

Island Voices: choice, equity and opportunity in Jersey schools

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Abstract

This paper explores issues of choice and opportunity in Jersey schools. Within a 'closed' island context, it gives voice to concerns that families have about the schools their children can attend, the subjects they can study, the extra-curricular activities they can pursue and the wider opportunities they perceive they have (or do not have) as a result of their education. Data collection was undertaken across both state and private sectors, primary and secondary schools, and included questionnaires, focus groups and interviews with school governors, headteachers, business leaders, teachers, pupils and parents. Our findings, which have application to insular communities around the world, reveal restricted outcomes associated with the reputational stigma of some schools, the limitations in how subject choices are actualised in schools and unequal academic attainment across the system, especially for the children of immigrant workers.

KEYWORDS: choice, opportunity, equity, schooling, island community

Introduction

Jersey, the largest of the Channel Islands, is not part of the UK but is a self-governing British Crown Dependency. Although defence and diplomatic representation are 'reserved to' the UK government in London, Jersey has its own international identity and negotiates directly with foreign governments on matters within the competence of the island's parliament, the States Assembly. Jersey is not part of the European Union (EU).

In the 2011 census, the total resident population was approximately 100,000. Half the population was born in Jersey, approximately 30% was born elsewhere in the UK, 7% in Portugal, 8% in other European countries and 5% elsewhere. Jersey belongs to the EU Common Travel Area and is within the UK for the purposes of immigration and nationality,¹ but it is legally entitled to (and does severely) restrict immigration. Jersey employment law is governed by the Employment Law 2003 and the Employment Relations Law 2007. These laws apply to employees, whatever their nationality, but employees working and living on Jersey are very reliant on their 'residential status'. After five years residency, a person can take up any job, and after ten years can take any type of housing, but until those requirements are met, access to work and housing is limited and restricted by the Housing Law 1949 and the Regulation of Undertakings and Developments Law 1973, which are designed to manage immigration and protect local housing and jobs (Little and Thompson, n.d. See also Employment Jersey, n.d.). Stopping those without residential status from purchasing or renting property on the island, allied to other restrictions on employment, means that the non-native population – mainly those who work in seasonal industries like agriculture and tourism - is not evenly spread among the island's school catchment areas.

Until the 19th century, an indigenous form of French was the everyday (and official) language of the island, but during the 20th Century well-to-do British families, attracted by the low income tax regime, settled in Jersey in increasing numbers, so that Jersey today is culturally indistinguishable from England and follows the same formal school curriculum. State schools on Jersey (including two fee-paying state secondary schools) are operated by the Department for Education, Sport and Culture, which unusually in the UK also supports private schools. At the time of writing, there are 31 primary schools on the island, of which 22 are state non-fee-paying, 7 are private fee-paying and 2 are state fee-paying 'preparatory' schools.² There are 9 secondary schools, of which 5 are state non-fee-paying (one, Hautlieu, has a selective intake), 2 are private fee-paying (Beaulieu Convent School and De La Salle College) and 2 are state fee-paying (Jersey College for Girls and Victoria College for Boys).

The research upon which this paper is based was funded by the Jersey Community Relations Trust. It was undertaken against the backdrop of a widely reported child abuse scandal on the island. Jersey, and in particular its children's homes, received world-wide negative publicity as a result of an investigation, codenamed Operation Rectangle, into systemic

¹ Under the 1981 British Nationality Act.

² Participants use the term 'fee-paying' and 'private' interchangeably to describe non-state schools, but we use the term 'fee-paying' (rather than 'private') exclusively in our commentary because we include fee-paying *state* schools in the private sector as they are outside Jersey's state school catchment area system. Participants also use the term 'public' and 'state' interchangeably; we use the term 'state' throughout to avoid confusion with Public (i.e. prestigious private boarding) schools in England.

sexual, physical and psychological abuse at Haut de la Garenne and other children's care homes, which saw people convicted of scores of serious offences against hundreds of children. The subsequent public inquiry heard that 'the Jersey way' – a 'negative aspect of Jersey life, involving the protection of the powerful and a deep-rooted resistance to change' (Morris, 2017) - was a contributory factor and part of the island's 'culture of fear' (ibid).

For an island community like Jersey - geographically isolated, politically independent but culturally part of the larger UK - traditional ways of thinking about school effectiveness do not deliver credible judgments on how the quality of schooling is perceived locally. In data-rich systems like the UK it is possible to use measures like changes in pupil attainment, rates of progression to higher education and employment success to gauge school effectiveness in a utilitarian sense, but it is difficult to use such measures to extrapolate the extent to which parents and pupils feel able to take advantage of educational opportunities to achieve their own desired outcomes and well-being in an island community like Jersey (Kelly and Downey, 2011).

Methodology

The research focuses on the freedom of individuals to pursue choices that reflect their values and interests. The emphasis is not solely on what pupils achieve, but also on whether they perceive they have the ability to live their school lives in ways they regard as important; for example, through participation in extra-curricular activities that they value and enjoy. The purpose is to explore schooling in terms of the value that people place on the decisions they make; to look beyond examination results and league tables, and instead consider the processes through which pupils make and pursue decisions regarding their schooling; and to explore how they feel about these decisions and to seek insights into how they experience or perceive the outcomes that ensue.

Our methodology was chosen to give voice to parents, pupils and other education stakeholders on the island. Three main methods of data collection were used: focus groups, individual semi-structured in-depth interviews and questionnaires (available both online and in hard-copy).³ Fourteen schools participated in the interviews and focus groups: 8 state primary schools, 1 fee-paying primary school, 3 state secondary schools and 2 fee-paying secondary schools. All schools participated in the survey by questionnaire. A total of 41 days were spent conducting field interviews with school governors, school and business leaders, teachers, students and parents.

Eighteen focus groups meetings were held for children in years 6, 7 & 9. Children were asked about perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards educational opportunities and choices. A total of 81 interviews were undertaken with 23 teachers, 1 EAL teacher; 1 SEN coordinator, 13 headteachers, 3 policy makers, 2 school inspectors, 2 governors; 4 business leaders and 32 parents with children in year 6 (14); year 7 (5); year 8 (1); year 9 (7); year 10 (1) and year 11 (4). Parents of students from all the sample schools were invited to participate but only those from the non-fee-paying schools accepted to take part (although some governors and business leaders had children in fee-paying schools so their views and

³ The authors would like to thank Dr Christina Chinas for her help with the fieldwork in the early stages of the research.

experiences as parents were also included in the analysis). In line with the aims of the research, interview participants were asked about their experiences, challenges, understandings, the support received from educational officers, and decision-making processes in relation to the opportunities offered to pupils especially those with special educational needs and from ethnic minority groups. Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded, fully transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis using NVivo software. Main topics emerging from the data were: curricular and extra-curricular choices, equity and opportunity, school selection; public and private schools and school choice. These topics were further scrutinised and divided into different subtopics that were subsequently used in the writing up of this paper. Ethical clearance was obtained prior data collection from our Faculty Ethics Committee and ethical principles of voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality were respected at all times. The next section discusses the findings of the study in relation to choice, equity and opportunity in the context of schooling in Jersey.

Choice of secondary school and transition to it

Choice is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for individual freedom, social and economic opportunity, and well-being. The freedom of pupils and parents to make school and curricular choices is the first step towards achieving the positive outcomes that they desire, both as individuals and collectively as a society, and making the 'right' choices for the given circumstances requires pupils and parents to have access to information that is relevant, accurate and high quality. Interviews with pupils, parents, teachers and other stakeholders throws light on the information that is available to families on Jersey when making choices about which schools their children will attend, what subjects they will study and what extra-curricular activities they will pursue. Overall, interviews provide a valuable source of information on the types of information available, where that information comes from, how useful it is felt to be and how it circulates through formal and informal channels.

The transition from primary to secondary school on Jersey is the inflection point at which the freedom to choose a school becomes most apparent. It is driven by the island's catchment area system, which is designed to manage under-subscription or over-subscription in particular schools, so if and when a catchment school becomes full, an alternative is allocated. The allocation of places is done by the Education Department taking account of whether families live or work in a particular area and whether or not the children attend a primary school in the area. Particular primary schools generally 'feed' into particular secondary schools, but choice of school also depends on factors like whether or not there is special education need (SEN) and whether or not older siblings already attend the particular secondary school in question. Fee-paying *state* secondary schools and fee-paying *private* secondary schools are outside the catchment area system, though they are all 'managed' by the Education Department.

The fact that secondary school choice is driven mainly by a catchment system does not obviate the need for, or the importance of, information for pupils and families because the Education Department accepts requests from pupils and parents 'to attend a non-catchment school if based on good educational reasons'. Information also helps *prepare* pupils for the transition to secondary school, and the ways in which information about schools circulates remains a topic of considerable importance for families and young people

in Jersey. Pupils generally receive information material from their local catchment secondary schools in the form of information packs, letters and leaflets. A smaller proportion of pupils also receive materials from *non*-catchment schools in the form of leaflets and letters, and others glean additional information from government offices and via the Internet. In England, league tables constitute an important source of information in these circumstances (Goldstein and Leckie, 2016), but as league tables are not published in Jersey, word of mouth and social networks constitute a major source of *informal* information that is not 'controlled' by schools.

"Parents consider where their neighbours' children or other family members' children go. Because Jersey is small you can have very good 'word of mouth' and you can also get genuine information from children who are there, rather than counting on the prospectus." [Local business leader]

Interestingly, while school and business leaders suggest that Jersey's 'small-island sociability' helps circulate informal information about schools, the evidence is that immigrant families do not derive any benefit from it. Word-of-mouth is important for these families, but they are typically seeking information on secondary school choices without much 'base knowledge' of the system:

"I think parents listen to the opinion of relatives who have been here for longer; maybe from their bosses as well. A lot of the parents who arrive are new here. They don't know much about the schools so they get a lot of input from others." [State secondary school teaching assistant]

In the absence of league table data and equivalent sources of information, this raises worrying questions as to whether all of Jersey's residents have equal access to accurate and useful information. While our interviews suggest the immigrant communities share informal information about schools, we find that such information is not available to newcomers who have yet to make social ties on Jersey. Information from Jersey's Education Department is also important, but many parents are critical of the lack of formal information available on the Internet, especially regarding school performance and examination results. Most of the island's teachers and stakeholders agree. They believe especially that parents with children in Years 5 and 6 (the final years of Primary school) should be given data on schools' Value Added scores. As a businesswoman and mother of school-age children told us:

"You will find it very difficult to find any results on the website, so you have to give them a call and they don't give you the results easily. The school websites [are] very poor quality. The Education Department should take more of an interest in this type of information [being] available."

Secondary schools themselves constitute an important source of information for parents and pupils. They generally hold open evenings in the autumn where they give information to prospective enrolees; and many primary schools also hold 'End-of-Year 6' meetings around the same time, to explain the secondary system to parents and make sure they are informed about the transition. These meetings and school visits are perceived positively by pupils and parents alike and are generally thought to provide the highest quality information available,

especially about curricular and extra-curricular choices, but there are exceptions and the provision is considered 'patchy'. Parents reported negative experiences, especially when attempting to access information on subject choices from prospective secondary schools:

"I haven't met the teachers yet and even when you do meet them, it's like five minutes and all the parents jump in, so it's a horrible experience." [Mother of a Year 6 and a Year 9 student]

In Jersey, family 'tradition' also informs secondary school choices, as it does in England (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003), and this is particularly evident in the case of fee-paying schools and high-performing state schools, where families feel strongly about continuing a family association. Having older children already attending particular secondary schools also guides parental choice, but overall there is general agreement that more and better performance information is needed across the system.

Choice and the divide between state and fee-paying schools

The catchment area system constrains choice between schools in the state sector. It does not impact directly on fee-paying schools, but there is interplay between the two sectors, as heads and teachers recognise. Whereas pupils themselves do not generally reflect on the limitations of the catchment area system, they are aware of the perceived consequences of choosing fee-paying or state schools. Some pupils perceive a significant difference in quality between the two, although this is considered in pragmatic terms and not necessarily in terms of lost opportunity:

"It was always going to be [state secondary school named] because ... we don't have the money to pay for a private school. We couldn't afford it. I know that private schools are better than public schools, but I think that I will learn well in [state secondary school named]." [Year 6 boy]

Unsurprisingly perhaps, teachers from fee-paying schools defend the equality of opportunity offered by their schools and pointed to the provision of bursaries in support of their argument:

"We have a good budget available for bursaries and we provide bursaries when we can. I have never said 'no' to someone who meets the criteria and is not financially able to come here. We have it as a target that 10% of our students are on bursaries. We fund the fees, the uniform, anything required; and subject related trips." [Fee-paying school headteacher]

"We have a wonderful and very generous bursary scheme so parents that can't afford the fees can apply to the school for a bursary. It's nearly £100,000 per year that we spend on bursaries. When you consider that the fee for the whole year is about £4,000 you can see that we do 20 to 30 pupils and some parents will get a full scholarship; it depends on their financial needs." [Fee-paying school headteacher]

Previous research (Morris, Dorling and Smith, 2016) has demonstrated that the existence of an education 'market' exacerbates social and educational inequality, but internationally, there is conflicting evidence on whether fee-paying students achieve better educational outcomes than students in state maintained schools (Parsons et al., 2017; Lubienski, Crane and Lubienski, 2008). Most stakeholders in our research – parents, teachers, headteachers, and pupils themselves – feel that the 'sorting' of more academically-able students into fee-paying schools creates a false impression of lower attainment in the state secondary school sector. Teachers in state schools are particularly conscious of this issue and of the related issue of value-added:

"What we've been pushing for is to look more at the value that we add to the student, so if the student comes with a target grade E and they achieve a C they are making value of two grades and that's what we view at the school as success. But not every school views that obviously and it's harder for [named school] when they have a 99% A to C success rate. So okay, if they have bright students, how are they pushed and how is the school stretching them? And that's the question we've got to be asking more."* [State secondary school teaching assistant]

Parents and pupils are also aware of the issue:

"Unfortunately the island is structured in such a way that if you can afford to pay then you get much better choice. [This] is not to say that any of the state secondary schools are bad - I don't think they are - but there is a high proportion of children being educated privately so the academic results of state schools are slammed by circumstances." [Parent of a Year 6 boy]

"State schools don't have high grades, but we can't blame the school as most of the high grade pupils leave for [named school], and then the pupils staying behind have lower grades, which doesn't look good on the school, but is not the school's fault." [Immigrant Year 9 boy]

On the other side of the value-added issue, a significant number of stakeholders are concerned about pupils not being 'sufficiently pushed' in state schools, both in academic terms and in terms of behaviour:

"If I want to achieve something, I have to work for that. I can't expect others to do it for me. But then again, like in class, if I am trying to learn something and someone else is disrupting the class, we are not going to be able to learn, so it does depend on others as well." [Student in state secondary school]

Generally, the question of academic attainment is viewed in terms of meritocracy and individual pupils' desire to work hard and achieve:

"I am of the opinion that if you are able, you [can] achieve in a public school the same [as] you can achieve somewhere else. It's down to you personally." [Parent of a Year 7 student in state secondary school]

This *laissez-faire* viewpoint is also common amongst pupils at academically selective fee-paying schools:

“There is nothing really stopping [state school pupils] from working as hard and making sure they get the same grades and results.” [Student in fee-paying secondary school]

Echoing research by Reay (2007), we found that while most state-school parents and pupils are quick to defend the quality of Jersey’s state schools, the negative perceptions of some state schools is widespread and constitutes a particular issue in relation to a social divide between the two sectors. Most acknowledge that the reputation of state schools varies considerably across the sector, but that overall they carry a certain ‘stigma’ regarding the quality of their provision. This is felt very acutely and is widely discussed among pupils and parents in the state sector:

“There is still a social standing if you went to a private school in Jersey. In the ideal world you wouldn’t want that, but it’s there.” [Mother of a Year 9 student in state secondary school]

“If you go to a private school you are better off. It’s more [about] the public opinion than the actual difference.” [Year 9 girl in state secondary school]

And it is reflected by pupils in fee-paying schools too:

“You get people here that are more focused on wanting to learn and really get work done, whereas some of the people who go to state schools are not really bothered about school.” [Year 9 boy in private secondary school]

“Here everyone is ready to learn something, I think in public schools sometimes you get groups of people who aren’t there to learn and this sometimes affects your learning.” [Year 9 boy in private secondary school]

Unsurprisingly, this issue is a source of frustration for those state school pupils who feel it presents their schools unfairly in a bad light:

“People in private schools think they are better than us. They say we’ve got a bad reputation. It’s kind of mean because they haven’t been to our school and haven’t [had] a lesson in it. They haven’t experienced what it’s like here.” [Year 7 girl in state secondary school]

It is widely believed on Jersey that pupils in fee-paying schools have more ‘invested’ in their education because of the financial commitment involved and this says something about the factors that influence the poor reputation of some state secondary schools on the island.

“I think the mentality in a state school: they don’t seem to be as bothered about their education, whereas here the majority of the people get the work for the money they are paying.” [Year 9 boy in fee-paying secondary school]

“Your work ethic is sort of better [here] because you are really channelled in your work because you just don’t want to waste the money.” [Year 9 boy in fee-paying secondary school]

While this attitude is widely articulated by pupils in fee-paying schools, those in state schools suggest that fee-paying schools are simply better resourced:

“I think there is quite a bit of difference. In private schools students seem to get a better education because they have more money and supply students with better equipment and more teachers.” [Immigrant Year 9 girl in state secondary school]

Perceptions of poor behaviour and poor classroom management in state schools constitute another widely discussed factor:

“State schools seem to have a worst reputation; there [are] more pupils who mess around than actually work.” [Immigrant Year 9 girl in state secondary school]

“Private schools are more strict and there is less people distracting you from your class because here in a classroom there will be one odd person deciding to distract the whole class and mess around and they don’t do much about it; probably sending him to ‘an exit room’. But in a private school they would punish you and you wouldn’t do it again, which helps other people as well. And here you normally get away with not doing your work.” [Immigrant Year 9 boy in state secondary school]

School reputations therefore reflect a range of factors. Some are external to the schools themselves, such as the financial investment of parents, while others are down to the perceived effectiveness of teachers in managing pupil behaviour and the learning environment. Parents and pupils on Jersey acknowledge that the reputation of schools changes over time, whether or not those reputations were ever fairly representative of pupils’ experience:

“Schools have different reputations, but reputations change over time when a new head comes along and that reputation changes, but in the meantime another school might be going downhill slightly.” [Local businessperson]

These points are important reminders that reputation is not fixed nor does it necessarily reflect reality, but the reputational stigma attached to state schools nevertheless constitutes a worrying issue, especially within a small system such as that on Jersey.

Opportunity and opportunity cost

There are three different, but related, aspects to opportunity: the opportunity for pupils and their families to make decisions regarding schooling; the opportunity for pupils to exercise these decisions with regard to selecting preferred subjects and to take part in extra-curricular activities; the opportunity that pupils perceive they have as a result of their education when trying to find a job or accessing further / continuing education. Opportunity

is related to how far pupils and parents are able to act on the choices they make; for example, to achieve a place at a desired school, to study a preferred range of subjects or to take advantage of extra-curricular activities on offer. So while choice relates to informed decision-making, opportunity relates to the ability to *act* on those decisions, although this alone offers no guarantee of satisfaction or achievement.

Whereas pupils regard their parents as the most important source of help in choosing a secondary school, parents cite a variety of influences: the opinion of primary school teachers, other parents and extended family. Subject choices, on the other hand, are almost exclusively influenced by teachers, and after-school activities are mainly decided by the children themselves. For example, two-thirds of parents rely on other parents when choosing a school, but fewer than half think that the opinion of other parents is of use when choosing subjects. Teachers recognise their own important role when pupils are choosing subjects, but say that parents are *their* most important sources of information on the children when it comes to advising them. Most teachers see it as important for pupils to talk to other pupils when choosing curriculum subjects and they actively encourage pupils to canvass opinion as widely as possible.

The opportunity that comes from choice of school and choice of subjects is influenced by academic selection, which is an ever-present topic on Jersey. Teachers and parents argue that the pressure placed on pupils to achieve the academic standards necessary to gain entry to certain secondary schools is a source of stress and anxiety at a sensitive stage in their development:

“One of the highest achievers in this school: his confidence is in tatters at the moment and it’s of extreme concern that the education system that we have in Jersey is supposed to be ‘every child cares’ and ‘every child matters’, but actually the system that we have is creating some severe issues for students.” [Secondary school teacher]

There is a popular view that only fee-paying schools are selective, but some in the fee-paying sector argue against this view:

“Our selection is based on a minimum on 100 CATs score and 100 is the national average. If you were a selective school in the UK you would be probably looking at 120+. We are not highly selective academically.” [Fee-paying school headteacher]

Pupils in secondary schools feel more pressure *from their parents* as they utilise their capital in support of their children’s education Ball (2003). This is especially the case when choosing subjects:

“I had freedom from my teachers, but I didn’t have that much freedom from my parents ‘cause they wanted me to do subjects that are better for the future.” [Year 9 boy in private secondary school]

A comment from a mother of a pupil in a fee-paying school – fairly typical of the overall response - illustrates the tensions in choosing certain subjects:

“There are some courses that for the amount of money I am going to pay ... like Medicine or Law ... if you do something like History of Art, it is not so clear at the end where you are actually going to build your career.”

Pupils also feel strong pressure from teachers in relation to choosing certain subjects. As one pupil explained:

“The teachers try to bias us to do their subjects. They try to make it sound better than it really is. When we went to their room to talk about the subject, they say stuff that you do practical, but if you ask some of the students they tell you different. So it’s hard to choose.” [Immigrant Year 9 boy in state secondary school]

Practically, at the level of the school, there are restrictions on pupils when choosing optional subjects. In most schools, both state and fee-paying, the curriculum is organised in particular ‘blocks’ in such a way as to inhibit certain choices and combinations. Schools claim to canvass their pupils in advance as to their preferred subject combinations so that these option blocks accommodate as many preferences as possible. Teachers think the system works well, but the majority of pupils do not support this view. Pupils also perceive the block system to be a source of inequality between schools and a source of disadvantage in accessing further education and employment:

“The option blocks are what stop us really. If we didn’t have option blocks we’d be happier because you’d get to pick our favourite subjects. The blocks aren’t really even because they are not really mixed. It’s the best ones in one block and the worst one in another block.” [Year 9 student]

“The blocks are terrible here. Other schools have different blocks. It’s obviously [the] school that has chosen these blocks and I think it should be the Education Department to choose the blocks, equal for all schools, because we hear about other kids in other schools doing their favourite subjects. We can’t.” [Year 9 student]

“We have three options and I would like to have four because if you have four when you are older you have a wider range of different jobs to choose from. Because I didn’t have History it will be a disadvantage to doing Law.” [Year 9 student]

The strength of feeling on this topic is very intense. Pupils regard the practice of ‘blocking’ certain curriculum options as a source of inequality in terms of how they can actualise their opportunities after they leave school.

Extra-curricular activities represent another area of dissent. At first glance Jersey schools provide a broad choice during ‘lunch hour’ and ‘after school’, with no marked difference between the state and fee-paying sector. Schools are very proud of their extra-curricular provision:

“They have a lot at this school; an awful lot. There is sport, drama, music. We have a very good Combined Cadet Force. I think it’s fair to say that this school has more activities than any other school on the island.” [Fee-paying secondary headteacher]

“There are a lot of things going on. We’ve got music, drama, revision classes, chess club, lots of sporting activities and dedicated Portuguese lessons.” [State secondary headteacher]

This positive view is shared by most parents and pupils who are satisfied with the choices available and keen to take advantage of them. They see such activities as having a positive impact on academic performance as well as on pupils’ socialisation. Due to the wide range of after-school activities on offer in schools on Jersey, students in both state and fee-paying schools report being ‘very busy most days of the week’. However, several issues arise in relation to the opportunities to take advantage of these activities in state schools. In particular, [as was reported some twenty years ago by Penney and Harris \(1997\) for schools in England and Wales](#), pupils pointed to gender disparities in the range of sports available:

“There should be more activities for girls to do; for example, for girls there is only netball.” [Year 7 girl in state secondary school]

“[I want] to play rugby in the school but there is no girls’ rugby.” [Year 9 girl in state secondary school]

Participants also point to the limited timeframe for certain activities, notwithstanding the seasonal nature of some sports. Pupils feel that schools should consider greater provision for indoor alternatives to promote year-round participation and they raise the more general issue of the poor quality of instruction in some activities. Most pupils want, but cannot afford, private sessions to augment their extra curricular activities, and some schools have financial support schemes to facilitate them:

“Inevitably for the minority, their financial circumstances are more restricted so their parents will not always pay for private lessons. So we make sure we offer that opportunity; and if we organise a trip we make sure everyone can go even if they can’t pay, so we privately talk to those families and give a donation through a charity or whatever.” [State secondary school headteacher]

“There are ... some children who have very enriched lives and do an awful lot of things while others sit at home and play with their XBoxes and don’t have the stimulation. We try to compensate [for this] and the extra curriculum is very important to us in terms of creating opportunities for children that they might not get at home. But you can’t compensate for everything. ... All our activities and visits are free. We raise money when we can ... so there are no additional charges.” [State secondary school headteacher]

Capability and outcomes

Educational capability, which we define as the combination of outcomes that a pupil achieves, both short-term and long-term, as a result of schooling, is difficult to measure as it involves a very wide range of ways in which pupils might use (or plan to use) their skills and experiences, but one of them relates definitively to future employment. The economy

of Jersey is largely driven by financial and legal services, which together account for approximately 40% of total Gross Value Added (GVA). More than 12,000 people are employed in this sector alone with recruitment mainly at graduate level, while non-graduates, school leavers and casual / vacation jobseekers are recruited mainly to the agriculture, tourism, telecommunications, retail and construction sectors (Employment Jersey, n.d.). Across all sectors, many parents and pupils perceive that employers are 'particularly sensitive' to the school attended by job-applicants and prospective employees, and employers are quite open about this:

"To get a job, it is very important where you went to school. I find it ridiculous, but that's the way things work around here. If you went to [fee-paying school named] or [fee-paying school named] it's easier to get a job. Where you went to school makes a huge difference." [Businessperson]

"Local employers may choose a student on the knowledge that they have been educated in particular schools. In Jersey there is a huge stigma attached to the school one attended." [School governor – a businessperson]

According to Rivera (2011), the recruitment criteria of elite employers are based not only on educational and extra-curricular credentials but on the prestige attached to them. We found similarly in Jersey, aided by the close links that fee-paying schools have with local businesses and the professional relationships they have with employers:

"We have a strong network of, and partnerships with, employers - a whole range of careers - that could involve career mentoring, internships, work placements, CV and application workshops. Also we have employers who come and sponsor [our] activities. We also work a lot with the big companies in Jersey on apprenticeship schemes." [Fee-paying secondary school headteacher]

Employers suggest that state schools are simply less effective than fee-paying schools at establishing links with local businesses, and attribute the greater success of private-school job applicants to better academic attainment:

"We have very close links with the private schools. The state schools know about us, but they don't seem to be so involved in directing their students to other options." [Businessperson]

"The fee-paying schools and [a named state school] are selective academically and therefore are more likely to have students go on to university, which will have an effect on their employment prospects. This does not mean that students in non-fee paying schools or those attending [another state school named] have worse job prospects, but they may be different." [School governor]

Many state-school pupils agree with this assessment, acknowledging that academic achievement and the quality of education in their schools are inextricably interlinked to job prospects:

*“Most people who leave private school leave with As or A*s and they can be really successful. In the public schools, they are less strict and people can leave with really bad grades and they can’t get jobs.” [Year 9 student in state secondary school born to immigrant parents]*

An allied problem is the widespread concern on Jersey regarding the provision of vocational training; specifically, that it is not adequately prioritised alongside academic skills:

“It’s not available as it should be ... Everything seems to be orientated towards high value, high economic benefit, so these skills aren’t at the top of everybody’s agenda. I employ hundreds of staff, most of them with very limited education, but we give them the opportunity to improve their skills. When you recognise that at 13 or 14 a child is not going to go the academic route, it is better to give them a more practical education and technical skills.” [Businessperson]

This view is generally accepted by headteachers, who feel that the choice between A-Levels and vocational training is too stark:

“The thing I think is not so good is when students leave us from Year 11 because they [have] the option of either doing traditional academic A-Levels or vocational, and there is no mixture of A-Levels with vocational courses, and I think that’s wrong.” [State secondary school headteacher]

Some see the effect of this perceived lack of vocational training as creating a skills mismatch within Jersey’s economy:

“I see a lot of disengaged youngsters that come out of school who do not want to work in the financial services sector. So a lot of organisations have to bring people over from the UK because local people are not trying properly to take up the jobs at banks and financial organisation services.” [Businessperson]

The well-being of vulnerable groups

Well-being, which we define as the personal evaluation of the outcomes of choices made and of opportunities available, relates to pupils’ (and parents’ assessment of pupils’) own capability, and reflects attitudes, opinions and perceptions. The well-being of two particular groups of pupils on Jersey is important in light of the revelations of disadvantage, abuse and bullying on the island: children with special education needs (SEN); and children for whom English is not the first language (ENFL).⁴

⁴ We deliberately eschew the term ‘English as an Additional Language’ (EAL). In the UK, EAL is a binary ‘flag’ in pupil databases and is based on whether or not a pupil has been ‘exposed’ to another language in the early years (age 0-5) regardless of the pupil’s proficiency in English. So large numbers of pupils are recorded as EAL even though they are fully fluent in English (Strand & Demie, 2005). In January 2017, in response to research by Strand (2015), the UK government introduced a measure of Proficiency in English into the school census - a five-point rating scale from ‘New to English’ to ‘Fully Fluent’, but this data is not released as part of the National Pupil Database (Strand, 2018, in conversation with the author).

Pupils with SEN typically attend their local catchment schools. Some schools have greater expertise than others in supporting SEN pupils and in gaining access to support and resources provided by the Department of Education, but overall, the inclusion of SEN pupils is perceived in positive and largely unproblematic terms:

“My children get a lot of support. They have severe medical conditions and they are allowed to arrive at school later and are given the required medication by school staff during school hours.” [Immigrant mother of SEN children in Year 2 and Year 7]

However, a recurring theme is the perception that fee-paying schools do not provide the same levels of SEN support as schools in the state sector and that they do not readily accept SEN pupils:

“There is a big difference between the private sector and state schools. The private sector would not take people in with special educational needs, [though] maybe they would take with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.” [Father of a Year 7 SEN student in a state secondary school]

This supposition is supported by teachers in the fee-paying sector, although it is argued that provision for support is improving in those schools:

“We didn’t have the support. There is no doubt that we had SEN children, but we hadn’t really had a proper support programme in place. ... I think that at the moment there is a feeling that we don’t offer much learning support and parents are beginning to understand that the school needs to provide for pupils with SEN.” [Fee-paying school headteacher]

The lack of easily available information is another problematic issue, especially for those who find it difficult to ask for support. The widespread view is that on Jersey the onus is placed on parents to inform schools and request support:

“I often find that as a parent you need to find out things for yourself. It would be really lovely if someone came and said ‘this is what you need to do’ and as a parent with a child with special needs I think that would be very supportive and very helpful. But nobody tells you that you [what] you are entitled to. I have no hesitation in picking up the phone and asking if I’ve got a query, but I know that not everybody has that ability.” [Father of a Year 7 SEN student]

With an average of between 600 and 1,000 new migrants arriving in Jersey annually over recent decades, and with nearly 20 per cent of Jersey’s population born in countries in which English is not the mother tongue, the island’s schools cater for a large and growing number of pupils for whom English is not the first language (ENFL). Their inclusion creates a challenge for schools, especially as many ENFL pupils arrive in Jersey at a relatively late stage in their education and their parents struggle to provide support with homework and generally engage with the school system:

“It would be better if our parents were better educated because sometimes they talk something different at school, and when it comes to help us they don’t really know what to do.” [Immigrant Year 9 student in state secondary school]

“[My parents] don’t speak English so if there is a letter home and they don’t really know what it’s about; you have to explain everything.” [Immigrant Year 9 student in state secondary school]

Many stakeholders are concerned about the impact of negative, bullying and discriminatory attitudes towards ‘non-natives’ within the broader Jersey community, regardless of the work being done in schools to ensure the inclusion of ENFL pupils:

“Our minority children feel proud of the Jersey community, but sometimes there are feelings of ‘not being an accepted part of the Jersey community.’ [State primary school headteacher]

It is clear that integration into the wider community is a necessary precondition for inclusion to be effective in schools. Jersey is no different from other parts of the UK in that respect: inclusion is not solely an issue for schools, in isolation from the broader societal context.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to give voice to the island community of Jersey through a coherent narrative of its educational life; in particular, by exploring issues of choice, opportunity and well-being in the island’s schools beyond the usual utilitarian ‘capture’ of effectiveness in schooling. Jersey is an interesting case study and full of contradictions: prosperous but challenged; English but foreign; successful but disadvantaged. Empirically, we found that pupils and parents on Jersey generally turn to relatives, peers and friends, rather than to official sources, for assistance and advice. They feel most constrained with respect to choice of school, especially in terms of the perceived loss of opportunity in choosing state schools through the catchment area system, and the process of appealing against the allocation of a catchment secondary school is seen as particularly difficult to navigate. The reputation of state schools plays into this narrative. It varies considerably on Jersey and some schools suffer from reputational stigma around poor standards of behaviour and low achievement. Pupils themselves feel that state schools need to do more to challenge them academically and complain that disruption in class hinders their learning. Employers are also critical of state secondary schools in this respect, which in a self-fulfilling way adversely affects the employment prospects of state school pupils. There is a clear social divide between state and fee-paying schools, but both sectors suffer from, and generate, the same pressures. Pupils report on this matter-of-factly and accept it without complaint. *Their* most serious contention is not the ‘pressure to perform’ but the issue of subject choice. Many report that they experience an unwelcome amount of pressure from teachers when choosing subjects and most complain that the timetabling of ‘options’ means that they cannot actualise their preferences. This stands out as the main source of concern within the state sector.

In relation to the inclusion of SEN and ENFL pupils, we found that state secondary schools offer good and improving levels of support, although parents feel that they are too often

required to initiate support and ENFL pupils themselves feel that their parents struggle to engage with 'the system' and assist with homework. More needs to be done to support *families* (and not just pupils) for whom English is not the first language, perhaps through the greater use of translated information material and the like. Overall, Jersey's state schools seem strongly committed to including pupils with a wide range of needs within the mainstream, but fee-paying schools are not so favourably disposed and have a considerable way to go in this regard. Outside schools, inclusion as a social principle also has a long way to go. Fears were strongly expressed over the lack of inclusion of non-natives in island life and the extent to which this impacts on the education of their children. Schools and employers on Jersey need to work more closely together to encourage greater cohesion within the island's wider community and more specifically to ensure that all school leavers, especially those from state schools, have as many opportunities as possible to equip themselves with an appropriate range of skills for the job market. Employment prospects constitute a particularly important aspect of an individual's life chances and relate directly to the idea of capability upon which this research is based. The capability to compete freely in the labour market is critical to ensuring that all individuals enjoy the freedom to access their chosen life paths. Jersey is not yet successful in this regard, but the fault does not lie solely with the island's schools.

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Acknowledgement and Funding Details

This work was supported by a grant from the Jersey Community Relations Trust.