 1

Young people were seen to absorb limited expectations from the local environment:

A lot of our children also don't see their parents getting a good job and feeling the benefits of, 'Oh my dad's got a promotion and now we're going on holiday to a nice place'. You know a lot of our employment down here is low income.

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

The knock-on effect of this type of poverty and isolation can be that people living in this area have a smaller stake in society, potentially leading to disillusion and disengagement. There is also the question of how this type of isolation affects the school budget through the way school leaders can feel obliged to use school resources for non-educational purposes:

If there's not a few bob in the back pocket then you begin to get into conversations around social services, around stress and anxiety in the home, which inevitably feeds into: we run one of the largest if not the largest breakfast clubs, heavily subsidised which drains our school budget ... And our next step will be to invite parents to sit with their children in that time. Not all of them need it but some of them [parents] just need a breakfast ... You're then beginning to be faced with a greater safeguarding need and domestic concerns ... All of a sudden, apostrophes become less important, and our stake in society gets a bit less.

Principal, Case Study 1

4.3.3 Employment opportunities

School leaders were asked to rate employment opportunities for school leaver's in their area (0 equals no opportunity, 100 high opportunity). As shown in Table 5, rural and coastal school leaders suggested that young people from their schools had the fewest opportunities. Responses from urban school leaders showed a greater range of perceived opportunity, but responses from leaders in rural and coastal locations reflected the limited opportunities outlined above by the case-study participants, and echoed the findings of limited local employment opportunities in the Coastal Schools Research [13].

	Lowest	Highest	Average
Urban	5	93	44
Coastal-urban	47	95	68
Rural and coastal	9	57	33

Table 5: School leaders' perceptions of employment opportunities for school leavers in their area (0 = no opportunity, 100 = high opportunity).

The consequence of the absence of opportunity for pupils in rural and coastal schools was exemplified by one of the case-study interviewees:

> *When I first started teaching in Year 4 ... we had a parent-liaison officer. And it really woke me up when she said, 'If we don't do right by these children, they will be the fourth generation unemployed in their family'. That just really hit home for me - fourth generation. So their parents don't work, their grandparents don't work and great grandparents didn't work. You know, that's massive.*

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

While intergenerational unemployment may also exist in urban locations, geographical isolation makes it more difficult for young people to travel to potential areas of employment and, as illustrated above, to learn of new and different types of employment opportunities and openings. All the factors outlined in this section, when combined with the ongoing austerity measures of reduced public spending, can have a devastating effect on deprived and isolated communities:

---

[13] Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England, https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_Passy.pdf, p.15.

All the socioeconomic issues that there are in this community … certainly during the time of recession, I feel that they worsened. I've been on this site now for [a long time] and … I've seen certain issues increase, for example suicide in this community. I don't really know what the statistics are, it's difficult because maybe I'm being anecdotal, but certainly I've had much more contact with young people who have direct experience with suicide … So, a lot of our students are experiencing a lot of trauma that's possibly a by-product of deprivation, and that remains our challenge.

Teacher (2017): Class of 2010 Research [14]

As the Principal above and this interviewee suggested, the range and extent of socioeconomic factors make school improvement in deprived and isolated areas a serious challenge (see Section 5). In schools with persistently disadvantaged pupils in rural and coastal schools in Cornwall, the RETAIN programme used evidence-informed practice approaches to support teacher development. For pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds the quality and continuity of good teaching makes a considerable difference to their attainment , but it became clear that the location of these schools created a challenge for teachers participating in the project:

It's changed the way I think about the children's 'normal'. So we were talking about how one person's 'normal' is completely different to someone else's 'normal' … Because I've come from a very different background to some of my children, it's made me think about that child and trying to understand that child, a bit more empathy than just teaching them as a child.

Early Career Teacher, RETAIN: Module 2 Interview [16]

In line with these findings and experiences, the Social Market Foundation commented on the way that working in a school in a coastal region amplifies the challenges senior leaders face due to the disadvantages of location (see Section 5):

[14] *Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2017) Class of 2010: A seven year study of a coastal academy in England. Summary Report, https://www.plymouth. ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/9/9902/Class_of_2010_summary.pdf, p.26.* [15] *Sutton Trust (2011) Improving the Impact of Teachers on Pupil Achievement in the UK – Interim Findings, London: Sutton Trust.* [16] *Maxwell, B., Clague, L, Bryne, E. et al (2018) Retain: CPD for Early Career Teachers of KS1. Pilot report and executive summary, May 2018, https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Projects/Evaluation_ Reports/Retain.pdf, p.28.*

> *'Britain's coastal communities are among the worst ranked parts of the country across a range of economic and social indicators, including earnings, employment, health and education – and the economic gap between coastal and non-coastal communities has grown'.*

Social Market Foundation, 2017 [17]

When viewed in the light of the evidence presented here, on the experience of pupils in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, their slower rate of progress than their urban counterparts' [18] becomes both explicable and a matter for urgent policy attention.

4.4   Cultural opportunities and/or diversity

EIP survey school leaders were asked if they considered their school to be isolated from cultural opportunities, such as museums and theatres, and cultural diversity. The results are shown below.

	Cultural opportunities	Cultural diversity
Urban*	5 (23%)	6 (27%)
Coastal-urban**	1 (17%)	3 (50%)
Rural and coastal***	23 (70%)	26 (79%)

Table 6: Cultural elements of isolation
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

Although a higher proportion of leaders from rural and coastal schools indicated that their schools were not isolated from these opportunities, neither survey nor case study school leaders commented about cultural opportunities. The absence of cultural diversity, however, was most frequently reported by rural and coastal schools.

4.4.1   Cultural diversity

The leaders interviewed for Case Study School 1 spoke in detail about the actions and investments they had made to compensate for the lack of cultural diversity in the local area. The Assistant Principal first explained the challenges posed by a lack of diversity in school:

[16] *Social Market Foundation (2017) Living on the edge: Britain's coastal communities, http://www.smf.co.uk/britains-coastal-communities-amongst-worst-performing-areas-earnings-jobs-health-education/. [17] Future Leaders Trust (2015) Isolated schools: Out on a limb, https://www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/blog/isolated-schools-out-limb/. [18] Future Leaders Trust (2015) Isolated schools: Out on a limb, https://www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/blog/isolated-schools-out-limb/.*

[There's] an awful amount of stuff we have to teach that you wouldn't teach in a school where you would have that cultural diversity because children would just be exposed to it. We are using curriculum time up on it which could be used elsewhere. I think it does present challenges and I think it has a knock-on effect on aspiration. … It creates a rather insular feel … we have to work quite hard to just make sure we are preparing children for modern global society and that they understand that global society doesn't look like [this town].

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

One leader then explained what actions the school had taken in response, but was honest about how much impact the school staff felt it had:

We're working with the [local centre for faith and cultural diversity]. We have to buy into that and we buy in at a 'gold' package [costing £2,500]. That buys us assemblies and buys us workshops and it buys us visits to religious buildings. And if we didn't do that the children wouldn't get any of that and we would be back to "here is a video" and we don't want that … I don't think it necessarily has the impact that we would like it to have because again it's very much in isolation: you come in and you have a workshop but then they [pupils] go home and they don't ever see it again for a long time, until they have another workshop.

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

He also suggested that pupils in isolated schools had a less rich experience because they had fewer opportunities to increase cultural awareness than pupils attending schools in multicultural areas:

We have to work really hard at it [teaching about cultural diversity] and it doesn't come naturally. And if you're only accessing 75 per cent of British society then that is going to make you a less culturally rich school, so it is bound to mean we are not going to have the same doors open to us as other schools.

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

Following the theme of 'an insular feel' in the school that was introduced above, the Principal noted a local reluctance to engage with other types of diversity, in particular gender issues. He commented that theirs was a [Gender Diversity] Champion school, and that:

We do the training for that ... One of the conditions around being a [gender diversity] Champion is that you run this training. And the training basically costs £250 a pop, and that money gets split 50:50 between the trainer ... and [Gender diversity programme provider]. And can I [sell] a course in Cornwall? Can I hell! ... [Gender diversity programme provider] phoned me up and asked me, 'Are you running another course?' And we say, 'Yes we'd love it, just no one is interested in spending 250 quid on gender diversity issues'.

Principal, Case Study School 1

The views above resonated with a survey comment from another school leader:

We are culturally very different to the rest of the country with the indigenous Cornish identifying themselves as Celtic rather than English, and those attitudes towards 'outsiders' of any race, culture or colour of skin can be difficult.

Survey Respondent, rural primary school

4.4.2 Isolation and funding

Reflecting on what the school would do in 'ideal' circumstances, the Assistant Principal commented how funding was critical to support the type of work that raised awareness of different environments and cultures:

If somebody would give me a blank cheque I would say, 'Right, we want to take our children to Birmingham, we want to take them to inner city London, we want to take our children to places' ... I would love to twin with a school in London and send some of our children up there, and indeed [bring] some of their children down to us.

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

This interviewee spoke of his own experience of the benefits of such an exchange. When working in a different school, he returned from a school stay in a large city and asked a participating child if he had noticed anything different about the children from what was a multicultural school:

> *And the one thing as a reception school he picked up on was that they were really tall. And that was it. And you think … if you can do that when they're in reception then that's going to be a big thing for them; that they are not going to be looking for those differences that aren't really important [such as a different colour skin].*

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

Finally, the Principal of the same school spoke of the imbalance in funding between schools, and how this made a significant difference to the cultural opportunities they could offer their pupils:

> *What's a bit different about a school in a rural location and especially a school in the far South West, it's a very long way to go, to go and show kids how it could be. It costs money to get on a coach. We did a London trip and we lost money massively … because the kids are never going to afford £350 to do two nights in London … And that isn't recognised in an APU [19] figure and in Cornwall that's £4,000. In Westminster that's £12,000. I absolutely get that the costs of living in London are that much more expensive. But that kind of [leads to] you know, the need for subsidy to promote cultural achievement … And then when the school says, 'Okay well, the parents can't do it for whatever reason; we'll do it' … but because of the low APU, we haven't got as much money to do it. And it's a hell of a distance, so the cost is a lot of money.*

Principal, Case Study School 1

While such trips and visits cannot provide a complete solution to a society that is currently deeply divided on a number of lines [20], they can contribute to children's cultural understanding and awareness through the direct experience that is absent in the workshops and lessons described by these interviewees.

---

[19] *Age-weighted Premium Unit – the rate of funding allocation for pupils in compulsory education.* [20] *Lord, C. (2018) The Brexit vote has only deepened the political and social divisions within British society, LSE blog, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2018/02/01/the-brexit-vote-has-only-deepened-the-political-and-social-divisions-within-british-society/.*

5. Limited access to resources for school improvement

In this section we examine further how schools' geographic location, socioeconomic conditions and lack of cultural opportunities and/or diversity can interact with the three elements of school improvement: recruiting and retaining a high quality workforce, accessing school support and accessing funded school improvement interventions.

5.1 High quality school workforce

Teacher retention and recruitment for schools in England is a national challenge [21]. Significant reductions in teacher trainee applications and acceptance have been reported since 2010 [22]. Published data shows that the proportion of teachers leaving the profession has increased every year since 2010 in primary schools [23], and in 2015/16 (the most recently reported data) the departure figure stood at 10 per cent [24]. The departure figures for early career teachers (ECTs) are arresting: 13 per cent of teachers leave teaching within one year of qualifying and 30 per cent leave within five years [25].

Regional differences in England have been reported as a factor for student attainment and school performance [26], but they are also relevant to workforce supply in schools. As we commented in the Coastal Schools Research, location brings additional problems for recruiting high quality teachers:

> *Interviewees commented that difficulties with recruitment related to the geographical isolation of these coastal academies and the limited employment prospects in coastal areas; experienced teachers often have families, and are reluctant to move to areas in which there would be difficulty in finding appropriate employment for their partners. On the other hand younger teachers, who are less likely to be in a stable relationship and/or have children, often want to be in an area that offers a wider range of social opportunities. The alternative, of travelling long distances to work, was equally reported as a significant barrier to recruitment [27].*

[21] National Union of Teachers (2017) Teacher Recruitment and Retention, https://www.teachers.org.uk/edufacts/teacher-recruitment-and-retention. [22] Helm, T, Siddiqui, K. & Ratcliffe, R. (2017) Teachers '£5,000 a year worse off under Tories', Guardian, 2 September, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/sep/02/teachers-5000-pounds-a-year-worse-off-under-tories-claims-labour. See also https://www.theguardian.com/education/teacher-shortages. [23] Worth, J. and De Lazzari. G. (2017). Teacher Retention and Turnover Research. Research Update 1: Teacher Retention by Subject, https://www.nfer.ac.uk/teacher-retention-and-turnover-research-research-update-1-teacher-retention-by-subject/. [24] DfE (2016) School workforce in England: November 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2016. [25] House of Commons (2017) Education Committee. Recruitment and retention of teachers, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmeduc/199/19902.htm. [26] Ofsted (2016) Ofsted Annual Report 2015/16, https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-annual-report-201516. [27] Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England, https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_Passy.pdf, p.13.

Responses from EIP survey participants show that little has changed since this time, as we discuss below.

5.1.1   General teacher recruitment

The EIP survey asked school leaders to indicate if they considered their school to be isolated from the school workforce supply generally and specifically teachers, leaders, and support staff. In Table 7 below we show how school leaders in different types of location responded. The rural and coastal schools identified greater difficulty in teacher, school leader and support staff recruitment and retention than coastal-urban or urban schools. Workforce support is clearly an issue taxing all schools, but the issue is greater for rural and coastal schools.

	Workforce supply	Teachers	Leaders	Support staff
Urban*	6 (27%)	5 (23%)	3 (14%)	0
Coastal-urban**	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	0	0
Rural and coastal***	13 (40%)	11 (33%)	7 (21%)	7 (21%)

Table 7: Teacher workforce elements of isolation
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

Survey and case-study participants elaborated on the specific difficulties experienced by leaders in crural and coastal schools. In Section 4.2 we demonstrated how geographical location meant that both pupils and staff had to spend greater amounts of time in travelling to their schools, and that the cost of this travel could be a barrier to teacher recruitment. Another difficulty related to the high cost of housing in some rural and coastal areas, where demand for holiday and second homes can raise prices beyond the means of prospective staff [28]:

Trying to recruit young staff to coastal/rural areas is very difficult and means that average salaries are higher due to nearly all recruits being on UPS. The high cost of housing does make a long-term commitment difficult for young staff and rental properties are expensive due to the amount of holiday opportunities in the area.

Survey Respondent, rural and coastal secondary school

---

[28] For instance Hastoe Group (2017) Rise in second homes pushing house prices out of reach for rural families, says Hastoe, http://www.hastoe. com/page/950/Rise-in-second-homes-pushing-house-prices-out-of-reach-for-rural-families-says-Hastoe.aspx.

Another survey respondent commented on how the high cost of London housing encouraged teachers to live, but not work, in their area of cheaper accommodation:

Being so close to London where the wages are higher, staff would rather live where we are based and work in London.

Survey Respondent, urban secondary school

A third challenge was staff turnover, which brought two specific issues that played out in different ways. The first was the problem of high levels of teacher churn. In the first quotation below, the problem related to staff development needs and inexperience:

We have to use Teach First as a recruitment stream and they tend to leave as soon as two year contracts are complete - now extended to three years - which creates continual staff development needs and inexperience.

Survey Respondent, coastal secondary school

While this survey participant did not elaborate on why this might be the case, it could be related to the absence of professional, cultural and social opportunities in isolated areas. The second difficulty with high levels of teacher churn related to issues with teacher quality:

Historically, the school had a number of vacancies for staff year on year. There is a real coastal churn of staff – for example if someone is underperforming in one school, they just move on to the next school. Because it's difficult to recruit staff, experienced teachers would get chosen over a newly-qualified teacher with potential. In this area, schools struggle with the quality of staff because it's about finding someone who you can get to work in challenging circumstances.

Headteacher, Case Study 4

The second aspect was the reverse; that school staff were unwilling or unable to move from their coastal or rural location. This was a point made by a Principal in our Coastal Schools Research, who argued that a relatively static staff meant that school improvement in his area tended to be inward-looking; this, in turn, resulted in fewer opportunities to introduce new ideas and techniques:

What you don't get is a lot of refresh. So in big cities and conurbations, you get movement in and out … [Here, schools] tend to look inwards for their solutions and for school improvement. I think that's a massive risk.

Principal, Academy 6, Coastal Schools Research [29]

However one EIP survey participant illustrated another consequence of a relatively static staff; a further challenge of recruitment as large numbers of staff were due to retire at approximately the same time:

We have had a very stable staffing structure for a number of years. However, nearly 50 per cent of staff are approaching retirement from 2016-19, so this will be a particular challenge for us.

Survey Respondent, secondary rural and coastal school

5.1.2 General teacher recruitment

The EIP survey asked school leaders how easy/difficult it was to recruit teachers in shortage subjects and in non-shortage subjects to their school. Tables 8 and 9 show that all responding school leaders found it difficult to recruit shortage subject teachers, and that they had an easier time recruiting non-shortage subject teachers. Nonetheless this was still seen as a challenge.

	Very easy	Easy	Neither hard nor easy	Hard	Very hard
Urban*	0	1 (5%)	2 (9%)	7 (32%)	7 (32%)
Coastal-urban**	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	0	2 (33%)	2 (33%)
Rural and coastal***	0	4 (17%)	6 (25%)	3 (13%)	11 (46%)

Table 8: Recruitment ease/difficulty in shortage subjects
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=24. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

[29] Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England, https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_Passy.pdf, p.13.

	Very easy	Easy	Neither hard nor easy	Hard	Very hard
Urban*	0	2 (9%)	9 (41%)	8 (36%)	3 (13%)
Coastal-urban**	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	0
Rural and coastal***	2 (8%)	4 (17%)	7 (29%)	7 (29%)	4 (17%)

Table 9: Recruitment ease/difficulty in non-shortage subjects
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=24. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

The Coastal Schools Research suggested that coastal schools were struggling to recruit to shortage subjects and all subjects, including leadership:

> *We're actually finding that now it's not only the STEM subjects but it's the other subjects across the board that we're finding difficulty in recruiting. … I need, desperately need a Learning Director for English because my current one is going to be retiring at the end of the year; I've advertised twice now and I've got not a single bite.*

Principal, Academy 3: Coastal Schools Research [30]

Four years later, conditions seem to be little different. The EIP survey invited school leaders to identify the ease/difficulty of recruiting senior leaders and headteachers/principals, and responses are shown below in Tables 10 and 11. Rural and coastal school leaders identified that it was more difficult to recruit senior leaders than it was in urban and coastal-urban schools, and that it was much harder to recruit head teachers/principals. The issue with senior staff appeared even more challenging than with teachers, with one school leader from an urban, all through school stating that this shortage was the 'most pressing issue'.

---

[30] *Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England, https://www. plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_ Passy.pdf, p.13.*

	Very easy	Easy	Neither hard nor easy	Hard	Very hard
Urban*	2 (9%)	3 (14%)	6 (27%)	9 (41%)	2 (9%)
Coastal-urban**	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)
Rural and coastal***	1 (4%)	5 (19%)	4 (15%)	10 (38%)	6 (23%)

Table 10: Recruitment ease/difficulty of senior leaders
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=26. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

	Very easy	Easy	Neither hard nor easy	Hard	Very hard
Urban*	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	9 (33%)	6 (29%)	2 (10%)
Coastal-urban**	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)
Rural and coastal***	0 (0%)	4 (15%)	3 (11%)	8 (30%)	12 (44%)

Table 11: Recruitment ease/difficulty of headteachers/principals
*n=21; **n=6; ***n=27. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

The Assistant Principal of Case Study School 1 commented on the difficulty of recruiting quality staff, but was uncertain as to how much of that was attributable to the school's location as opposed to its 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted status. It might be expected, however, that the location was influential in the school's grade.

I think, whether it's geography or because we are a Requires Improvement school, is that where you want to start your teaching career? In the past when we have recruited new teachers we have not always managed to get the advert out to pick out the cream of the NQTs. You know you're not always picking out the best from the beginning and we have to do a lot of work with them to get to them up to the standard that we would need to work in these challenging circumstances with these challenging children.

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

Nonetheless we need to recognise the difficulties with funding and shifts in government policy that EIP survey participants reported as contributing to staff recruitment and retention issues nationally and not just in schools experiencing isolation. One participant summarised the content of these comments:

Constant change of government policy and an almost unattainable increase in expectations of children's attainment, coupled with budget restraints and little or no increase in pay over the last seven years means that staff feel they are set up to fail and are not appreciated. SIP visits, hub leader visits (now we're in a MAT), Ofsted inspections (which in themselves feel like a punitive act) and SIAMS inspections mean that staff feel like they're constantly under the spotlight and that the system is set up to find fault, never celebrating the achievements we've all worked so hard to make.

Survey Respondent, rural primary school

5.2   School support

Survey respondents were invited to indicate all types of external school support that they received, and the results are shown in the table below.

Coastal-urban schools were relatively well-connected in all categories, while urban schools were likely to be part of a multi-academy trust (MAT). Similar proportions of rural and coastal schools were part of a MAT and / or a Teaching School Alliance (TSA). Perhaps the most surprising result was the relatively high number of rural and coastal schools that indicated partnerships with local universities in comparison with the urban / coastal-urban schools, as universities tend to be in the more densely populated areas of the country. This may reflect successful outreach work by universities keen to support schools in their efforts to raise pupil expectations in relation to higher education.

	Multi Academy Trust	Teaching School Alliance	Local Authority offer	University	No support
Urban*	14 (64%)	9 (41%)	9 (41%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Coastal-urban**	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	5 (83%)	2 (33%)	0
Rural and coastal***	19 (58%)	18 (55%)	8 (24%)	10 (30%)	1 (3%)

Table 12: External school support
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

Towards the end of the survey, leaders were asked to indicate if they considered their school to be isolated from the school support in terms of teacher continuing professional development (CPD) and leadership development. In the table below we show how school leaders in different types of location responded.

	Teacher CPD	Leadership development
Urban*	1 (5%)	4 (18%)
Coastal-urban**	1 (17%)	0 (0%)
Rural and coastal***	13 (39%)	13 (39%)

Table 13: School support elements of isolation
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

Once again rural and coastal schools indicated the highest levels of isolation, suggesting that being part of a MAT or TSA does not necessarily mean high-quality school support. One Principal described how MAT organisation can unfold in a highly competitive school system such as the one currently existing in England:

> *… [in] our multi-academy trust, on a local basis, we were basically five grade 4 inadequate schools at point of conversion. Those schools have been fighting for their lives. And when you're fighting for your life, you're not worried about other schools in your trust; you're fighting for oxygen yourself.*

Principal, Case Study School 1

The geographical isolation experienced by these leaders was seen to create further difficulties related to school improvement in terms of school support. The time required to travel between schools and/or to other opportunities for professional development can be prohibitive, and the Headteacher of Case Study School 2 drew on her previous experience of working in a rural school to reflect on how geographical remoteness created time-related challenges:

In the rural school I worked in, the meetings that were held were very few and far between … If your school is 20 miles from the nearest school that's similar to you, then that makes a huge difference, whereas we're 15 minutes down the road from one of our network schools … Also a lot of the rural schools are smaller, so if you've got fewer staff you can't really have a member of staff who just disappears for a meeting for half the day.

Headteacher, Case Study School 2

The Principal of Case Study School 1, a rural school, focused on how long travelling times can limit opportunities for school improvement and networking, and he commented on the importance – and difficulty – of building face-to-face relationships with colleagues from other schools:

Geography is always going to be … something of an issue. Our multi-academy trust stretches all the way down to [town]. If I want to borrow a teacher to deliver a master class or if I want to run a moderation session on KS2 writing, essentially that means we've got to write a member of staff out of school for a day, which is fine but then you lose the continuity in the classroom … We try and use skype or I've got a call tomorrow to look at PiXL, but nothing replaces the whites of the eyes.

Principal, Case Study School 1

This view was echoed by the Headteacher in Case Study 2:

It's much more difficult developing those [school to school] links because of the actual time it takes to travel to another school and to actually make contact and get involved. You're really reliant then on things like having headteacher meetings and things like that.

Headteacher, Case Study 2

The same principles of time and distance applied to difficulties with attending conferences in major urban areas, which can be a valuable source of professional development and networking opportunities:

I would love to send some of my teachers to conferences but you know, the cost of supply cover and getting there [is prohibitive]. You know you're not going to be in school tomorrow because of that conference [but actually] it's you're not going to be in school for three days because you've got to get there and it's a conference and then you've got to get back.

Assistant Principal, Case Study School 1

The EEF evaluation of RETAIN [31] showed that the programme enabled ECTs to develop their knowledge and understanding, confidence and practice in relation to literacy and other classroom practices. The evaluation also indicated a close alignment between the design and delivery of the RETAIN programme and many of the indicative characteristics of effective CPD. ECTs progressed in terms of the intermediate teacher outcomes, with particular enhancement of self-efficacy as measured by the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale [32]. High quality school support is important for school improvement and the RETAIN programme, which was undertaken in rural and coastal schools with high levels of socioeconomic deprivation, provided this in educationally isolated schools with positive effect.

5.3   Externally funded educational interventions

Survey respondents were asked if their schools were participating in externally funded, national initiatives of Social Mobility Areas, Department for Education priority areas/Opportunity Areas, Research Schools and School Strategic Improvement Fund. In Table 14 below we show how school leaders in different types of location responded.

	SM/DfE OA [1]	Research school	SSIF [2]
Urban*	11 (50%)	2 (9%)	4 (18%)
Coastal-urban**	2 (33%)	0	2 (33%)
Rural and coastal***	4 (12%)	2 (6%)	3 (9%)

Table 14: Government support participation
[1] Social Mobility / Department for Education Opportunity Area
[2] School Strategic Improvement Fund
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

[31] Maxwell, B., Clague, L, Bryne, E. et al (2018) Retain: CPD for Early Career Teachers of KS1. Pilot report and executive summary, May 2018, https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Projects/Evaluation_Reports/Retain.pdf.   [32] Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001) Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive concept. Teaching and Teacher Education, 17, 783–805.

Once again school leaders from urban and coastal-urban schools demonstrated greater connectivity, this time to national funding streams, than those in rural and coastal schools. Nationally funded interventions, such as Opportunity Areas [33], which aim to improve social mobility through changes to education, included a regional spread and coastal, urban and rural areas. The issues of population density or school remoteness within these areas of low social mobility and high socioeconomic deprivation, however, were not part of the area selection process. This may in some way explain why school leaders in rural and coastal schools may feel more isolated from funded interventions than their urban counterparts. The next table below shows the number of school leaders who indicated that they felt isolated from these types of government initiative, showing a high level of response from school leaders in rural and coastal locations.

	Government initiatives
Urban*	7 (32%)
Coastal-urban**	3 (50%)
Rural and coastal***	25 (76%)

Table 15: Government initiatives elements of isolation
*n=22; **n=6; ***n=33. Percentages are calculated as the proportion of each of these three categories, and are rounded to the nearest full number.

This issue was highlighted by a Principal in our Coastal Schools Research:

Some of the initiatives which I've been used to in city areas weren't immediately apparent here. And so the really strong, sharply-focused school improvement initiatives which were spawned out of first National Strategies and then the City Challenges, they were conspicuous in their absence.

Principal, Academy 2: Coastal Schools Research [34]

One EIP survey participant summed up their situation in a similar way:

We are a very small rural school with no direct transport links, the surrounding areas are quite deprived and Cornwall as a region does not receive as much funding, support or access to national schemes or programmes.

Survey Respondent, rural and coastal secondary school

---

[33] More information on Opportunity Area methodology can be accessed at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650036/Opportunity_areas_selection_methodology.pdf. [34] Ovenden-Hope, T. & Passy, R. (2015) Coastal Academies: Changing School Cultures in Disadvantaged Coastal Regions in England, https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11623/Coastal_Academies_Report_2015_final_2_Tanya_Ovenden-Hope_and_Rowena_Passy.pdf, p.12.

One of the case-study interviewees elaborated on these points during their telephone interview. The interviewer was located in Birmingham, which the interviewee used to highlight the point about regional disparities:

> *I think the starting point is statistical here. If you're looking areas of deprivation, 97 per cent of those in the UK exist within cities or the urban network. Three per cent exist within rural communities ... So the all of the funding has typically ended up in the big city. So you think London Challenge, you think Future Leaders. Where are you calling me from today? It's not from Hull, it's not from Grimsby - it's from Birmingham! So if you're a head struggling in one of those inner-city towns or cities, you've got access to far more resources on top of an already inflated APU figure ... You've got more resources by far.*

Principal, Case Study School 1

Others have drawn attention to absence of national funding initiatives in isolated locations. In 2013 Ofsted argued that:

> *The areas where the most disadvantaged children are being let down by the education system in 2013 are no longer deprived inner city areas, instead the focus has shifted to deprived coastal towns and rural, less populous regions of the country, particularly down the East and South-East of England. These are places that have felt little impact from national initiatives designed to drive up standards for the poorest children [35].*

In the following year, Weale reported along similar lines, arguing that schools in coastal locations faced 'a host of problems' and that they had been 'neglected by national initiatives' [36]. Our evidence here, once again, suggests that little has changed; schools in isolated locations face multiple disadvantages that stem primarily from their isolated location.

[35] Ofsted (2013) Too many of England's poorest let down by education system, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/too-many-of-englands-poorest-let-down-by-education-system. [36] Weale, S. (2014) Out in the cold: the coastal schools neglected by national initiatives, Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/oct/15/coastal-schools-neglected-by-national-initiatives.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

Education isolation can be defined as a school experiencing limited access to resources for school improvement, resulting from challenges of school location.
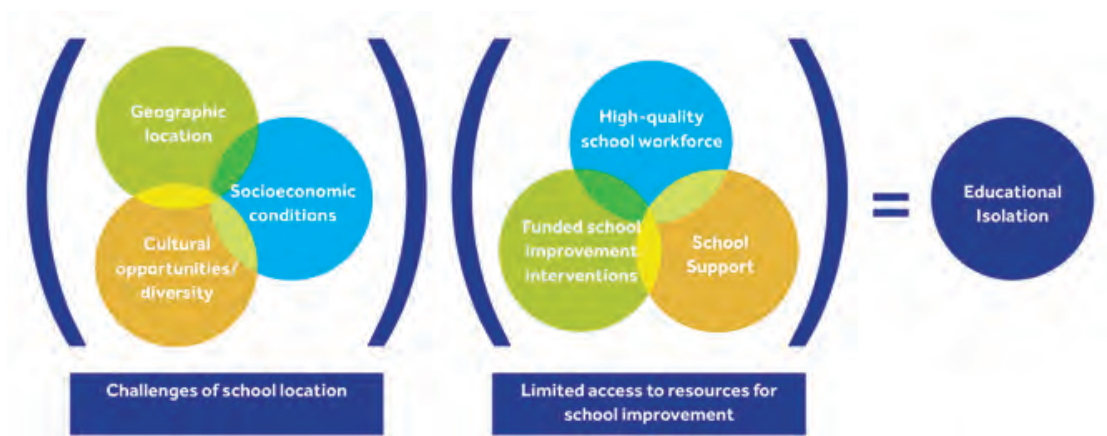

Figure 1: Conceptualising educational isolation for schools

Educational isolation has typically been entirely related to the geographical remoteness of the school. We accept the importance of geography, but also recognise how socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the schools' location affect their experience of isolation. Challenging conditions of location bring limitations in access to the resources for school improvement of a high quality school workforce, school support and externally funded interventions.

Educational isolation is complex, grounded in location, situated in access to resources and results in reduced agency for schools; it is this complexity that needs to be understood to ensure that schools receive the support necessary for school improvement. Part of the complexity can be seen in the way that educational isolation is experienced by schools in different ways within the commonality of location-related challenges. This fluidity also makes definition difficult, and the one presented here is purposefully broad to encompass the many combinations of challenges of location and consequential limited access to specific resources.

The challenges of schools' geographical location, socioeconomic conditions and/or cultural opportunities and diversity in the community were identified by rural and coastal schools to a much greater extent than by urban, or coastal-urban schools. The key challenges of location for educationally isolated schools were:

- **Geographic remoteness** - physical distance from the school for parents, pupils and teachers creates a barrier through the time taken and cost of travel to the school, poor transport links and public transport. It can result in community disengagement with the wider aspects of the school. It can also become a barrier in teacher recruitment.

- **Socioeconomic disadvantage** - high levels of isolation from employer engagement, economic and social opportunities, including an absence of large employers in manufacturing and professional industries. The lack of employment prospects, limited career advice, intergenerational low or unemployment and limited access to 'role models' was considered demotivating for young people, with the potential for creating culture of educational disengagement and reducing employment prospects further.

- **Cultural isolation** - high levels of isolation from cultural opportunities, such as museums and theatres, and from cultural diversity in the community. This was considered to create 'insularity' in these schools and reduce pupils' social awareness and aspirations. Disparity in funding was identified as exacerbating cultural isolation, preventing schools from creating opportunities to expand pupils' cultural experiences.

It is important to consider, however, that these challenges may not result in educational isolation if schools have access to the necessary resources for school improvement. Urban inner-city schools can have high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, but the research shows that they generally have greater access to resources that support school improvement.

The key resources for educationally isolated schools that are limited by the challenges of location are:

- **A high quality school workforce** - the main issues are poor teacher recruitment due to housing and travel cost and limited opportunities for teachers' partners, and difficulties with high levels of teacher churn or a static staff. The challenges for recruiting and retaining a high quality schools workforce is a national concern, but educationally isolated schools appear to have additional specific challenges.

- **School support** - educationally isolated schools were less likely to have high quality school to school support, collaboration and externally supported continuing professional development than other schools. While a MAT or TSA can provide high-quality support, this is not always the case, particularly when all schools within a particular MAT have low Ofsted grades. University outreach programmes may be supporting some isolated schools; rural and coastal survey participants reported a relatively high level of university partnerships.

- **Externally funded interventions** - access to the full range of DfE funded school improvement interventions was more limited in educationally isolated schools than other schools. Research participants reported that there was little funding available for those in isolated areas.

Rural and coastal schools have not matched the performance of urban schools with similarly deprived communities. Our research and projects span nine years and in this time we have seen little change in the conditions impacting negatively on schools experiencing educational isolation. We know that our findings resonate with experienced teachers and school leaders in coastal, rural and small schools (small schools typically being located in rural and coastal areas) [37]. It is worth noting that schools reporting no educational isolation in the EIP were all in urban areas with greater opportunities for employment and support from nearby schools, and they participated in a greater range of collaborative and funded interventions.

The Social Mobility Commission (2017) shares our concerns, identifying reduced educational opportunities for pupils in rural and coastal towns in England:

> *'Isolated rural and coastal towns and former industrial areas feature heavily as social mobility coldspots. Young people growing up in these areas have less chance of achieving good educational outcomes and often end up trapped by a lack of access to further education and employment opportunities.'*

Social Mobility Commission, 2017 [38]

The Princes Countryside Fund provides further evidence on the challenge of location, identifying similar issues to those raised in this report:

> *Infrastructural issues are experienced as the most significant barrier [for remote communities] … to reduce out-migration (particularly of rural youth), attract in-migration of families and businesses, open up education and training opportunities without having to leave your locality and ensure people feel connected with wider society with the option to engage with "mainstream culture". Remote rural is also associated with limited, seasonal employment options that give little opportunity for career progression, with a concerning rise in zero-hours contracts.*

The Princes Countryside Fund, 2018 [39]

---

[37] *Feedback on summary findings on Educational Isolation presented at the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Teaching Profession, November 2018, Westminster, London.* [38] *Social Mobility Commission (2017) State of the Nation Report 2017. London: SMC, https://www.gov.uk/ government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf, p.2.* [39] *Skerratt, S. (2018) Recharging Rural: Creating sustainable communities to 2030 and beyond, London: The Prince's Countryside Fund, http://www. princescountrysidefund.org.uk/downloads/research/recruiting-rural-full-report-final.pdf, p.26.*

Now that we understand more about educationally isolated schools, we can do more to increase school leaders' opportunities to access to the resources they need for school improvement. The range of research projects and reports highlighted here, together with the practical experience of working with ECTs in schools with high levels of disadvantage and the work of Professor Ovenden-Hope with school leaders in Cornwall [40], provided the incentive for the EIP. Understanding educational isolation enables us to raise awareness of its effects, provide recommendations to mitigate its impact and that will, if acted upon, help schools that have been 'stuck' to access the necessary resources for school improvement.

Recommendations

The House of Lords currently has two Select Committees focusing on the locations identified in this report as limiting school improvement; coastal and rural. The Lords Select Committees for Regenerating Seaside Towns (appointed 17 May 2018) [41] and Rural Economy appointed 17 May 2018) have collected evidence and are reviewing the issues for these locations, including in education, which may require additional support to provide equity with other locations in England. This recognition of the specific challenges for these areas brings some hope that change will follow.

The findings of this report support the case made in the State of the Nation Report 2017 for a fund to enable school-to-school support and CPD in educationally isolated contexts [42]. The importance of partnership, networking and collaborative practice for supporting school improvement in remote schools has been articulated in recent reports, such as by The Church of England [43] and The Key [44]. We recognise that many rural and coastal schools have, out of necessity, already developed networks and partnerships (within MATs, through TSAs, for example). Therefore our recommendations will not focus on actions for school leaders of educationally isolated schools; their strength in school leadership to find specific location related solutions is evidenced in our research and projects, as well as in the reports cited above. Our recommendations are for education policy makers, funding agencies/organisations and stakeholders. We suggest that, drawing on the evidence presented and cited in this report, and on our definition of 'educational isolation':

[40] Professor Ovenden-Hope was invited to work with school leaders in Cornwall by the Kernow Teaching School Alliance in 2016 and 2017 through their school improvement CPD. The focus for this CPD was 'The challenges for school leaders on the coastal strip'. [41] Information on the Lords Select Committee's for Regenerating Seaside Towns and Rural Economy can be accessed at: https://www.parliament.uk/regenerating-seaside-towns and https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/rural-economy/ [42] Social Mobility Commission (2017) State of the Nation Report 2017. London: SMC, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-. [43] The Church of England (2018) Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools. London, Church of England, Education Office, https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/Rural%20Schools%20-%20Embracing%20Change%20WEB%20FINAL.pdf. The Church of England is currently funding rural schools to develop networks for school improvement and effectiveness, identifying professional learning networks as crucial for schools in remote settings. [44] The Key (2018) The challenges of leading a rural school. London, The Key, https://resources.thekeysupport.com/hubfs/Rural%20Schools%20Report/The%20Key_The%20Challenges%20of%20Leading%20a%20Rural%20School_Report%202018.pdf?hsCtaTracking=99b976aa-09d5-4a6a-af0d-1b340dd8877e%7Ca62f7ad1-4bbe-4832-8759-d9ddb9eaa246.

Policy makers

1. Review current education policy in relation to priority areas and target schools, and revise as appropriate.
2. Consider the implications of educational isolation for school improvement and provide relevant, contextual and focused support to schools that are educationally isolated.
3. Work with rural and coastal school stakeholders, including the House of Lords Select Committees in these areas, to acknowledge factors affecting educationally isolated schools' performance.
4. Recognise the contribution school leaders have made at a local level in solving issues of educational isolation and make sure they are resourced at a national level.

Funding agencies/organisations

1. Work with school leaders of educationally isolated schools to develop a full understanding of areas that require extra funding to support school improvement.
2. Review Invitation to Tender (ITT) documents for national educational interventions to ensure that educationally isolated school leaders can complete the ITT within the allocated timeframe, and have access to the technology infrastructure required to use online portals.
3. Consider the challenges for school leaders experiencing educational isolation and provide specific and/or additional support to enable them to have the capacity to complete ITTs.

Stakeholders

1. Review all schools' performance indicators and consequential judgement criteria to include challenges of educationally isolated schools.
2. Consider the task school leaders of educationally isolated schools have in delivering school improvement and support collaborative practices with other schools locally, regionally and nationally.
3. Work creatively with schools experiencing educational isolation to maximise the advantages of rural and coastal locations for school improvement, such as learning outdoors.

We hope that this report will provoke a response and create a foundation for further research. We consider that additional benefit would come from research into:

- The interplay between school funding, socioeconomic disadvantage, geographic remoteness and underperforming schools rural and coastal areas
- Recruiting and retaining teachers to educationally isolated schools
- Exploring access to external CPD and externally funded interventions for educationally isolated schools
- The relationship of governance to the challenge of educational isolation
- Parental and community engagement and educational isolation
- How the MAT structure could effectively support schools working in educationally isolated contexts.

Appendix 1: Responding schools' profile

1. School leaders' role and region

Sixty-one school leaders responded to the survey invitation. Table 16 below shows the school leaders' roles and the region of their school. All school leaders were in different schools.

Region / role	Executive Principal	Principal	Head Teacher / Head of School	Senior Leader	Total
East Midlands				2	2
East of England				6	6
London	1			3	4
North West			2	2	4
South East		1		1	2
South West	5	3	15	9	32
West Midlands		1	2	2	5
Yorkshire and the Humber				6	6
Total	**6**	**5**	**19**	**31**	**61**

Table 16: School leaders' role and region (n=61)

2. School sector

Table 17 shows that 25 of the 31 primary schools (teaching different combinations of early years, KS1 and KS2) came from the South West. Schools from other regions made up the majority of secondary schools (offering combinations of KS3, KS4 and KS5), with 22 of the 28 located in areas other than the South West, shown in Table 3. The two all-through responding schools (London and the South West) are not included in the tables to support a focus of the primary and secondary school data.

Region / Stages	Early years	KS1	KS2	Total schools
East Midlands	1	1	1	1
East of England	2	2	3	3
South West	22	24	25	25
West Midlands	2	2	2	2
Total	**27**	**29**	**31**	**31**

Table 17: Responding primary schools by region (n=31)

Region / Stages	KS3	KS4	KS5	Total schools
East Midlands	1	1	1	1
East of England	3	3	1	3
London	3	3	2	3
North West	4	4	1	4
South East	2	2		2
South West	6	6	5	6
West Midlands	2	3	2	3
Yorkshire and the Humber	6	6	4	6
Total	13	6	1	28

Table 18: Responding secondary schools by region (n=28)

3. School region and status

Table 19 below shows that there were equal numbers of responding primary schools that were members of a multi-academy trust (MAT) or were a stand-alone academy or were linked to the local authority (LA). One independent school leader responded to the survey.

Region / Type of school	MAT	Academy	Local Authority	Independent school	Total schools
East Midlands	1				1
East of England	3				3
South West	8	3	13	1	25
West Midlands			2		2
Total	12	3	15	1	31

Table 19: Primary schools by region and type of school (n=31)

Table 20 below shows that of the majority of responding secondary schools were part of a MAT (13) or a stand-alone academy (six) and seven were LA schools. Responses were also provided from one free school and one studio school. The London all-through school reported that it was part of a MAT, and the all-through school from the South West reported that it was a Free School; the all-through schools' data are not included in Tables 19 or 20.

Region / Type of school	MAT	Academy	Free school	Studio school	Local Authority	Total schools
East Midlands		1				1
East of England	3					3
London	1				2	3
North West		1			3	4
South East	1	1				2
South West	2	2			2	6
West Midlands	1	1		1		3
Yorkshire and the Humber	5		1			6
Total	13	6	1	1	7	28

Table 20: Secondary schools by region and type of school (n=28)

There are now over 6,000 academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical schools in England, over half of which are part of a MAT [45]; academies and free schools make up 27 per cent of primary schools and 72 per cent of secondary [46]. Survey completions come from a high proportion of primary academy school leaders (15 of 31; 48 per cent), while secondary school leaders correspond broadly to the national profile with 21 secondary academies (of 28; 75 per cent) of different types, including a free school and studio school.

[45] Education Policy Institute (2017) Quantitative analysis of the characteristics and performance of multi-academy trusts. Online: https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/quantitative-analysis-characteristics-performance-multi-academy-trusts/. [46] Department for Education (2018) Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2018. Online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719226/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2018_Main_Text.pdf.

Appendix II: Elements of isolation

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the educationally isolating elements was appropriate for their school:

1. Other schools due to geography
2. Employer engagement
3. Teacher CPD opportunities
4. Leadership development opportunities
5. Government initiatives to support education e.g. social mobility area, teaching school alliance
6. Workforce supply
7. Teachers
8. Leaders
9. Support staff
10. Cultural opportunities e.g. theatres, museums
11. Social opportunities e.g. restaurants, cinemas, pubs, sports clubs
12. Economic opportunities e.g. large employers, access to targeted government funding
13. The local community
14. Parents
15. Cultural diversity
16. No isolation

Seven out of 61 schools surveyed reported 'no isolation'.