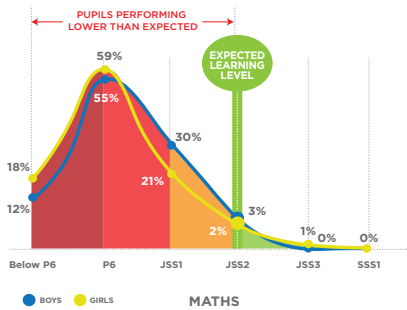
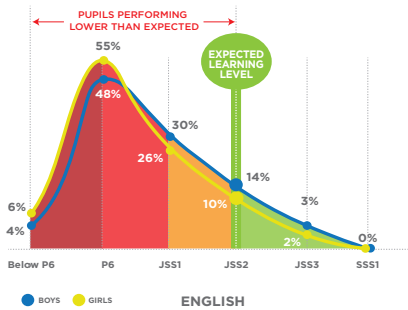


POLICY BRIEF

Tackling Barriers to Learning

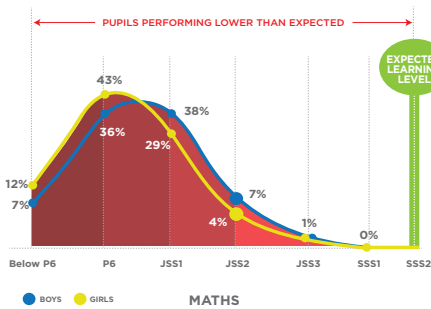
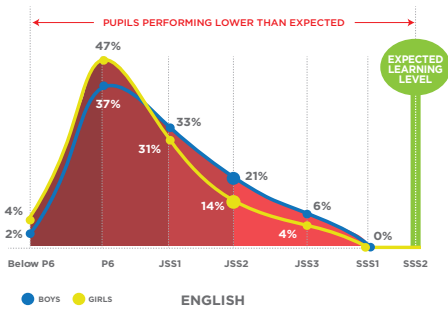
Tackling barriers to learning is the most effective way to improve learning outcomes in Sierra Leone's secondary schools. Quality education for all children is critical to Sierra Leone's growth and development. The Education Sector Plan (2018-2020) and Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme aim to equip Sierra Leonean schools to deliver sustained quality learning for all pupils, whether they are girls, boys, from rural or urban locations, have disabilities, are poor or rich.

PERFORMANCE OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN JSS AND SSS, MATHS AND ENGLISH



JSS. Maths versus English

Compared to boys, significantly fewer girls reach JSS1-level knowledge or above, either for English or Maths



SSS. Maths versus English

No boys or girls reach expected learning levels in both Maths and English

English. JSS versus SSS

Boys outperform girls in English, with more boys outperforming girls across both grades.

Maths. JSS versus SSS

Boys outperform girls. Though small in Junior Secondary, the gap between boys and girls widens as they move to Senior Secondary.

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OVERVIEW

Despite recent progress, evidence shows that sustained action is required to ensure that secondary education can meet the diverse learning needs of all pupils, irrespective of gender, disability, family background or remoteness of school location. Barriers to learning are exacerbated by increased enrolment placing significant pressure on classrooms and teachers, many of whom are volunteer teachers. Many schools suffer from a scarcity of teachers in core subjects, including English and Maths, especially in disadvantaged rural areas.

Ensuring enough well-trained teachers are equitably deployed across all schools is a priority first step in addressing the barriers that students face. This Policy Brief concludes that, improving teacher deployment and skills and enforcing the teacher code of conduct, amongst other measures, can do much to address persistent barriers to learning.

KEY FINDINGS ON BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Geography is a major barrier to learning.

In English and Maths, there is a significant relationship between remoteness of the school and pupil performance. Pupils' learning levels drop the further from urban centres. Across both JSS2 and SSS2 grades, these pupils are more likely to feature in lower performance bands (P6 or below). SGLA III shows that schools further from urban centres are generally not as well-managed and have significantly worse learning environments. North Western, Northern and Eastern regions are below the national average and Kenema, Falaba, Pujehun and Karene are among the districts that are falling behind.

Gender-based differences in pupils' performance exist in all provinces.

Differences between boys and girls widen as they move to the higher SSS grade subjects across all provinces. The Western province has the smallest gender gap in performance. Though gender differences across districts are complex and vary substantially across the country, the gender gap in JSS2 is clear and pronounced in almost all districts.

Some districts show significant gender gaps with girls performing much worse than boys (e.g. Kenema, Kambia, Koinadugu and Karene). These differences may be a reflection of societal attitudes, a lack of female teachers, or bias in the classroom.

Pupils' family background is one of the biggest determinants of learning levels.

Pupils from the top 20 percent richest households perform significantly better than pupils from the poorest 20 per cent of households. More pupils from less advantaged households only reach skills at P6 level or below for English and Maths, in both JSS and SSS grades. For English, the learning level between richest and poorest is already wide: 27% more pupils from poorer backgrounds performing at P6 level or below than pupils from richer backgrounds in JSS2. For Maths, the gap between richest and poorest widens over time with 13% more poorer than richer pupils performing at P6 level or below in JSS2. This gap widens to 39% in SSS2.

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Teachers, the majority of whom are male, underestimate or under-report the incidence of sexual harassment in schools.

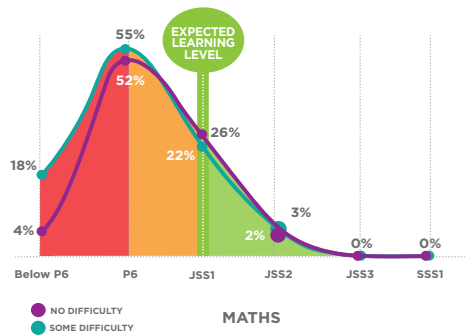
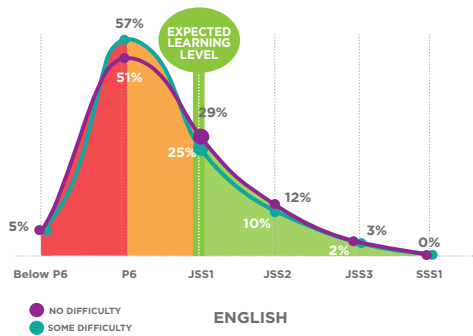
Less than 5 per cent of teachers report that girls are subject to sexual harassment by male pupils or by male school staff, whereas girls themselves report a much higher incidence. Despite the existence of School Safety Committees at JSS, harassment and sex-for-grades seems to be largely underestimated by male teachers. Female teachers are likely to be more realistic in their reporting of incidences of sexual harassment in their schools, and are also more likely to report that female pupils face risks on the way to school.

Difficulties in walking and hearing correlate with pupil performance.

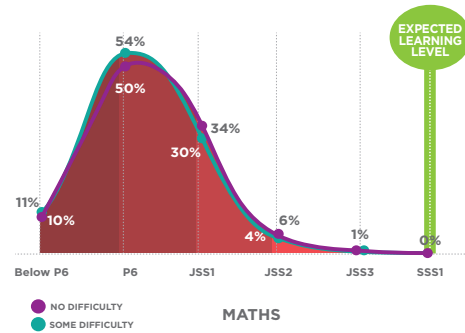
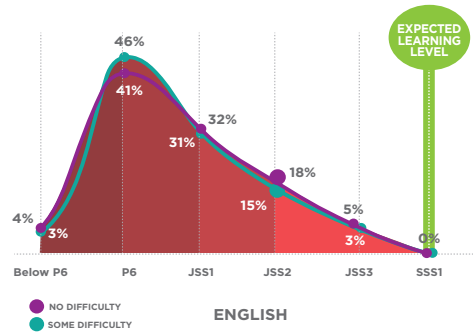
With around 36 per cent of all the sampled pupils in SGLA III reporting some form of difficulty, walking or hearing difficulties appear to represent the most significant barriers to learning. For both English and Maths, a larger percentage of pupils with difficulties in walking fall in the performance band corresponding to primary grade level, and fewer pupils reach JSS1 and JSS2 knowledge. However, the low numbers of children reporting hearing, seeing or communication problems suggest they may be either in special schools or out of school altogether. Just 9 per cent of the sampled pupils reported having some form of difficulty seeing.

LEARNING OUTCOMES OF PUPILS WITH WALKING AND HEARING DIFFICULTIES

JSS: Performance by pupils with and without walking & hearing difficulty



SSS: Performance by pupils with and without walking & hearing difficulty



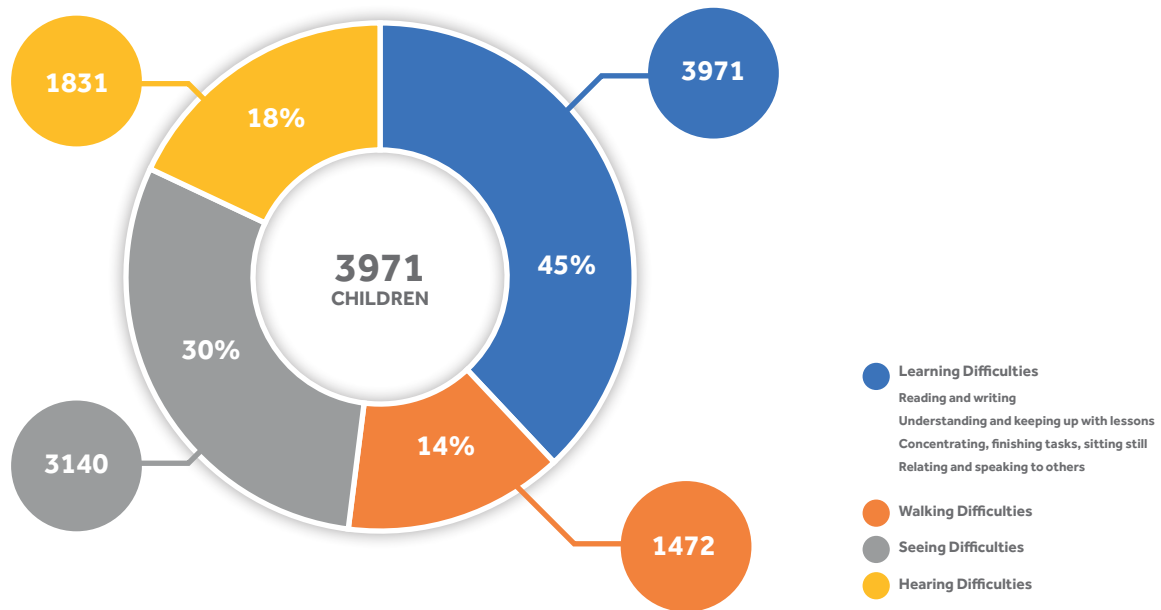
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Most teachers say there is no special provision for pupils with special needs.

Around 60 per cent of teachers report there are no ramps or railings at their schools. Just over half of teachers said there was no special support such as counselling provided to pupils with special needs, nor was there a system for providing additional

teaching outside regular classes. However, almost all teachers report that they adapted their pedagogies to make the lesson delivery more accessible to pupils with special needs, though the effectiveness of these techniques is not captured in this survey.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AT JSS



RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Term

Generate school catchment area plan based on EMIS data to rationalise distribution of schools and improve equity in rural/urban provision. (Action: MBSSE)

Incentivise teachers to work in remote/rural communities through: a) teacher recruitment process recognising willingness to work in specified remote areas; b) teacher training programmes that target young women in remote rural areas; c) incentives fixed to remote locations, not individual teachers, e.g. improving housing and electricity in rural school communities. (Action: TSC)

Address pupils' foundational skills to ensure that teaching and learning happens at the right level through targeted remediation, e.g. at JSS1 and JSS2. (Action: TSC)

Conduct best practice study to assess effectiveness of teachers' adaptation of pedagogy to meet the needs of children with disabilities. (Action: TSC)

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Medium Term

Introduce a streamlined grievance and incident reporting system empowering schools to escalate reports, and respond promptly to cases to build faith in the integrity of the system. (Action: TSC)

Advance the focus of teacher training programmes from teaching and pedagogy to learning, supporting teachers to do formative pupil assessment, carry out continuous assessment of pupils, report on the progress of individual pupils, and provide remediation measures. (Action: TSC)

Align identification tools for collecting data on CWDs to ensure reliable and harmonised planning data on CWDs. (Action: MBSSE)

Long Term

The National CPD Framework for teachers should reorient teacher education, initial training and CPD towards how to support individual and differentiated learning needs, including pupils with special needs. (Action: TSC)

Leh Wi Lan/Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SSEIP) is a five-year (2016-2021) UKaid-funded programme aimed at improving English and Mathematics learning achievement in all secondary schools of Sierra Leone, especially for girls. The programme expects to impact learning conditions for 1.4 million boys and girls, leading to improved secondary exam passes, by making the learning environment safer and more productive.
