LINEup
Longitudinal Data For INequalities In Education

# EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL IN ITALY
# INSIGHTS FROM THE LINEup QUALITATIVE STUDY

## 1. LINEup qualitative research at a glance - Introduction

### How can schools support student engagement with school?

LINEup's qualitative research explores how educational inequalities are experienced and addressed in everyday school life. The study combines the perspectives of school leaders, teachers, specialised staff, students, and parents to understand how school organisation, teaching practices, relationships and local contexts can support engagement, learning and more equitable educational opportunities. In Germany, the research examined nine schools across primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. The selection reflects the variety of conditions under which schools in Germany work.

**9** SCHOOLS

**3** EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

**10** SCHOOL LEADERS

**67** TEACHERS

**80** STUDENTS

**54** PARENTS

**211** PARTICIPANTS IN TOTAL

## 2. What did we learn? - Three Key Findings

**Structural challenges limit equity-oriented reforms**
Schools know what equity requires. What stops them is that classes are too large, schools are structurally understaffed, and decisions get stuck between administrative levels. Principals and teachers make up the difference themselves.

**Classrooms have become more diverse, support has not kept pace**
The range of learning conditions within one class keeps widening. Language is one driver, particularly where recent migration has increased the number of pupils learning the language of instruction. Others weigh as much. Teachers report more compensatory arrangements, more emotional and behavioural needs, weaker reading and concentration skills. Support staff are scarce almost everywhere, and at some schools missing entirely.

**Shared arrangements last longer than individual commitment**
Schools respond to comparable pressures in different ways. Where leadership sets a clear direction and where teachers, social work and special education cooperate, schools can absorb part of the strain. Arrangements agreed across the staff and kept up over years prove more durable than single projects. Without them, much depends on individuals and continuity becomes harder to secure.

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## 3. What helps? - Enabling Conditions & Practices

- Strong, collaborative school leadership and organisational capacity
- Multiprofessional teams and sustained external cooperation
- Differentiated, language-sensitive and relationship-oriented teaching
- Inclusive, participatory school cultures
- Stable resources and protected collaboration time

## 4. What gets in the way? - Structural & Contextual Constraints

- Limited reach into students' home environments, with no means to ensure cooperation where it is needed
- Fragmented governance, bureaucracy, and limited school-level control over resources
- Unequal and unstable support structures for inclusion, language support and students' mental health

## 5. Three messages to take away - Implications for Policy & Practice

**Equity depends on resources, not rhetoric.**
Inclusive and language-sensitive teaching has become indispensable. Without smaller classes, more staff, and stable funding, schools meet national equity goals only in part.

**Policy must align ambition with capacity.**
Reforms on inclusion, digitalisation and all-day schooling will only succeed if governance, staffing and funding structures are adapted so that everyday school work is more than just managing shortages.

**Commitment carries schools, shared arrangements keep it going.**
Where schools have turned individual commitment into arrangements across the staff, their work continues when people leave. Developing them takes time that schools currently lack.

## 6. Voices from the School Community

### Student
*"I also think [T04] gives very good…lessons. She's really fully into it, and she can take a joke, too. And then there's the atmosphere, which I think that a big difference to how you are in class."*

### Teacher
*"Well, I also find it really challenging that the kids have such a hard time concentrating. I think—or rather, my guess is—that all the new media, like TikTok, are responsible for this."*

### Parent
*"What I think is really good about this school, or still think, is the school social worker, who handles all of this so well, puts a lot of effort into it, and is also very open. That's just great."*

### School leader
*"Well, I'm a committed employee of this city (…) I'm always sure that every actor here in the city knows, everyone does the best they can, and I get the support I need. And I think that's something that really defines this city. There are major challenges that are simply tackled with a lot of dedication and… a lot of heart, and in a really very in a spirit of togetherness."*



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