Paper 2/2 - Tackling ESL in the UK: case study from a London school

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Our fieldwork in four London schools revealed remarkable similarities in approaches to student support measures. Likely related to the importance of school league-tables and constant monitoring (Foskett et al. 2005), schools tend to collect comprehensive data on students' academic achievement, attendance, punctuality and behaviour. This presentation focuses on student support initiatives in one school. In this case study we draw upon an interview with the school's assistant head-teacher, a focus group with staff involved in support services for vulnerable students and another with underachieving students at risk of becoming NEET. In addition, we will draw on an interview with a male white British student and a separate interview with his mother. These interviews and focus groups provided rich data, from various perspectives, on interventions and good practice in the school, thus enabling us to triangulate our findings. While it was evident that the school has been striving to meet the needs of students – some of them coming from very vulnerable backgrounds; the fieldwork revealed some of the limits of school intervention measures, highlighting cases that may fall through the cracks of even comprehensive support measures. Our case study focuses on a family which has been assisted extensively by this school. However, a combination of different factors - related to low parental educational background and a lack of understanding of the education system and labour market, might still lead to the children becoming NEET (MacDonald 2011; Roberts and Atherton 2011; Yates et al. 2011). Since in the UK, young people from White working class backgrounds are the least likely, of all ethnic groups, to stay in post-16 education (Kingdon and Cassel 2010), this case study can highlight some of the factors behind the statistics (Duckworth and Schoon 2012; Reay 2006).