This briefing focuses on the Ofsted Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education (HMCI) on Children's Services and Skills 2012/13 published on 11 December. The report is published as a series of documents:

- Full commentary on the Ofsted Annual Report from the HMCI, Sir Michael Wilshaw;
- Eight regional reports covering the eight Ofsted regions (East Midlands, West Midlands, London, South East, South West, East of England, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, North West);
- Schools Report;
- Further Education and Skills Report; and
- Data View (a digital tool that allows inspection data to be viewed in a visual way).

The report provides a reminder of the first published Ofsted annual report on social care which, published in October. See Related Briefings. It also flags up the prospective Ofsted Annual Report on early years to be published early in 2014.

This briefing focuses on the key national messages emerging from the Annual Report HMCI commentary and Schools and FE reports. It will be of interest to school leaders, teachers, governors, local authorities and parents as well as national organisations involved in education policy development in this area.

This briefing will be of interest to all with responsibility for school and college improvement.

Overview

Launching his second Annual Report last week, Sir Michael Wilshaw commented that overall, schools and colleges were performing better than they were a year ago. The report is underpinned by the findings of more than 8,500 inspections carried out during 2012/13 of schools, adult learning and skills and colleges. Children and young people now have a ‘better chance than ever of attending a good or outstanding school’ while the FE sector has ‘raised its game’ in response to the major concerns expressed in the 2011/12 Annual Report.

However, the HMCI went on to emphasise that serious challenges remain and continue to mar the UK’s performance in comparison with its international competitors. In a speech titled ‘The Unlucky Child’, launching the Annual Report, Sir Michael Wilshaw developed this further by defining the key future challenge education as the need to address our ‘two-nation’ education system, divided between ‘lucky’ and ‘unlucky’ children:

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“the lucky child is born in the right postcode, goes to the right school and has the widest opportunities. The unlucky child does not. The unlucky child has more than poverty to contend with. He was born into an unlucky area, where there are more mediocre schools than good ones… He is unlucky because his school and local authority have failed him”.

In his letter to the Secretary of State, accompanying the Annual Report, the HMCI stresses that the priority of tackling the ‘persistent variations in performance that disproportionately affect some children in particular parts of the country’ is the major reason behind the decision to publish eight separate reports this year, one for each Ofsted region, which focus on local issues. Furthermore, the interactive tool, Data View, also newly launched, also ‘highlights for the first time sometimes stark differences in the performance of schools and colleges in local authority areas that share the same profile’. (Annual Report Press Release 11December)

**Briefing in full**

**HMCI commentary**

**The battle against mediocrity**

The commentary reports that improved teaching and more effective leadership have resulted in more children in England having a better chance of attending a good or better school. Nearly eight in every 10 schools are good or better, around 485,000 more primary schools and 188,000 more secondary schools attend a good or better school than last year. The primary sector has improved in particular with only three local authorities where fewer than 60% of primary school pupils attend good or better schools, compared to 23 in 2011-12. Across the FE and skills sector, 71% of all providers were judged good or outstanding, an increase of 7% on last year. Although there is some remaining concern about the quality and targeting of apprenticeships, there are more grounds for optimism.

It is the HMCI’s view that a number of factors have made a contribution to a more optimistic view. These fall into two areas:

- **Improved accountability** with new frameworks that have raised expectations and ‘established that only ‘good’ is good enough’, helping the system challenge mediocrity. In schools, for example more is now done when a school is judged as requiring improvement than happened previously following a judgement of satisfactory. Leaders in schools and colleges have also been encouraged to participate in inspection. Over half of all school inspections have a serving leader on the inspection team.

- **A changing landscape with academies and trusts well established** and ‘helping to raise standards in some of our weakest schools’. More than half of all secondary schools are now academies and many are in federations, clusters and trusts. Converter academies reflect a strong performance, though it is felt that too few are using their status to support disadvantaged pupils. Very few free schools have been inspected so far but they will be the focus of more detailed reporting during the next year.

Three factors, however, continue to impede educational progress and together they are part of the inconsistency across the system that is regarded as the barrier to excellence. These are outlined in the next three sections.
Too much mediocre teaching and weak leadership

While it is encouraging that inspectors judged more schools to have good or outstanding teaching this year, teaching observed was less than good in around three to 10 lessons. More English and mathematics lessons were judged less than good than any other parts of the curriculum. Too many secondary schools fail to tackle poor literacy and mathematical skills and the position in colleges is even worse. It is a concern that 82% of 16 year-olds who do not achieve at least a 'C' grade at GCSE do not go on to achieve these grades later at age 19.

The commentary emphasises that inspection judgements on the quality of teaching are based not on the style of teaching but on the amount of useful learning taking place, contrary to teachers’ beliefs that Ofsted prescribes teaching approaches in lessons. Around 700,000 pupils attend schools where behaviour needs to improve and it is still the case in this report that ‘we have accepted for far too long minor disruption and inattention in schools’.

Inspectors found that much of the weakest teaching in primary schools was concentrated in the younger groups, a concern in the face of research showing that unless children had grasped basic skills by the age of seven, they found it difficult to catch up. ‘In secondary schools, fewer good or outstanding lessons were seen in Year 9 classes with lower ability pupils. Classes with lower ability pupils in Years 8 and 10, and those with average ability children in Years 8 and 9, were only marginally more likely to be good or outstanding’, suggesting the deployment of the better teachers to teach pupils preparing for tests and examinations. Schools need to commit to sufficient resources and a better quality of teaching if they are to close the attainment gaps. Inspectors noted worrying inconsistencies in teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 1, and in some cases, inconsistent moderation of school assessment by local authorities. For those reasons, the Government is urged to consider a return to external assessment at the end of Key Stage 1.

It remains the responsibility of school and college leaders to provide an inspiring and disciplined environment in which all teachers can thrive. However, although evidence shows that the quality of leadership is improving, 18% of schools still have leadership that is less than good and where leadership is inadequate, aspirations for the school and its pupils were low. Additionally, in around 400 schools inspected this year, governing bodies were so weak that an external independent review of governance was recommended. There needs to be a fair distribution of good teachers and leaders throughout the country to raise standards in underperforming areas. This has important implications for the quality of initial teacher education (ITE) and as the system moves to more school-based training, it is important that trainees see good practice and have the opportunity to move to parts of the country that need their skills the most.

Regional variation in the quality of education

The role of the regional reports and the Data View website are highlighted as providing further insights into the performance of schools, colleges and local authorities across the regions. England is seen as a ‘patchwork of provision (with) disadvantaged areas that provide an excellent education and affluent regions that could do much better’. In some areas, primary schools are improving rapidly while secondary schools and FE colleges are poor while in other areas the reverse is true. Examples of primary school improvement are cited as Coventry (42% to 64% of pupils attending a good or better school) and 43% to 69% in Derby, but also performance decline in Southend and Bracknell Forest (6 and 8 percentage points respectively). In secondary schools, it is reported that 13 authorities have less than half of all pupils attending a good or outstanding school, though London’s success in ensuring
that all secondary pupils attend a good or outstanding school is commended. However, the East of England is of particular concern because ‘Children in this region have the lowest chances in the country of attending a good or better school…Leadership and management of schools is among the weakest in the country’.

Focused Ofsted inspections have taken place in the authorities criticised in the 2011/12 report (Coventry, Derby, Bristol, Portsmouth, East Riding of Yorkshire and Medway). Local authorities are warned that they must use their existing powers more effectively and develop a strategic oversight of schools and colleges if they are to play a future part in raising standards. As the education system becomes more autonomous, a coherent response to underperformance and the demands of the local economy is important, and the HMCI commentary advocates a national strategy to address regional disparities and apply effective remedies.

Significant underachievement of children from low income families, particularly white children

Since 2007, the attainment of White British pupils eligible for free school meals has improved more slowly than for any other ethnic group. White boys and girls from low-income families have the lowest attainment of any poor ethnic group. In 2012, only 26% of disadvantaged White British boys and 35% of girls achieved five good GCSEs including English and mathematics. The commentary highlights poverty as a key factor, not just material poverty but a poverty of expectation in families, schools and the communities that they serve. Some schools are commended for their leadership in forging close relationships with families and parents and putting in place necessary interventions to improve the quality of teaching and learning. FE colleges and providers need to play their part as they can be the ‘last-chance saloon’ for some of the most deprived children in the country.

Schools

The schools report is based on inspection evidence from 7,064 local authority schools 2012/13 and 841 academies. This is taken from the 22,000 schools in England with 16% of them across secondary and primary sectors, that have become academies. Despite the change in status and character of many schools and the changing landscape resulting, it is emphasised that the purpose of schools has not changed. ‘Fundamentally, whatever their size, type or status, schools are where children are taught knowledge, acquire skills and understanding’. The following points summarise the key findings and these echo many of the overall strengths and weaknesses outlined in the commentary:

- **Children in England now have the best chance they have ever had of attending a good school.** Despite changes to inspection, more schools and academies inspected in 2012/13 were judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding than in the previous year. Good and outstanding schools make up 78% of all schools inspected in England, and out of these only 42% had received the same judgement in their previous inspection. In those schools where the inspection grade improved in 2012/13, test and examination results were higher than in the previous year.

- **Greater accountability and more focused inspection have contributed to improvement in many weaker schools.** Ofsted’s new regional structure introduced in the last year, has been undertaking monitoring inspections of schools that are not yet good enough. This has had considerable impact on schools alongside the introduction of the new ‘requires improvement’ judgement replacing ‘satisfactory’. According to inspection evidence, there is a widespread perception that the new judgement has ‘acted as a sharp catalyst’ for more rapid changes in

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staffing and leadership. Over 90% of schools judged as requiring improvement are making satisfactory progress in remedying weaknesses.

- **However, England's schools are not yet among the best in the world.** There remain three key barriers to raising standards further: mediocre teaching and weak leadership in a minority of schools; pockets of weak educational provision in parts of the country; and significant underachievement of children from low-income families, particularly White children.

- **In the best schools, strong leaders and governors routinely challenge low expectations and mediocre teaching.** According to the report, leaders in those schools recruit and retain good teachers, including by ensuring effective support for new teachers in their first years of teaching. They create a culture in which good teaching can flourish – orderly and welcoming schools that insist on high standards, where teachers routinely challenge children to do better. These leaders reward good performance and tolerate neither inconsistent teaching nor poor behaviour. This contrasts sharply with a minority of schools where leadership loses focus on the essential job of ensuring high standards of behaviour and improving teaching and learning. In these schools, low-level misbehaviour in the classroom often slows pupils’ progress.

- **English and mathematics are not taught well enough.** The report stresses that without a strong foundation in English and mathematics, children and young people are not prepared for the next stage in their education. They cannot progress to successful further study and, as adults, struggle to gain and sustain employment. Between September 2009 and August 2013, around a third of lessons observed by inspectors were judged as less than good for the quality of teaching in these two key subjects. Disproportionately poorer teaching in the lower sets compounds this.

- **The proportion of children attending good or outstanding primary schools has increased considerably this year** This includes some of the weakest local authority areas reported in last year’s Annual Report. However, there are major concerns over secondary school provision in a number of local authority areas. It is regarded as unacceptable that in 13 local authorities, less than half of secondary students attend a good or outstanding school. Schools in these areas often have a range of underlying weaknesses, including high levels of exclusion and persistent absence. By contrast, there are seven London boroughs and two areas outside London where every secondary school student attends a good or outstanding school.

- **White children from low income backgrounds are being left behind.** As highlighted in the commentary, white children from low income backgrounds have the lowest attainment compared with poor children from any other ethnic group. In too many schools, poverty of expectation for these children leads to low outcomes that show little sign of improvement. Evidence shows that economic disadvantage does not have to lead to low attainment. Poor children from other ethnic minority groups do better than poor children from white low-income backgrounds; in some cases they do better than the national level for all children. A relentless focus by school leaders on the quality of teaching creates a climate in which no pupil is left behind. A review of the use of the pupil premium by a sample of schools this year, revealed that those schools that are succeeding in narrowing the gaps are making the most effective use of the pupil premium.

- **Academies are now a well-established part of the English educational landscape.** More than half of all secondary schools have become academies and in the last year, 210 schools in the secondary sector converted to become new academies. The proportion of primary academies has also doubled in the last year. Ofsted will assess the impact of conversion to academy status on school performance in the coming year, including detailed reporting on how well new academies make use of their autonomy and freedom to innovate and raise standards.
We will also report in more detail on the performance of free schools once more of them have been inspected.

- **Sponsor-led academies are delivering a step change in performance for chronically underperforming schools.** Academies established in 2007 have narrowed the attainment gap of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, by eight percentage points. The large majority of sponsor-led academies are members of multi-academy trusts, some of which have performed very strongly. Some trusts, however, are not performing well enough.

- **In conclusion, schools are better than in 2011/12. However, more needs to be done in those schools that continue to underperform.** Ofsted has strengthened its inspection arrangements for this coming year to tackle weaknesses in regional performance and the underachievement of children who are not yet reaching their full potential. School inspection will again be reviewed in 2013/14.

**Further Education and Skills**

In 2012/13, provisional data shows that 3.7 million learners were involved in some form of government-funded education or training in the FE and skills sector. General Further Education (GFE) colleges, including tertiary colleges, specialist FE colleges as well as sixth form colleges remain the major providers with just over two million learners. Overall, there are a similar number of providers in the sector this year as in 2011/12, though the number of independent learning providers that are subject to inspection, have increased.

Since the introduction of the revised Common Inspection Framework for FE and Skills in September 2012, inspections have focused even more on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the effectiveness of managers in improving teaching. The framework also requires inspections to consider learner destinations on leaving their programmes and to evaluate how well providers tailor their provision to labour markets and the needs of local communities. Key findings from the report on the FE and skills sector are set out below.

- **The Annual Report 2011/12 raised serious concerns about the further education (FE) and skills sector. This year, Ofsted evidence has revealed grounds for optimism.** In many of the providers inspected, improvements were detected in the quality of teaching, as well as higher expectations for learners. Sector leaders were giving greater priority to improving the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, 13 providers were judged outstanding for teaching and learning, covering a wide range of provision from national providers of apprenticeships to small sixth form colleges and other providers serving their local communities. It includes two general further education (GFE) colleges, the first time any GFE college has achieved this judgement in over three years.

- **However, there is still too much provision that is not responsive to local employment needs. This provision is therefore inappropriate for young people, regardless of the quality of teaching.** In most regions, many providers struggle to understand the priorities or the business opportunities in their area. There is currently no structure, accountability measure or system of incentives to ensure that FE and skills provision is adapted to local economic and social needs. This report concludes if the government is committed to raising employment through better skills and to secure economic competitiveness, it will need to fill this gap in strategic accountability urgently.

- **Training providers need to ensure that vocational provision is better matched to the needs of local businesses and communities.** Over the next year, Ofsted will be looking...
closely at the appropriateness of provision in meeting local needs and the early impact of government reforms in this area. This will include the provision of English and mathematics, where the quality of current provision is weak.

- **Across the whole sector, 71% of providers were judged good or outstanding at their latest inspection as of 31 August 2013.** This is an increase of seven percentage points compared with August 2012. Last year, over a third of learners were in provision that was less than good. This year, this has reduced to a quarter. However, the number of inadequate providers has also increased from 34 to 41, and this includes some large colleges that were previously judged good or outstanding. These must be a priority for the new FE Commissioner.

- **Apprenticeships are still failing to meet their full potential.** Many young people are applying for an apprenticeship, but are not sufficiently employable. Ofsted believes that this is because young people lack basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, aptitudes in vocational and employability skills and appropriate attitudes for work. For young people under 19, there were seven applicants for every apprenticeship vacancy in 2012/13, whereas people over the age of 25 are much more likely to be given an apprenticeship place. Schools and FE and skills providers must do more to ensure that young people are employable and well prepared for an apprenticeship. Over the coming year, Ofsted will be making an initial evaluation of the 16–19 study programmes, which include traineeships as the bridge to apprenticeships.

- As well as the system ensuring that more young people who want an apprenticeship are ready and able to access one, **providers must improve the quality of apprenticeships.** Too many providers do not work closely enough with employers and, consequently, apprentices fail to get the right training. This year, inspections judged 9% of apprenticeship provision to be inadequate which is seen as far too high.

- **Too many young people from poorer backgrounds fail to achieve in their post-16 destination and drop out of education, employment or training.** A disproportionate number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds go into the FE sector. While in schools, there is an increasing focus on the achievement of this group of children, influenced by national incentives such as the pupil premium, in the FE and skills sector, it is too often the case that managers and staff do not know who these young people are or what provision and support would be most appropriate for them. The best providers take steps to overcome this, but the regulations that govern the transfer of information from schools are burdensome and bureaucratic.

- **Training and education in prisons are very poor and are failing to support offenders into employment.** This contributes to a cycle of reoffending that costs taxpayers billions each year. Evidence shows that very few prisoners are getting the opportunity to develop the skills and behaviours they need for work. Despite some prisons having state of the art facilities, the quality of training and education is not good enough in about two-thirds of the prisons inspected by Ofsted in the past four years. In many prisons, training and education comes too far down the list of priorities for prison governors and other senior staff. Accountability for the quality of this provision is weak and must be addressed urgently.

**Comment**

This second Ofsted annual report brings much to be welcomed. The 80% figure for good and outstanding schools is as the report itself pinpoints, the highest since Ofsted's inception twenty years ago, and there are other headlines that underpin the sense of cautious optimism that is expressed. However, the inconsistency across the system, the variation in the provision that is on offer to children and young people and their parents rightly dominates the report and its public response. Inconsistency in provision across the country needs continued intervention, though as it has often been argued, there are current national education policies that militate against more evenness in school provision, such as...
the ability of academies to opt out of the National Curriculum, and the dilution of Qualified Teacher Status across the changing landscape of more autonomous schools.

Furthermore, some argue that there does also need to be more regional and local consistency in the funding that is available to support schools improvement at school and local authority level, pointing to the National Fair Funding Formula being developed as the mechanism for more equitable support across the system. Teacher supply is another source of variation across the country; the report advocates managing the supply of teachers coming into the profession as the way to plug gaps in different areas of the country but the Government needs to continue to address the issues urgently through the STRB processes. Funding and teacher supply issues are also hitting the FE sector hard with the continuation of young people in education and training until the age of 17, being combined with the need for a greater supply of teachers to teach mathematics and English to those post-16, who have not achieved a GCSE 'C' grade, and the announcement from the Education Funding Agency of a cut to full time education for 18 year-olds of 17.5%.

While many commend Ofsted for the job it has been doing over twenty years to identify and monitor strengths and weaknesses across the education system, it remains a regulator that is widely mistrusted and feared by those working in institutions and local authorities. It continues to move further away from the potential partnership role in school improvement that it proposed almost ten years ago. Under Sir Michael Wilshaw we are also returning to the Chris Woodhead 'hero-model' style of leadership that is often associated with 'super-heads' in the profession. Sir Michael's comments to the press on a return to national testing at 7 and 14 and his opposition to grammar schools have gone far beyond anything that is said in the report. It will have been received with interest by the Government; but more importantly it feels again as if the HMCI role is being politicised. The trend for more head teacher and college principals to be involved in inspections is positive and should develop further amongst teaching and local authority professionals, as a way of ensuring that Ofsted works more collectively as part of the institutional improvement solution as well as leading the processes of identifying the problems.

External Links
All published on 11 December 2013:

- Full commentary on the Ofsted Annual Report from the HMCI, Sir Michael Wilshaw
- Eight regional reports covering the eight Ofsted regions
- Schools Report
- FE and Skills Report
- Data View

Related Briefings

Ofsted Social Care Annual Report 2012/13 (October 2013)

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