This summer, Ofsted published *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on* – the evidence report of a major review conducted over the preceding year to mark the 20th anniversary of publication by Ofsted of the original *Access and achievement* report in 1993. The report acknowledges the improvements of recent years – but sets out the extent to which pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are still failed by the system in many areas, and the striking variation in performance at regional, local authority and institutional levels. The report – together with the background papers and a spreadsheet showing attainment data by local authority at key stage 2 (KS2), key stage 4 (KS4) and age 19 for pupils eligible for free school meals – provides a detailed picture of the current position and a wealth of information for those with responsibility for improvement. The speech by HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw which marked its launch set out eight recommendations and made clear his determination to use the power and influence of inspection to challenge providers to do better and to improve the present situation.

The review had a wider scope than the two previous reports, considering disadvantage more broadly by looking at all children eligible for free school meals (referred to in this briefing, for brevity, as FSM pupils) and then asking where they are and how well they achieve. It considers the early years, schools and education and training up to age 19. The review was supported by an expert panel, and informed by a range of background papers commissioned from leading academics, which Ofsted has published alongside the report, and a short survey identifying examples of good practice in schools which have raised achievement for pupils from low income backgrounds (which will be published shortly).
The report provides an overview of Access and Achievement 20 years on – and emphasises that material poverty is not in itself an insurmountable barrier to educational success – before considering early years provision; tackling underachievement at school level and at area level; getting the best leaders and teachers to where they are needed most; and further education and vocational skills.

Access and achievement in education – background (chapter 1) and 20 years on (chapter 2)

Chapter 1 briefly summarises the findings of the 1993 report: seven areas in the edge of cities, suffering from some degree of geographical isolation, often perceived negatively by those living beyond the immediate community, and feelings of low self-esteem and disaffection common amongst residents; much of the provision visited by Ofsted was described as ‘inadequate and disturbing’, but with ‘enough work of good quality in each sector to mean that the situation is not irredeemable’.

In 2003, David Bell (then HMCI) said in his speech marking the 10th anniversary, “The evidence leads me to say that there has been improvement, but not enough. We must look again, urgently, at how to close the gap in achievement between youngsters in the most deprived areas and elsewhere… The fact that the spread of educational achievement is greater in the UK than in many other OECD countries is, of course, bad news, but it also means that the association of social class with low achievement is not universal and inevitable… The fact that more schools are enabling more children to gain pleasure and a sense of achievement from education, as well as, potentially, power and control over their lives, is a cause for celebration. But that celebration will deserve to remain slightly muted until the still patchy and sporadic pattern of improvement becomes far more widespread and consistent. That is the challenge that faces us for the next 10 years.”

Looking at the seven areas in 2013, Ofsted reports that ‘Although the seven areas are still marked by consistently high levels of deprivation, the quality of the existing schools is generally much improved. Overall, three quarters of the schools still open were judged to be good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their last inspection and only one school is currently judged to have serious weaknesses. Levels of attainment, which were generally low at the time of the 1993 and 2003 reviews, have also improved… The overall quality of education has improved considerably in some of the areas, while in others the rate of improvement has been slow. Some demonstrate that the significant challenge of improving the quality of education and raising achievement in areas of high disadvantage is not an insurmountable one. However, others reflect the stubborn challenges that face many schools across the nation where, in spite of some improvement, the pace of positive change has not been quick enough to close gaps in achievement for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.’

Chapter 2 comments that ‘In England, the educational landscape today is a much more positive place than it was 10 and 20 years ago. Much has changed and for the better in the intervening period… However, the detailed picture is a more complex one. There is too much variability in the quality of education and outcomes across different local authorities (LAs) and between schools serving the most and least deprived communities. In some areas of the country and in some communities, there is a worryingly engrained poverty of expectation, with large groups of
disadvantaged pupils performing poorly. Of particular concern in this respect is the low attainment and poor progress made by too many White British pupils from low income backgrounds.’ It outlines the progress made in early years and at key stages 2 and 4, highlighting differences between outcomes for FSM and non-FSM pupils, regional differences and changes in outcomes for pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. Key points include:

- the rate of improvement for disadvantaged children in the Early Years Foundation State (EYFS) profile is keeping pace with the rest, but the gap has narrowed only marginally
- the proportion of good or outstanding schools in the most deprived areas is 20 percentage points lower than in the least deprived areas, and the proportion of outstanding schools in the least deprived areas is nearly double that in the ‘deprived’ and ‘most deprived’ areas
- levels of attainment at the end of KS2 have risen for all pupils, and the attainment gap in the percentage of pupils attaining Level 4+ in both English and maths has narrowed from 24 points in 2007 to 16 points in 2012 – but, in 2012, only two out of 10 FSM pupils attained a Level 5 or above compared with four out of 10 non-FSM pupils
- at KS4, there have been improvements in attainment for all pupils at GCSE, but the gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils continues to widen between the end of KS2 and KS4 and has hardly narrowed at GCSE – standing at 27 percentage points in 2012
- there remain noticeable variations in the proportion of pupils reaching national benchmarks across different government regions, particularly at the end of KS4: in 2007, the range in the percentage of pupils attaining five GCSEs at A*-C including English and maths was 41.9 to 50.4; in 2012, it was 57.3 to 63.1 – and there were some significant changes in the rank order of regions, with inner London moving from second lowest to second highest (and its FSM pupils out-performing similar pupils in England by 17 percentage points)
- all the main ethnic groups have increased their levels of attainment at GCSE since 2007, with Bangladeshi pupils making the greatest gains; they now outperform their White British peers, and Black African pupils attain at a similar level
- levels of attainment have improved for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL), and the attainment gap in 2012 compared with pupils whose first language is English was small: four percentage points at the end of KS2, and only three points at the end of KS4; at the end of both KS2 and KS4, a higher percentage of EAL pupils achieved the expected level of progress than those whose first language is English
- White British pupils from low income backgrounds are by far the largest of the main disadvantaged ethnic groups (64% of the total number of FSM pupils in 2011/12); the attainment gap between White British FSM and non-FSM pupils is much larger than that for any of the other main ethnic groups (32 percentage points, compared with six to 18 percentage points for the other groups)
- White British FSM pupils are consistently the lowest performing of the main ethnic groups, and gaps in attainment compared to other groups have widened over time: since 2007, the percentage of White British FSM pupils attaining five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths improved by 13 percentage points (from 17.4% to 30.5%), compared with 22 points for Bangladeshi FSM pupils (from 36.4% to 58.6%)
- the poor performance of White British FSM pupils is not a gender issue; girls outperform boys across all the main ethnic groups, but the attainment of White British FSM girls is below that of FSM boys from other ethnic groups with the exception of Black Caribbean boys.
Chapter 3: Investing in high quality early years education and care for the most disadvantaged children

‘For too many children, especially those living in the most deprived areas, educational failure starts early. Gaps in achievement between the poorest children and their better off counterparts are clearly established by the age of five. Children from low income backgrounds in the UK are 19 months behind their better off peers in vocabulary tests compared with only 10.6 months in Canada. It is essential, if gaps in achievement are to close more quickly, that early years education and support for parents continue to focus resolutely on strategies that improve children’s skills in communication, language and literacy.’

The report comments that barriers to school readiness and achievement described by school leaders working in the most disadvantaged communities today are not dissimilar from the features of isolation described in the 1993 report.

All children benefit from regular and high quality early education, but the benefits are greatest for boys, children with special educational needs and disadvantaged children. The difference in impact between attending high quality and low quality pre-school is greater for disadvantaged children, but they are less likely to attend high quality provision; overall 76% of early years provision in England is now good or better compared with 65% three years ago, but the overall quality is weakest in areas of high deprivation – particularly for childminding. Other key points include:

- the most successful childhood interventions begin early in a child’s life, are centre-based and involve well-trained professionals. Those that encourage high levels of active parent engagement in their children’s learning are more successful in closing the attainment gap for socially disadvantaged children. The most effective settings share their educational aims with parents and enable parents to support children at home with activities or materials that complement what the setting is doing in its delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum
- a programme for the expansion of high quality, part-time early education to disadvantaged two-year-olds is currently being rolled out in the UK to allow access for 40% of the most disadvantaged children
- recent research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation emphasises the importance of parental involvement in children’s education as a causal influence on children’s school readiness and subsequent attainment. It is critical, therefore, that parents and carers are encouraged, supported and expected to play their full part in their children’s education. The Effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) longitudinal study found that, for all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income
- pre-school programmes can help parents and carers to improve their parenting skills and the quality of the home learning environment so that children are better prepared for school
- children get the best start when they are cared for by highly qualified and experienced professionals; a well-trained and highly qualified early years workforce, with access to ongoing professional development, is vital in closing the achievement gap between children from poorer homes and their peers. Prof Cathy Nutbrown’s recent review of early years for the DfE recommended that all early years staff should be qualified at a minimum ‘full and
relevant’ level 3 by September 2022 and that students should have level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics before they begin a level 3 early education or childcare course.

- the positive gains reported in the Early Years Foundation Stage are often not maintained and built on sufficiently during the earliest stages of statutory schooling; the best primary schools quickly assess each child in terms of key skills such as reading, writing and grasp of numbers, and use this baseline to inform teaching and support for each child.

Chapter 4: Tackling the underachievement of disadvantaged pupils at school level

The attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals varies greatly between similar schools and too many schools achieve very little for this group of pupils, particularly during their secondary education. Stark variations in levels of attainment can be identified across the full range of free school meals bands in schools. In too many instances, what is working very well in some schools is not being replicated elsewhere in schools serving similar proportions of disadvantaged pupils. A striking ‘scattergram’ plotting the attainment of FSM pupils against the proportion of FSM pupils in 2,603 mainstream state secondary schools with six or more FSM pupils shows clearly the relatively few successful schools serving deprived communities where FSM pupils attain well.

In 2012, there were 442 secondary schools in England where the percentage of FSM pupils attaining five good GCSEs including English and maths was above the national average for all pupils; over two-thirds of these had fewer than 10% of FSM pupils. By comparison, there were only 97 secondary schools with over 14% of FSM pupils (the national average) where these pupils attained above the national average for all pupils at GCSE; 64 of these were in London, and none was in the South West or South East of England. Two maps showing the location of the highest and lowest attaining schools serving above average proportions of FSM pupils show the strongest performing are concentrated in London and a few other large urban areas, whilst the weakest are spread widely, often in towns rather than large urban areas, with many near the coast. In some areas, schools in the two groups are in close proximity, reinforcing the point that economic disadvantage in itself is not an insurmountable barrier to educational success.

In too many secondary schools, the poor performance of pupils from low income backgrounds is masked by the generally strong performance of other pupils (hence the report’s title). In 2012 there were 424 secondary schools where, overall, pupils attained at or above the national average for all pupils, whereas the pupils eligible for free school meals attained below the national average for similar pupils. Of these schools, 225 had been judged good for overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection and 31 had been judged outstanding – leading to Sir Michael’s first recommendation (see the section below on his speech), for Ofsted, that schools previously judged outstanding which are not doing well by their poorest children will be re-inspected. On average, FSM pupils do best in schools where they make up either a very small or a large proportion of the total; they do worst in those schools where they are in the middle range.

At both KS2 and KS4, all types of pupils attain more highly when they attend a good or outstanding school; average attainment rises incrementally across the four Ofsted judgements for overall effectiveness – but, although good and outstanding schools achieve better outcomes for their pupils overall, they do not demonstrate a greater ability to close attainment gaps within the school, and the average attainment of FSM pupils in outstanding secondary schools is still below the national average for all pupils at GCSE and only slightly higher than that of non-FSM pupils in schools judged inadequate.

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Chapter 5: Tackling the underachievement of disadvantaged pupils at area level

At their most recent inspection, a third of schools (1,353) serving the ‘most deprived’ areas were judged to be no better than satisfactory compared with 14% of schools (574) serving the ‘least deprived’ areas. The gap between the least and most deprived is more pronounced in secondary schools. There are also notable regional variations in the quality of schools serving areas of high deprivation – from 75% judged good or outstanding in London to 51% in the East of England (it is above 60%, and better than the national average, in only three regions: London, the North West and North East).

In some whole regions, opportunities for FSM pupils look bleak; for example, in the relatively affluent South East, FSM pupils attain at levels below the national figure for similar pupils in every local authority, and in most the attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils is greater than the gap at national level.

There are even larger variations in the attainment of FSM pupils across different local authorities; in the most successful LAs, FSM pupils perform much better than similar pupils elsewhere and the gap between their performance and their better off peers is much smaller than average. Other key points include:

- although pupils’ attainment is important at all stages, performance at GCSE represents the culmination of a pupil’s statutory schooling and is a strong indicator of future success in education and employment. In 2012, 36% of FSM pupils nationally gained five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics compared with 63% for all other pupils
- there were 21 LAs where 45% or more of the disadvantaged cohort achieved the GCSE benchmark; with the exception of Birmingham, all of these were in London. By contrast, there were 15 LAs where the benchmark GCSE attainment of FSM pupils was 26% or less; in all bar one of these, the attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils was higher than the national average
- there are striking differences in the performance of FSM pupils across different regions and between ostensibly similar LAs. This calls for a much greater level of accountability for the performance of disadvantaged pupils at an area-based level and specific targeted interventions that improve achievement in areas where underperformance is most prominent
- since 2011, government policy has focused on giving targeted Pupil Premium funding to individual schools to support their work with disadvantaged pupils. Studies have shown that whole school improvement activities tend to have greater benefit for better off pupils. To close gaps, initiatives need to be targeted closely at those schools facing the most challenging circumstances and the most disadvantaged pupils within those schools; early studies into schools’ use of the Pupil Premium indicated that, while broadly welcomed, the funding was not always targeted closely on those pupils who need it or on those interventions that have a track record of successfully raising achievement, but this appears to be improving
- in general, area-based initiatives have failed to close the overall attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils – but there has been one notable exception: the London and City Challenge programmes, which ran from 2003 to 2011; the report outlines a range of considerations which contributed to that success.
Chapter 6: Getting the best leaders and teachers to where they are needed most

Recent reviews have shown that talented leadership is an essential factor in driving school improvement and a prerequisite for improving student achievement, particularly in a time of considerable educational change. It is good leadership – and particularly good leadership of teaching and learning – that makes the biggest difference to school standards. Talented leadership is most important in those schools that serve the most disadvantaged communities, but in many areas there is a shortage of high quality leaders, with schools in the most challenging circumstances often the most acutely affected. If achievement gaps between the highest and lowest performing areas of the country are to be closed, more of the best school leaders will need to be encouraged to work in challenging contexts.

The report acknowledges that the quality of leadership and management in maintained schools has improved markedly over the past four years, with the proportion of schools judged to be outstanding for leadership and management increasing by eight percentage points since 2008. However, it also illustrates the noticeable difference across different regions and between the least and most deprived schools – which is particularly acute in the secondary phase: in the North East, leadership and management is good or outstanding in just over a third of the most deprived secondary schools compared with over four fifths in London, and outstanding in nearly two fifths (38%) of London’s 245 most deprived secondary schools compared with only one of the North East’s 28 most deprived secondary schools. Other key points include:

- the National College and Future Leaders are two organisations that have played a prominent role in leadership development; in April 2013 the National College merged with the Teaching Agency to become the National College for Teaching and Leadership. One of its most high profile programmes – National Leaders of Education (NLEs) – uses outstanding headteachers to support schools in challenging circumstances (with significant success)
- where there are fewer outstanding schools, there are typically fewer NLEs and more schools in need of support; some LAs have very few NLEs to support large numbers of schools which require support (eg. there were just three NLEs in Norfolk and two in Derbyshire at the end of 2012); whilst NLE schools are generally more disadvantaged than other outstanding schools, in some areas there is a mismatch between the type of schools providing NLEs and the schools in need of support (eg. in Yorkshire and Humber, more than half the NLE schools have highly advantaged populations, with fewer than 10% of FSM pupils). A key question is therefore how to ensure good strategic matching between NLEs and the schools in need of support
- the report outlines the Future Leaders programme and considers briefly the leadership of more than one school and school-to-school collaboration – which are described as showing promise but the impact is too patchy; attention is drawn to the evidence that too few converter academies take sufficiently seriously their responsibility to work in partnership with other schools to help them improve
- the quality of teaching makes a crucial difference to pupils’ learning and achievement particularly in disadvantaged schools, and the report outlines the characteristics of outstanding teaching and the practices and techniques associated with improved outcomes for disadvantaged learners
a recent study of GCSE results of more than 7,000 pupils in England showed that being taught by a high quality teacher for two years adds 0.565 of a GCSE point per subject, and that the same student can score significantly different marks in different subjects as a result of different teacher quality.

over a school year, disadvantaged pupils can gain 1.5 years’ worth of learning with very effective teachers, compared with 0.5 of a year’s worth with poorly performing teachers – a difference of a whole year’s learning.

there are big regional variations in the quality of teaching between the most and least deprived schools (with a bigger difference in England than in other OECD countries); the position is worse in secondary schools. In five of the nine regions, the gap between the quality of teaching in the least and most deprived schools is more than 30 percentage points.

Recruiting and retaining good quality teachers to schools in disadvantaged areas was identified as a major priority in the previous two Access and achievement reviews, and the report outlines a number of initiatives introduced to achieve this goal, including the new School Direct initiative. It points out that England has one of the most open labour markets for teachers in the world, and that most teachers train and seek employment in their ‘home’ region. It also points out that the Teaching Agency used to collect information (through the now defunct General Teaching Council) about where newly qualified worked, and describes the failure to do this now as ‘a weakness in the system’ which makes it difficult to identify and support the best teachers to encourage them to work in more challenging contexts. The report outlines the approach taken in a number of successful jurisdictions overseas, which provide a combination of financial incentives and on-going support and career development opportunities, concluding that ‘there is much to be learned from these international experiences. More can be done to incentivise the best teachers to work in areas of the country and schools that find it difficult to recruit’ (see the recommendations in the section below on HMCI’s speech).

Chapter 7: Further education and vocational skills

Most young people either enter the labour market or continue to higher education around the age of 19. The level of educational attainment they have reached at this point is particularly important. A ‘full level 2 qualification’, meaning the equivalent of at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, is a critical ‘employability benchmark’. If young people entering the labour market lack a full level 2 qualification – and the key employability skills such as reliability and the ability to work independently and in teams – then they will struggle. Level 3 qualifications meanwhile – such as A levels – are the passport to higher education, high value employment and the professions. The report looks at outcomes at both levels, with a particular focus on English and mathematics. It makes a number of key points:

- outcomes at 16 and 19 have improved over recent years: the proportion of young people attaining level 2 including English and maths has been rising year on year; for 19 year-olds, it increased from 45% in 2005 to 62% in 2012 – but this left almost four in 10 young people without the qualifications they needed to secure employment.
- from a very low base, the proportion of young people from low-income families reaching the level 2 and level 3 benchmarks at age 19 has increased markedly: the proportion of those who were eligible for FSM at school who secured level 2 including English and maths was...
20% in 2005 and 38% in 2012 – a significant gain, but still leaving six out of 10 in this group below the benchmark

- at level 3, achievement for disadvantaged young people at age 19 has risen from 20% in 2005 to 34% in 2012
- the variations in outcomes for disadvantaged young people at 19 are similar to those at 16: the highest performing areas are almost all in London, and the three lowest performing are all relatively affluent areas (where just one in four or fewer FSM pupils achieved the equivalent of five good GCSEs including English and maths)
- of those young people who were 19 in 2012, 62% had level 2 qualifications or better, but 51% had already reached this level three years earlier in school – so the 16-18 system helped just over one in five of those who had not reached level 2 to do so by age 19 (though the report acknowledges that this is not what the system has recently been funded or incentivised to do)
- progression to level 2 for young people from low income families is worse: 38% of the pupils who were eligible for FSM at school secured level 2 including English and maths by age 19 in 2012, but 27% of them had achieved it at school when they were 16 – so seven out of 10 FSM pupils left school in 2009 without a level 2 qualification, and three years later just one out of those seven had reached the benchmark. Some of this group may not have been in education during these years, or may have received valuable education in some other area, but the key point remains that only a minority of young people from poor families secure good qualifications from school, and few subsequently acquire them through further education (FE).

The report discusses the pattern and quality of FE provision, pointing out that – in addition to their other (and main) activities – general FE colleges are by far the largest providers for young people who did not gain five GCSEs at A*-C including English and maths, and that they are particularly important for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It outlines the key findings from the 2011 review of vocational education by Prof Alison Wolf, and evidence from Ofsted inspections of post-16 learning – which raises a number of concerns about quality. It also comments on the relatively small number – and therefore large size – of general FE colleges, observing that 'where these large institutions are of poor quality, the life chances of disadvantaged young people locally are severely compromised'. The report goes on to outline current government action aimed at addressing many of these concerns, arguing the need for robust and nationally comparable progress measures for all learners, covering the whole range of attainment, through which providers can be held to account, and encouraged to maximise the progress of all learners; it cautions against putting too much weight on the raw attainment of particular benchmarks.

The report ends by looking at apprenticeships, both in this country and abroad – where, in most cases, employers play a far more active and committed role. Other key points include:

- the quality of apprenticeships in England varies widely across sectors, and is generally lower where apprenticeships are not traditional; attempts to increase the number of employers willing to offer them, or to improve the quality of those offered, have generally founndered
- compared with other countries, England is starting from a low base in terms of the number of apprenticeships on offer; although there has been recent growth, it has mostly been for over-25s
the recent review of apprenticeships for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) by Doug Richard made 10 recommendations which, he stressed, should be taken collectively; the government has accepted many of the key elements, and has announced a programme of ‘Traineeships’ designed as a bridge to a full apprenticeship or employment.

Unseen children – HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw’s speech launching the report

In his speech to mark publication of the Unseen Children report, Sir Michael briefly outlined and summarised the evidence from the review; expressed his determination to use the power and influence of inspection to improve the system, and to challenge providers to do better; and made eight recommendations, largely for government. His key points included the following:

• As a country, we have to tackle two major barriers to becoming world class: the wide variety in regional performance (“I have high hopes of Ofsted’s regional structure and the work of Regional Directors and HMIs. They must shine a spotlight on local authorities and individual institutions that are failing their children”) and the long tail of underperformance (“In this regard, we are amongst the worst performing of the OECD countries”)
• This report is more optimistic than its predecessors, because we are learning the lessons of the good practice we see in schools which are doing well for our poorest children; (“[Unseen children] emerge from the darkness of educational failure when we as a country show the resolve to do something about them”)
• “Poor, unseen children can be found in mediocre schools the length and breadth of our country… [They] are not unseen in our best schools, which have good knowledge and high expectations of every child. But in more complacent schools they do badly”
• “Poverty of expectation is a greater problem than material poverty, because we know of examples of schools serving areas of great disadvantage that are doing very well by their children"
• “Some parents, having been failed by education themselves, place little value on it. This is the greatest blight, and it predominates within the underprivileged White British communities that are the lowest performing of all the major ethnic groups in England”
• The distribution of underachievement has shifted from urban areas to the provinces and coastal towns, where disadvantaged children are usually in a minority
• “There are [excellent] teachers, leaders and schools in all parts of the country – but in some areas, their power to influence schools more widely is stifled by complacency, mediocrity and timidity in school and local authority leadership… I very much favour the idea of sub-regional challenges, based on London Challenge, but adapted to the area or locality involved”
• The most important change required is to attract and incentivise the best people to the leadership of underperforming schools in these areas, with more National Leaders of Education working in the places that need them most
• The sub-regional challenges could help ensure that good teachers are deployed in the areas of greatest need (as happens in countries where teachers are directly employed by the state): “If the government contracted with a proportion of good teachers each year to do ‘National Teaching Service’, they could be deployed in the schools which need them most… unless government is interventionist in this area, we are not going to get our most talented teachers to the schools in these areas”
• Underachievement starts from birth; children who fall behind in the early years struggle to catch up, and many children (especially those from the poorest families) don’t get the
support they need. But effective nursery and primary schools set high expectations, go out of their way to engage with parents, have a systematic, rigorous and consistent approach to assessment from the start, and use this baseline to inform teaching and support. They assess their children much earlier than required by the EYFS Profile

- “For too long, the FE and Skills sector has been the Cinderella of the education world – that must change, quickly.” Recent changes, including the establishment of an FE Commissioner, are welcome, but issues remain with the structure and quality of much provision
- The level of employer engagement in the FE and Skills sector must be greatly strengthened, advising on the curriculum and providing direct experience of work; the focus for apprenticeships should be on 16-19 year olds who would benefit from a rigorous level three apprenticeship over at least a two or three year period
- We need clearer information to help keep track of disadvantaged young people; and if the Pupil Premium is important pre-16 then we should consider making additional provision post-16 for our poorest students and tracking their progress from school through to employment. “We should never lose sight of these young people.”

**HMCI’s recommendations**

- My first recommendation is for Ofsted. **We will be tougher in future with schools which are letting down their poor children. Schools previously judged outstanding, which are not doing well by their poorest children, will be reinspected.**
- My second recommendation is the development and roll-out of sub-regional challenges aimed particularly at raising the achievement of disadvantaged children.
- My third recommendation is that a more strategic approach is taken to the appointment of National Leaders of Education and their matching with schools in need of support.
- My fourth recommendation is that government does more to ensure that teachers on funded schemes are directed to underperforming schools in less fashionable or more remote or challenging places. The concept of a ‘National Service Teacher’ should be an urgent consideration for government.
- My fifth recommendation is for government to review assessment in reception and Key Stage 1, with a view to publishing progress measures from the start of school to the end of Key Stage 1. (Note: The DfE is currently consulting on primary school assessment and accountability.)
- My sixth recommendation is that the government should be more prepared to dismantle inadequate colleges that have grown too large to assure quality across their different activities. Smaller specialist units, particularly University Technology Colleges, should be created with stronger links to business, commerce and industry.
- My seventh recommendation is that the Richard Review should be fully implemented. It provides a sound basis on which to reform and grow this system.
- My eighth and final recommendation is that all post-16 providers should report on the rate of progress and outcomes for all young people who had previously been eligible for free school meals.

Sir Michael also made a commitment as Chief Inspector that Ofsted will revisit this issue every five years and not every 10: “By the next report in 2018, I hope I can say that most if not all of these recommendations have been implemented and that our poorest children have continued to improve their educational performance.”
Comment

This is an important piece of work, into which Ofsted put a lot of resources. The result is a wealth of information, particularly Ofsted inspection grades and performance information, pulled together which lays out clearly the scale of the challenge still to be addressed in improving provision for disadvantaged children and young people. At the same time, the report demonstrates that real progress can be made (and has been, notably across London) if a determined and committed effort is made over a sufficient period.

The fact that the report echoes the urgency expressed in the two previous reviews is obviously rather depressing, as is the fact that, whilst there have been considerable improvements in attainment, the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers has hardly narrowed at GCSE – the importance of which is emphasised in the report. In this respect, perhaps Ofsted should go further than simply re-inspecting schools previously judged outstanding which are not doing well by their poorest children; there is surely a case for it to be impossible for a school to be judged outstanding unless the attainment gap of its pupils is closing significantly – as well as for inspectors to pay more attention in general to the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils than some appear to have done in the past.

The recommendations on measures to get the best leaders and teachers into the schools where they are needed the most are very welcome – and it will be very interesting to see if they receive a positive response. The problem is that education is often seen as a zero sum game, and those who perceive their provision being diminished (in quality or quantity) in order to make improvements elsewhere (however necessary and justified) have successfully resisted or undermined too many such initiatives in the past. Only if this attitude changes, or is not allowed to prevail, will the change being urged by Sir Michael come about. As he says, ‘our success as a nation – our prosperity, our security, our society – depends on the how well we educate our young people’. That means all our children.

External links

Unseen children – Ofsted evidence report and associated resources

Related briefings

Primary assessment and accountability – DfE consultation (August 2013)
What works in enabling school improvement? The role of the middle tier (May 2013)
Reform of the National Curriculum in England: DfE consultation (March 2013)
GCSE Reform and secondary school accountability (February 2013)
Report of her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills 2011-12 (December 2012)
See also: LGiU Should We Shed the Middle Tier? (September 2012)

For further information, please visit www.lgiu.org.uk or email john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk

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