

Online schools 'worse than traditional teachers'

By Sean Coughlan Education correspondent

The report, from researchers at the University of Washington, Stanford University and the Mathematica policy research group, found online pupils falling far behind their counterparts in the classroom. In maths, it was the equivalent of pupils having missed an entire year in school.

Online schools are still relatively small in pupil numbers, but this idea of virtual schooling has been growing quickly and has been seen as a significant future alternative to mainstream classes.

There are currently about 200,000 pupils in online charter schools in the US, says the study. In 2012-13, there were about 65,000 - and although students pay no tuition fees, based on annual funding levels of \$6,000 (£3,900) per pupil, that represented \$39m (£25m) in public spending.

These online schools, otherwise known as "virtual" or "cyber" schools, are defined by teaching more or less everything online. They are an alternative to attending a traditional school, rather than providing additional lessons.

But low achievement in these schools, identified by this research, has raised big doubts about this approach.

Teacher time

The study found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that there was much less teacher contact time in virtual schools. On average, pupils in bricks-and-mortar classrooms received the same amount of teacher time each day as the virtual pupils received on-screen each week.

The online schools relied much more on students driving their own learning and often determining the pace at which they advanced.

And the biggest problem identified by the researchers was the difficulty in keeping online pupils focused on their work.

"Challenges in maintaining student engagement are inherent in online instruction," said report co-author Brian Gill.

"And they are exacerbated by high student-teacher ratios and minimal student-teacher contact time, which the data reveal are typical of online charter schools nationwide."

The researchers compared the performance of pupils in online schools with their equivalents in the mainstream schools, in terms of gender, ethnicity, relative wealth or poverty and the prior attainment levels. The most consistent difference in online schools was a disproportionately high intake of white students.

Researchers found that only 2% of online schools outperformed their bricks-and-mortar equivalents in reading. In maths, no online schools were better, and 88% were "significantly weaker".

The study also highlights certain groups who benefit from online schools - such as rural students with limited options, students at home with health problems, those with families moving around the country and those who for whatever reason did not fit in with a conventional school.

資料來源

<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-34671952>