



Economics Seminars

Thursday 9 May 2024 at 12:00

Aula Magna Edificio Baffi

Facoltà di Scienze Economiche Giuridiche e Politiche - Viale Sant'Ignazio 74

Marco Bertoni

Università degli Studi di Padova

*Free to improve? The impact of free school attendance
in England*

with G. Heller-Sahlgren and O. Silva

Abstract. We investigate the impact of attending a free school in England – that is, a new start-up school that enjoys considerable autonomy while remaining in the state sector. We analyse the effects of two secondary free schools with different teaching philosophies: one follows a ‘no excuse’ paradigm, while the other adopts a ‘classical liberal’, knowledge-rich approach. We establish causal effects exploiting admission lotteries and a distance-based regression discontinuity design. Both schools have strong impacts on student test scores, absences and school mobility. Peer quality, teacher characteristics, and inspectorate quality ratings do not seem to explain the schools' effectiveness. Instead, a quantitative text analysis of the schools' ‘vision and ethos’ statements shows that the ‘no excuse’ and ‘classical liberal’ philosophies of the two free schools clearly set them apart from the counterfactual schools where rejected applicants enrol-providing a more likely causal channel.