Teachers' perspectives on the development of Curriculum for Wales

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Sample

- Semi-structured interviews: 10 Pioneer Leads (AoLE) and 25 teachers in 10 schools (primary and secondary, Welsh and English medium) serving the more economically disadvantaged communities.
- A survey was developed to be administered to all teaching staff within Pioneer Schools nationally: distinguishing levels of involvement in 'Pioneer' work & role in school (e.g. SMT & classroom teachers).
- Survey data were collected from 634 teachers across 81 Pioneer Schools.

How well informed do you feel about the new curriculum?

- 93% of Pioneer Leads said they were considerably informed. This figure drops to 39% for teachers in Pioneer schools who as yet had no specific role or involvement in curriculum development.

Are you familiar with the 'What Matters' statements?

- No specific involvement - 48% No, 52% Yes

Are you happy with the current content of the What Matters statement in your AOLE? (only if familiar with them) Response categories: Yes, Somewhat, Unsure, No.

- For all except Pioneer Leads, there were more 'somewhat' happy than simply happy. 17% who are involved but not Pioneer Leads were unsure or unhappy; 26% who are not involved at all are unsure or unhappy.

What do teachers think about more specific aspects of changes (subject specific knowledge, adaptation to teaching, AoLE teaching, teacher choice)?

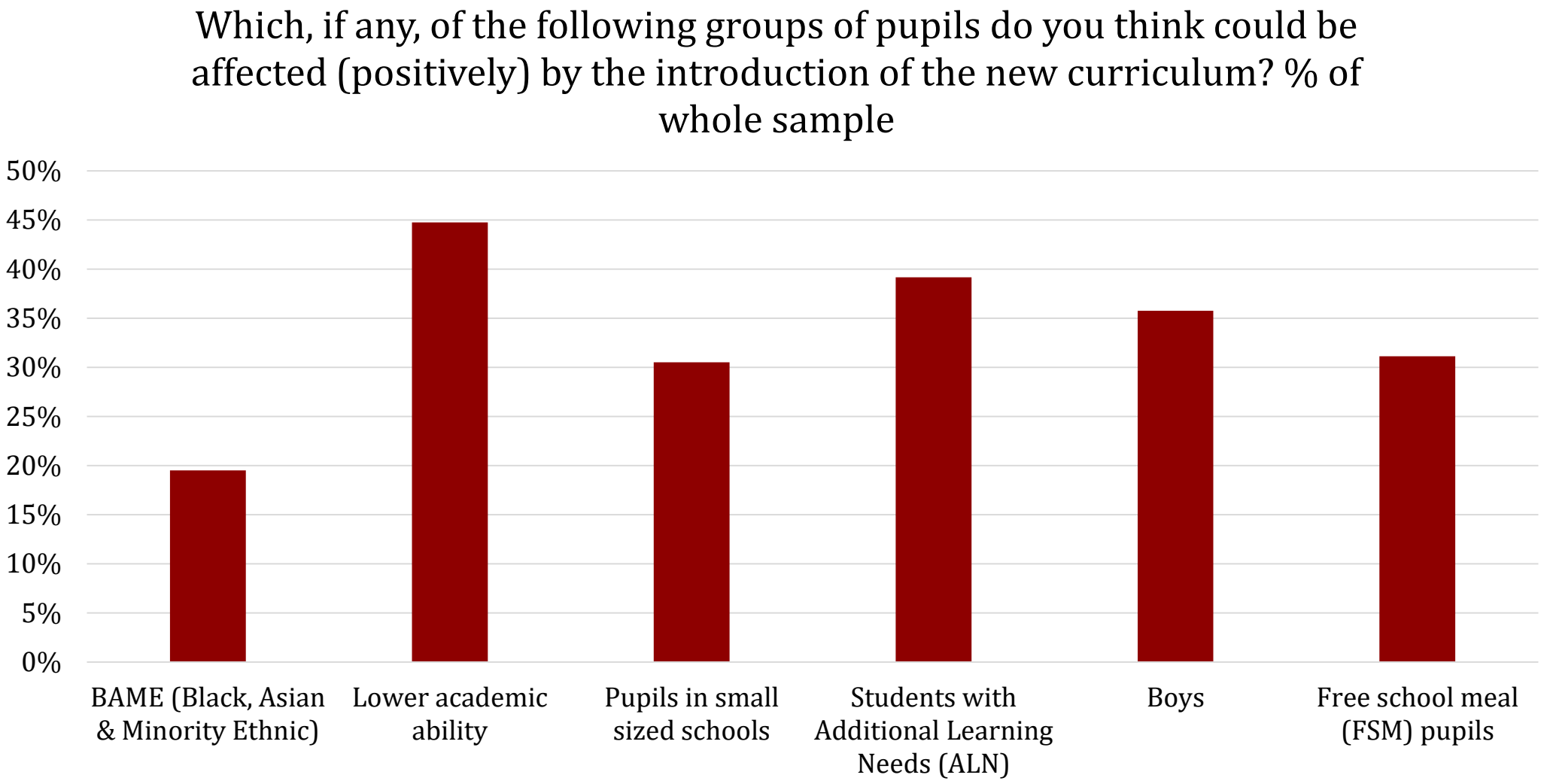
- There is a significant group of teachers (ranging from 41% - 24%) who are unsure or have negative perspectives on the benefits of the new curriculum to their pupils and experience of teaching.

'Mindset' change

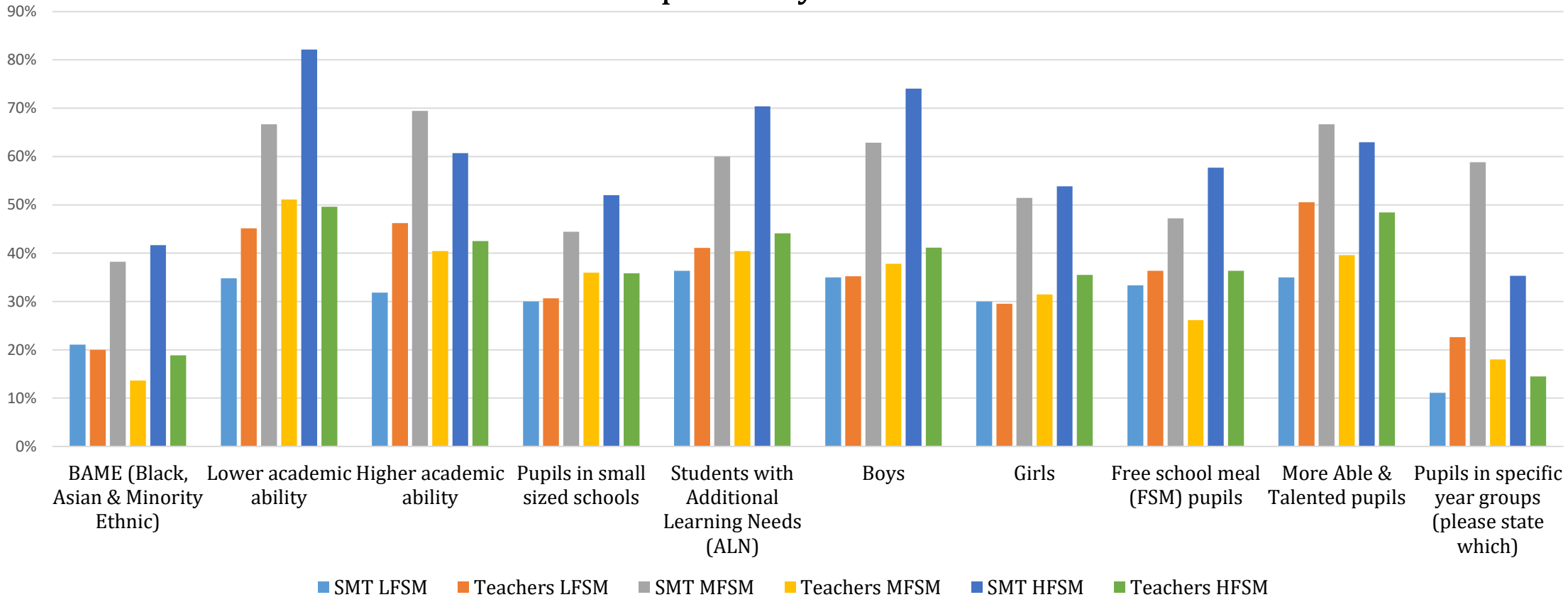
"It's a difficult one because it's change your mindset more than resources."

"I think a lot of heads will need to become far more creative and change their mindsets, look at the curriculum design issue. It's not going to be a box ticking exercise thank god, we've had that. This has got to be a lot more evolved and it's got to be a change of mindset."

"Have they got the skills to do those things because we've never taught in that particular way and you can't just suddenly change the mindset of a profession that's almost going to take a generation to re-educate that profession to do things differently."

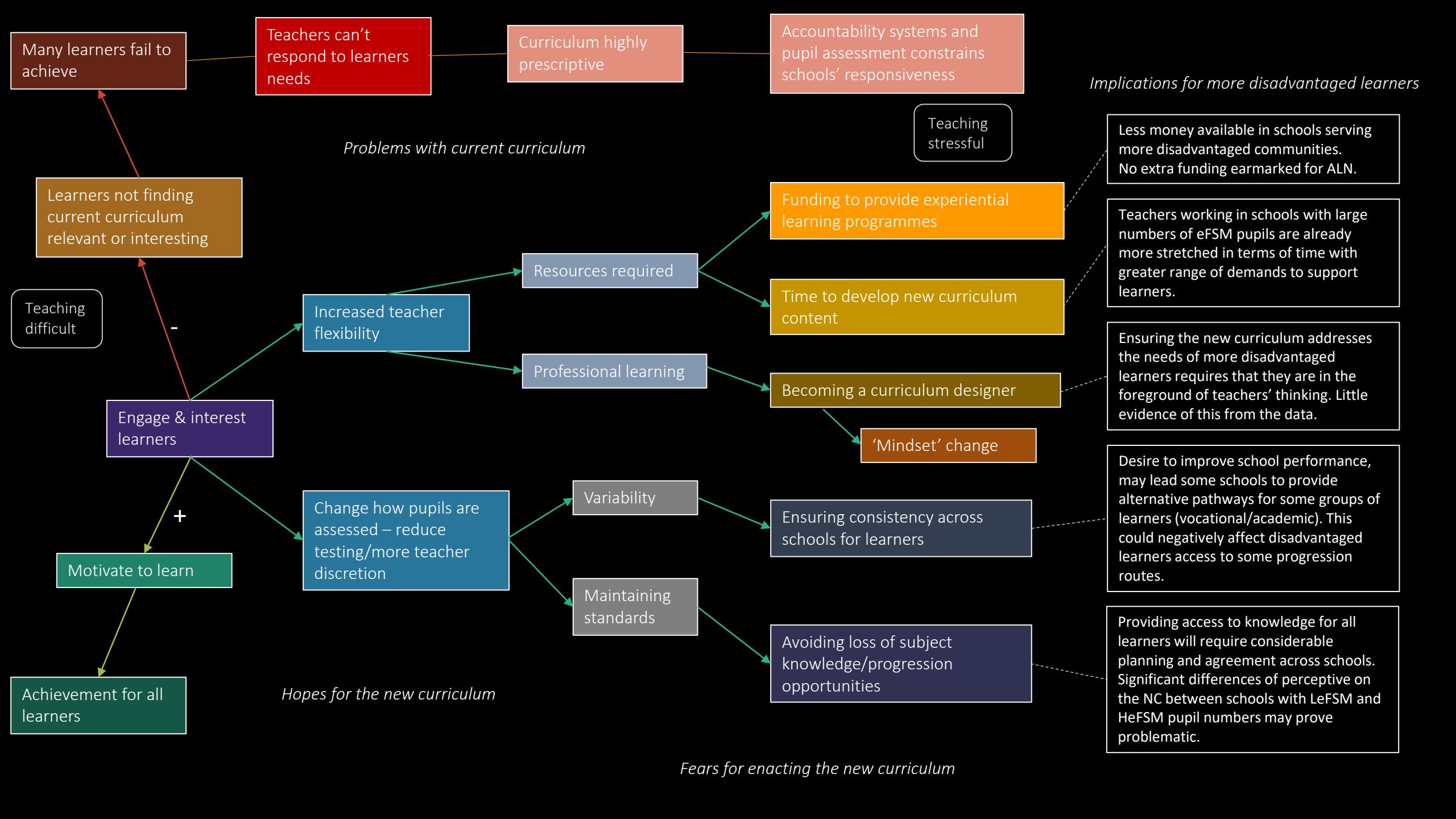

Which, if any, of the following groups of pupils do you think could be affected (positively) by the introduction of the new curriculum? % of whole sample
50%
45%
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
BAME (Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic)
Lower academic ability
Pupils in small sized schools
Students with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
Boys
Free school meal (FSM) pupils

Which, if any, of the following groups of pupils do you think could be affected by the introduction of the new curriculum?
% positively indicated



Tensions within hopes & fears

- School & teacher flexibility
- Changes to assessment in keeping with the reforms
- Benefits of a broader curriculum that is more child-centred
- Avoiding variability across schools
- Successful progression to post-16 study and employment
- Ensuring pupils don't miss out on subject specific knowledge


Many learners fail to achieve
Teachers can't respond to learners needs
Curriculum highly prescriptive
Accountability systems and pupil assessment constrains schools' responsiveness
Problems with current curriculum
Learners not finding current curriculum relevant or interesting
Teaching difficult
-
Increased teacher flexibility
Resources required
Professional learning
Engage & interest learners
+
Motivate to learn
Achievement for all learners
Change how pupils are assessed – reduce testing/more teacher discretion
Variability
Maintaining standards
Hopes for the new curriculum
Teaching stressful
Funding to provide experiential learning programmes
Time to develop new curriculum content
Becoming a curriculum designer
'Mindset' change
Ensuring consistency across schools for learners
Avoiding loss of subject knowledge/progression opportunities
Fears for enacting the new curriculum
Implications for more disadvantaged learners
Less money available in schools serving more disadvantaged communities.
No extra funding earmarked for ALN.
Teachers working in schools with large numbers of eFSM pupils are already more stretched in terms of time with greater range of demands to support learners.
Ensuring the new curriculum addresses the needs of more disadvantaged learners requires that they are in the foreground of teachers' thinking. Little evidence of this from the data.
Desire to improve school performance, may lead some schools to provide alternative pathways for some groups of learners (vocational/academic). This could negatively affect disadvantaged learners access to some progression routes.
Providing access to knowledge for all learners will require considerable planning and agreement across schools. Significant differences of perceptive on the NC between schools with LeFSM and HeFSM pupil numbers may prove problematic.

Implementation of reform for Success

High Quality Support → Regard → Confidence → Practice

Sinnema, Claire (2011) *Monitoring and Evaluating Curriculum Implementation: Final Evaluation Report on the Implementation of The New Zealand Curriculum 2008-2009.* Ministry of Education, New Zealand

How might learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds be affected by the new curriculum?

- School practices contributing to the attainment gap between learners from more and less advantaged backgrounds:
  - Lower quality teaching (less qualified teachers), ability grouping, undermined confidence, less access to a broad curriculum and fewer out-of-school educational experiences[1].
- What doesn't help:
  - Adopting new curricula does not, in general, produce large improvements in learning outcomes; use of ICT (e.g. individualised, self-instructional programmes) has minimal impact on attainment for children living in poverty[3]
- Factors that contribute to narrowing the gap:
  - Rigorous monitoring and use of data; raising pupil aspirations using engagement/aspiration programmes; engaging parents; developing social and emotional competencies; supporting school transitions; providing strong and visionary leadership; high quality teaching; an inclusive curriculum[2].
  - Good pedagogy supported by high quality professional development; whole-school reform models, which address multiple elements of school provision; use of coaching teachers/assistants in evidence-based approaches include cooperative learning (structured groupwork), frequent assessment and 'learning to learn' strategies[3].

1. Crenna-Jennings, Whitney (2018). *Key drivers of the disadvantage gap: Education in England Annual Report 2018.* Education Policy Institute: London.
2. Pirrie, A., & Hockings, E. (2012). Poverty, educational attainment and achievement in Scotland: a critical review of the literature
   Demie, F., & Mclean, C. (2015). Tackling disadvantage: what works in narrowing the achievement gap in schools. Review of Education, 3(2), 138-174.
3. Sharples, J., Slavin, R., Chambers, B., & Sharp, C. (2011). Effective classroom strategies for closing the gap in educational achievement for children and young people living in poverty, including white working-class boys. London: C4EO.

Aims

- Four purposes
- Raising attainment
- Employability (Wales PLC)

Content

- AoLEs
- 'What matters'
- Progression Steps
- An evolving and inconsistent process
- Expectations about high levels of teacher autonomy

Pedagogy

- 12 pedagogical principles
- Considerable variation and experimentation
- Will be influenced by decisions about assessment

Assessment

- The unknown
- High levels of hope that current assessment system will be changed.