



The Impact of Non-State Schools in Developing Countries

A synthesis of the evidence from two rigorous reviews

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Abbreviations

A 1-19	Assumptions 1-19
ASER	Annual Survey of Education Report
DFID	UK Department for International Development
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PS	Private Schools
P&RS	Philanthropic and Religious Schools

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report synthesises the findings from two rigorous literature reviews commissioned by the Department for International Development entitled: *[The role and impact of private schools in developing countries](#)* (Day Ashley et al, 2014¹), and: *[The role and impact of philanthropic and religious schools in developing countries](#)*: (Wales et al, 2015²). It aims to bring together and compare and contrast key findings from the two reviews, and to identify areas of research needed to fill gaps in the knowledge base on non-state schools³, in an attempt to contribute to working towards a more evidence-informed approach to policy in this area.

Methodology

Both rigorous reviews followed the same research methodological protocols and processes. An initial bibliography was compiled by using key search terms to search a wide range of citation and journal indexes and policy-oriented reviews. This initial bibliography was verified by a selection of experts in the field before applying a set of transparent criteria for the inclusion of studies in the review. Included studies were published from 2008, sourced from DFID priority countries, and were assessed by the review team as high or medium quality. This resulted in 59 studies included in the private schools review and 61 studies included in the philanthropic and religious schools review. A set of policy-relevant hypotheses and testable assumptions were elaborated, interrogated and challenged throughout the review process, including through an independent peer review process and a series of roundtables with international experts. The bodies of evidence supporting (positive), refuting (negative) and ambiguous (neutral) in relation to each testable assumption were assessed and rated ‘strong’, ‘moderate’ and ‘weak’.

Key findings

A key finding of the rigorous reviews is that the evidence base on the role and impact of non-state schools in developing countries is weak and many gaps remain. As such, it is not sufficiently robust to make policy recommendations. However, the findings from the rigorous reviews provide insights that can help to guide policymakers and international actors engaging with the non-state school sector.

The process of synthesis has highlighted some noteworthy common and contrasting findings between the reviewed evidence on private schools and on philanthropic and

¹ Day Ashley L, Mcloughlin C, Aslam M, Engel J, Wales J, Rawal S, Batley R, Kingdon G, Nicolai S, Rose P (2014) *[“The role and impact of private schools in developing countries: a rigorous review of the evidence.”](#)* Education Rigorous Literature Review. London: Department for International Development

² Wales J, Aslam M, Hine S, Rawal S, Wild L, Batley R, Day Ashley L, Mcloughlin C, Nicolai S, Rose P (2015) *[“The role and impact of philanthropic and religious schools in developing countries: a rigorous review of the evidence.”](#)* Education Rigorous Literature Review. London: Department for International Development

³ In this report we use the term ‘non-state’ only where it applies generally to providers examined across the two reviews, otherwise we specify the particular type of provider the finding relates to (i.e. private, philanthropic or religious schools).

religious schools⁴. In terms of supply, a common finding is that private and philanthropic schools (with little evidence on religious schools) fare better in terms of quality learning outcomes (moderate evidence) and teaching (strong evidence) compared with state schools. There are some important caveats to this finding, however: most of the learning outcome studies did not rigorously account for pupils' social background; and 'better teaching' took on different meanings in the philanthropic schools literature where there was a focus on learner-centred pedagogies, compared with the private schools literature where the focus was teacher presence, and activity and learning-outcome oriented approaches. Even where children are found to perform better in non-state schools, many children in developing countries are not achieving basic competencies across all school types: as such 'better' does not necessarily mean 'adequate' or 'good'.

'Supply' findings relating to equity contrast strikingly between the two reviews. There was strong evidence of philanthropic schools (in all cases reviewed) and religious schools (in several cases reviewed) reaching the poor and marginalised, but the evidence was weak and ambiguous on whether private schools reach the poor. There was also moderate strength consistent evidence of philanthropic schools expanding enrolment for girls, with more mixed evidence for religious schools. For private schools the evidence was weak and indicated that girls are less likely than boys to attend private schools, but this finding was context specific with some studies ambiguous on the issue and a minority of studies showing that private schools reduce the gender gap in certain contexts.

Under 'demand' the evidence on the affordability of non-state schools was mostly weak and ambiguous - this was the case for evidence on whether the poor are able to pay private school fees, and for the evidence on whether philanthropic and religious schools are as affordable to users as government schools. However, there was a clear moderate strength finding that private schools are less affordable to users than government schools.

In terms of the 'enabling environment', both reviews found evidence that states often lack the knowledge, capacity and legitimacy to implement policy frameworks for collaboration with, and regulation of, non-state schools. However, the finding was more consistent and moderate strength in the private schools review, but weaker in the philanthropic and religious schools review though there were some positive examples of curriculum regulation and co-operation frameworks. In terms of state regulation of the non-state sector the findings were contrasting. Where regulation of private schools existed there was moderate strength evidence that it was often not effective or selectively enforced, unrealistically stringent and potentially created opportunities for rent seeking. The philanthropic and religious schools review found with moderate strength evidence that despite flaws basic recognition and certain forms of regulation can help to facilitate collaborations with the state and improve coordination in the sector.

These contrasting findings highlight potential areas for further research. For example, in the light of the philanthropic and religious school findings, it would be useful to investigate the nature of the equity challenges presented by private schools, or to explore

how regulatory frameworks could be made more effective in enabling collaboration with a broader range of non-state providers. Areas for further research can also be identified from the evidence gaps which are outlined below in Table 2. However, it is important to note that the evidence gaps and potential areas for further research are discussed in more detail in the original rigorous reviews.

Critical gaps

The synthesis of evidence across the two reviews flags up critical gaps in the knowledge base and a number of areas of concern, highlighting both a need for caution in terms of policy and intervention in this area and a need for more targeted rigorous research. These evidence gaps are sizeable. This is a matter of concern particularly given the recent policy interest in the role and performance of private schools. Importantly more research is needed to better understand the nature of the equity challenges private schools may present and to broaden the focus beyond enrolment and short-term outcomes to the potential trade-offs between investing in improving state provision versus providing vouchers or subsidies to private schools. There is also a relatively limited evidence base for many of the main hypothesised market drivers of education quality. Much of the debate arguing for an enhanced role for the private sector in developing countries is based on theories that private schools provide choice for users in a free market, that private schools are more accountable to users, that users vote with their feet and exit private schools when they have quality concerns and that this creates market competition by driving up standards across all schools. While the review found positive evidence regarding the role of choice based on quality, there was little evidence relating to private school accountability and responsiveness, user exit in response to poor quality or competition having a positive effect on the state sector. Improving our understanding of the functioning of choice, accountability and competition in practice should be a research priority.

Another critical gap highlighted by the synthesis of the evidence is the role of international organisations in shaping policies, incentives for providers and direct provision interventions, which requires improved understanding and analysis. Work which disaggregates between different types of education provider, different types of funder and different types of international organisation could be particularly useful here. One potentially fruitful area of international support lies in assisting the development of improved policy frameworks and regulatory mechanisms for private providers. There is clear evidence that the current frameworks are weakly evidenced, poorly implemented, cause significant resentment and do not appear to be effective in improving education standards.

Critical gaps identified in synthesising the evidence across the two reviews should be understood within the broader context of the immense gaps in knowledge of the scale and coverage of the non-state school sector and how it operates in different contexts. There is a clear need for the evidence bases of both reviews to be expanded beyond the South Asian context where it is currently concentrated. The lack of evidence on religious providers must also be given serious consideration. Further research into this type of provider should examine impact in a wider range of contexts, faiths and types of intervention.

The methodological biases of the different evidence bases should also be addressed. More quantitative research should be conducted on philanthropic and religious schools, particularly regarding education quality, and there should be greater use of qualitative methods on private schools, particularly to examine their relationship to the state and to alternative policy frameworks. It should also be importantly acknowledged that much of what we know about private schools is based on limited understanding of registered private schools. The scale and coverage of unregistered private schools is less well documented or accessible.

Conclusion

In order for programme design to be effective in the future the evidence base on the non-state education sector must be broadened, deepened and clarified. Priority must be given to expanding the coverage of research beyond South Asia; focusing less on individual providers and more on how different provider types operate together as a system (i.e. their impact upon, and interactions with, each other and the state); broadening the research methodologies used to analyse the different providers to include not only rigorous quantitative analysis but also greater use of longitudinal, ethnographic, political economy and comparative analysis across contexts; as well as improving the conceptual rigour of research and the clarity of definitions used.

1. How to use this document

This paper presents a synthesis of key findings from two rigorous literature reviews commissioned by the Department for International Development entitled: *The role and impact of private schools in developing countries* (Day Ashley et al, 2014), and: *The role and impact of philanthropic and religious schools in developing countries* (Wales et al, 2015)⁵. It aims are twofold. Firstly, it aims to bring together and compare and contrast key findings on quality, equity and affordability from the two reviews. Secondly it aims to identify areas of research needed to fill gaps in the knowledge base on non-state schools, in an attempt to contribute to working towards a more evidence-informed approach to policy in this area.

The report should be read alongside the original reviews which fully describe the conceptual framework and methodology, and provide explanations and detailed narratives relating to the assessments of bodies of evidence.

1.1 History of the reviews

Two rigorous literature reviews on non-state schooling in developing countries were commissioned by the Department for International Development and conducted sequentially. The first, *The role and impact of private schools in developing countries* (Day Ashley et al, 2014) focused on non-elite private schools which depend on user fees and therefore follow the market to attract and retain students and therefore maintain their financial viability. The second, *The role and impact of philanthropic and religious schools in developing countries* (Wales et al, 2015) was commissioned to complement the first review by focusing on other forms of non-state schools not explicitly defined in the literature as ‘private’ and therefore not captured in the first review. In the process of undertaking the literature search for this review it became apparent that the ‘other’ forms of non-state schooling could be divided into two broad categories. These were schools run by national and international NGOs and community or charitable organisations, referred to in the review as ‘philanthropic schools’, and schools founded as ‘religious schools’. The analysis presented in the second review distinguishes between these different categories and highlights where findings are relevant to each.

1.2 Defining parameters between non-state providers

It is important to note that blurred boundaries exist between these categorisations; for example some religious, charitable and NGO schools may also charge fees. The reviews highlight these issues wherever possible, but are limited by the lack of an agreed set of definitions and limited information on providers in the literature. The reviews therefore adopted a pragmatic approach to defining providers. Studies explicitly referring to schools as ‘private schools’ are included in the private schools review and studies referring to schools as non-state or as religious/faith based organisations are included in the non-state religious and philanthropic schools review. The separation intends to address concerns that the conflation of religious and philanthropic schools with private schools is unhelpful,

⁵ Evidence Briefs for each review are also published which summarise the key findings of the reviews.

given their different management arrangements, procedural norms and structures, and regulatory environments (Srivastava, 2013). The synthesis of evidence presented here does not attempt to aggregate findings from the two reviews, but rather to bring together key findings, compare and contrast bodies of evidence, and to identify gaps in the knowledge base in an attempt to shed more light on this diverse and complex field of research.

1.3 Scope of the evidence reviewed: methods, inclusion criteria, limitations

Both rigorous reviews followed the same research methodology protocols and processes (see Day Ashley et al, 2014 and Wales et al, 2015 for details). In each, an initial bibliography was compiled using key terms to search a wide range of citation and journal indexes and policy oriented reviews. This initial bibliography was verified by a selection of experts in the field before applying a set of transparent criteria for the inclusion of studies in the review. Included studies were published from 2008, sourced from DFID priority countries⁶, and were assessed by the review team as high or medium quality⁷. As a result of the focus on quality published research, much of the current policy debate reported in grey literature and other policy literature is not captured in the review. This resulted in 59 studies included in the private schools review and 61 studies included in the philanthropic and religious schools review. The rigorous reviews do not claim to be a comprehensive representation of *all* research and evidence in this area, but only of that falling within the search and selection criteria.

There were some important differences in the nature of the evidence available for inclusion in the two reviews. While both reviews analysed a similar number of studies, with comparable levels of quality, the literature on private schools had a stronger focus on primary and empirical research, particularly quantitative analysis. In contrast, a higher proportion of articles from the philanthropic and religious review were secondary or review articles, while the primary research was more qualitative and case study based⁸. These patterns reflect different research interests and variations in the policy debates in these spaces. The private schools debate is often framed in economic terms, with a major question being one of effectiveness relative to the state that lends itself to investigation by economists using quantitative methods. In contrast other forms of non-state provider have attracted less policy interest in this respect and so the available literature in the philanthropic and religious schools review focused more on drawing lessons on practice from across individual non-state providers in different contexts. The risk of confirmation bias here must be acknowledged in terms of the tendency of research to focus on positive cases. However, it is important to note that a mixture of positive and negative evidence was found for most of the assumptions examined. Another important issue for both

⁶ Based on the availability of research, the private review covered 11 DFID priority countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Malawi, South Africa and Tanzania. The philanthropic and religious review covered 18: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.

⁷ The strength of individual studies was assessed in accordance with [DFID's How to Note \(2013\)](#). A 'checklist for study quality' was completed for each study included in the review and based on this, studies were rated as high, medium or low quality, with reference to a shared 'guide for grading the quality of individual studies'. Studies rated 'low quality' were not included in the review. The process of reviewing individual studies also involved the completion of templates, to facilitate the extraction of relevant data in a consistent way across all the studies. These templates classified studies and recorded substantive data, information on methodology and weaknesses identified by reviewers and the authors of the studies themselves.

⁸ This may be partly because evaluations of donor-funded programmes often remain unpublished.

reviews is the concentration of the evidence base in terms of context. The majority of literature for both studies focuses on South Asia, with fewer in African contexts, and the literature on religious schools particularly concentrates on madrasa schools in South Asia.

1.4 Assessing the strength of evidence

The two reviews devised a similar conceptual framework to enable a systematic analysis of the evidence. This involved the establishment of three thematic fields of analysis, namely: supply, demand and the enabling environment. These examine:

- The nature of the supply of non-state education, which affects the quality, equity and accessibility, cost-effectiveness and financial sustainability of education.
- The dynamics of demand, which include issues of affordability, the nature of user choice and provider accountability.
- The enabling environment, including market conditions, as well as state and international agency interventions which may enable or impede non-state provision of education.

Within each thematic field, a set of policy-relevant hypotheses and testable assumptions were identified from a rapid appraisal of the policy debates for each rigorous review⁹. These were elaborated, interrogated and challenged throughout the review process. The bodies of evidence supporting (positive), refuting (negative) and ambiguous (neutral) in relation to each testable assumption were assessed and rated ‘strong’, ‘moderate’ and ‘weak’¹⁰. These ratings were arrived at using a clear set of criteria relating to the quality, size, context and consistency of each body of evidence. It is important to stress the relative nature of the ratings of evidence strength in each rigorous review which should be understood within the parameters of the sets of studies included in each review. The original testable assumptions for each review are listed in the Appendix with the evidence strength ratings.

⁹ Where possible the testable assumptions were the same in both rigorous reviews. However a small number of assumptions were tested in each of the reviews that were specifically relevant to those types of schools and were not also tested in the other review, usually due to the absence of evidence related to those assumptions.

¹⁰ The [DFID How to Note \(2013\)](#) was drawn on to develop a set of transparent criteria for the assessment of bodies of evidence. This same set of criteria was applied to both reviews.

2. Findings from the synthesis

The synthesis approach focuses on identifying and discussing similarities and differences in findings related to assumptions tested in the reviews under each thematic field, namely ‘supply’, ‘demand’ and ‘enabling environment’. Evidence gaps in this synthesis report are also highlighted where weak bodies of evidence were found for testable assumptions in at least one of the reviews¹¹. Under each assumption category headline findings are presented and in brackets the original review - Private Schools (PS) or Philanthropic and Religious (P&RS) is presented with the numbered testable assumption the findings refer to (see Appendix for original numbered testable assumptions for each review). These headline findings and evidence gaps are summarised in Table 1. This synthesis report does not provide detail regarding the quality, size, context and consistency of evidence for each assumption; this level of detail can be found in the original rigorous reviews.

¹¹ Exceptions relate to the evidence gap on cost-effectiveness and accountability. For the former moderate evidence was found in the reviews on lower costs of non-state schools compared with government schools but the evidence fell short of providing a clear finding on cost-effectiveness. For the latter there was a lack of detailed evidence on accountability relationships and their effectiveness.

Table 1: Headline findings at a glance

Supply	
Similar Findings	
Quality: Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate strength evidence of better learning outcomes in private and philanthropic non-state schools compared with state schools (with very little and mixed evidence for religious schools). However, studies are typically faced with the difficulty of adequately accounting for the social background of pupils making it difficult to ascertain whether or to what extent the achievement advantage is attributed to schools. Even where learning outcomes are better for non-state providers, overall levels of learning outcomes remain low in rural areas of many developing countries across both state and non-state schools. (PS A1 / P&RS A1)
Quality: Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong evidence of better teaching in private and philanthropic non-state schools compared with state schools (with little evidence on religious schools). But ‘better teaching’ took on different meanings depending on the type of provider, with the private schools literature referring to more teacher presence, teaching activity and learning-outcome oriented approaches, and the philanthropic schools literature referring to pedagogies and structures adapted to learner needs and provision of teacher support and training. (PS A2 / P&RS A2) • Strong evidence that religious and philanthropic schools adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of particular groups. (P&RS A11)
Cost-effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate strength evidence that private and philanthropic non-state schools have lower costs of education delivery compared with government schools, often related to lower teacher salaries; there was little evidence relating to religious schools but it supported this finding. There is some limited evidence indicating a relationship between lower costs and cost-effectiveness, but it falls short of giving a clear finding on cost-effectiveness which is therefore identified as a research gap. (PS A5 / P&RS A5)
Financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evidence on financial sustainability is small and therefore weak in both reviews and, as such, is identified as a gap in the evidence on non-state schools. (PS A6 / P&RS A6)
Contrasting Findings	
Equity: Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak evidence that girls are less likely than boys to access private schools. However, this finding is context specific as some studies were ambiguous on the issue and a minority of studies showed contrasting evidence that private schools reduce the gender gap in certain contexts. (PS A4) <p><i>By contrast:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate strength and consistent evidence that philanthropic schools target female enrolment. <p>However, the evidence on religious schools is more mixed and context specific with evidence of gender parity in some studies, and of male dominance in enrolment in others. (P&RS A4)</p>

<p>Equity: Poor and marginalised</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evidence is ambiguous (weak) on whether private schools reach the poor. Private schools are prevalent in urban areas and growing in rural areas and poorer states in some contexts, but this does not necessarily mean they are reaching the poor. (PS A3) <p><i>By contrast:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is strong evidence that philanthropic schools (in all cases reviewed) and religious schools (in several cases reviewed) site and organise their provision to reach poor and marginalised groups. (P&RS A3)
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Demand	
Similar Findings	
<p>Affordability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ambiguous and therefore weak evidence base on whether the poor are able to pay private school fees. (PS A7) • An ambiguous (weak) evidence base on whether philanthropic and religious schools are as affordable to users as government schools. (P&RS A7) <p><i>But:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A moderate body of evidence that private schools are less affordable to users than government schools. (PS A8)
<p>Accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small and therefore weak body of evidence that users actively participate in and influence operational decision making in private schools. (PS A11) • Small and therefore weak evidence that private schools are responsive to user demands and complaints. (PS A12) • Moderate strength of evidence that philanthropic schools provide opportunities for users to participate in, and influence, decision making through a variety of mechanisms. (P&RS A12) • Across both reviews there is a lack of detailed evidence on these accountability relationships and their effectiveness, making this an important evidence gap.
Contrasting Findings	
<p>Choice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate evidence that perceived quality of education is a priority for users when choosing private schools, and that private schools are often perceived by users to be higher quality than government schools. (PS A9) • Moderate evidence that users base their choice of private schools on signals such as teacher attendance, engagement and performance, school performance (exam results and promotion rates) and school popularity. Informal networks may play a significant role in informing users when choosing private schools. (PS A10)

	<p><i>By contrast:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ambiguous and therefore weak evidence on whether perceived education quality is a priority for users when choosing philanthropic and religious schools. The evidence indicates that choice of philanthropic or religious school is based on multiple complex priorities, which may include quality as well as factors such as cost, distance, accessibility, safety of learning environment, perception of children’s academic ability and religious factors. (P&RS A8)• Small and ambiguous, and therefore weak evidence regarding whether parents have access to information or knowledge of the workings of their child’s school, teacher qualifications and overall signals of education quality. (P&RS A9)• Moderate evidence that religious motivation is an important factor for users in choosing religious schools, although other factors (e.g. economic) were also found to be important (P&RS A10).
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Enabling Environment	
Similar Findings	
State knowledge, capacity and legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States often lack the knowledge, capacity and legitimacy to implement effective policy frameworks for collaboration and regulation of the non-state sector. This finding was more consistent in the private school review, with the strength of the finding rated as moderate. The philanthropic and religious schools review found weak evidence, due to a lack of consistency in findings. Negative cases outnumbered positive ones, but both were context specific. (PS A13 / P&RS A13)
Subsidies, co-operation, partnerships and contractual relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subsidies, co-operation, partnerships and contractual relationships between the state and non-state providers can have positive impacts on quality and equity, but these vary by context. This finding was weak, for both reviews, but for different reasons. The evidence base for philanthropic and religious schools lacked consistency across cases, with a mix of negative as well as positive, and was therefore weak. The literature on private schools was consistently positive, but was very small, and therefore weak. (PS A15 / P&RS A15)
Complementarity and competition with state provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate evidence that philanthropic schools, in particular, and religious schools in some cases, are complementary to state provision - covering gaps in state provision, reaching marginalised groups and improving their integration into the state education system. However, there is also a perception that these providers are competing with the state system for international aid and there are concerns over the long run impact of parallel systems of philanthropic provision that develop with support from external funding. (P&RS A17) There is a small and therefore weak evidence base suggesting that private schools can complement government school provision in terms of gap filling where there is a poor supply of government schools. However there is also evidence that private schools fill gaps where government schools are performing poorly thus indicating blurred boundaries between whether private schools complement or compete with government schools. (PS A16) There is small, ambiguous and therefore weak evidence base regarding whether market competition can improve quality in the state and private school sectors or whether it depletes quality by encouraging better off students to exit the state sector. (PS A17)
Contrasting Findings	
Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate evidence that regulation of private education providers does not have positive impacts, due to it being poorly designed, ineffectively enforced and potentially creating opportunities for rent-seeking. (PS A14) <p><i>By contrast:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is moderate evidence that basic recognition of philanthropic and religious schools, and particular forms of regulation, can create the conditions for positive collaboration with the state and can help to establish a broader national curriculum. However, regulations can focus overly on inputs and appear to be designed more to control market entry than to improve quality. (P&RS A14)

Additional finding - Philanthropic and Religious Providers only	
Role of international organisations and funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a large, but ambiguous and therefore weak evidence base on whether international organisations and funders can play a positive role in supporting philanthropic and religious schools. This issue was not examined in the private schools review but it was found that the involvement of international companies in private schooling was not yet present in the published literature. (P&RS A 16) • There is a small and ambiguous and therefore weak evidence base on whether or not philanthropic and religious schools increase tensions between different groups. (P&RS A 18) • There is a small and therefore weak evidence base to suggest that philanthropic and religious provision can help support peace building. (P&RS A 19)

2.1 Supply - similar findings

From the perspective of supply, similar findings were found across both reviews related to the *quality* of education provision. The first of these findings focuses on *learning outcomes* and second on *teaching*. Similar findings were also found in relation to *cost-effectiveness* and *financial stability* but due to the insufficient evidence base, these areas are identified as key gaps.

Quality: Learning Outcomes

Headline similar finding:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate strength evidence of better learning outcomes in private and philanthropic non-state schools compared with state schools (with very little and mixed evidence for religious schools). However, studies are typically faced with the difficulty of adequately accounting for the social background of pupils making it difficult to ascertain whether or to what extent the achievement advantage is attributed to schools. Even where learning outcomes are better for non-state providers, overall levels of learning outcomes remain low in rural areas of many developing countries across both state and non-state schools. (PS A1 / P&RS A1)

The two reviews found moderate and positive evidence regarding the performance of non-state pupils relative to pupils in state schools, but with important caveats and limitations on this evidence. In the case of private schools there was a large body of empirical evidence that suggested students in private schools tend to achieve better learning outcomes than state schools. However, while several studies attempted to rigorously account for social background factors, many recognised that it is difficult to establish the extent to which learning advantages may be attributed to private schools. It is also notable that studies generally examine relative performance, rather than absolute learning outcomes.

The philanthropic and religious schools review found that philanthropic schools tend to have positive learning outcomes, particularly where they work in partnership with the state system. In some cases the evidence was based in changes over time (e.g. improved exam pass rates in communities) or attainment against specific benchmarks. Where direct comparisons of learning outcomes are made they suggest that pupils in non-state schools are performing as well, or better, than those in state schools. Evidence is sparse for religious schools, with only two empirical studies examining their impact, and with mixed findings (neutral and negative). Comparisons of learning levels need to take account of pupil background, since those in philanthropic and religious schools often come from more marginalised socio-economic groups (see findings on *Equity: poor and marginalised* later in this report). However, few studies control for this phenomenon.

Across the different types of provider there are three notable tendencies. Firstly there is a lack of research on whether non-state schools provide quality education in absolute terms, not just compared with the state which is important given that overall levels of learning outcomes tend to be low in rural areas of many developing countries across state and non-state providers. Secondly, there was a stronger focus in the private schools review on quantitative analysis of learning outcomes relative to state schools (rather than on absolute learning outcomes), whereas these comparisons were less of a feature of the philanthropic and religious schools literature. Thirdly, there is a lack of research comparing outcomes across state, private, philanthropic and religious schools, or that consider their impact on each other within the education system.

Quality: Teaching

Headline similar finding:

- **Strong** evidence of better teaching in private and philanthropic non-state schools compared with state schools (with little evidence on religious schools). But ‘better teaching’ took on different meanings depending on the type of provider, with the private schools literature referring to more teacher presence, teaching activity and learning-outcome oriented approaches, and the philanthropic schools literature referring to pedagogies and structures adapted to learner needs and provision of teacher support and training. (PS A2 / P&RS A2)
- **Strong** evidence that religious and philanthropic schools adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of particular groups. (P&RS A11)

Both reviews found strong and positive evidence that teaching in non-state schools is better than state schools. This is the only finding that both reviews rate as strong. However the two reviews highlighted that the meaning of ‘better teaching’ differs in the literature depending on the type of provider.

Studies of private schools emphasised greater teacher presence, teaching activity, learning approaches that are more conducive to improved outcomes, as well as lower pupil-teacher ratios in certain contexts. One explanation in the literature for this type of better teaching in private schools compared with government schools relates to performance incentive mechanisms with better performing private schools monitoring presence, retaining effective teachers and dismissing less effective teachers. However,

several studies also find that private school teachers are often less formally qualified, trained and experienced compared with government school teachers.

Studies of philanthropic schools emphasised pedagogical and organisation innovation, as well as greater teacher support. Literature regarding teaching in philanthropic and religious schools was less comparative than the private schools literature and focused more strongly on philanthropic than religious schools. In philanthropic schools, the relationship between teachers and school management is described in more supportive terms than was found for private providers. Studies tend to emphasise teachers as having low initial qualifications and being drawn from local communities, but also as having a relationship with providers who ensure quality by providing in-service training and teacher support, as well as mechanisms for recognition and reward of effort. A greater emphasis is also placed on philanthropic schools adapting their curriculum, teaching methodologies, school organisation and pace of learning to the needs of different communities and students, for example, the adaptation of curriculum materials for nomadic schools; the introduction of flexible hours for working children; and an emphasis on teacher-parent interaction and outreach for marginalised children. This often includes the development of specific learning materials, greater use of child centred learning, and improved multi-grade teaching methods. In contrast only a minority of studies in the private schools review examined teaching methodologies; for those that did, there was more of a focus on regular student testing and homework. There is little evidence on teaching quality at religious schools but that which exists indicates that they have lower pupil: teacher ratios than state schools. There is also evidence that religious schools tend to either have a religiously-based curriculum or use the state curriculum and supplement this with religious materials to meet user needs, interests and preferences.

Cost-effectiveness

Headline similar finding:

- **Moderate** strength evidence that private and philanthropic non-state schools have lower costs of education delivery compared with government schools, often related to lower teacher salaries; there was little evidence relating to religious schools but it supported this finding. There is some limited evidence indicating a relationship between lower costs and cost-effectiveness, but it falls short of giving a clear finding on cost-effectiveness which is therefore identified as a research gap. (PS A5 / P&RS A5)

Moderate positive evidence was found that private and philanthropic schools have lower costs of education delivery than state schools. Although there was little evidence regarding religious providers it also supported this finding. Few studies in either review focused on cost-effectiveness, but where analysis was undertaken a relationship between lower costs and cost-effectiveness was indicated. Lower teacher salaries appeared to be a key element of lower operating costs for both private and philanthropic schools, while lower input costs (e.g. fewer resources, single room and rented school locations) were also noted for philanthropic schools. Some studies highlighted the need to treat estimates with caution given the low levels of data availability, the hidden costs of donated supplies, volunteer time, paying (particularly women) teachers below minimum wages, and the lack of accuracy in measurements of direct and indirect benefits. Given the absence of a focus

on costs relative to benefits and outputs, cost effectiveness has been identified as a key research gap.

Financial stability

Headline similar finding:

- The evidence on financial sustainability is ambiguous and therefore **weak** in both reviews and, as such, is identified as a gap in the evidence on non-state schools. (PS A6 / P&RS A6)

There is very limited relevant evidence that enables an assessment of the financial sustainability of private schools. The small amount of available evidence indicated that although private schools may vary in their length of operation they (and in particular low-fee private schools) may be vulnerable to closure after short periods of time. But there is a need to more directly assess whether fees and other income sources cover the costs of provision over a school cycle. The evidence in the philanthropic and religious schools review does not directly address the issue but rather highlights challenges for funding mostly philanthropic provision that could undermine sustainability, such as the difficulties caused by short-term project funding and donor dependency, as well as strategies of funding diversification pursued by some providers. There is also some limited evidence in the contexts of Bangladesh and Pakistan which notes the ability of philanthropic and religious schools to mobilise resources. There is a lack of analysis on the sustainability of different financial models in the literature. As a result of this weak evidence base in the non-state school literature, financial stability is identified as a key evidence gap.

2.2 Supply - contrasting findings across the reviews

In the supply thematic field, the key area where contrasting findings were found across the two reviews related to *equity and access*; firstly in relation to *gender*, and secondly in relation to *poverty and marginalised groups*.

Equity: Gender

Headline contrasting finding:

- **Weak** evidence that girls are less likely than boys to access private schools. However, this findings is context specific as some studies were ambiguous on the issue and a minority of studies showed contrasting evidence that private schools reduce the gender gap in certain contexts. (PS A4)

By contrast:

- **Moderate** strength and consistent evidence that philanthropic schools target female enrolment.

However, the evidence on religious schools is more mixed and context specific with evidence of gender parity in some studies, and of male dominance in enrolment in others. (P&RS A4)

The private schools review found that girls are less likely than boys to access private schools. This female disadvantage may be particularly experienced in poorer households and by girls with less educated mothers and may be related to a bias towards the selection of boys for private schooling. However, these findings are weak and context specific as some studies were ambiguous on the issue and a minority of studies showed contrasting evidence that private schools reduce the gender gap in certain contexts. The reasons underlying this contextual variation are not clear.

By contrast evidence from the philanthropic and religious schools review consistently showed that philanthropic schools target female enrolment with some schools achieving gender parity and with some NGO schools favouring girls with higher ratios of girls to boys. The evidence on religious schools was more mixed. Some of the evidence reviewed indicates that there has been an expansion of female enrolment and gender parity achieved in religious schools in certain contexts; in other contexts male dominance in enrolment persists.

Equity: Poor and marginalised

Headline contrasting finding:

- The evidence is **ambiguous (weak)** on whether private schools reach the poor. Private schools are prevalent in urban areas and growing in rural areas and poorer states in some contexts, but this does not necessarily mean they are reaching the poor. (PS A3)

By contrast:

- There is **strong** evidence that philanthropic schools (in all cases reviewed) and religious schools (in several cases reviewed) site and organise their provision to reach poor and marginalised groups. (P&RS A3)

The two reviews present contrasting evidence in relation to whether non-state schools reach the poor. For private schools the evidence is weak and ambiguous; although private schools continue to be predominantly situated in urban areas, there is also evidence of expansion in rural areas. However, this does not necessarily mean these schools are accessible to the poor: rural private schools are more likely to exist in better-off villages with larger populations and more developed infrastructures where market conditions are likely to be more viable.

The philanthropic and religious schools review found that both types of school tend to site and organise their provision to reach the poor and marginalised. Philanthropic schools were found to operate flexibly to target groups such as urban slum dwellers, child labourers, migrants, or the rural poor. Despite this targeted provision, they do not always reach the *most* marginalised. Religious schools were documented as being heavily concentrated in rural areas and many of these studies stated that these religious schools were mostly serving the poor or substantial proportions of the poor.

2.3 Demand - similar findings

Under the demand thematic field, the only similar findings were found for areas where there were evidence gaps. The first set of evidence presented relates to the *affordability* of non-state schools to users followed by findings on *accountability*.

Affordability

Headline similar findings:

- An **ambiguous** and therefore **weak** evidence base (neutral and negative evidence) on whether the poor are able to pay private school fees. (PS A7)
- An **ambiguous (weak)** evidence base on whether philanthropic and religious schools are as affordable to users as government schools. (P&RS A7)

But:

- A **moderate** body of evidence that private schools are less affordable to users than government schools. (PS A8)

There is ambiguous evidence regarding the fee structures and affordability of different types of schooling, as well as the impact of these costs on household welfare over time. This is a gap across all forms of non-state provision but this is of particular concern in the debate on private schools, with available evidence suggesting they are less affordable than state schools; that financial constraints are a barrier to accessing private schools; and that, for poorer households, attendance involves other welfare sacrifices and is hard to sustain. Greater clarity is needed from the evidence base in terms of who is defined as being poor, marginalised and disadvantaged; and what are the direct costs of different types of schooling to households relative to income, and how this affects other welfare costs over time. However, there is a clear finding that private schools are less affordable to users than government schools.

Accountability

Headline similar findings:

- **Small** and therefore **weak** body of evidence that users actively participate in and influence operational decision making in private schools. (PS A11)
- **Small** and therefore **weak** evidence that private schools are responsive to user demands and complaints. (PS A12)
- **Moderate** strength evidence that philanthropic schools provide opportunities for users to participate in, and influence, decision making through a variety of mechanisms. (P&RS A12)
- Across both reviews there is a lack of detailed evidence on these accountability relationships and their effectiveness, making this an important evidence gap.

Both reviews found positive evidence on accountability to users, although there was no evidence for religious schools. Overall, information on accountability mechanisms and dynamics was found to be very limited. There was weak evidence for private schools and

moderate evidence for philanthropic schools that these providers have mechanisms to enable users to actively participate in or influence operational decision making. However, much of the evidence was anecdotal, descriptive and lacking analysis of effectiveness. It is also not clear if these mechanisms and the responsiveness of schools actually increase the accountability of schools to users, and as such this represents a major gap in need of further investigation. However, there are some examples of NGO user participation being selectively or nominally practised, and of private school users not employing the exit strategy available to them even when facing school quality concerns.

2.4 Demand - contrasting findings

Under the demand thematic field we found contrasting findings in terms of strength of evidence on the existence and nature, with all findings on the existence and nature of choice contrasting across the two reviews.

Choice

Headline contrasting finding:

- **Moderate** evidence that perceived quality of education is a priority for users when choosing private schools, and that private schools are often perceived by users to be higher quality than government schools. (PS A9)
- **Moderate** evidence that users base their choice of private schools on signals such as teacher attendance, engagement and performance, school performance (exam results and promotion rates) and school popularity. Informal networks may play a significant role in informing users when choosing private schools. (PS A10)

By contrast:

- **Ambiguous** and therefore **weak** evidence on whether perceived education quality is a priority for users when choosing philanthropic and religious schools. The evidence indicates that choice of philanthropic or religious school is based on multiple complex priorities, which may include quality, such as cost, distance, accessibility, safety of learning environment, perception of child's academic ability and religious reasons. (P&RS A8)
- **Small** and ambiguous, and therefore **weak** evidence regarding whether parents have access to information or knowledge of the workings of their child's school, teacher qualifications and overall signals of education quality. (P&RS A9)
- **Moderate** evidence that religious motivation is an important factor for users in choosing religious schools, although other factors (e.g. economic) were also found to be important (P&RS A10).

The private schools review found moderate, positive evidence that perceptions of better quality are a priority for parents choosing private schools. Parents tend to perceive private schools as high quality and of better quality than government schools in terms of teacher attendance, engagement and performance, school performance (exam results and promotion rates), and school popularity. Some of these signals are derived through informal social networks, rather than direct observation. Another key priority cited in the Indian context is the availability of English language instruction. The literature finds that two major drivers of demand for private schools are: (i) parental aspirations for children's

educational attainment and future occupations; and (ii) dissatisfaction with government schools (including infrastructure and teacher absenteeism, attitudes and practices) and a lack of confidence in government services in general. Some studies also caution that user perceptions of quality may be related to views of private schools in general, including of private schools in more advantaged settings than the private schools available to users in their local settings.

In the philanthropic and religious schools review the evidence was weak and ambiguous but indicated that factors influencing choice were multi-faceted. Studies focusing on philanthropic (NGO) schools found that a common choice factor was that they were lower cost (or free) compared with other types of provision. Evidence also indicated that proximity of school to home, security and discipline were important to many parents across different school types. However, a small number of studies note that parents may face difficulties in evaluating education quality due to a lack of information available, and since their knowledge of conditions in schools may be limited. Instead, parents may base their school choices on general perceptions of school types and rough proxies for quality (e.g. presence of learning materials and quality of infrastructure). Additionally, the evidence indicated that parents may find defining educational quality difficult, however, those that did emphasised the importance of teaching methods, discipline and the relationship between teachers and students.

The evidence on religious schools found that, although perceived quality of education was important to parents, religious reasons were a priority with economic factors also playing a role. The evidence also indicated that different children within a household may access different types of schools e.g. religious, private or government.

2.5 Enabling Environment - similar findings

In the enabling environment thematic field, the similar findings present a nuanced picture of the role of state intervention - with both reviews finding, broadly, that states often lacked the *knowledge, capacity and legitimacy* to effectively engage with the non-state sector, but also that, where *subsidies and partnerships* were implemented, there was some evidence of positive impacts on non-state school quality and equity. Additionally both reviews found evidence that non-state schools complement state provision.

State knowledge, capacity and legitimacy

Headline similar finding:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">States often lack the knowledge, capacity and legitimacy to implement effective policy frameworks for collaboration and regulation of the non-state sector. This finding was more consistent in the private school review, with the strength of the finding rated as moderate. The philanthropic and religious schools review found weak evidence, due to a lack of consistency in findings. Negative cases outnumbered positive ones, but both were context-specific. (PS A13 / P&RS A13)

Evidence from both reviews suggests that government capacity to implement policy frameworks for non-state education is limited. The findings of the private sector review

were consistently negative, whereas those of the philanthropic and religious review were more mixed and drew from a broader range of contexts.

Both reviews found a general lack of state knowledge regarding the scale and nature of the non-state sector, something that is reflected in the lack of accurate estimates of non-state school enrolment and coverage. These knowledge gaps then constrain the development of meaningful policy frameworks. Both reviews find evidence that low state capacity and difficulties with co-ordination then undermine the ability of governments to implement policies and engage constructively with the non-state sector. The legitimacy of state intervention was identified as another constraint which can potentially amplify issues of state capacity, if non-state providers become less willing to engage with the state and operate increasingly in informal spaces where they are harder to register or regulate.

The literature on philanthropic and religious providers is richer overall in its analysis of enabling and disabling factors. It emphasises the importance of the government and non-state actors having overlapping interests and the nature of the engagement between the non-state sector and government at different levels. It finds that most effective collaborative relationships start informally, grounded at the local level and then gradually develop into more formalised mechanisms. However, several studies note the dangers of incoherence within the state and questions of policy credibility, which can create risks for non-state providers.

Subsidies, co-operation, partnerships and contractual relationships

Headline similar finding:

- Subsidies, co-operation, partnerships and contractual relationships between the state and non-state providers can have positive impacts on quality and equity, but these vary by context. This finding was **weak**, for both reviews, but for different reasons. The evidence base for philanthropic and religious schools **lacked consistency** across cases, with a mix of negative as well as positive, and was therefore **weak**. The literature on private schools was consistently positive, but was **very small**, and therefore also **weak**. (PS A15 / P&RS A15)

Both reviews found a number of positive examples of state engagement in various forms, although the strength, breadth and emphasis varied substantially. In the case of the private review the evidence was restricted to the impact of subsidies in a small number of programmes in Pakistan, and therefore found only weak evidence overall. These studies provided positive evidence that targeted and conditional subsidies can improve the quality of inputs, increase test scores and improve gender equity. However, we cannot generalise beyond the specific context of these programmes. The philanthropic and religious review found positive, but weak evidence overall due to a lack of consistency. There were a number of context specific positive and negative cases covering a far wider range of issues and contexts than the private schools review. Whether this difference in focus is the result of gaps in the private schools literature or reflects a narrower focus of state policies towards the private sector is not clear and warrants further attention.

Policies were documented that improved the sustainability of philanthropic and religious schooling, along with some aspects of equity and quality, although the impact varies considerably by context. The main limiting factors cited are weak state capacity and legitimacy, as well as fluctuating policy environments. Difficulties were particularly noted in fragile states. The dominance of large and international NGOs in policy dialogues was noted as a further barrier to effective policy design for smaller providers.

The main positive evidence focuses on collaboration between state and non-state providers to improve the equity of education opportunities. A combination of informal relationships and memoranda of understanding can facilitate the expansion of philanthropic provision amongst marginalised groups, and allow students better access to mainstream and higher levels of state education, particularly by creating mechanisms for transfer between state and non-state schools such as recognition of non-state qualifications or allowing students to sit exams in state schools. The evidence base on subsidies and contracting was positive too, both for supporting the expansion of philanthropic schools and broadening the curriculum of religious schools in certain contexts.

However, risks are identified. The need for philanthropic providers in particular to maintain close relationships with government officials has led them to tolerate government breaches in formal contracting in some cases, while in others NGOs have limited their advocacy work in order to avoid risking their collaborative and contractual relationships with governments. The extent to which this is a challenge varies, with a key factor being the extent to which providers have strategic capacity to balance their autonomy against their dependence on state funding, in order to maintain a co-operative but not subjugated relationships with government.

Complementarity and competition with state provision

Headline similar finding:

- **Moderate** evidence that philanthropic schools, in particular, and religious schools in some cases, are complementary to state provision - covering gaps in state provision, reaching marginalised groups and improving their integration into the state education system. However, there is also a perception that these providers are competing with the state system for international aid and there are concerns over the long run impact of parallel systems of philanthropic provision that develop with support from external funding. (P&RS A17)
- There is a **small** and therefore **weak** evidence base suggesting that private schools can complement government school provision in terms of gap filling where there is a poor supply of government schools. However there is also evidence that private schools fill gaps where government schools are performing poorly thus indicating blurred boundaries between whether private schools complement or compete with government schools. (PS A16)
- There is **small, ambiguous** and therefore **weak** evidence base regarding whether market competition can improve quality in the state and private school sectors or whether it depletes quality by encouraging better off students to exit the state sector. (PS A17)

The impact of non-state education providers on the overall education system is an area where the evidence base has particular limits across both reviews. Neither review found evidence that competition with non-state schools had an impact on the quality of state education. However, while there is evidence of complementarities between philanthropic schools and state schools, there is only weak evidence regarding complementarities between private schools and state schools.

There is a considerable amount of literature in a range of fragile and non-fragile contexts which notes philanthropic providers expanding access to education in the absence of state provision, as well as their role in integrating students from marginalised communities into mainstream state education. The role of philanthropic providers as incubators and demonstrators of innovative practices is also noted, with some examples of successful non-state programmes that have been adopted and scaled up by state education systems. Evidence on religious providers is very limited and the extent to which they are complementary or competitive with the state sector is not clear. Overall there is a need to build a more complete understanding of how these different provider types interact and affect each other.

The evidence on private schools suggests that they can expand overall enrolment rates, but that they may also expand by drawing off students where state schools are present but performing poorly. However, evidence that this competition is driving up quality in state schools is weak and ambiguous.

The literature in the philanthropic and religious review also raised questions about competition for funding and resources between the state and non-state sectors, particularly in terms of international assistance. Evidence on the long run impact of non-state providers on education systems was particularly lacking, with some studies noting concerns that this form of provision may reduce political incentives to develop the state education system and others noting the potential for external assistance to create parallel non-state education systems at the expense of the state that lack coherence and regulation. These phenomena were not analysed in detail, however, and are an area where further research is needed.

2.6 Enabling Environment - contrasting findings

In the enabling environment thematic field, there were contrasting findings regarding the effectiveness and impact of *regulation*. A key evidence gap was also identified in terms of understanding the *role of international organisations and donors* in supporting philanthropic and religious schools. This was hypothesis was not specifically examined in the private schools review.

Regulation

Headline contrasting finding:

- **Moderate** evidence that where regulation of private education providers exists it is not necessarily effective or may be selectively enforced. (PS A14)

By contrast:

- There is **moderate** evidence that basic recognition of philanthropic and religious schools, and particular forms of regulation, can create the conditions for positive collaboration with the state and can help to establish a broader national curriculum. However, regulations can focus overly on inputs and appear to be designed more to control market entry than to improve quality. (P&RS A14)

The evidence on the impact of regulation diverges between the two reviews. The evidence on private schools suggests that the overall impact of regulation is negative, although this finding is based on moderate evidence and there is some evidence of positive impacts. In contrast the evidence regarding philanthropic and religious schools reveals a moderate, positive finding with a mix of some negative evidence. A notable research gap across the reviews is that there are relatively few studies that empirically link regulations causally to outcomes, whether positive or negative.

The evidence on philanthropic and religious schools emphasised the role basic recognition of non-state schools can play in creating a framework for co-operation and collaboration between officials and non-state providers, as well allowing students in non-state schools to take government exams and so gain access to secondary education. Recognition itself is not sufficient to ensure these effects, however, which often depend on state capacity and the nature of the relationships between the provider and the state. There are some indications that regulation can assist in establishing broad and comprehensive national curricula in religious schools.

The private schools review did find some positive evidence that well-designed state regulation can support the expansion of private school provision, although there are concerns regarding state capacity to effectively enforce regulations and, in some contexts, about promotion of private schools without adequate regulation or quality controls. Some evidence indicated that state regulation may become a proxy for quality with unrecognised schools aspiring for recognition status and seeking to mimic recognised schools.

*Role of international organisations and funders***Headline finding:**

- There is a **large**, but **ambiguous** and therefore **weak** evidence base on whether international organisation and funders can play a positive role in supporting philanthropic and religious schools. This issue was not examined in the private schools review, but it was found that the involvement of international companies in private schooling was not yet examined in the published literature. (P&RS A 16)
- There is a **small** and **ambiguous** and therefore **weak** evidence base on whether or not religious and philanthropic schools increase tensions between different groups. (P&RS A 18)
- There is a **small** and therefore **weak** evidence base to suggest that philanthropic and religious provision can help support peace building. (P&RS A 19)

Analysis of the role of international organisations and funders was only undertaken as part of the philanthropic and religious schools review. Although this review found a large number of studies that touched on these questions, overall there is a lack of rich information on how international bodies interact with state and non-state providers as well as on their long-term impact. The available evidence suggests that the strategies and success of external actors are highly context specific. However, common themes were the potential for their having a positive role in brokering relationships between state and non-state providers; the coordination challenges that states face where there are multiple external actors and questions of donor funding dependency for non-state providers. It is notable that evidence on international chains of private schools was lacking in the literature and that there are similar gaps in terms of the role of international faith-based organisations involved in education provision. There is a need for further research into the range of non-state providers present in fragile contexts and the long run impacts of these providers, particularly for state-building, social cohesion and peace-building. Disaggregation of research both by type of international actor and type of education provider would further aid understanding.

3. Conclusion

A key message from this synthesis report, which echoes that of the two rigorous reviews on which it is based, is that the evidence base on the role and impact of non-state schools in developing countries is weak and many gaps remain. The reviews have flagged up critical gaps in the knowledge base and a number of areas of concern, highlighting both a need for caution in terms of policy and intervention in this area and a need for more targeted rigorous research. It should also be noted that findings cannot be translated into policy regardless of context, and that any intervention requires a thorough understanding of specific contexts, potential implications and unintended consequences which these reviews have helped to highlight.

3.1 Key findings

The process of synthesising the two reviews has highlighted some noteworthy common and contrasting findings. In terms of supply, a key common finding is that private and philanthropic schools fare better in terms of quality learning outcomes (moderate evidence) and teaching (strong evidence) compared with state schools (with little evidence on religious schools). There are some important caveats to this finding, however. Most of the studies of learning outcomes faced the problem of rigorously accounting for pupils' social background. Likewise 'better teaching' took on different meanings in the two reviews. In the philanthropic schools literature it meant that there was a focus on learner-centred pedagogies, while in the private schools literature the focus was on the presence and activity of teachers and on their adoption of learning-outcome oriented approaches. Another limitation is that findings are relative - i.e. compared with state schools - rather than absolute: given that many children in developing countries are not achieving basic competencies across all school types, 'better' does not necessarily mean 'adequate' or 'good'.

'Supply' findings relating to equity contrast strikingly between the two reviews. There was strong evidence of philanthropic schools (in all cases reviewed) and religious schools (in several cases reviewed) reaching the poor and marginalised, but the evidence was weak and ambiguous on whether private schools reach the poor. There was also moderate strength consistent evidence of philanthropic schools expanding enrolment for girls, with more mixed evidence for religious schools. For private schools the evidence was weak and indicated that girls are less likely than boys to attend private schools, but this finding was context specific with some studies ambiguous on the issue and a minority of studies showing that private schools reduce the gender gap in certain contexts.

Under 'demand' the evidence on the affordability of non-state schools was mostly weak and ambiguous - this was the case for evidence on whether the poor are able to pay private school fees, and for the evidence on whether philanthropic and religious schools are as affordable to users as government schools. However, there was a clear moderate strength finding that private schools are less affordable to users than government schools.

In terms of the 'enabling environment', both reviews found evidence that states often lack the knowledge, capacity and legitimacy to implement policy frameworks for collaboration with, and regulation of, non-state schools. However, the finding was more consistent and

of moderate strength in the private schools review, while it was weak in the philanthropic and religious schools review though with some positive examples of curriculum regulation and co-operation frameworks. In respect of state regulation of the non-state sector the findings were contrasting. Where regulation of private schools existed there was moderate strength evidence that it was often not effective or that it was selectively enforced, unrealistically stringent and potentially created opportunities for rent seeking. The philanthropic and religious schools review found moderate strength evidence that despite flaws basic recognition and certain forms of regulation can help to facilitate collaborations with the state and improve coordination in the sector.

These contrasting findings highlight potential areas for further research, for example, in the light of the philanthropic and religious school findings, to investigate the nature of the equity challenges presented by private schools, or to explore how regulatory frameworks could be made more effective in enabling collaboration with a broader range of non-state providers. Areas for further research can also be identified from the evidence gaps which are outlined below in Table 2. However, it is important to note that the evidence gaps and potential areas for further research are discussed in more detail in the original rigorous reviews.

3.2 Critical gaps

A number of gaps were identified from the synthesis of the evidence across the two reviews. These are presented in Table 2, listing research areas where findings were partial and not fully address in the reviews, weak across both reviews, or weak in either one of the reviews.

Table 2: Summary of evidence gaps

Type of evidence gap	Area of research
Partially and not sufficiently addressed in both reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-effectiveness • Accountability
Weak evidence across both reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial sustainability • Affordability • State subsidies, co-operation, partnerships and contracting
Weak in Private Schools review (but moderate/strong in Philanthropic & Religious Schools review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity - poor and marginalised • Equity - gender • Complement/compete with the state sector
Weak in Philanthropic & Religious Schools review (but moderate in Private Schools review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice • State capacity
Weak in Philanthropic & Religious Schools (and not investigated in Private Schools review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of international organisations and funders • Social tensions and peace building

These evidence gaps are sizeable. This is a matter of concern given the recent policy interest in the role and performance of private schools. Importantly more research is needed to better understand the nature of the equity challenges private schools may present and to broaden the focus beyond enrolment and short-term outcomes to the potential trade-offs between investing in improving state provision versus providing vouchers or subsidies to private schools. There is also a relatively limited evidence base for many of the main hypothesised market drivers of education quality. Much of the debate arguing for an enhanced role for the private sector in developing countries is based on theories that private schools provide choice for users in a free market, that private schools are more accountable to users, that users vote with their feet and exit private schools when they have quality concerns and that this creates market competition by driving up standards across all schools. While the review found positive evidence regarding the role of choice based on quality, there was little evidence relating to private school accountability and responsiveness, user exit in response to poor quality or competition having a positive effect on the state sector. Improving our understanding of the functioning of choice, accountability and competition in practice should be a research priority.

Another critical gap highlighted by the synthesis of the evidence is the role of international organisations in shaping policies, incentives for providers and direct provision interventions, which requires improved understanding and analysis. Work which disaggregates between different types of education provider, different types of funder and different types of international organisation could be particularly useful here. One potentially fruitful area of international support lies in assisting the development of improved policy frameworks and regulatory mechanisms for private providers. There is clear evidence that the current frameworks are weakly evidenced, poorly implemented, cause significant resentment and do not appear to be effective in improving education.

Critical gaps identified in synthesising the evidence across the two reviews should be understood within the broader context of the immense gaps in knowledge of the scale and coverage of the non-state school sector and how it operates in different contexts. There is a clear need for the evidence bases of both reviews to be expanded beyond the South Asian context where it is currently concentrated. The lack of evidence on religious providers must also be given serious consideration. Further research into this type of provider should examine the impact of a wider range of contexts, faiths and types of intervention.

The methodological biases of the different evidence bases should also be addressed. For example, more quantitative research could be conducted on philanthropic and religious schools, particularly regarding education quality, and there should be greater use of qualitative methods on private schools, particularly to examine their relationship to the state and to alternative policy frameworks. It should also be importantly acknowledged that much of what we know about private schools is based on limited understanding of registered private schools. The scale and coverage of unregistered private schools is less well documented or accessible.

3.3 Implications for future education systems research

A major finding from this overview is that there is a clear lack of analysis of the education system as a whole, and particularly the interactions and roles played by different types of education providers. For example, analyses do not generally examine the impact of private schooling and sorting effects on state school learning outcomes, meaning that the effects on the system as a whole are unclear.

One element of this is the need to map whole education systems with regard to different types of providers that are operating and the scale of non-state provision within it. This could in part be achieved by improvements in demographic and household surveys, in identifying and distinguishing between types of schools in international, regional and national learning assessments. Quantitative and qualitative mapping could enable understanding of how and why students move between different types of school within and across levels of education; the school management and decision making processes of the different providers with regard to the curriculum, perceived competition and gate keeping (both academic and financial); and the links between providers and state officials within policy frameworks. Research into the labour market dynamics of the teaching work force could also be fruitful in understanding the conditions that prevail in non-state and state schools, as well as the impacts that changing economies and labour forces might have on these arrangements. This research would be particularly informative regarding the current roles being played by different forms of provider and to inform how targeted support might assist in improving quality education for all.

To summarise, in order for programme design to be effective in the future the evidence base on the non-state education sector must be broadened, deepened and clarified. Priority should be given to expanding research outside South Asia; focusing less on individual providers and more on how different provider types operate as a system (i.e. their impact upon, and interactions with, each other and the state); broadening the research methodologies used to analyse the different providers to include not only rigorous quantitative analysis but also longitudinal, ethnographic, political economy and comparative analysis across contexts; as well as improving the conceptual rigour of research and the clarity of definitions used.

4. References

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Appendix: Assessment of overall strength of body of evidence for each assumption

Key: **STRONG** = Body of evidence rated as ‘strong’ overall. **(+)** = Positive findings supporting assumption.
MODERATE = Body of evidence rated as ‘moderate’ strength overall. **(-)** = Negative findings refuting assumption.
WEAK = Body of evidence rated as ‘weak’ overall. **(o)** = Neutral findings ambiguous in relation to assumption.

Table 3: Private schools - Assumptions & evidence assessment

Assumption	Overall Strength
(A1) Private school pupils achieve better learning outcomes than pupils in state schools	MODERATE (+)
(A2) Teaching is better in private schools than in state schools	STRONG (+)
(A3) Private schools geographically reach the poor	WEAK (o)
(A4) Private schools are equally accessed by boys and girls	WEAK (-)
(A5) The cost of education delivery is lower in private schools than in state schools	MODERATE (+)
(A6) Private schools are financially sustainable	WEAK (o)
(A7) The poor and poorest are able to pay private school fees	WEAK (o)
(A8) Private schools are as affordable to users as state schools	MODERATE (-)
(A9) Perceived quality of education is a priority for users when choosing private schools	MODERATE (+)
(A10) Users make informed choices about the quality of education	MODERATE (+)
(A11) Users actively participate in, or influence, operational decision making in private schools	WEAK (+)
(A12) Private schools are responsive to users’ demands and complaints	WEAK (+)
(A13) States have the knowledge, capacity and legitimacy to implement effective policy frameworks for collaboration and regulation of the private school sector	MODERATE (-)

(A14) State regulation is effective and improves the quality, equity and sustainability of private school provision	MODERATE (-)
(A15) State subsidies improve the quality, equity and sustainability of private school provision	WEAK (+)
(A16) Private schools complement government school provision	WEAK (+)
(A17) Market competition enhances quality in state and private school sectors	WEAK (o)

Table 4: Philanthropic and religious schools - Assumptions & evidence assessment

Assumption	Overall Strength
(A1) Philanthropic and religious school pupils achieve better learning outcomes than state school pupils	MODERATE (+) (Little evidence for religious schools)
(A2) Teaching is better in philanthropic and religious schools than in state schools	STRONG (+) (Little evidence for religious schools)
(A3) Philanthropic and religious schools geographically reach the poor and the marginalised	STRONG (+)
(A4) Philanthropic and religious schools are equally accessed by boys and girls	MODERATE (+) (Mixed evidence for religious schools)
(A5) Philanthropic and religious schools are cost-effective	MODERATE (+) (Little evidence for religious schools)
(A6) Philanthropic and religious schools are financially sustainable	WEAK (o)
(A7) Philanthropic and religious schools are as affordable to users as state schools	WEAK (o)
(A8) Perceived quality of education is a priority for users when choosing philanthropic and religious schools	WEAK (o)
(A9) Users make informed choices about the quality of education	WEAK (o)
(A10) Users' choices reflect their identities, beliefs or membership of particular social, cultural or religious groups	MODERATE (+) (No evidence for philanthropic schools)

Appendix: Assessment of overall strength of body of evidence for each assumption

(A11) Philanthropic and religious schools provide education that is suited to the needs and interests of particular social, cultural or religious groups	STRONG (+)
(A12) Users actively participate in or influence operational decision-making in philanthropic and religious schools	MODERATE (+) (No evidence for religious schools)
(A13) States have the capacity, legitimacy and knowledge to implement effective policy frameworks for collaboration and regulation of philanthropic and religious schools	WEAK (-)
(A14) State regulation of philanthropic and religious schools improves quality, equity and sustainability	MODERATE (+)
(A15) State subsidies, co-operation, partnerships, and contractual arrangements with philanthropic and religious schools improve quality, equity and sustainability	WEAK (+)
(A16) International support effectively strengthens philanthropic and religious provision of education	WEAK (-) (Little evidence for religious schools)
(A17) Philanthropic and religious education provision complements or strengthens the state	MODERATE (+) (Little evidence for religious schools)
(A18) Philanthropic and religious provision does not increase tensions between different groups	WEAK (o) (No evidence for philanthropic schools)
(A19) Philanthropic and religious provision can help to support peace-building	WEAK (+)



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The report was designed in December 2015 by Philip Rose, EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London

Day Ashley L, Wales J (2015) The Impact of Non-State Schools in Developing Countries: A synthesis of the evidence from two rigorous reviews. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development

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