

Using the National Pupil Database to evaluate school interventions: lessons learned

In 2014, Think Physics (now NUSTEM) planned to use the National Pupil Database and HESA data to evaluate the impact of a three-year sustained intervention (2014 – 2017) with 15 secondary schools in the North East.

Ultimately, we realised that this was not the best evaluation method, but that the lessons learnt from this might be useful for others.

Reporting thresholds

Data from the NPD has a reporting threshold of 10. Numbers smaller than this cannot be reported. In small entry subjects, this can mean that you can't report detailed findings

When a subject only has a small number of pupils entering it, 1 pupil can change the cohort number by a large percentage. This variation masks most attributable changes from the intervention.

Small sample = large variation

NPD change over time

NPD is used for government reporting, and when their measures change - so does the NPD. This can affect previously planned measures such as regional data.

Different nationally available data sets use different methodologies to calculate GCSE and A-level entries. This makes it very difficult to compare between data sets.

Comparison challenges

Time delayed release

There is a delay of at least 8 months between students getting their results and those data being available to researchers. Using HESA data adds another 2 years to the wait.

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