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## **Does social deprivation influence inter-group contact outcomes for pupils in Northern Ireland?**

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### **Abstract**

The education system in Northern Ireland is characterized by division, with around 95% of the pupil population attending predominantly co-religionist schools. In a society that is transitioning from a thirty year conflict that has been framed by hostilities between the main Catholic and Protestant communities, reconciliation interventions in education have sought to promote the value of inter-group contact between pupils attending separate schools. Some qualitative research suggests that such initiatives are more likely to have positive outcomes for pupils from more middle class backgrounds than those from more disadvantaged communities and areas that experienced high levels of conflict related incidents and deaths during the pre-ceasefire years. Drawing on contact theory and empirical evidence from a large scale quantitative study, we seek to examine this theory. Using free school meals as a proxy for social class, our findings are consistent in finding that there is a differential impact of contact for those from less affluent backgrounds, and we conclude by arguing that this should be reflected in policy responses.

**Keywords:** intergroup contact, reconciliation, education, disadvantage

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## Introduction

In the two decades since the ceasefires in Northern Ireland, there has been a clear movement towards peace, and, despite setbacks and intermittent periods of unrest, there are many hopeful signs of a better future for a region that experienced almost 30 years of violent internecine conflict. The legacy of the conflict remains, however, and around half of the population continues to live in separate (predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant) communities. The education system too continues to be characterised by division, with most children (around 95%) attending either Catholic schools (also known as ‘maintained schools’) or schools that are either state controlled or voluntary and that are mainly attended by Protestant children and young people (also known as ‘controlled schools’).

Reflecting a consensus that education has a role to play in promoting social cohesion and more harmonious inter-group relations, schools in Northern Ireland have been the target for a range of ‘contact’ initiatives, designed to bring Catholic and Protestant children together. A proliferation of research studies have sought to examine the impact of these initiatives, and in this vein, three years ago, we (the authors) began a five year longitudinal study of intergroup contact experienced at post-primary level in Northern Ireland. Focusing on 11-16 year olds, the study, which has qualitative and quantitative components, seeks to examine the relationship between inter-group contact experienced by pupils within and outside the school setting, and a range of social outcomes, including reduced inter-group anxiety and prejudice as well as more positive social attitudes. Drawing on contact theory (see below), the results from the first phases of this research were as expected, with pupils who have experienced more positive contact faring better on the full range of outcome measures than pupils who experienced little or no contact or ‘negative’ contact. In addition, we developed a model to elucidate the process through which effective contact is mediated, showing that the formation of inter-group friendships is central (Hughes, Lolliot, Hewstone, Schmid, & Carlisle, 2012).

Although encouraging in respect of ‘contact’ policy initiatives, our initial analysis also reveals that some groups may experience more benefits from inter-group encounters than others. Specifically, some qualitative work indicates that pupils in more disadvantaged communities and areas that experienced high levels of conflict related incidents and deaths during the pre-cease fire years are less likely to experience the same positive outcomes of contact as pupils from more affluent and mixed communities (Hughes, 2013). The quantitative analysis we present in this

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paper explores this initial finding in more depth. Using free school meals as a proxy for social deprivation, we compare survey responses from pupils in receipt of free school meals with those of pupils who do not get subsidized lunches. Our concluding section will confirm that free school meal pupils generally score lower than non-free school meal pupils on a range of contact outcomes. In the light of this, we argue that there is no one size fits all solution to the problem of separation and ongoing hostilities between the two main communities in Northern Ireland, and that a more nuanced approach to the implementation of structured school-based peace building initiatives may be required.

### **The Education System in Northern Ireland**

Since the foundation of the State in the 1920s, education in Northern Ireland has been characterised by separation along ethno-religious lines. The outbreak of violence in the late 1960s, which marked the beginning of a decades-long conflict between those who want to see Northern Ireland remain under British rule (also known as ‘loyalists’ who are mainly Protestant) and those who want Northern Ireland to reunite with the Republic of Ireland (also known as ‘republicans’ who are mainly Catholic), was seen by some to have been compounded by the education system which, taken together with residential segregation in many areas, severely limited the opportunity for many young people from the two communities to meet (Brokkehurst, 2006; Murray, 1985). A range of policy and structural initiatives have been introduced in the intervening years to mitigate the assumed negative impact of separate education and to promote more harmonious relations. Chief amongst these was the establishment of the first integrated school in 1982. The school had a mixed enrolment of Catholics and Protestants, and signed up to a statement of principles that committed to a religious balance in pupil enrolments, teaching staff, and governors (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) Statement of Principles, 1991). There are now 61 integrated schools in Northern Ireland accounting for around 5% of overall provision. Other significant interventions have included the introduction of a citizenship curriculum and Government sponsored short-term cross-community contact schemes designed to give Protestant and Catholic pupils opportunity for encounter. Evaluations of the latter have been mixed, and a prevailing view is that the short-term nature of encounters and the light touch approach adopted by many teachers have limited their impact (Hughes, 2011).

Taking account of the relatively low uptake of integrated education and the limitations of short-term interventions, a recent intervention in ‘shared education’

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aims to provide opportunities for sustained, curriculum based contact for pupils attending separate schools. Introduced in 2007, and funded initially by a philanthropic organisation, shared education offers, inter alia, the possibility of undertaking GCSE O and A level options in a school with majority ‘other group’ enrolment. Usually, the model entails pupils studying one or more subjects in mixed classes at the ‘host’ school. Uptake has been high and there are now more than 100 primary and post-primary schools involved in the Programme (‘Schools Working Together’, <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/SEP2.html>). Underpinning the above initiatives is the understanding that inter-group contact will have an enhancing effect on relations formerly characterised by hostility and negative stereotyping. This ‘contact theory’, credited to Allport (1954), remains one of the most enduring in the social sciences.

### Contact theory

The theory posits that contact between members of opposing groups can effectively promote more harmonious group relations when contact is structured such that it (a) promotes equal status between group members, (b) encourages the pursuit of shared goals, (c) is characterised by cooperation, and (d) has institutional support or the sanction of appropriate authority figures.

This hypothesis (straightforward in principle, challenging in practice) led to a wealth of empirical data in the years following its publication. It has been tested and supported by a diverse array of research methods, across a variety of social groups, and in a number of different social contexts attesting to the robustness and flexibility of the hypothesis. A recent meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) of 515 studies and more than 250,000 participants in 38 nations provided conclusive evidence that intergroup contact typically corresponds with lower levels of intergroup prejudice; a relationship that is enhanced when contact is structured along Allport’s optimal conditions.

In addition to Allport’s optimal conditions, Pettigrew and colleagues argue that contact situations that are sustained and intimate can be particularly effective at reducing prejudice as they provide participants with the opportunity to form cross-group friendships (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011; Pettigrew, 1998). The introduction of more intimate contact scenarios invokes many of the optimal conditions, facilitates self-disclosure, and allows for friendship-developing mechanisms to occur. This shift has led researchers to focus on the *quality* of intergroup contact and not just the quantity.

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Along with *when* contact is most likely to lead to prejudice reduction, a number of different processes have been proposed and tested in the research literature regarding exactly *how* contact reduces prejudice, or what mediates the relationship between contact and prejudice. A subsequent meta-analysis conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) that specifically examined mediators of contact revealed that contact appears to have the strongest impact on prejudice by reducing negative affect, such as intergroup anxiety, and by inducing more positive affective processes, such as intergroup empathy and perspective taking.

Researchers and practitioners alike have amassed overwhelming empirical evidence of the effectiveness of intergroup contact, the conditions under which it is most beneficial, and the psychological processes underlying it; however, relatively little research has explored the role that social deprivation may play. It is more often the case that social deprivation, in the form of socio-economic status, is treated as an individual difference variable that is statistically controlled for. The relatively little research that has been conducted suggests that individuals with a lower socio-economic status are more likely to display higher levels of intergroup threat and to hold less positive multicultural attitudes which can have a negative impact on intergroup contact (Savelkoul, Gesthuizen, & Scheepers, 2011; Schneider, 2008; van Gler & Vedder, 2011). In Northern Ireland, Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, and Niens (2006) found that higher social class was positively associated with attending a mixed or integrated school and a more positive attitude towards general mixing with the ethno-religious outgroup for Catholic respondents. In addition, higher social class was positively associated with experiences of more intimate intergroup contact (friends, relatives, and neighbours from the ethno-religious outgroup) and a more positive attitude towards general mixing with the ethno-religious outgroup for Protestant respondents.

The limited attention given to the relationship between social deprivation and the efficacy of contact interventions is somewhat surprising, given that a wealth of research posits a connection between deprivation, inequality, and conflict (see Crammer, 2005, for a review), and the fact that empirical evidence from Northern Ireland and other conflict regions shows that the most deprived communities are disproportionately and more negatively impacted by conflict than more affluent neighbourhoods (Ferguson & Michaelsen, 2013). Hence, whilst cultural identity and nationalism played important roles in the Northern Ireland conflict, the real and perceived horizontal inequalities between the Protestant and Catholic communities are frequently cited as causes of the conflict (Fitzduff & O'Hagan, 2009) and as drivers of the intensity of violence (Honaker, 2010). Accepting these trends, it is reasonable to assume that there may be more hostility towards the 'out-group' in disadvantaged communities, and consequently, more resistance to interventions

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aimed at relationship building. The study described below aims to test this hypothesis.

## Method

### Participants

All post-primary schools across Northern Ireland ( $N = 217$ ) were recruited to take part in a 5-year longitudinal study to explore young people's attitudes and experiences of intergroup contact. The study was designed to survey pupils once each year through their post-primary career as they moved from Year 8 to Year 12. This paper draws from the first wave of the study examining pupils' responses to the survey conducted during Year 8, in the spring of 2011 when they were approximately 11-12 years of age. In total, 4,472 participants from 51 schools completed online or paper surveys, representing approximately 20% of all Year 8 pupils in Northern Ireland.

To determine social deprivation, participants were asked to indicate whether or not they received free school meals. In Northern Ireland, a pupil is eligible for free school meals if their family is entitled to Income Support, Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance, supported by the Home Office National Asylum Support Service, or receives Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and has an annual income that does not exceed £16,190. Entitlement to these sources of support is contingent upon the family having a low assessed income with no adults in full-time paid work; eligibility for free school meals therefore serves as an indication that the pupil is more likely to come from the lowest income households. Relevant to the study, it is important to note that there is significantly higher uptake of free school meals in those areas most adversely affected by the conflict (Ferguson & Michaelsen, 2013). Free school meals has been used extensively in administrative datasets, official reports, and educational research in the United Kingdom as a proxy variable of economic disadvantage (Goldstein & Noden, 2003; Sammons, West, & Hind, 1997; Schagen & Schagen, 2005; Yang, Goldstein et al., 1999).

Recently, however, concerns have been expressed regarding the validity of free school meals as a measure of disadvantage, as researchers have found evidence to suggest that it may underestimate the level of disadvantage in a given school (see Hobbs & Vignoles, 2010). Shuttleworth (1995) explored the use of free school

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meals as a proxy for social deprivation in Northern Ireland and found that free school meals usefully predicts the majority, but not all, of those children who come from families without a parent in paid employment. One reason for this discrepancy may be that while families in the lowest income brackets are eligible for free school meals they may not necessarily claim it. This may be because they are not aware of their eligibility for the programme or, in some instances, parents may be put off for fear of embarrassment or having their children teased (Storey & Chamberlin, 2001).

While imperfect, free school meal eligibility is a useful mechanism for capturing social deprivation as it presents school age participants with a simple and straightforward question to which they should have knowledge of. On the survey, participants could indicate yes, no, or I don't know to whether they received free school meals. As our analyses focuses on the relationship between deprivation and intergroup relations between members of the Protestant and Catholic community, for the current set of analyses we restricted our sample to those individuals who indicated that they either did or did not receive free school meals and those that self-identified as either Catholic or Protestant. See Table 1 for the breakdown of participants according to participation in the free school meal programme and religious affiliation.

Table 1. *Breakdown of participants based upon religious group and free school meals*

Free School Meals	Within Religious Grouping Percentage			
	Protestants	%	Catholics	%
Students receiving free school meals	152	13.7	526	22.5
Students not receiving free school meals	957	86.3	1815	77.5

## Measures

**Contextual intergroup contact.** The quantity and quality of intergroup contact was explored across three different domains – experiences within primary school, in secondary school, and outside of school. Non-contextualised intergroup contact, in the form of negative contact, was also explored.

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**Primary school contact** was measured by asking participants, “How often did you spend time with [outgroup]<sup>1</sup> pupils?” (1 = *Never* to 5 = *Very often*) and “How happy were you when you spent time with [outgroup] pupils?” (1 = *Very unhappy* to 5 = *Very happy*). These two items measured quantity and quality of primary school intergroup contact respectively.

**Secondary school contact** was measured with four items that addressed the quantity of intergroup contact and two that addressed the quality of intergroup contact. First, participants were asked to, “Please think about the time you spend in the classroom.” and then asked to answer the following questions, “How often do you do activities with [outgroup] pupils?” and “How often do you talk with [outgroup] pupils?” (1 = *Never* to 5 = *Very often*). They were then asked the same two questions prefaced with “Please think about the time you spend between classes or during break time.” These four items exhibited strong reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .95$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of the quantity of secondary school contact. The quality of intergroup contact was measured by asking participants, “How happy are you when you spend time with [outgroup] pupils?” (1 = *Very unhappy* to 5 = *Very happy*) in relation to contact experienced in the classroom and between classes and during break time. These items correlated strongly ( $r = .83, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of the quality of secondary school contact.

**Contact outside of school** was measured with two items preceded by, “Now, please think about the time you spend outside of school.” Participants were then asked to answer the following questions, “How often do you spend your free time with [outgroup] people?” and “How often do you send emails or link up on MSN with [outgroup] people?” (1 = *Never* to 5 = *Very often*). These two items correlated strongly with each other ( $r = .83, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of the quantity of contact experienced outside of school. Responses to how happy they were with the contact experienced outside of school was used as a measure of the quality of contact experienced outside of school.

**Negative contact** was measured by averaging the responses to two items, “Have you had any bad experiences with [outgroup] children (e.g. name calling, teasing, bullying)?” and “Have you ever been hurt by [outgroup] children?” (1 = *Never* to 5 = *Very often*). These two items correlated strongly with each other ( $r = .67, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of negative contact.

**Intervening variables.** To take into account the potential underlying processes active in intergroup contact situations, a number of intervening variables derived from contact research were included, such as intergroup anxiety, empathy, perspective taking, and perceived group norms.

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**Intergroup anxiety** was measured using two items which were preceded by, “Now think of a situation where you might meet [outgroup] children.” Participants were then asked to answer the following questions, “Would you feel nervous towards them?” and “Would you uncomfortable around them?” (1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Very much*). These two items correlated strongly with each other ( $r = .62, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of intergroup anxiety.

**Empathy** was measured using the following two items, “How much do you care about the problems faced by [outgroup] children?”, “Do you feel pity for [outgroup] children when you see them being treated unfairly?” (1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Very much*). These two items correlated strongly with each other ( $r = .50, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of intergroup empathy.

**Perspective taking** was measured using two items, “How well do you think you understand how [outgroup] children view things?”, and “Do you find it easy to see things from the point of view of [outgroup] children?” (1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Very Much*). These two items were strongly correlated ( $r = .57, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of intergroup perspective taking.

**Perceptions of group norms** was measured with three items, “My family and friends like me to have [outgroup] friends”, “...are happy for me to visit [outgroup] in their homes”, and “...are happy for me to invite [outgroup] friends to my house”. These three items exhibited strong reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .95$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of group norms.

**Outcome variables.** To explore the potential impact that intergroup contact may have on intergroup attitudes and behaviours, participants were asked to respond to items measuring outgroup trust and outgroup attitudes.

**Outgroup trust** was measured with two items, “How much do you trust [outgroup] children to treat you well?” and “How much do you trust [outgroup] children to be fair to you?” (1 = *Don’t trust at all* to 5 = *Trust very much*). These two items were significantly correlated with each other ( $r = .85, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of group trust.

**Outgroup attitudes** were measured using two items, “How positive or negative do you feel about [outgroup] children?” (1 = *Very negative* to 5 = *Very positive*), and “How much do you like [outgroup] children?” (1 = *Don’t like at all* to 5 = *Like very much*). These items were significantly correlated ( $r = .75, p < .001$ ) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of outgroup attitudes.

**Covariates.** Within the contact literature, while minor, gender differences are evident in the relationship between contact and prejudice reduction (Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). Fur-

ther, research has shown that in Northern Ireland the highest levels of deprivation are found in Controlled schools as opposed to Maintained or Integrated schools (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2013). Therefore, respondent gender (male, female) and the type of secondary school attended (Controlled, Maintained, Integrated) were controlled for in the current set of analyses.

## Results

We conducted three separate 2 X 2 between-subjects multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA)— an extension of analysis of variance—with post-hoc comparisons to investigate possible main effects and interactions between deprivation (those on free school meals and those not on free school meals) and religious group (Catholic and Protestant) on the intergroup contact variables, intervening variables, and outcome variables. A MANCOVA allows one to simultaneously test for mean differences along a number of dependent variables while taking the relationships amongst them into consideration. Additionally, as we are examining mean differences amongst a number of dependent variables, an advantage of MANCOVAs over separate analyses of covariance is the ability to control for familywise error (the increased chance of making a Type I error when performing multiple comparisons).

**Group differences on intergroup contact.** The first MANCOVA examined the intergroup contact measures as dependent variables, religious group and deprivation of participants as independent variables, with gender and school type as covariates. A significant Box's test for intergroup contact variables ( $p < .001$ ) indicated that the assumption of equivalent covariance matrices was violated; as such Pillai's Trace was used to evaluate the potential differences in the data. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect for the intergroup contact variables and deprivation (Pillai's Trace = .012,  $F(7, 1039) = 1.81$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .03). The main effect for religious group and the interaction between deprivation and religious group, however, were nonsignificant. These non-significant multivariate results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences across religious group or the interaction of deprivation and religious group for the linear combination of the intergroup contact variables.

Univariate analyses for the effect of deprivation significantly predicted responses related to the quality of intergroup contact experienced in primary school ( $F(1, 1051) = 4.32$ ,  $p = .04$ , partial eta squared = .004) and secondary school ( $F(1, 1051) = 5.97$ ,  $p = .02$ , partial eta squared = .006) with those receiving free school meals reporting significantly lower quality intergroup encounters with

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members of the ethno-religious outgroup in primary ( $M = 3.78$ ) and secondary school ( $M = 3.70$ ) than those not receiving free school meals ( $M = 3.93$  primary school,  $M = 3.89$  secondary school). Additionally, deprivation significantly predicted experiences of negative contact ( $F(1, 1051) = 21.16, p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .02) with participants receiving free school meals ( $M = 1.92$ ) reporting significantly more negative encounters with members of the ethno-religious outgroup than those not receiving free school meals ( $M = 1.59$ , see Table 2 for group means).

Table 2. *The means and standard deviations for contact variables by deprivation*

Variable		Mean (SD)			
		Catholic	Protestant	FSM	Non-FSM
Primary school	Contact quantity	3.12 (1.13)	3.14 (1.09)	3.11 (1.02)	3.13 (1.13)
	Contact quality	3.86 (0.99)	3.95 (1.05)	3.77 (1.06) <sub>a</sub>	3.93 (1.01) <sub>b</sub>
Secondary school	Contact quantity	3.20 (1.07)	3.45 (1.07)	3.27 (0.99)	3.33 (1.10)
	Contact quality	3.79 (0.97)	3.93 (0.94)	3.70 (0.95) <sub>a</sub>	3.89 (0.96) <sub>b</sub>
Outside school	Contact quantity	2.86 (1.13)	2.95 (1.07)	2.91 (1.08)	2.90 (1.11)
	Contact quality	3.76 (1.07)	3.84 (1.04)	3.68 (1.09)	3.82 (1.05)
Non-contextual	Negative contact	1.71 (0.98)	1.57 (0.89)	1.92 (1.10) <sub>a</sub>	1.59 (0.89) <sub>b</sub>

Cell means with different subscripts are significantly different at (at least) the  $p < .05$  level. Cell means without subscripts were not compared as they failed to show a significant multivariate  $F$ -statistic. SD = Standard deviation. The analysis controlled for participant gender and type of school.

**Group differences on intervening variables.** Similar to intergroup contact, Pillai's Trace was used to evaluate the potential differences as the Box's test for the intervening measures was significant ( $p < .001$ ). Results revealed significant multivariate effects for both religious group (Pillai's Trace = .01,  $F(4, 2858) = 6.94, p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .01) and deprivation (Pillai's Trace = .01,  $F(4, 2858) = 4.69, p = .001$ , partial eta squared = .007), as well as their interaction (Pillai's Trace = .004,  $F(4, 2858) = 2.84, p = .02$ , partial eta squared = .004).

Significant univariate main effects for the effect of religious group were found for empathy ( $F(1, 2861) = 6.26, p = .01$ , partial eta squared = .002), perspective taking ( $F(1, 2861) = 13.72, p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .005), and group norms ( $F(1, 2861) = 20.99, p < .001$ ) such that Catholic participants reported lower levels of empathy ( $M = 3.01$ ) and perspective taking ( $M = 2.45$ ), and a perception that their group would be less likely to approve of intergroup contact ( $M = 3.07$ ) than

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Protestant participants ( $M_s = 3.08, 2.56, \& 3.31$  respectively). Similar results were found for group differences based upon deprivation. Significant main effects were found for experiences of intergroup anxiety ( $F(1, 2861) = 6.02, p = .01$ , partial eta squared = .002), empathy ( $F(1, 2861) = 4.61, p = .03$ , partial eta squared = .002), and group norms ( $F(1, 2861) = 13.59, p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .005). Participants receiving free school meals reported higher levels of intergroup anxiety ( $M = 1.78$ ), lower levels of empathy ( $M = 2.90$ ), and a belief that their group would be less likely to approve of intergroup contact ( $M = 2.89$ ) than those participants not receiving free school meals ( $M_s = 1.67, 3.07, \& 3.21$  respectively; group means can be found in Table 3).

Table 3. *The means and standard deviations for intervening variables*

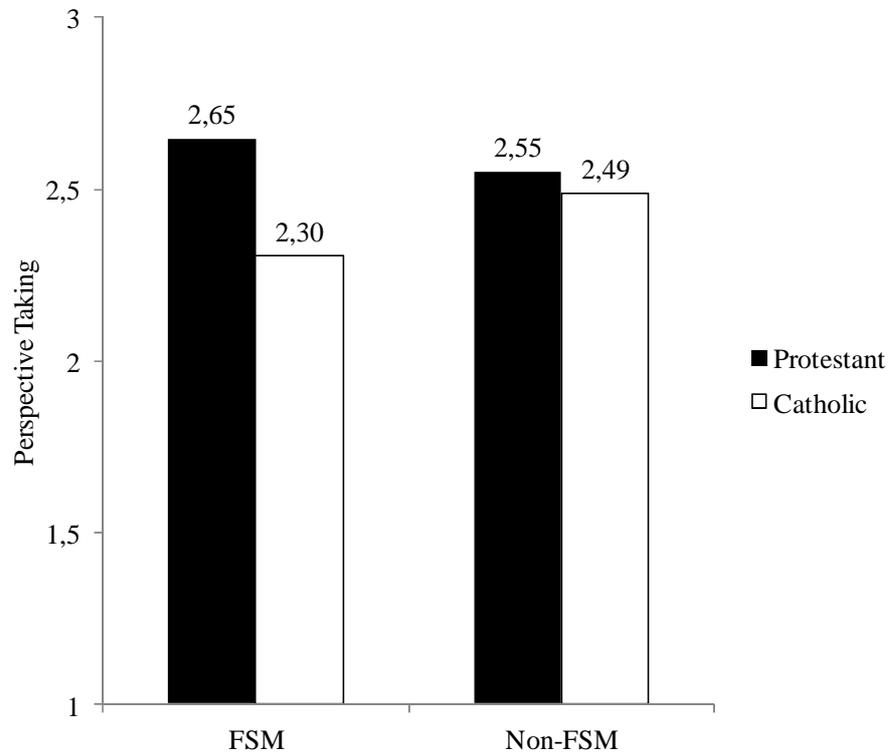
Variable	Mean (SD)			
	Catholic	Protestant	FSM	Non-FSM
Intergroup anxiety	1.72 (1.00)	1.63 (0.90)	1.78 (1.04) <sub>a</sub>	1.67 (0.95) <sub>b</sub>
Empathy	3.01 (1.19) <sub>1</sub>	3.08 (1.22) <sub>2</sub>	2.90 (1.18) <sub>a</sub>	3.07 (1.20) <sub>b</sub>
Perspective taking	2.45 (1.11) <sub>1</sub>	2.56 (1.12) <sub>2</sub>	2.38 (1.14)	2.51 (1.11)
Group norms	3.07 (1.28) <sub>1</sub>	3.31 (1.26) <sub>2</sub>	2.89 (1.33) <sub>a</sub>	3.21 (1.26) <sub>b</sub>

Cell means with different subscripts are significantly different at (at least) the  $p < .05$  level. Subscripts within religious group denoted by numbers and subscripts within deprivation denoted by letters. SD = Standard deviation. The analysis controlled for participant gender and type of school.

Significant main effects for perspective taking were qualified by a significant interaction between religious group and deprivation ( $F(1, 2861) = 7.58, p < .01$ , partial eta squared = .003). Post hoc analyses revealed that Catholic participants receiving free school meals ( $M = 2.30$ ) reported lower levels of perspective taking than Catholic participants not receiving free school meals ( $M = 2.49, p < .01$ ). Further, Catholic participants receiving free school meals ( $M = 2.30$ ) reported significantly lower levels of perspective taking than Protestants receiving free school meals ( $M = 2.64, p < .001$ ; see Figure 1). There were no statistically significant differences between Protestants receiving and not receiving free school meals.

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Figure 1.



**Group differences on outcome variables.** The final MANCOVA was used to examine the association between religious group and deprivation and potential outcomes of intergroup contact – attitudes and trust towards the ethno-religious outgroup. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect for the outcome variables and deprivation (Roy's Largest Root = .006,  $F(2, 2775) = 7.77, p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .006). The main effect for religious group and the interaction between deprivation and religious group were nonsignificant.

Univariate analyses for the effect of deprivation significantly predicted reports of outgroup attitudes ( $F(1, 2776) = 14.48, p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .005) and trust ( $F(1, 2776) = 12.66, p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .005) such that par-

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ticipants receiving free school meals reported significantly less positive attitudes ( $M = 3.15$ ) towards and were less likely to report trusting ( $M = 2.97$ ) the other ethno-religious community than those not receiving free school meals ( $M_s = 3.36$  & 3.22).

Table 4. *The means and standard deviations for outcome variables*

Variable	Mean (SD)			
	Catholic	Protestant	FSM	Non-FSM
Outgroup trust	3.13 (1.14)	3.27 (1.11)	2.97 (1.15) <sub>a</sub>	3.22 (1.12) <sub>b</sub>
Outgroup attitudes	3.29 (1.14)	3.38 (1.10)	3.15 (1.16) <sub>a</sub>	3.36 (1.11) <sub>b</sub>

Cell means with different subscripts are significantly different at (at least) the  $p < .05$  level. Cell means without subscripts were not compared as they failed to show a significant multivariate  $F$ -statistic. SD = Standard deviation. The analysis controlled for participant gender and type of school.

## Conclusions

The analyses demonstrate that while there are slight variations across religious groupings, with Catholic respondents reporting less empathy and perspective taking, and a stronger belief that their social group is less likely to endorse intergroup contact, the main differences were based upon social deprivation. There are statistical differences between children who receive free school meals and those who do not on how they perceive intergroup contact and their feelings and beliefs towards members of the ‘other’ ethno-religious group. The results indicated that pupils receiving free school meals reported less pleasant interactions, more experiences of negative contact, were more anxious interacting with members of the other community, and believed that their own community would be less likely to approve of intergroup contact than those who were not receiving free school meals. They also reported lower levels of empathy and trust, and less positive attitudes than those who were not receiving free school meals.

In the context of empirical evidence that posits a relationship between social deprivation and more negative experiences of conflict, these results are perhaps not surprising. It is worth noting here that, although Northern Ireland has witnessed a significant reduction in violence since the first cease fires in the 1990s, areas of high level deprivation continue to experience ‘low level’ inter-group hostilities, manifest in periodic rioting and protests targeted at the ‘other’ community. Indeed, Police statistics attest to the fact that most sectarian incidents in Northern Ireland continue to occur in those areas most impacted by the conflict

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([http://www.psni.police.uk/hate\\_motivated\\_incidents\\_and\\_crimes\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland](http://www.psni.police.uk/hate_motivated_incidents_and_crimes_in_northern_ireland)).

It follows then that negative intergroup interaction is more likely to be the norm for children from more deprived communities of Northern Ireland. The findings also chime with research by Hughes (2013) which suggests that in areas that are characterised by residential segregation and sectarian tension, pupils of contact initiatives have some difficulty in reconciling school norms that valorise reconciliation and peace building, and community norms relating to the ‘other’ group that are informed by fear, suspicion and sense of threat.

As noted in the introduction our findings raise some questions about the implementation of a blanket approach to school based contact initiatives. Although it is increasingly clear that programmes such as shared education lead to more positive inter-group responses generally, and can therefore contribute to social cohesion (see Hughes et al., 2013), the findings presented here suggest that not all children will be impacted equally, with those from the most deprived communities responding less well than pupils from more affluent backgrounds to opportunities for contact. At present there is limited recognition of this in terms of how contact interventions are devised and implemented, and in the context of the research presented here, we make the following practical suggestions.

First, prior to participation in contact programmes, pupils should be assessed to ascertain experiences of the ‘other’ group to date, and levels of prejudice and hostility. This could be done using age appropriate questionnaires and/or flash cards. Pupils whose experience has been generally negative, and who are least receptive to the potential contact experience, should be encouraged to participate in preparatory programmes. Such programmes would aim to expose and alleviate fears and apprehension regarding contact, and to ameliorate negative stereotyping and prejudice. Examples might include role play (where participants are encouraged to enact and reflect on imagined contact scenarios) and ‘show and tell’ (where participants are encouraged to discuss political or cultural emblems and artefacts associated with their own and the other group). Second, the reconciliation aims and objectives of contact initiatives should be tailored to reflect the context within which the programme is taking place. Hence, schools in areas where inter-group tensions have been high might have more modest objectives in respect of reconciliation outcomes than schools in more affluent areas where intergroup relations are generally good. The development of contact indicators and an outcome scale based on existing evidence would be useful in this respect. Third, programme monitoring and evaluations should have scaled output and outcome indicators built in, such that programme effectiveness is measured against deprivation and ‘prior experience’ indicators. Fourth, good practice models should be collated and

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disseminated. Finally, in an era of fiscal constraint, and as some areas of Northern Ireland continue to experience very poor community relations (the consequences of which can be at considerable cost to the public purse), policy makers might usefully target interventions in areas that are likely to benefit most from less negative responses to the other group – even if the positive outcomes are more modest than might be the case in areas where relations are already generally positive.

Although the above suggestions may enhance contact outcomes, this is not to diminish the extent of the underlying problem – ongoing high levels of disadvantage and disproportionate experience of the worst effects of conflict and hostility amongst those who have least. It goes without saying that whilst there are ongoing inter-community grievances that relate not only to issues of national identity and constitutional arrangements, but also to economic disadvantage, the impact of any contact scheme will be necessarily limited.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The term ‘outgroupers’ was not used in the survey. All school children received a filtered survey which inserted either Catholics or Protestants outgroup depending on the respondent’s given religious affiliation.

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