

How to Build a theory of change for an impact evaluation

3ie How-To Videos

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International Initiative for Impact Evaluation*

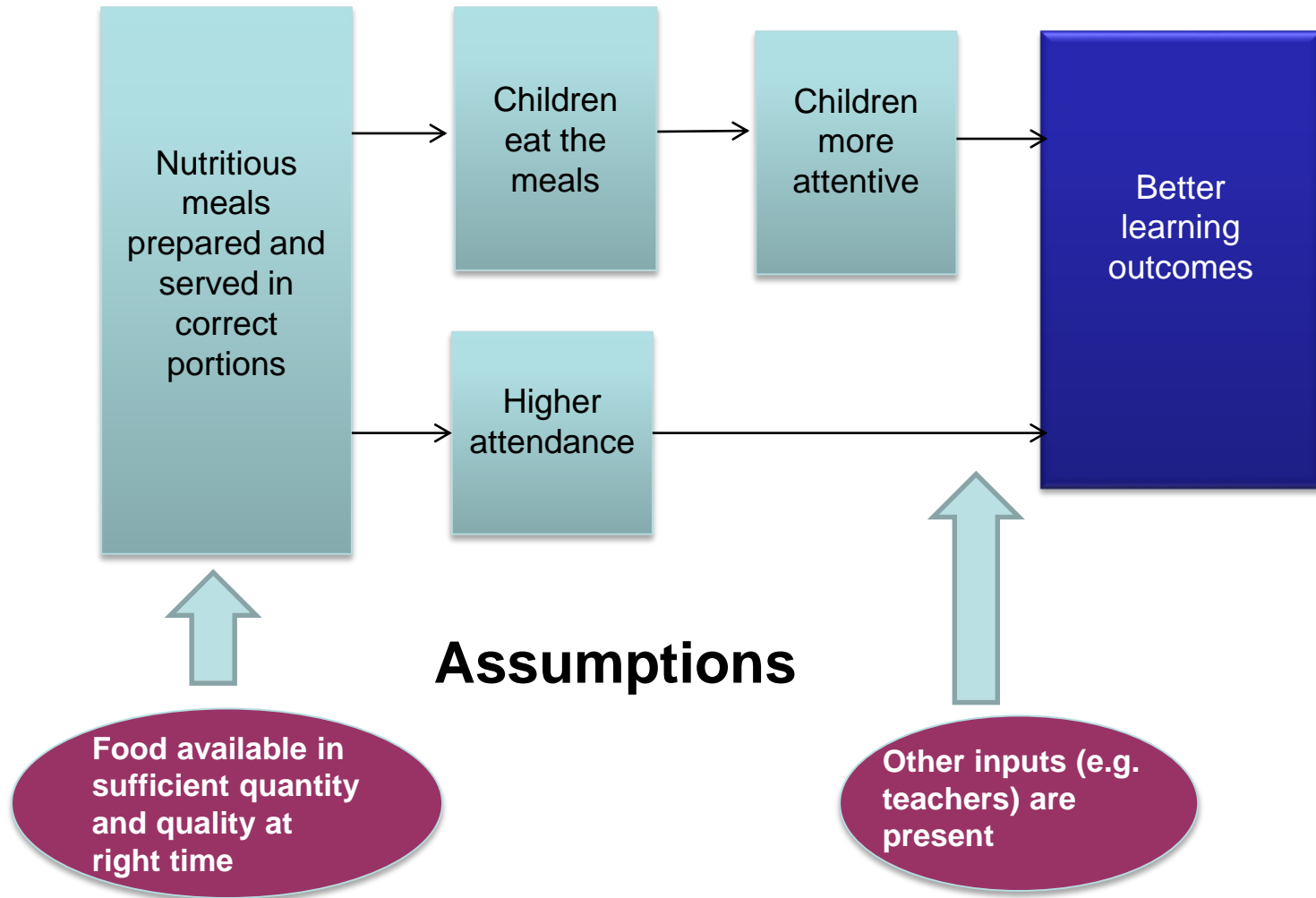
What is a theory of change?



A theory of change documents the causal links between inputs, activities, outputs and intermediate and final outcomes, and identifies the underlying assumptions.

Assumptions are what needs to be true for this causal chain to operate.

Example ToC for school feeding



Assumptions

Steps in building theory of change



1. Define intervention, objectives and outcomes
2. Lay out main steps in causal chain
3. Identify underlying assumptions
4. Add a temporal dimension
5. Identify key evaluation questions
6. Validate and revise

Step One



Clearly define the intervention, its objectives and outcomes of interest

- Be precise in terms of outcome definition and proposed measurement
- And unanticipated outcomes may be uncovered

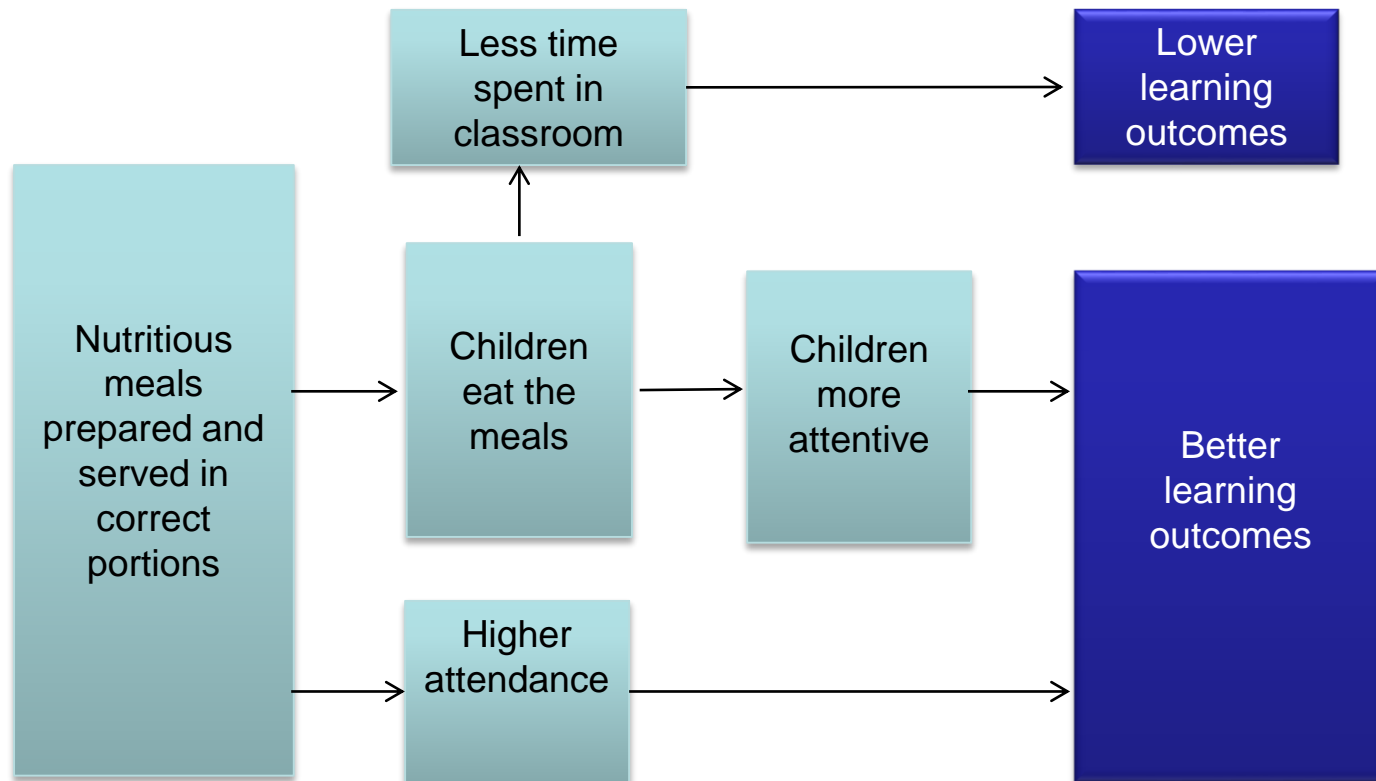
Define the intervention: school feeding



- Which meal?
- Do guidelines exist?
- How is food to be procured?
- What is planned to ensure parents know about it?
- What training will be provided to those preparing food?



Unanticipated outcomes



Steps Two and Three

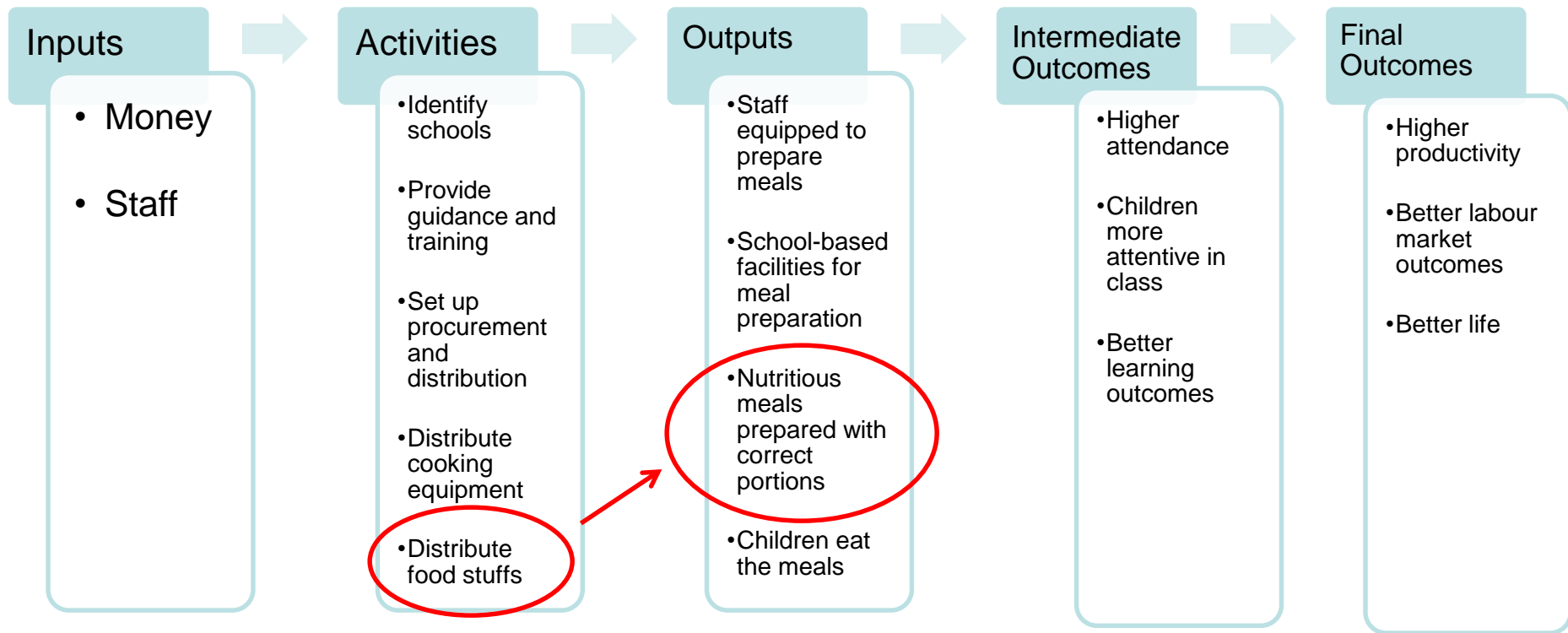


Map out the main steps in the causal chain (input, process, activities, outputs, intermediate and final outcomes)

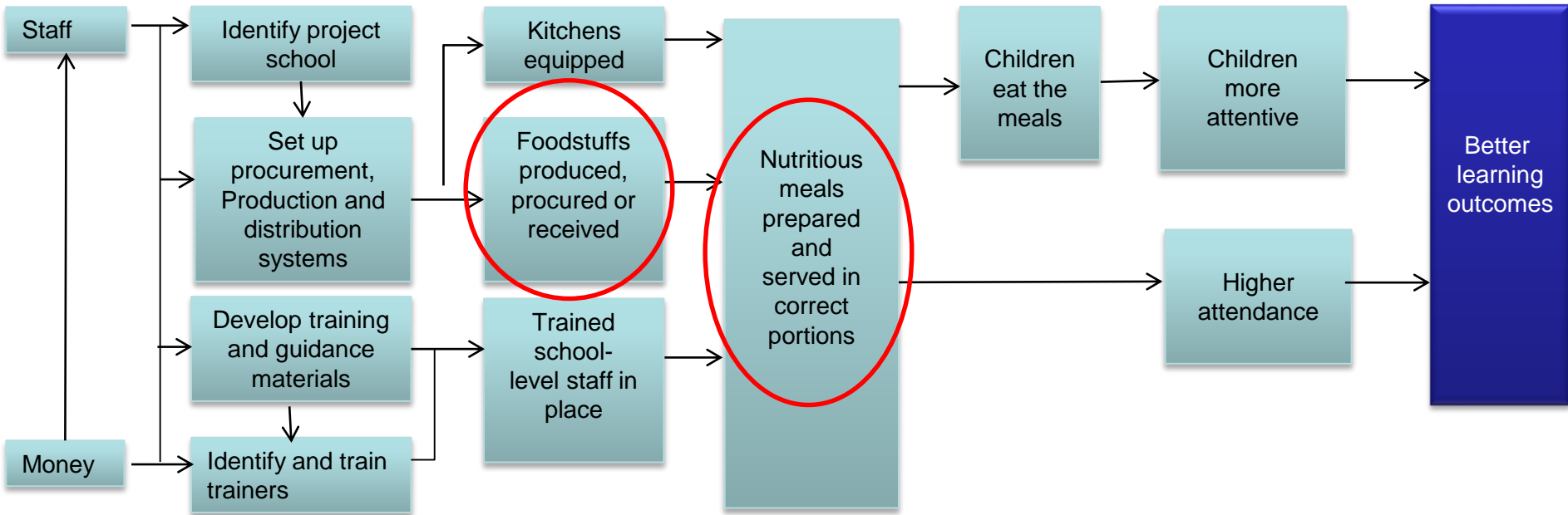
And then identify the assumptions which underpin these steps

- Specific and detailed, don't use silos
- Empathy

A 'silo' theory of change for school meals



The 'un-siloed' ToC



Assumptions

Funds available on time

Data available for school selection

Equipment is distributed and usable

Food used for school meals and properly prepared

Parents are aware of school feeding and value it

Other inputs (e.g. teachers) are present

Appropriately Qualified and Motivated Project staff

Those trained understand tasks

Food available in sufficient quantity and quality at right time

Meals are palatable

Empathy

Who are these people?

What do they really want?

And what's it going to cost me?

How would that benefit me?



Step Four



Add a temporal dimension

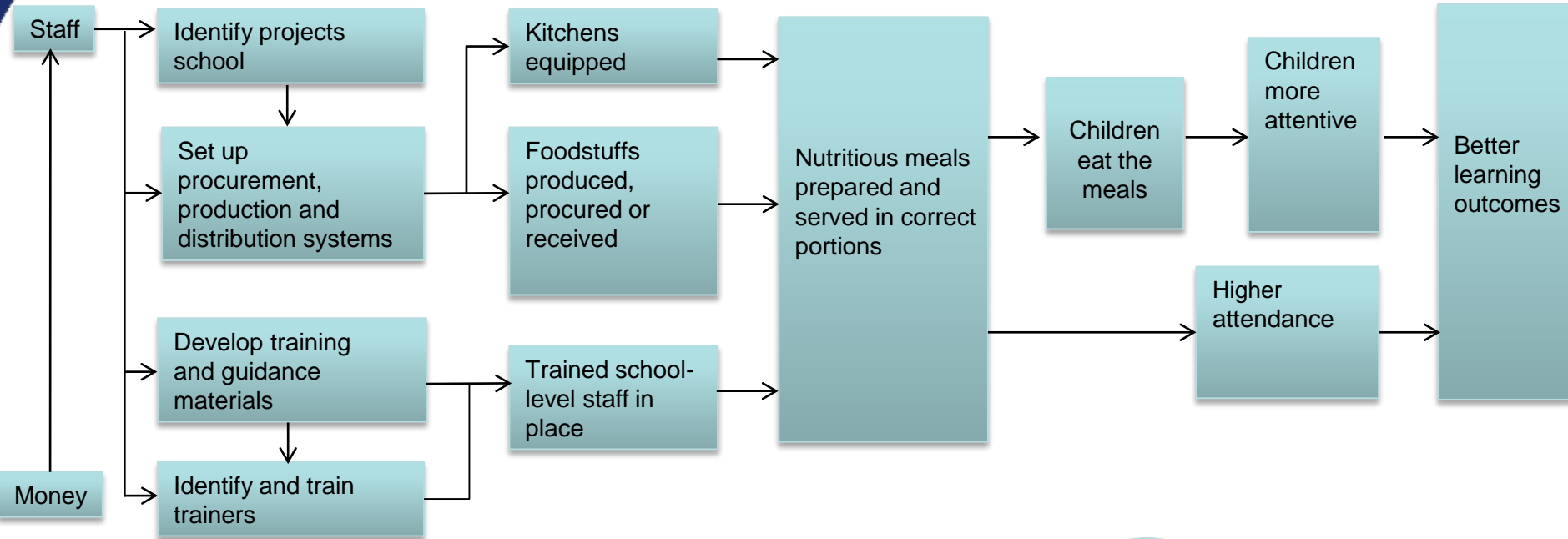
- Define project time line accurately and realistically
- Think through time required to observe sufficient change in outcome in a sufficiently large group to measure impact

Step Five

Identify the Evaluation Questions

- Interrogate the causal chain, and ask ‘what needs to be in place for this to work’?
- Different types of evidence (factual and counterfactual)
- Probe potential weak links
- Look for second generation questions which tackle design issues

What needs to be in place?



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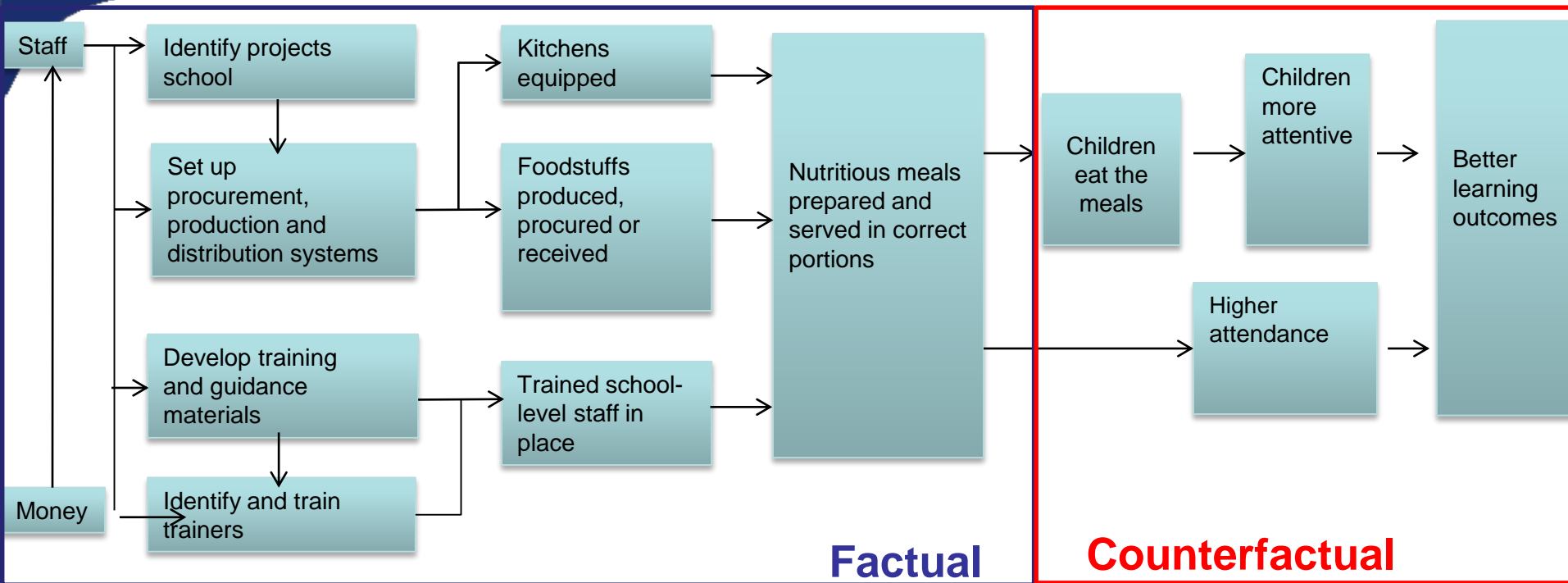
Appropriately qualified and motivated project staff

Those trained understand tasks

Food available in sufficient quantity and quality at right time

Meals are palatable

Different Types of Evidence



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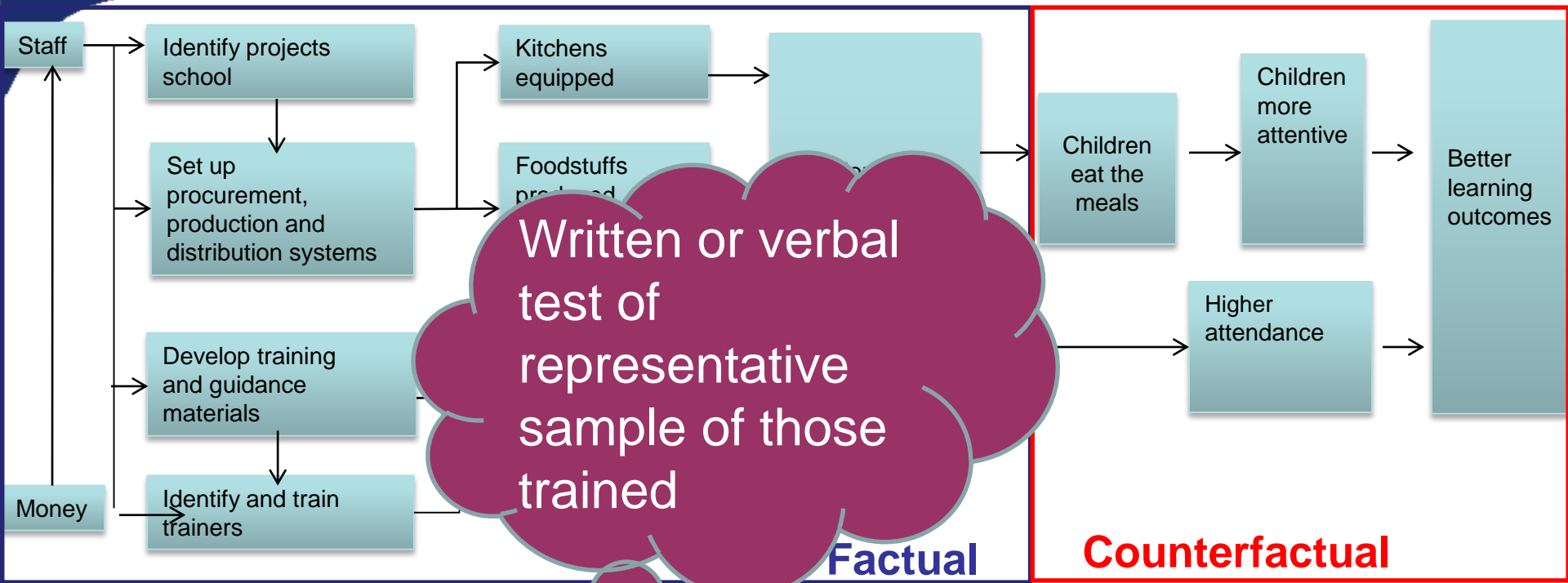
Appropriately qualified and motivated project staff

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Meals are palatable

Different Types of Evidence

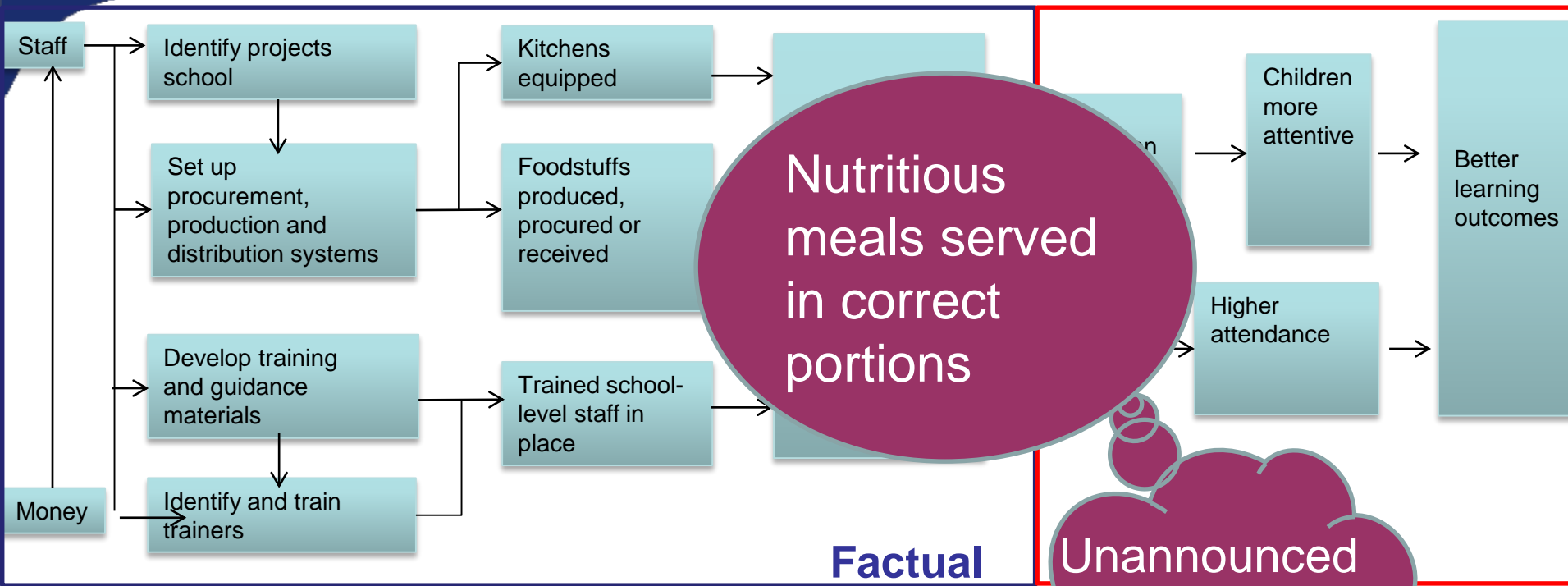


Assumptions

Funds available on time	Data available for school selection	Food used for school meals and properly prepared	Parents are aware of school feeding and value it	Other inputs (e.g. teachers) are present
Appropriately qualified and motivated project staff	Those trained understand tasks	Meals are palatable		

Those trained understand tasks

Different Types of Evidence



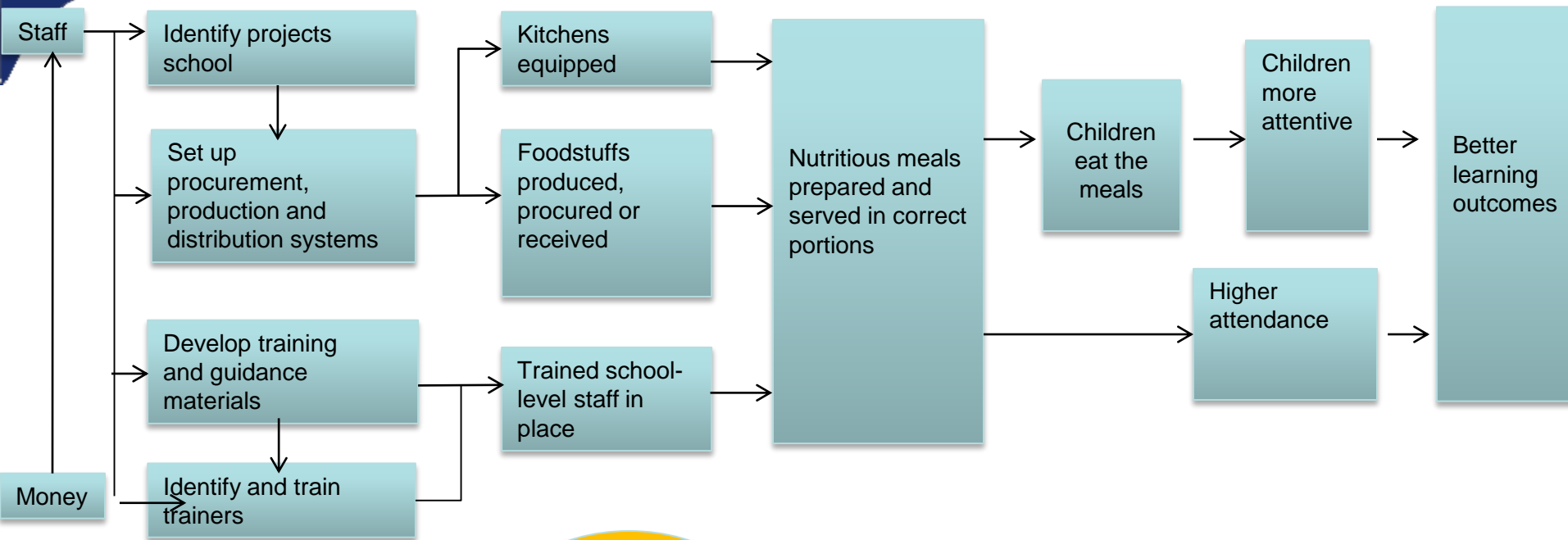
Factual

Unannounced school visits at meal times to observe the school meals

Assumptions

Funds available on time	Data available for school selection	Equipment is distributed and usable	Food used for school meals and properly prepared	Other inputs
Appropriately qualified and motivated project staff	Those trained understand tasks	Food available in sufficient quantity and quality at right time		(others) present

Potential Weak Links



Assumptions

Funds available on time

Data available for school selection



Food used for school meals and properly prepared

Parents are aware of school feeding and value it

Other inputs (e.g. teachers) are present

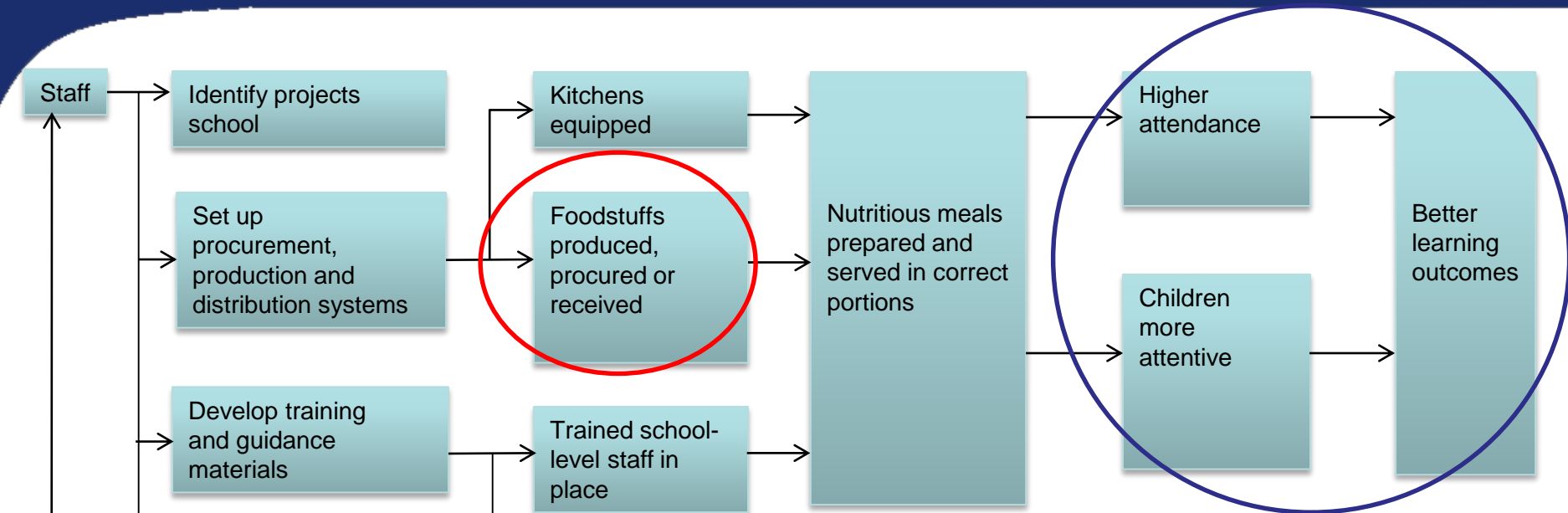
Appropriately qualified and motivated project staff

Those trained understand tasks

Food available in sufficient quantity and quality at right time

Meals are palatable

Second generation questions



Is central procurement or local production most efficacious and cost effective?

Does breakfast or a mid-day meal have higher impact?

Assumptions

Funds available on time

Appropriately Qualified and Motivated Project staff

Data available for school selection

Those trained understand tasks

Equipment is distributed and usable

Food available in sufficient quantity and quality at right time

Food used for school meals and properly prepared

Parents are aware of school feeding and value it

Other inputs (e.g. teachers) are present

Validate and revise (theory of change walk)

Consult programme managers, intended beneficiaries

Example: School vouchers



Voucher Scheme Established

Students Attend Private School

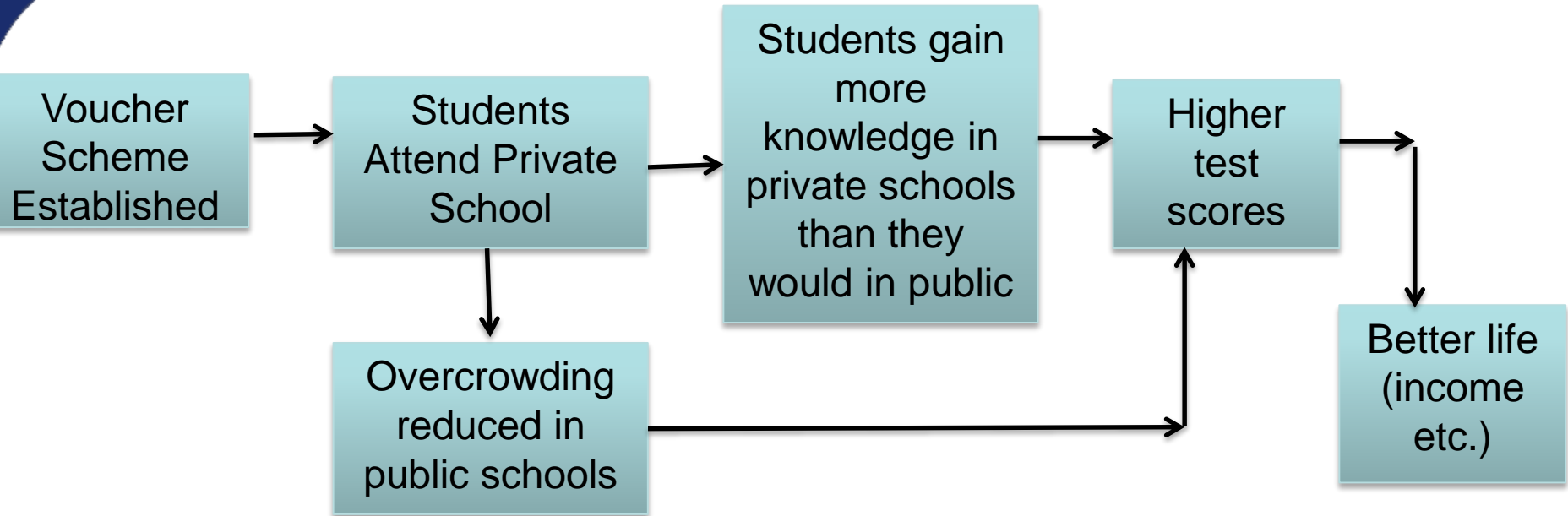
Students gain more knowledge in private schools than they would in public

Higher test scores

Better life (income etc.)



Example: School vouchers redrawn



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