House of Commons
Education Committee

Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children

First Report of Session 2014-15

Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 11 June 2014*

The Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

All publications of the Committee (including press notices) and further details can be found on the Education Committee web pages.

Current membership

Mr Graham Stuart *(Conservative, Beverley and Holderness)* (Chair)
Neil Carmichael MP *(Conservative, Stroud)*
Alex Cunningham MP *(Labour, Stockton North)*
Bill Esterson MP *(Labour, Sefton Central)*
Pat Glass MP *(Labour, North West Durham)*
Siobhain McDonagh MP *(Labour, Mitcham and Morden)*
Ian Mearns MP *(Labour, Gateshead)*
Caroline Nokes MP *(Conservative, Romsey and Southampton North)*
Mr Dominic Raab MP *(Conservative, Esher and Walton)*
Mr David Ward MP *(Liberal Democrat, Bradford East)*
Craig Whittaker *(Conservative, Calder Valley)*

Chris Skidmore MP *(Conservative, Kingswood)* was also a Member of the Committee for this inquiry.

Contents

Report

Summary

White working class underachievement in education is real and persistent. White children who are eligible for free school meals are consistently the lowest performing group in the country, and the difference between their educational performance and that of their less-deprived white peers is larger than for any other ethnic group. The gap exists at age five and widens as children get older. This matters, not least because the nature of the labour market in England has changed and the consequences for young people of low educational achievement are now more dramatic than they may have been in the past.

The possible causes and contributors to white working class underachievement are many and various, and include matters in home life, school practices, and wider social policies. We received evidence on a broad range of policy areas and relevant factors, many of which fell outside education policy. Our report holds a mirror up to the situation—it does not attempt to solve the problem on its own—but it is clear that schools can and do make a dramatic difference to the educational outcomes of poor children. Twice the proportion of poor children attending an outstanding school will leave with five good GCSEs when compared with the lowest rated schools, whereas the proportion of non-FSM children achieving this benchmark in outstanding schools is only 1.5 times greater than in those rated as inadequate. Ofsted's inspection focus on performance gaps for deprived groups will encourage schools to concentrate on this issue, including those that aspire to an "outstanding" rating.

Our inquiry focused on pupils who are eligible for free school meals, but there are many pupils just outside this group whose performance is low, and it is known that economic deprivation has an impact on educational performance at all levels. Data from a range of Departments could be combined in future to develop a more rounded indicator of a child's socio-economic status and used to allocate funding for disadvantaged groups. The improvement in outcomes for other ethnic groups over time gives us cause for optimism that improvements can be made, but not through a national strategy or a prescribed set of sub-regional challenges. Schools need to work together to tackle problems in their local context, and need to be encouraged to share good practice in relevant areas, such as providing space to complete homework and reducing absence from school.

Policies such as the pupil premium and the introduction of the Progress 8 metric are to be welcomed as measures that could improve the performance of white working class children and increase attention on this group. Alongside the EEF "toolkit", our recommendation for an annual report from Ofsted on how the pupil premium is being used will ensure that suitable information on how to use this extra funding reaches schools. An updated good practice report from Ofsted on tackling white working class underachievement would also help schools to focus their efforts. Meanwhile, further work is needed on the role of parental engagement, particularly in the context of early years.

The Government should also maintain its focus on getting the best teachers to the areas that need them most, and should give more thought to the incentives that drive where

teachers choose to work. Within a school, the best teachers should be deployed where they can make most difference. Schools face a battle for resources and talent, and those serving poor white communities need a better chance of winning. White working class children can achieve in education, and the Government must take these steps to ensure that that they do.

1 Introduction

Background

1. In June 2013, Ofsted's report *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on*[1] was reported as having exposed the problem of "white working class children" underachieving in England's education system.[2] Ofsted described how white British children eligible for free school meals were now the lowest-performing children at age 16, with only 31% of this group achieving five or more GCSEs at A*–C including English and Mathematics.[3] At the launch of the report, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (Sir Michael Wilshaw) noted that the size of this group meant that tackling this issue was an important part of the "closing the gap" agenda:

> The underperformance of low-income white British pupils matters, particularly because they make up the majority—two-thirds—of such pupils. So the lowest-performing group of poor children is also the largest. If we don't crack the problem of low achievement by poor white British boys and girls, then we won't solve the problem overall.[4]

PISA 2009 data has shown that in England the impact of a student's socio-economic background is significantly higher than the OECD average; countries such as Hong Kong, Canada, Finland, Iceland and Korea all do better for their socially and economically disadvantaged students than England does.[5] Public attention has also been drawn to the educational prospects of white working class children within higher education. In January 2013, the Minister for Universities and Science (Rt Hon David Willetts MP) suggested that white working class boys should be a particular focus for the Office for Fair Access, in a similar manner to its approach to ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups.[6]

2. The Government's stated aim is to "ensure that a child's socio-economic disadvantage does not limit their educational outcomes by age 19, compared to their peers", with a strategy of raising the attainment of all pupils, ensuring that more disadvantaged pupils reach the thresholds that are crucial for future success, and narrowing the attainment gap between them and their peers.[7] As part of this strategy it has implemented policies such as the pupil premium.[8] We therefore decided to investigate the underachievement in education of white working class children.

---

1   Ofsted, *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on* (June 2013)

2   "White working class boys are consigned to education scrapheap, Ofsted warns", *The Daily Mail*, 15 June 2012

3   Ofsted, *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on* (June 2013), p 30

4   Ofsted, *Unseen children – HMCI speech* (June 2013), p 4

5   Department for Education, *PISA 2009: How does the social attainment gap in England compare with countries internationally?*, Research Report RR206 (April 2012)

6   "Universities should target white working class boys, minister says", *The Guardian*, 3 January 2013

7   Department for Education (WWC 28) para 51–52

8   "Raising the achievement of disadvantaged children", Department for Education (accessed 29 April 2014)

Our inquiry

3. We launched our inquiry on 23 July 2013, seeking written evidence on the following points:

- the extent of white working class pupils' educational underachievement;

- the factors responsible for white working class pupils' educational underachievement, including the impact of home and family;

- whether the problem is significantly worse for white working class boys than girls;

- what steps schools can take to improve the educational outcomes and attainment of white working class pupils;

- the potential for a wider range of educational approaches, for example vocational pathways, to improve outcomes for white working class pupils; and

- what role the Government can play in delivering improved educational outcomes for white working class pupils.

4. We received over 30 written submissions from a range of witnesses. We took oral evidence on four occasions, hearing from seven panels of witnesses including the Minister for Schools, Rt Hon David Laws MP, and held a seminar in November 2013 to help steer our inquiry. We also visited Peterborough on 6 February 2014 to explore the issues raised in the inquiry in a local context.[9] We are grateful to all those who contributed to our inquiry, and especially those who organised or participated in our visit to Peterborough.

5. During this inquiry we benefitted from the expertise and assistance of Professor Steve Strand, who was appointed as a Special Adviser to the Committee for his specific understanding of white working class underachievement in education, and, as ever, from the advice and expertise of Professor Alan Smithers as our standing Special Adviser on education matters.[10]

The scope of this report

6. We received evidence relating to a wide range of education issues during our inquiry, not all of which were unique to the question of white working class underachievement, or strictly within the boundaries of our education remit. This is a natural consequence of the issue we sought to explore: white children constitute the vast majority of the school population, and their interests are likely to reflect the English school system as a whole rather than occupy an easily-defined niche within it. All of the areas discussed in this report are important and deserving of focused policy attention, but in the interests of

---

9   See annex for an outline of the visit programme.

10   Professor Alan Smithers (Director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham) and Professor Steve Strand (Professor of Education, University of Oxford) declared no interests relevant to this inquiry.

producing a report that accurately reflects the time devoted to examining them individually, they are discussed relatively briefly and in some cases are presented without definitive conclusions or recommendations. In doing so, it is our intention that this report will provide a useful 'map' of the issue and its connections to other policy areas, for future reference. Where relevant we have highlighted specific issues for further scrutiny by ourselves or our successor in the next Parliament and by the Government itself.

Definitions

Defining "working class"

7. The starting point for our inquiry was "white working class children", but from the oral and written evidence it became apparent that this group was not well-defined. Traditional notions of what constitutes "the working class" are based on a categorisation of employment occupations[11]—the child's parents' occupations in this case—but national education data based on parental occupations is not always readily available or used by commentators. Chapter 2 discusses what data exists and what conclusions can be drawn.

FSM eligibility as a proxy for working class

8. Statements relating to the achievements of white working class children are almost always based on the exam results of children who are eligible for free school meals (FSM).[12] While Ofsted's *Unseen Children* report does not itself use the term "working class", media coverage of the issue raised in this report issue frequently used working class as a shorthand for this group.[13, 14, 15]

9. FSM eligibility is more normally used as a proxy for economic deprivation. The Economic Policy Institute (an American think-tank) describes the practice of using poverty as proxy for class in generally positive terms:

> Of course, how much money a child's parents earned last year (the qualifier for the lunch program) does not itself impede learning. But poverty is a good proxy, sometimes, for lower class status because it is so highly associated with other characteristics of that status. Lower class families have lower parental literacy levels, poorer health, more racial isolation, less stable housing, more exposure to crime and other stresses, less access to quality early childhood experiences, less access to good after school programs (and less ability to afford these even if they did have access), earlier childbearing and more frequent unwed childbearing, less security that comes from stable employment, more exposure to environmental toxins (e.g., lead) that diminish cognitive ability, etc. Each of these predicts lower achievement for

---

11   "What is working class?", BBC News Online, 25 January 2007

12   See, for instance, Centre for Research in Race and Education (WWC 15) para 17, and Q9.

13   "Ofsted chief says England's schools failing white working class children", *The Observer*, 8 December 2013

14   "White working class boys are schools' worst performing ethnic group by age of 11", *Daily Mail*, 20 March 2009

15   "White working class boys 'worst performers at school'", *The Telegraph*, 11 December 2008

children, but none of these (including low income) itself causes low achievement, and lower social class families don't necessarily have all of these characteristics, but they are likely to have many of them.[16]

Nevertheless, measuring working class performance in education through FSM data can be misleading. The Centre for Research in Race and Education (CRRE) drew our attention to a mismatch between the proportion of children who were eligible for free school meals and the proportion of adults who would self-define as working class:[17] in 2012/13, 15% of pupils at the end of key stage 4 were known to be eligible for free school meals,[18] compared with 57% of British adults who defined themselves as 'working class' as part of a survey by the National Centre for Social Research.[19] The CRRE warned that projecting the educational performance of a small group of economically deprived pupils onto what could otherwise be understood to be a much larger proportion of the population had "damaging consequences" on public understanding of the issue.[20] The logical result of equating FSM with working class was that 85% of children were being characterised as middle class or above.[21]

10. Conversely, while a large proportion of adults may self-identify as working class as a result of their backgrounds or their parents' occupations, this does not correspond well with the proportion of adults who now work in semi-routine or routine occupations or are unemployed. The Office for National Statistics uses the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)[22] to categorise occupations under eight headings as in the table below. Within this, categories 6–8 might be grouped together as a "working class";[23] data from the 2011 census show that 34% of 16–74 year olds (excluding students) fall within these categories of employment. Extending this to categories 5–8 would create a larger group of 41%, while groups 4–8 represent 52% of the population. However, the NS-SEC does not label any group working class since "changes in the nature and structure of both industry and occupations have rendered this distinction [between manual and non-manual occupations] outmoded and misleading".[24] There is therefore some debate as to whether "working class" gives a meaningful reflection of current occupations.

16   "Does 'Poverty' Cause Low Achievement?", The Economic Policy Institute Blog (8 October 2013)

17   Centre for Research in Race and Education (WWC 15) para 11

18   See Table 2, para 23

19   "What is working class?", BBC News Online, 25 January 2007

20   Centre for Research in Race and Education (WWC 15) para 17

21   Centre for Research in Race and Education (WWC 15) para 12

22   "The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification", Office for National Statistics

23   The NS-SEC categories of Routine & Semi-routine occupations (or what were conventionally known as 'semi-skilled' or 'unskilled' occupations) "entail a 'labour contract' where employees are closely supervised and given discrete amounts of labour in return for a wage [...] that was typical of working class occupations" (Rose & Pevalin, 2001, p10). Also "Because a basic labour contract is assumed to exist for both positions it would be normal to consider (categories 6 & 7) as forming a unified class" (p18).

24   Office for National Statistics, Standard Occupation Classification 2010: Volume 3, The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification: (Rebased on the SOC2010) User Manual (2010), para 7.4

Table 1: NS-SEC Categories (2011 census data, England only)

NS-SEC category	Examples [25]	Number of people (usual residents aged 16-74)	Proportion	"Working class" (NS-SEC 6–8)
1. Higher managerial, administrative & professional occupations	Lawyers, Architects, Medical doctors, Chief executives, Economists	4,045,823	11.4%	
2. Lower managerial, administrative & professional occupations	Social workers, Nurses, Journalists, Retail managers, Teachers	8,132,107	23.0%	
3. Intermediate occupations	Armed forces up to sergeant, Paramedics, Nursery Nurses, Police up to sergeant, Bank staff	4,972,044	14.1%	
4. Small employers and own account workers	Farmers, Shopkeepers, Taxi drivers, Driving instructors, Window cleaners	3,662,611	10.4%	
5. Lower supervisory and technical occupations	Mechanics, Chefs, Train drivers, Plumbers, Electricians	2,676,118	7.6%	
6. Semi-routine occupations	Traffic wardens, Receptionists, Shelf-stackers, Care workers, Telephone Salespersons	5,430,863	15.4%	15.4%
7. Routine occupations	Bar staff, cleaners, labourers, Bus drivers, Lorry drivers	4,277,483	12.1%	12.1%
8. Never worked and long-term unemployed	N/A	2,180,026	6.2%	6.2%
Total		**35,377,075**	**100.0%**	**33.7%**
Not classified (full time students)		7,008,598		

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2011 census, Table KS611EW

11. Thus, FSM eligibility corresponds to a small group of children (15%), NS-SEC classifications 6–8 equate to a larger group of adults (34%), and self-perception of working class produces a larger group still (57%). Overall, the statistical evidence base for an inquiry in this area requires careful interpretation, and it is easy for loosely-phrased statements to be misleading. The CRRE summarises the situation as follows:

> The present debate is largely shaped by crude data (based on free school statistics) that dangerously mis-represent the true situation when they are reported in broad and over-simplistic terms.[26]

---

25   Examples are taken from Office for National Statistics, *Health Gaps by Socio-economic Position of Occupations In England, Wales, English Regions and Local Authorities, 2011* (November 2013); The reduced NS-SEC class to which an individual belongs is not solely based on occupation but also other factors such as whether they are employers and how many people they employ. For example, a window cleaner who is self-employed or is an employer would be in NS-SEC class 4 while a window cleaner who is an employee would be in NS-SEC class 7.

26   Centre for Research in Race and Education (WWC 15) para 19

The exact nature of the "true" situation will inevitably depend on how working class is defined. The evidence we have received shows that this can vary considerably.

FSM eligibility as a measure of poverty

12. Criticisms are also levelled at the use of FSM eligibility as a measure of poverty. Children are eligible for free school meals if their parents receive any of the following payments:[27]

- Income Support

- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance

- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance

- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit

- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)

- Working Tax Credit run-on—paid for 4 weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

- Universal Credit

13. A report for the Children's Society noted that the criteria for FSM mean that parents working 16 or more hours per week (24 hours for couples from April 2012) lose their entitlement to FSM since they are eligible for working tax credit; as a result there are around 700,000 children living in poverty who are not entitled to receive free school meals.[28] In addition, not all those who may be eligible for FSM register for it; a recent report for the Department for Education estimated under-registration to be 11% in 2013.[29] This figure varies across the country: in the North East under-registration is estimated to be 1%, compared to 18% in the East of England and 19% in the South East.[30]

Pragmatism versus precision

14. Nevertheless, free school meals data is readily available, has the advantage of being easy to conceptualise, and has been consistently collected for many years; in contrast, national datasets on education performance based on NS-SEC classifications of parental occupations (or self-perceptions of social class) are less frequently produced. Pragmatism

27   "Apply for free school meals", Gov.uk, 8 November 2013

28   The Children's Society, *Fair and Square: a policy report on the future of free school meals* (April 2012), p 6

29   Department for Education, *Pupils not claiming free school meals 2013*, Research report DFE-RR319, December 2013

30   Department for Education, *Pupils not claiming free school meals 2013*, Research report DFE-RR319, December 2013, p 9. Figures based on comparing HMRC benefits data from December 2012 and the January 2013 School Census.

has led us to pursue analyses of free school meals data as an insight into the issue that Ofsted and others have raised.

15. **Statements relating to the underachievement in education of white working class pupils often use eligibility for free school meals as a proxy for working class. Entitlement to FSM is not synonymous with working class, but it is a useful proxy for poverty which itself has an association with educational underachievement.**

Defining "white"

16. 'White' is a broad heading within classifications of ethnicity which can be used to make comparisons against other aggregated groups such as black and Asian. Within the white group the overwhelming majority of children fall into the subgroup of white British, but other subgroups include white Irish, Gypsy/Roma, and 'Other white', which encompasses a range of white mostly European ethnicities. Thus, information referring to 'white' and 'white British' should not be conflated, and we have been careful to distinguish throughout. The smaller size and greater complexity of other groups within the 'white' category has led us to focus primarily on the performance of white British children, and this matches the focus of Ofsted's *Unseen Children* report. Chapter 2 examines this in more detail.

Defining "underachievement"

17. "Underachievement" can be defined as relative to what a pupil could be predicted to achieve based on prior attainment, or could be thought of in terms of a comparison with another group, such as children from more prosperous homes, a different ethnic group, or a different part of the country. Again, we have taken our cue from the data that is most readily available, which are threshold performance indicators: at key stage 4, the achievement of five GCSEs at grades A*–C, including in English and mathematics; at key stage 2, achieving level 4 or above in English and mathematics; and in the early years, the proportion of children who achieve the expected level in all 17 Early Learning Goals. Strictly speaking, these are measures of low achievement rather than "underachievement", and where we refer to underachievement in this report we mean that attainment is low, and lower than other comparison groups.

18. Finally, the data we have used in this report reflects group averages. This is not to suggest that individuals and schools do not buck these trends, as personal anecdotes will readily confirm.

Risks of focusing specifically on white working class underachievement

19. Evidence to our inquiry questioned whether focusing on white working class underachievement carried risks in itself. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) argued that shifting the focus to white working class children could lead to other groups falling back in turn, and that it should be up to schools to decide how to strike a

balance in their particular area.[31] NASUWT felt that "In the context of educational achievement, there is a significant risk that focusing on white working class underachievement leads to the assumption that racial discrimination is no longer a problem".[32] Similarly, Professor Gillborn argued that:

> […] while social class is of enormous importance, it does not explain away gender inequalities, disability inequalities, and race inequalities […] One of the key problems […] with the current debate about white working class as it is described in relation to free school meals is that it ignores huge inequalities in other parts of the system by focusing on this very particular area.[33]

20. More generally, Professor Gillborn warned us of the dangers of a "deficit" interpretation of white FSM underperformance, and the extent to which this can obscure the issue of racial bias in the education system:

> […] it is easy to fall into a kind of deficit analysis: an assumption that, if a group is underachieving, there must be a problem with the group, whereas we have an awful lot of research showing that schools tend to treat different groups in systematically different ways.[34]

> […] the debates about poverty get lost amid a wider question of whether white people are suffering because of multiculturalism, which I think is hugely dangerous.[35]

He also cautioned against inferring that white children had somehow lost out as a result of previous attention to other ethnic groups. As Jenny North (Impetus—the Private Equity Foundation) described the situation, "[…] ethnic minority acceleration of performance has not pushed white working-class boys' attainment down. It has simply exposed what was already there".[36]

21. Nevertheless, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, there are some worrying trends in the data that warrant investigation.

---

31   Association of School and College Leaders (WWC 5) para 22

32   NASUWT (WWC 26) para 6

33   Q15

34   Q4

35   Q4

36   Q53

2 The extent of white working class underachievement in education

Do "white working class" children underachieve in education?

22. The two main sources of data for our inquiry are:

- national data on the performance of children known to be eligible for free school meals, taken from the gov.uk website, which provides annual information on the proportions of pupils in the early years, key stage 2 and key stage 4 reaching the relevant benchmark; and

- sample-based survey data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), which includes a measure of socio-economic status constructed from information on parental occupations, educational qualifications, home ownership, neighbourhood deprivation and FSM entitlement. The LSYPE is managed by the Department for Education, and is based on annual interviews with a nationally representative sample of the population who were aged between 13 and 14 in 2004, with an initial cohort size of 15,700.[37]

FSM data provides information on how poorer white children fare in comparison to less-poor white children, and in comparison to poorer children of other ethnicities. LSYPE data provides a view of socio-economic status (SES) as a continuous measure and shows how the educational performance of children from different ethnic groups is affected by their SES across the spectrum.

Free School Meals data

White British ethnicity in context

23. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals varies by ethnicity. For instance, in 2012/13 around 12.5% of white British children at the end of key stage 4 were eligible for free school meals, compared to 38.5% of Bangladeshi children and 9.7% of Indian children.

Table 2: Proportion of pupils at the end of key stage 4 who are eligible for free school meals, by ethnicity (England, state-funded schools (including Academies and CTCs), 2012/13, revised data)

	Number of pupils	Number known to be eligible for FSM	Proportion eligible for FSM
White British	438,469	54,900	12.5%
Irish	1,899	288	15.2%
Traveller of Irish heritage	137	85	62.0%
Gypsy/Roma	820	392	47.8%
Any other white background	19,265	2,761	14.3%
Mixed heritage[38]	21,611	4,560	21.1%

---

37   "Welcome to interactive LSYPE", Department for Education

38   Includes white and black Caribbean, white and black African, white and Asian, and Any other mixed background.

Indian	13,543	1,308	9.7%
Pakistani	17,778	4,976	28.0%
Bangladeshi	7,676	2,959	38.5%
Chinese	2,257	168	7.4%
Any other Asian background	7,789	1,212	15.6%
Black Caribbean	8,158	2,059	25.2%
Black African	16,201	5,439	33.6%
Any other black background	3,083	924	30.0%
Any other ethnic group	10,327	3,185	30.8%
All pupils (including those for whom ethnicity could not be obtained, refused or could not be determined)	571,334	85,182	14.9%

Source: Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics: National and local authority* tables, SFR 5/2014, Table 2a, 14 February 2014. Note that the numbers in 'All pupils' row will be larger than the sum of the rows above it.

Although a smaller proportion of white children are eligible for free school meals than some other ethnicities, white British children still constitute the majority (64%) of the FSM group—some 55,000 children per year.

Early years

24. Table 3 shows that the attainment "gap" between FSM and non-FSM children exists pre-school, and is already larger for white British children by the age of 5 than for other ethnicities (24 percentage points). White British is the lowest performing group at this age (other than smaller white subgroups), although their performance is not significantly different from that of Pakistani FSM children.

Table 3: Proportion of pupils at the early years foundation stage achieving at least the expected standard in all 17 Early Learning Goals, by major ethnic group and free school meal eligibility (England, all types of schools or early education providers that deliver the EYFSP to children in receipt of a government funded place, 2013, final data)

	% Pupils known to be eligible for FSM who achieve the benchmark	% All other pupils (those not eligible for FSM and for whom eligibility could not be determined) who achieve the benchmark	Gap (percentage points)
White British	32%	56%	24
Irish	36%	59%	23
Traveller of Irish heritage	13%	31%	18
Gypsy/Roma	11%	18%	7
Any other white background	31%	40%	9
Mixed heritage	38%	55%	17
Indian	37%	53%	16
Pakistani	30%	38%	8
Bangladeshi	37%	42%	5
Chinese	33%	47%	14
Any other Asian background	34%	46%	12
Black Caribbean	39%	50%	11
Black African	40%	51%	11
Any other black background	41%	49%	8
Any other ethnic group (including not obtained)	37%	45%	8

Source: Department for Education, *EYFSP attainment by pupil characteristics: 2013*, SFR47/2013, National and local authority tables, Table 2a, 21 November 2013

Key stage 2

25. A similar pattern is seen at key stage 2. The FSM gap is larger for white British children than other major groups—only the smaller white subgroups and "any other" groupings have a larger FSM gap or a lower FSM performance.

Table 4: Proportion of pupils in key stage 2 achieving level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics, by ethnicity and free school meal eligibility (England, state-funded schools (including academies and CTCs), 2013, revised data)

	% Pupils known to be eligible for FSM who achieve the benchmark	% All other pupils (those not eligible for FSM and for whom eligibility could not be determined) who achieve the benchmark	Gap (percentage points) [39]
White British	74%	89%	15
Irish	60%	86%	26
Traveller of Irish heritage	33%	38%	5
Gypsy/Roma	18%	28%	10
Any other white background	57%	70%	13
Mixed heritage	80%	90%	10
Indian	82%	90%	8
Pakistani	78%	83%	5
Bangladeshi	82%	86%	4
Chinese	87%	85%	-2
Any other Asian background	66%	80%	14
Black Caribbean	77%	86%	9
Black African	80%	88%	8
Any other black background	63%	74%	11
Any other ethnic group (including not obtained)	65%	73%	8

Source: Department for Education, *National curriculum assessments at key stage 2: 2012 to 2013*, SFR 51/2013, National tables, Table 9a, 12 December 2013

Key stage 4

26. Table 5 shows that by GCSE the gap between the performance of FSM and non-FSM white British children is considerably wider, and the difference between white British FSM children and poorer children of other ethnicities is starker (other than Traveller and Gypsy/Roma children).

---

39   The table suggests that Chinese FSM students outperform their non-FSM counterparts, but it should be noted that only 144 Chinese pupils were eligible for free school meals that year.

Table 5: Proportion of pupils at the end of key stage 4 achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*–C including English and mathematics, by ethnicity and free school meal eligibility (England, state-funded schools (including academies and CTCs), 2012/13, revised data)

|	% Pupils known to be eligible for FSM who achieve the benchmark	% All other pupils (those not eligible for FSM and for whom eligibility could not be determined) who achieve the benchmark	Gap (percentage points)
White British	32.3%	64.5%	32.2
Irish	38.5%	74.2%	35.7
Traveller of Irish heritage	12.9%	25.0%	12.1
Gypsy/Roma	9.2%	18.0%	8.8
Any other white background	43.8%	57.3%	13.5
Mixed heritage	43.9%	67.5%	23.6
Indian	61.5%	77.2%	15.7
Pakistani	46.8%	58.8%	12.0
Bangladeshi	59.2%	67.0%	7.8
Chinese	76.8%	78.2%	1.4
Any other Asian background	52.4%	66.4%	14.0
Black Caribbean	42.2%	57.0%	14.8
Black African	51.4%	66.2%	14.8
Any other black background	43.1%	59.6%	16.5
Any other ethnic group (including not obtained)	51.5%	62.7%	11.2

Source: Department for Education, _GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics: National and local authority_ tables, SFR 5/2014, Table 2a, 14 February 2014

Trends over time

27. As Figure 1 and Figure 2 show, the performance of white British children eligible for free school meals has improved significantly in the last seven years, but the "FSM gap" for white children has barely changed. While the proportion of white British FSM children achieving the key stage 4 benchmark has almost doubled over the last seven years, it is still the case that around twice the proportion of non-FSM white British children succeed by this measure.

28. White British FSM children have consistently been the lowest performing group during 2006/07–2012/13, with a FSM/non-FSM performance gap that is larger than others.

Figure 1: Trends in the proportion of FSM-eligible children achieving the key stage 4 benchmark, selected ethnicities, 2006/07–2012/13
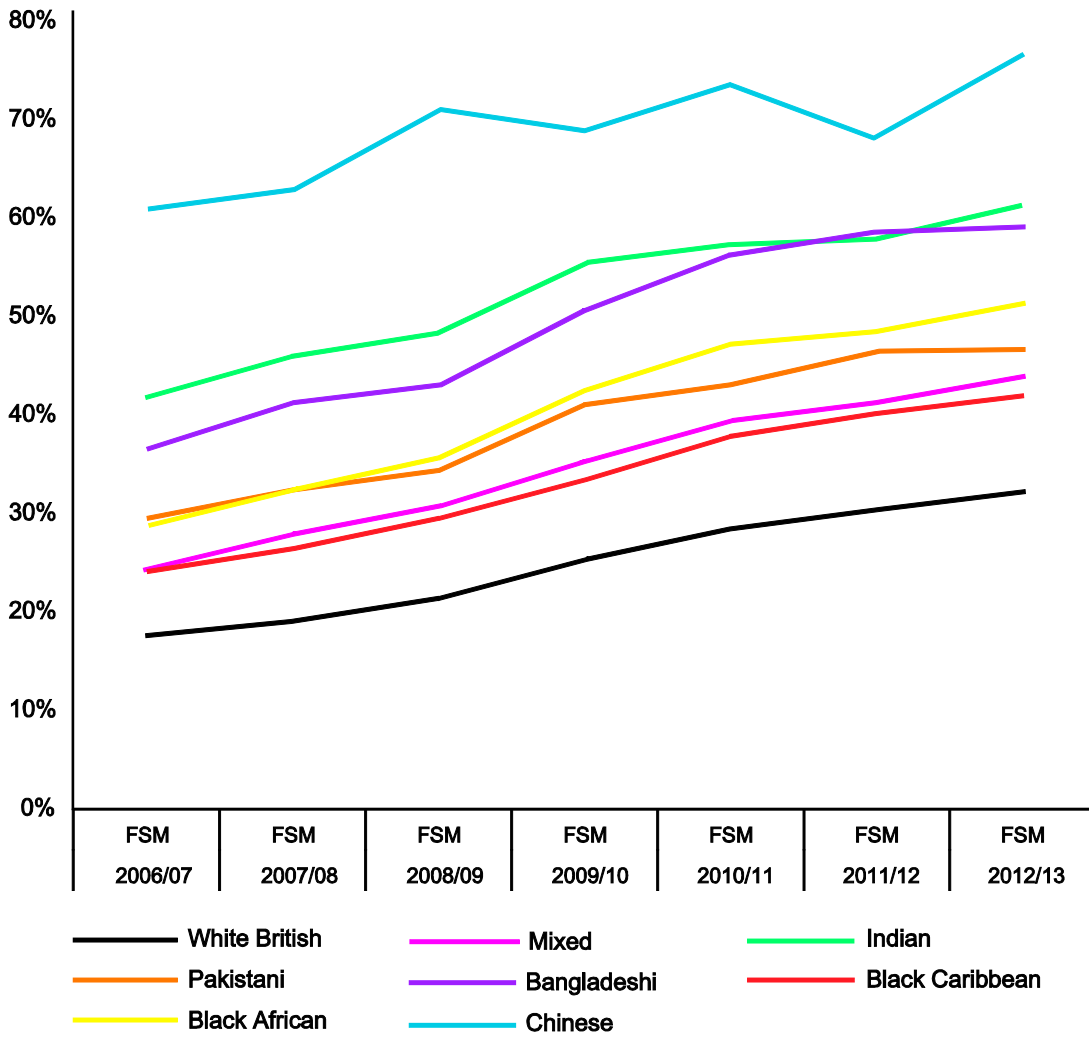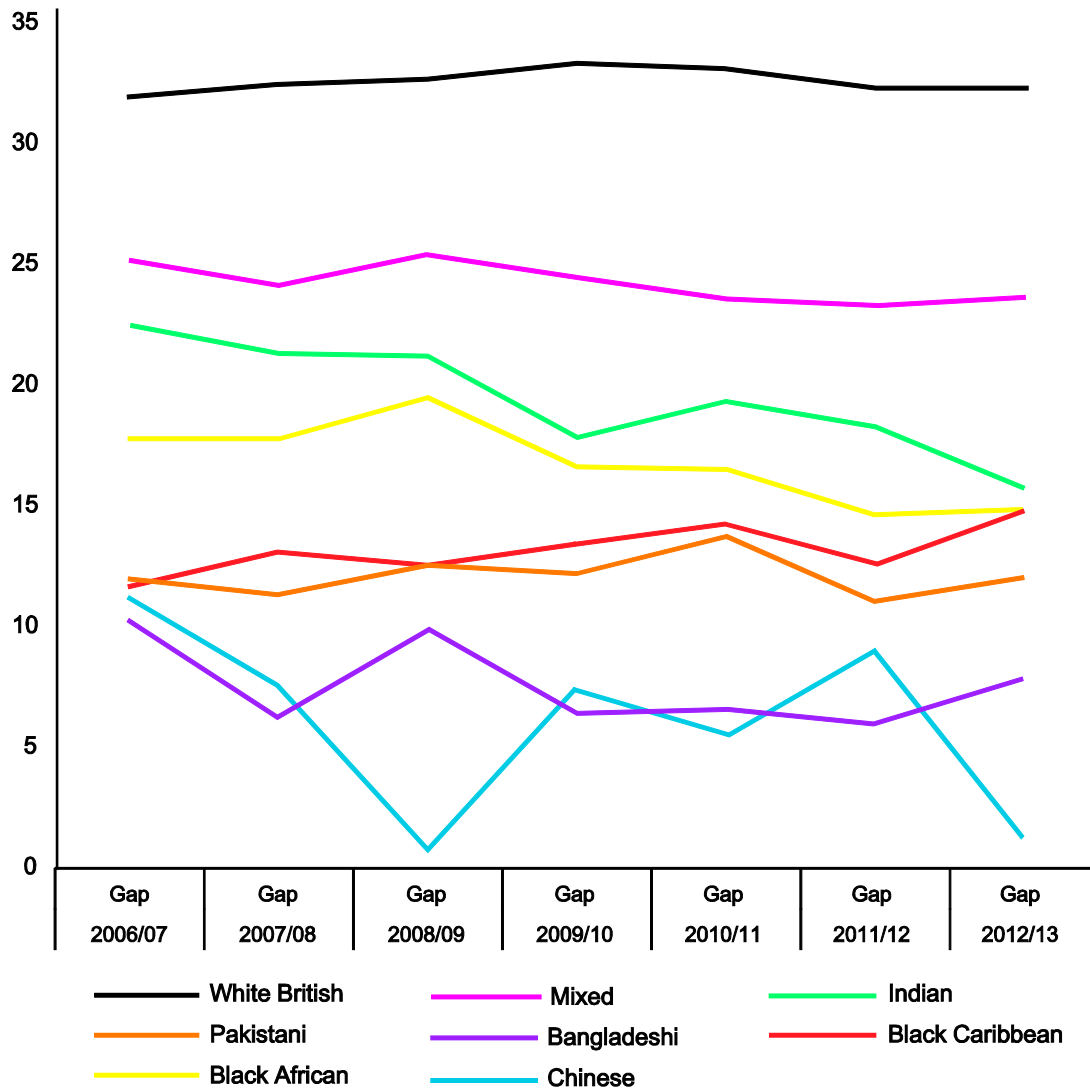

Source: 2006/07–2009/10: Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics in England: 2010 to 2011*: *National and local authority* tables, SFR 3/2012, Table 2a, 9 February 2011
Source: 2009/10–2012/13: Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics*: *National and local authority* tables, SFR 5/2014, Table 2a, 14 February 2014
Figures for 2006/07–2011/12 are based on final data, figures for 2012/13 are based on revised data.

Figure 2: Trends in the gap (percentage points) between the proportion of FSM and non-FSM children achieving the key stage 4 benchmark, selected ethnicities, 2006/07–2012/13

Source: 2006/07–2009/10: Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics in England: 2010 to 2011: National and local authority* tables, SFR 3/2012, Table 2a, 9 February 2011
Source: 2009/10–2012/13: Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics: National and local authority* tables, SFR 5/2014, Table 2a, 14 February 2014
Figures for 2006/07–2011/12 are based on final data, figures for 2012/13 are based on revised data.

29. The data shows that the performance of Bangladeshi children eligible for free school meals has improved by 22.8 percentage points between 2006/07 and 2012/13, compared to only 14.9 percentage points for white British FSM children. Similarly, the FSM performance gap for Indian children has closed by 6.8 percentage points over this period, whereas for white British children it has hardly altered. Thus, while the performance of poorer children is improving for all ethnic groups, for some ethnic minorities within those groups it is improving faster than for white British pupils.[40]

---

40   Strand, S., De Coulon, A., Meschi, E., Vorhaus, J., Ivins, C., Small, L., Sood, A., Gervais, M.C. & Rehman, H., *Drivers and challenges in raising the achievement of pupils from Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish backgrounds* (2010) Research Report DCSF-RR226. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families

30. **Overall, the evidence from analysing free school meals (FSM) data is that:**

- **white British children eligible for FSM are consistently the lowest performing ethnic group of children from low income households, at all ages (other than small subgroups of white children);**

- **the attainment "gap" between those children eligible for free school meals and the remainder is wider for white British and Irish children than for other ethnic groups; and**

- **this gap widens as children get older.**

The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE)

31. Professor Strand's evidence to our inquiry drew on LSYPE data to demonstrate that a broader measure of socio-economic status (SES) presented similar conclusions to the FSM data, albeit with almost no distinction between white British children from low SES backgrounds and low-SES black Caribbean children. Figure 3 below shows that the steepness of the "SES gradient"—the extent to which SES has an impact on attainment—is greater for white British children than for other groups, and is similar for boys and girls. This reinforces the message from the "FSM gap" for white British children referred to above.

Figure 3: Normalised mean GCSE points score by ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status (LSYPE dataset)
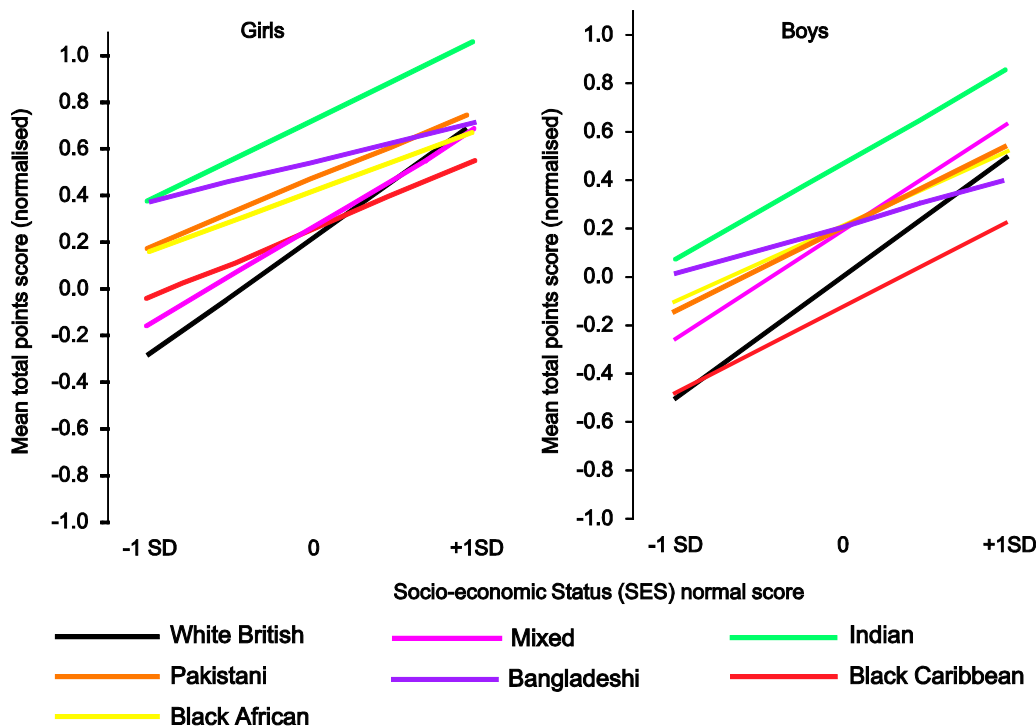
Source: Professor Steve Strand (WWC 4) Figure 2, p 2. *Notes: (1). The outcome (total points score) is a measure of achievement based on all examinations completed by the young person at age 16, and is expressed on a scale where 0 is the mean (average) score for all Young People at age 16 and two-thirds of young people score between -1 and 1. (2). The SES measure also has a mean (average) of zero and the effects for low SES are estimated at -1SD and of high SES at +1SD. See Strand, S., "Ethnicity, gender, social class and achievement gaps at*

age 16: intersectionality and 'getting it' for the white working class", Research Papers in Education, *Vol 29 Issue 2, 2014 for full details.*

The general link between economic deprivation and educational achievement

32. Loic Menzies (Director, LKMco) argued that the link between economic deprivation and educational achievement applied at all levels of poverty, not just between the two groups that FSM data identifies: "[...] we have got a continuous spectrum. If you do these things by IDACI, then you see a continuous line, so I am not sure it is actually a very good idea to divide it and chop it at a particular point".[41] The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) provides a more continuous measure of deprivation. The graph below plots IDACI scores for children (grouped in deciles) against their GCSE attainment measured in terms of their mean 'Best 8' points scores.[42]

Figure 4: The relationship between GCSE performance (mean best 8 points) and deprivation (IDACI decile) for various ethnicities
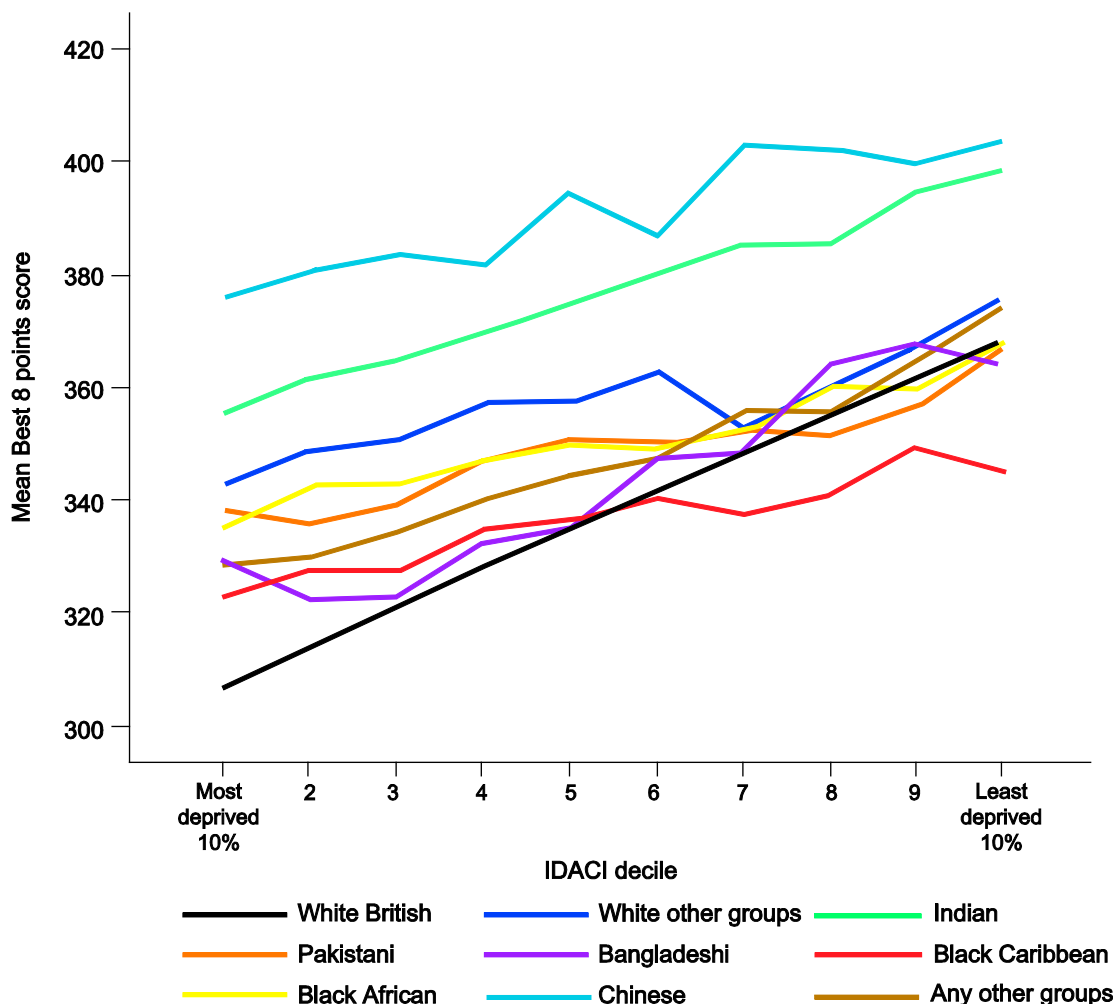
Source: National Pupil Database 2013

---

41   Q83

42   The "Best 8" point score is based on listing each pupils' qualifications in descending order of point score, and summing these points for the top eight GCSEs or equivalents.

33. Figure 4 confirms that the link between wealth and educational achievement exists at all levels of income—not just for the most economically deprived. As with the LSYPE data, it also shows that the "deprivation gradient"—the steepness of the line in the graph—is greater for white British students than for others; this supports what FSM data says about the effects of income appearing to be greater for this group than for other ethnicities.

34. **Measures of economic deprivation and socio-economic status both suggest that white "working class" children are underachieving, and that the performance of some other ethnic groups is improving faster. But they also show that similar problems persist in a number of other minority groups.**

35. *Some other ethnic groups appear to be more resilient than white British children to the effects of poverty, deprivation and low-socio-economic status on educational achievement. Further work is needed to understand why this is the case. The Government should commission a project to assess why some ethnic groups are improving faster than white British children, and what can be learned from steps taken specifically to improve the achievement of ethnic minorities. This research should include, but not be limited to, the effects of historic funding and strategies, parental expectations, community resilience and access to good schools.*

Gender

36. Sir Michael Wilshaw's *Unseen children* speech noted that the problem of white FSM children underachieving in education was not limited to boys:

> Let me emphasise, this is not a gender issue. Poor, low-income white British girls do very badly. So we should stop talking about "white working class boys" as if they are the only challenge.[43]

Free school meals data supports this view. Although white FSM-eligible boys are the lowest performing group overall in terms of the proportion achieving the key stage 4 benchmark, white FSM girls are the lowest-achieving group of girls. Moreover, Table 6 shows that the FSM gap for white children is slightly bigger for girls than it is for boys. Dr John Jerrim (Lecturer in Economics and Social Statistics, Institute of Education) told us that:

> [...] there is always an undertone in speeches that the problem is with white working-class boys, more so than girls, but if you look at PISA and you look at the maths test scores there, it is actually the girls who do worse than the boys [...] I do not think you need to separate "white working class" as a group into white working class boys versus white working class girls.[44]

---

43   Ofsted, *Unseen children – HMCI speech* (June 2013), p 4

44   Q35

Professor Gillborn went further: "It would be very dangerous to slip into a situation where we are only looking at one gender and one ethnicity".[45]

Table 6: Proportion of pupils at the end of key stage 4 achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and mathematics, by ethnicity, gender and free school meal eligibility (England, state-funded schools (including Academies and CTCs), 2012/13, revised data)

	% Pupils known to be eligible for FSM who achieve the benchmark	% All other pupils (those not eligible for FSM and for whom eligibility could not be determined) who achieve the benchmark	Gap (percentage points)
White boys	28.3%	59.1%	30.8
Mixed race boys	39.5%	62.7%	23.2
Asian boys	48.6%	62.4%	13.8
Black boys	43.1%	57.2%	14.1
Chinese boys	74.1%	74.2%	0.1
White girls	37.1%	69.5%	32.4
Mixed race girls	48.2%	72.3%	24.1
Asian girls	57.2%	72.8%	15.6
Black girls	53.3%	67.7%	14.4
Chinese girls	79.5%	82.4%	2.9

Source: Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics*: *National and local authority* tables, SFR 5/2014, Table 2a, 14 February 2014

37. **The problem of white "working class" underachievement is not specific to boys; attention to both sexes is needed.**

Data quality and availability

38. Statistical First Releases from the Department for Education readily allow for the analysis of FSM data by ethnicity in terms of achievement in early years, key stage 2 and key stage 4. Unfortunately figures for white FSM children for other relevant measures, such as absences and exclusions, and even key stage 5 results, are not routinely published. We have obtained some additional figures through requests to the Department for Education, but it is clear that analysis of combinations of ethnicity and FSM eligibility are not consistently available online.

39. Some witnesses were keen for better information to be collected to support analysis by social class, beyond FSM eligibility.[46] Others were more wary of the practicality and reliability of collecting information on parental occupations or other class indicators. Dr Demie cautioned that:

> It is really important to gather information that can be gathered [...] I would really like parental occupation to be collected. Until that has really happened,

---

free school meals is the best indicator you have, which is very easy to use and can be widely used in schools.[47]

I really think social class is good to collect, but it is probably not practical to collect it, and free school meals probably remains the best indicator.[48]

Dr Jerrim argued that it should be possible to join up educational performance data with information held by other government departments:

[...] parental education, parental occupation and income would be ideal [...] you would be able to get this information cheaply if you could just link the NPD—the National Pupil Database—to their parents' tax records, or other national sources. It is cheap and it is quick; it should be done.[49]

We asked the Minister for Schools (David Laws MP) about the sharing of data between Departments—he told us that some sharing can be done on an ad hoc basis at the moment, but that to do it effectively legislation would be required. He added that it would be "very sensible" for a future Government to look at this issue.[50] There are obvious issues here relating to data privacy.

40. *Data relating to combinations of ethnicity and free school meals status is not always readily available in Government statistical releases. The Government should ensure that data relating to white FSM children is included in its statistical reports.*

41. *The Government should consider how data from a range of Departments can be combined in future to develop a more rounded indicator of a child's socio-economic status than FSM eligibility alone can provide for the purposes of targeting intervention.*

42. We also heard that there could be problems with transmission of existing information between institutions. The Association of Colleges told us that "Colleges do not routinely receive data from local authorities on school pupils who were in receipt of free school meals".[51] Matthew Coffey (Director of Learning and Skills, Ofsted) told us that he had written to the Minister, Matthew Hancock, about this issue, and Sir Michael Wilshaw commented that it should be schools be expected to deliver this information as there was currently a reliance on goodwill.[52] In response, the Minister noted that Colleges do hold deprivation-related data through their distribution of the bursary, but that further action could be taken to strengthen the transfer of data between schools and colleges.[53]

---

47   Q13 [Dr Demie]

48   Q14 [Dr Demie]

49   Q13 [Dr Jerrim]

50   Q320

51   Association of Colleges (WWC 24) para 3

52   Oral evidence taken on 12 February 2014, HC (2013-14) 1065, Q88 [Sir Michael Wilshaw]

53   Q322

43. *The Government should act to ensure that FSM data (and any future revised indicator) is made available to post-16 institutions to allow effective monitoring of the progress of this group of young people.*

Regional variation

44. The Department for Education's written evidence revealed a significant variation in the performance of white FSM pupils by local authority. Extreme examples included Peterborough, where the proportion of white FSM pupils reaching the key stage 4 benchmark was less than 13% in 2012, and Lambeth, where the equivalent figure was almost 50%.[54] Other notable geographical variations included:

- white FSM children perform unusually well in London, both in affluent areas such as Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster, and in poorer areas such as Lambeth, Hackney and Wandsworth. These areas also have the smallest gaps between white FSM pupils and other FSM pupils, and between white FSM and all other children;

- white FSM children perform poorly in a range of areas, including in cities (Nottingham), coastal areas (Isle of Wight, Southend-on-Sea) and rural areas (Herefordshire);

- there are a small number of areas where white FSM pupils outperform other FSM pupils at KS4, including Sefton, Gateshead and Wakefield, but in the overwhelming majority of cases the reverse is true—most noticeably in North Lincolnshire.[55]

45. Figure 5 shows how the proportion of FSM children achieving five good GCSEs (including English and mathematics) varies by ethnicity at a regional level. White FSM children are the lowest performing group in all regions other than the South West, where they perform slightly better than Black FSM pupils (although the Black FSM population is very small at 152 pupils at the end of key stage 4 in 2012/13).

---

54   Department for Education (WWC 28) Annex 1

55   Department for Education (WWC 28) Annex 1

Figure 5: Regional variation in the proportion of FSM children achieving the key stage 4 benchmark, by ethnicity (2012/13, revised data, England, not including pupils recently arrived from overseas)
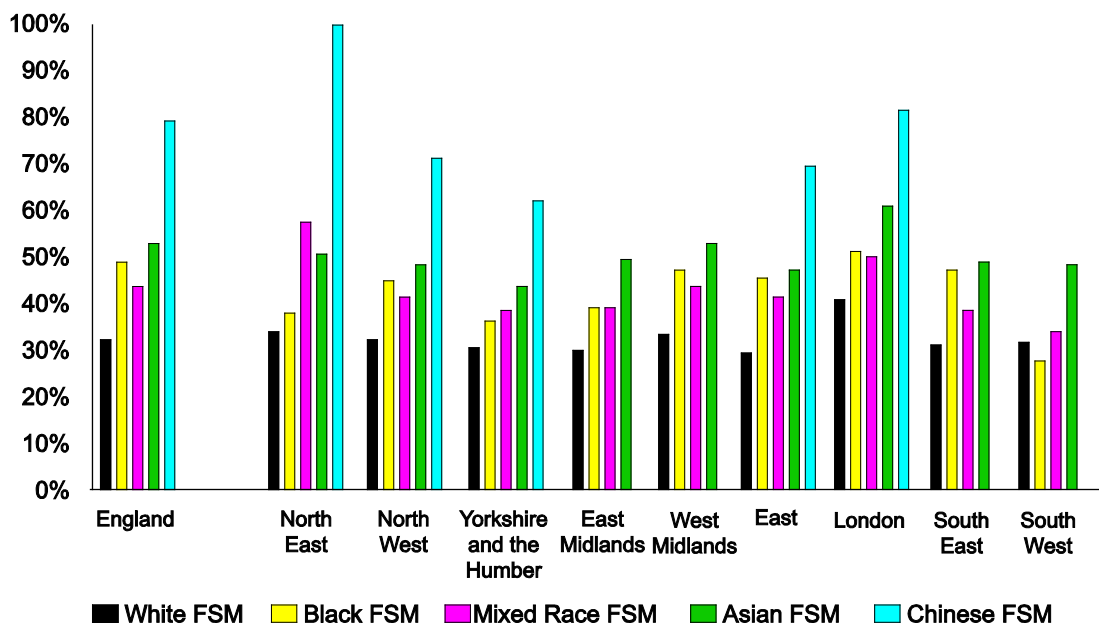
Source: Department for Education (WWC 42). Data relating to Chinese FSM students has been suppressed in some regions due to small populations.

Will school improvement alone close the gap?

46. Professor Strand told us that:

> Equity gaps are not the result of a small number of 'failing' schools which, if they can somehow be fixed, will remove the overall SES or ethnic achievement gaps.[56]

This view is supported by analysis in the IPPR report *A Long Division*, which noted that "Even if every school in the country was outstanding there would still be a substantial difference in performance between rich and poor children".[57] Ofsted data confirms that the FSM 'gap' exists in outstanding schools as well as inadequate schools.

---

56   Professor Steve Strands (WWC 4) para 14

57   Clifton, J. and Cook, C. *A Long Division: Closing the Gap in England's Secondary Schools*, Institute for Public Policy Research, September 2012, p 22

Figure 6: Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals attaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, by school overall effectiveness judgement
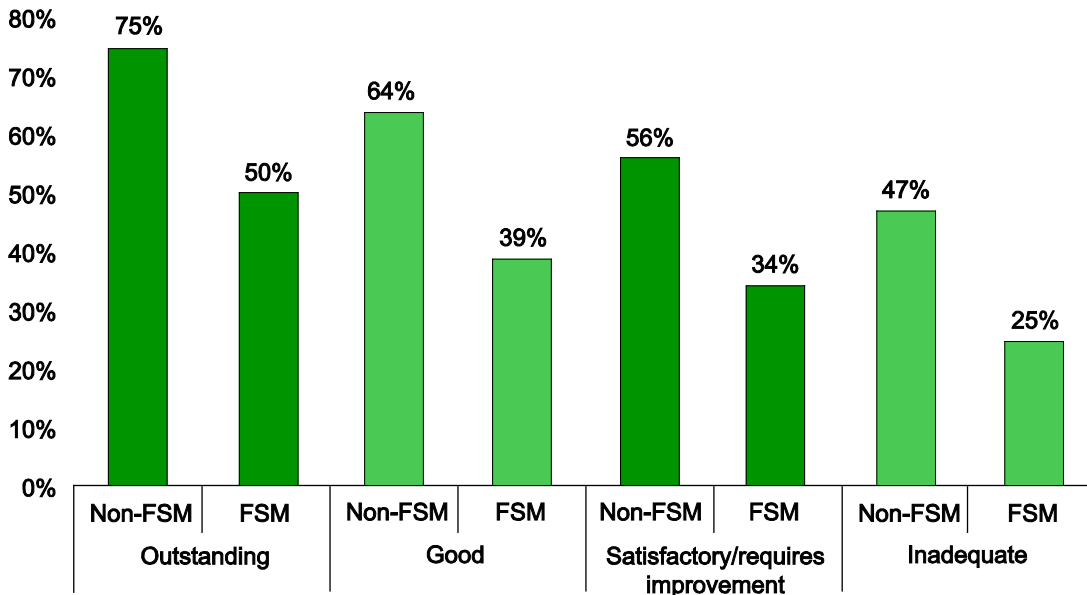
Source: Ofsted, *Unseen Children,* Figure 19 (based on open secondary schools with a published Section 5 inspection report at 31 December 2012)

47. Figure 6 shows that there is a significant difference between the performance of inadequate and outstanding schools for FSM children. **Twice the proportion of poor children attending an outstanding school will leave with five good GCSEs when compared with the lowest rated schools, whereas the proportion of non-FSM children achieving this benchmark in outstanding schools is only 1.5 times greater than in those rated as inadequate.** This reinforces the message from our 2012 report on great teachers that "raising the quality of teaching yet higher will have profound consequences for pupils' attainment and progress, and subsequently for their adult lives and the contributions they make to society".[58] A good school and good teaching can have a significantly positive effect on the educational attainment of FSM children, which underlines the central importance of raising school and leadership quality alongside closing the attainment gap.

---

58   Education Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2010–12, *Great teachers: attracting, training and retaining the best*, HC 1515-I, para 124

3 Factors that may contribute to white working class underachievement

48. We received evidence on a wide range of factors that may contribute to white working class underachievement. Some of these related to the home environment, while others were connected with in-school practices. A much broader third category included wider social policies and engagement with the community. This chapter gives an overview of what witnesses suggested were possible causes of, or contributors to, white working class underachievement.

Family and home factors

49. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) argued that home and family influences on underachievement were particularly significant because young people spend the majority of their lives outside of school.[59] Witnesses described factors within this category in terms of aspirations, expectations, access to social capital, parental engagement, time spent doing homework, use of tutors, and parenting skills. The Minister held similar views:

> Many of the problems with low attainment in school are due to factors outside the school gate: parental support, or lack of it; parental aspirations; poverty in the home environment; poor housing; and lack of experience of life [...].[60]

Aspirations and expectations

50. One of the more frequently discussed home factors was the role of aspirations, but there was disagreement on whether white working class children had low aspirations and whether this caused or explained low achievement.

51. The DfE quoted research that found that aspirations and expectations vary according to pupils' socio-economic backgrounds, with pupils from deprived backgrounds being less likely to hold high aspirations for their futures.[61] Professor Steve Strand echoed this, highlighting significant differences in educational aspirations according to socio-economic status, based on large-scale quantitative evidence.[62] He argued that the level of aspirations can be interpreted as a measure of engagement with schooling, and a reflection of how well other factors (such as the curriculum) meet the needs of these pupils.

---

59   Association of School and College Leaders (WWC 5) para 9

60   Q309

61   Department for Education (WWC 28) para 43, quoting Schoon and Parsons, 2002

62   Professor Steve Strand (WWC 4) para 9

52. Leicester City Council told us that "In parts of Leicester the white working class culture is characterised by low aspirations and negative attitudes towards education".[63] David Jones, a headteacher in Bradford, agreed that parental expectations were important and felt that the lack of expectation did not come from schools.[64] Vic Goddard, a secondary headteacher in Essex, argued that:

> Students spend 18% to 19% of their adolescence in schools. If you want to ask where the biggest influence can come on their aspirations and their expectations in life, that is the answer. They spend four times as long at home or outside of school as they do in school. From that point of view, where are you going to make the biggest impact quickest? It is great if you could tackle parenting quicker, but obviously that is not an easy fix, whereas throwing money at schools and making me responsible for it is.[65]

53. Conversely, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation felt that low aspirations were *not* a key cause of lower attainment among white British children from low income backgrounds, and suggested that aspirations were actually very high across all social groups.[66] The Foundation argued instead that the difference between parents and children from richer and poorer backgrounds was the strength of their belief that they would be able to achieve such goals.[67]

54. The Future Leaders Trust argued that "One of the solutions to improve the educational outcomes and attainment of white working class students is to raise their aspirations".[68] Others pointed out that even if low aspirations were found to exist, a correlation between this and low performance did not mean that *raising* aspirations would be sufficient; a 2012 report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded that interventions to raise aspirations had no effect on educational attainment.[69] Professor Stephen Gorard (Professor of Education and Public Policy, Durham University) described attitudes and aspirations as "a red herring":

> I do not think we have enough evidence that it cashes out into improvements in attainment […] What you have are high correlations […] It does not seem that raising aspiration in itself makes a difference. You need to raise competence in order to make an actual difference to attainment, and if you raise the competence then the attitudes go with it.[70]

Jenny North (Director of Policy and Strategy, Impetus—The Private Equity Foundation) agreed:

---

63   Leicester City Council, Learning Services (WWC 8) para 2

64   Q157 & 159

65   Q158

66   Joseph Rowntree Foundation (WWC 9) p 2

67   Joseph Rowntree Foundation (WWC 9) para 3.10

68   Future Leaders Trust (WWC 21) para 3

69   Todd, L. Et al (2012), *Can changing attitudes and aspirations impact on educational attainment?*

70   Qq96–97

We are all fascinated with the idea that there might be something to do with aspiration within the family background that leads to attainment, but when you look at the literature, while there is quite a lot of correlation between aspiration and attainment, they have tried to find causality and they just cannot.[71]

55. Sir Michael Wilshaw attributed the underachievement of poor white children to a "poverty of expectation", and in particular the low expectations of others:

Poverty of expectation bears harder on educational achievement than material poverty, hard though that can be. And these expectations start at home. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds very often have high ambitions, especially when they're young. But the odds against achieving them can worsen with age. All too often there comes a point at which expectations shrink. They don't see their elder siblings or friends going to university, so they think it's not for them. Or no-one in their household is in paid work, so they don't expect to get a job. But where the family is supportive and demanding then in my experience the child is much more likely to succeed [...] the job of schools is made so much easier, or so much harder, by the expectations that families have for their children. So as a society we have to create a culture of much higher expectations for young people, both in our homes and in our schools.[72]

56. A distinction can also be drawn between "aspirations" in a general sense and specifically *educational* aspirations. While witnesses were keen to emphasise that all young people had high aspirations, evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in Education (LSYPE) suggests that a 14 year-old's answers to "do you want to continue in Full Time Education after age 16?" are strongly associated with socio-economic status.[73] This does not necessarily mean that working class children have low aspirations, but they are significantly less likely to see schooling as instrumental to achieving them.

"Social capital" and advice and guidance

57. Several witnesses argued that a lack of "social capital" was more significant than a lack of aspiration. Professor Becky Francis told us that:

[...] there is a lot of evidence that working-class families have high aspirations. What they do not have is the information and the understanding as to how you might mobilise that aspiration effectively for outcomes for your children. Money makes a big difference here [...] but also understanding the rules of the game.[74]

---

71   Q57

72   Ofsted, "Unseen Children: HMCI speech 20 June 2013", 20 June 2013 (accessed 28 November 2013)

73   Professor Steve Strand (WWC 4) para 8–9

74   Q60

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's view was that "impact comes not from changing parents' attitudes or aspirations, but rather from giving parents better information and access to appropriate support and advice".[75] Dr Ruth McLellan (Southampton Solent University) drew on information from her doctoral thesis on white working class boys to argue that "disadvantaged families had high aspirations, however their immediate social networks had little educational experience. This directly impacted on the amount of educational social capital resource available within the network to help mobilise aspirations, which in turn raised motivation for attainment".[76]

Parental engagement and family learning

58. ASCL told us that parental engagement was a particular issue for white working class children, and that "Schools report that white working class families are often the hardest to draw into the life of the school and to engage with their children's learning".[77] Conversely, NASUWT told us that "Evidence challenges the assumption that working class families do not value education and are reluctant to engage in their child's education".[78]

59. A NIACE report on Family Learning[79] quoted research showing that parental involvement in school was "more than four times as important as socio-economic class in influencing the academic performance of young people aged 16".[80] In a similar vein, the Minister drew on the Department for Children Schools and Families' 2010 report on identifying components of attainment gaps[81] to argue that parental engagement was the third most important factor in educational underachievement:

> We know, from this work that was done in 2010, that if you take the top factors that explain the differences in attainment, the first couple are fairly predictable. They are income and material deprivation and SEN status. I do not think those would really surprise anybody. Then, behind that, we have parental engagement as the third factor, and parental employment status will obviously link to income issues but not completely. There is parental background, and we have, lower down the ranking, pupil aspirations. That appears to suggest that getting parents onside and getting parents to be very aspirational are factors that seem to be important for the ethnic community.[82]

---

75   Joseph Rowntree Foundation (WWC 9) para 4.5

76   Ruth McLellan (WWC 12) para 3.5.1

77   Association of School and College Leaders (WWC 5) para 12

78   NASUWT (WWC 26) p 1

79   NIACE, *Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales* (October 2013)

80   NIACE, *Family Learning Works*, quoting Nunn, A. et al. (2007) *Factors influencing social mobility*, Research Report No. 450, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

81   Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Identifying Components of Attainment Gaps* (March 2010), Research Report DCSF-RR217

82   Q314

Parenting skills and language in the home

60. The Sutton Trust recently reported that 40% of children miss out on "the parenting needed to succeed in life", and that "securely attached children are more resilient to poverty, family instability, parental stress and depression. Boys growing up in poverty are two and a half times less likely to display behaviour problems at school if they formed secure attachments with parents in their early years".[83]

61. In its 2013 state of the nation report, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission noted that there was currently a lack of focus on parenting, and was concerned that "not enough is being done to help parents to parent".[84]

62. Loic Menzies also pointed to research into the effect of language used in the home:

> We know, for example, the huge differences in the amount of language that is used by parents of children in low socio-economic groups, and the language they use in higher socio-economic groups. We know the difference in the type of language they are using. We know that by shifting that, we can have a big impact on attainment.[85]

Owen Jones (Author, *Chavs*) described this as a difference in "cultural capital": "A middle class child will be exposed to broader vocabulary from the earliest age, will be surrounded by books, and is more likely to be read to by parents".[86] David Jones, a primary school headteacher in Bradford, told us about his school's "Time to talk" initiative, which involved providing activities for children and parents to do together as a way to tackle this difference in cultural capital:

> The important thing is that you sit face-to-face with your children and do these things, and that you speak with them. We found that that engaged the parents and that they then came to the phonics classes. It was a very small step, but a practical approach, and we found that it paid some dividends.[87]

63. ***The evidence we heard related to how the amount of language and breadth of vocabulary used in the home in the early years varies by socio-economic status. It is not clear whether this is a particular issue in white working class homes as opposed to other ethnic groups. We believe that this issue is critical. Further research in this area is needed, given the importance of oracy to child development.***

64. We asked the Minister whether there was scope for including parenting skills in the national curriculum, particularly given that some young people may have children very soon after leaving school. The Minister dismissed this idea:

---

83   "40% of Children Miss Out On The Parenting Needed To Succeed In Life—Sutton Trust", The Sutton Trust, 21 March 2014

84   Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*, October 2013, p 19

85   Q77

86   Q247

87   Q167

Barely a day passes at the DfE without somebody asking us to add a new compulsory subject to the curriculum [...] schools should accept that they have a wider responsibility than the core academic curriculum. The main policy challenge is to get all young people with the right qualifications so that they do not end up just having children as a better alternative to going into a dead-end job or having no job at all.[88]

School factors

Can schools make a difference?

65. A report for the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2012 explored the role that schools can play in tackling the general link between educational achievement and family income, and noted that academic studies generally had found that "about 20 per cent of variability in a pupil's achievement is attributable to school-level factors, with around 80 per cent attributable to pupil-level factors".[89] Similarly, ASCL felt that the problem was "not of schools' making [...] they cannot solve it by themselves",[90] and Ofsted told us that "[…] factors beyond the school gates and in the communities where pupils live can have a detrimental impact on their achievement. Schools can do much to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils but only so much".[91] On the other hand, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation struck a more optimistic note from a similar figure: "Schools do make a difference to outcomes. While students' social and economic circumstances are the most important factors explaining their educational results, we find that about 14% of the incidence of low achievement is attributable to school quality".[92] We recognise the challenges caused by social problems but we saw in Figure 6 how dramatic the impact of schools can be on economically disadvantaged pupils.[93]

Curriculum relevance

66. Several submissions suggested that the perceived relevance of the curriculum was a factor in disengagement with schooling by white working class children. Professor Diane Reay told us that the Government should:

Develop ways of offering the white working classes subjects they want to learn, introducing a greater degree of choice and voluntarism into the curriculum so that the white working classes no longer feel schools offer them nothing they can see as relevant to their lives.[94]

---

88   Qq385–387

89   Clifton, J. and Cook, C. *A Long Division: Closing the Gap in England's Secondary Schools*, Institute for Public Policy Research, September 2012, p 4

90   Association of School and College Leaders (WWC 5) para 3

91   Ofsted (WWC 37) p 1

92   Cassen, R. and Kingdon, G., *Tackling Low Educational Achievement*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007), pp xi-xii

93   See paragraph 47.

94   Professor Diane Reay (WWC 2) para 18

In oral evidence Dr Chris Wood (Her Majesty's Inspector) explained that:

> The most successful schools make sure that the curriculum is really well-suited to those individuals. What does that mean in practice? What it means in practice is it is built around their needs and their interests, but it is underpinned by a really good grounding in literacy and numeracy, particularly in terms of early reading.[95]

Professor Becky Francis echoed this by calling for "flex" within a school's curriculum so that students could "pursue subjects for which they have a passion".[96] In contrast, Dr Kevan Collins (Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation) argued that: "pedagogy trumps curriculum every time. It is very clear that the way you teach and how you teach is always more powerful than just changing the curriculum".[97]

Absences and exclusions

67. The DfE told us that both deprivation and white ethnicity were associated with higher rates of absence from school, and with higher rates of fixed period exclusions.[98] While it is logical that absence from school can have a negative effect on educational outcomes, it is also possible that low achievement itself can fuel disengagement and increase absences. Table 7 shows that white British FSM children are absent far more often than Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi FSM children, but have a similar absence rate to mixed white and black Caribbean FSM children. Subgroups within the white category have the highest absence rates overall. In contrast, white British children who are not eligible for free school meals have a similar absence rate to other non-FSM children (other than the smaller white subgroups). Overall, the absence rate has fallen consistently since 2007/08.[99]

---

95   Q105

96   Professor Becky Francis (WWC 30) para 15

97   Q 135 [Dr Collins]

98   Department for Education (WWC 28) paras 19–20

99   Department for Education, *Pupil absence in schools in England, including pupil characteristics*, SFR 10/2013, May 2013

Table 7: Absence rates (proportion of sessions missed) by ethnicity and FSM eligibility, 2012–2013 (state funded primary, secondary and special schools, England)

	FSM eligible		Non-FSM	
	Total absence (% of session)	Unauthorised absence (% of session)	Total absence (% of session)	Unauthorised absence (% of session)
White	**8.4**	**2.6**	**4.8**	**0.7**
White British	8.4	2.6	4.7	0.7
Irish	10.7	4.0	4.9	0.7
Traveller of Irish heritage	19.7	8.2	23.1	6.7
Gypsy/ Roma	15.2	7.1	14.6	5.6
Any other white background	7.3	2.5	5.6	1.3
Mixed	**7.7**	**2.5**	**4.7**	**0.9**
White and Black Caribbean	8.3	2.9	5.1	1.1
White and Black African	6.7	2.1	4.4	0.8
White and Asian	7.6	2.4	4.5	0.7
Any other mixed background	7.4	2.3	4.7	0.8
Asian	**5.8**	**1.6**	**4.6**	**0.9**
Indian	5.4	1.2	4.1	0.6
Pakistani	6.1	1.7	5.0	1.1
Bangladeshi	5.5	1.4	4.9	1.0
Any other Asian background	5.5	1.5	4.2	0.8
Black	**4.6**	**1.3**	**3.3**	**0.7**
Black Caribbean	6.1	2.0	4.1	1.0
Black African	3.9	1.0	2.8	0.6
Any other Black background	5.4	1.6	3.7	0.8
Chinese	**3.5**	**0.8**	**3.0**	**0.4**
Any other ethnic group	5.5	1.7	4.8	1.2

Source: Department for Education ([WWC 40](#))

68. *We welcome the reduction of the school absence rate in recent years. The Government must continue to focus on encouraging reduced absence from school.*

69. Table 8 shows that the exclusions picture is more complicated. While white British children eligible for free school meals have a much higher rate of fixed and permanent exclusions to similarly economically deprived Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children, black Caribbean and mixed white and black Caribbean children have a higher rate still.

Table 8: Rates of fixed period and permanent exclusions, 2011-12

	FSM eligible		Non-FSM	
	Fixed period exclusions (% of population)	Permanent exclusions (% of population)	Fixed period exclusions (% of population)	Permanent exclusions (% of population)
White	**5.61**	**0.23**	**1.86**	**0.05**
White British	5.66	0.23	1.87	0.05
Irish	6.68	0.36	2.09	0.06
Traveller of Irish heritage	9.51	0.25	5.31	0.69
Gypsy/ Roma	9.71	0.47	5.45	0.24
Any other white background	3.64	0.15	1.47	0.04
Mixed	**5.65**	**0.26**	**2.44**	**0.08**
White and Black Caribbean	7.49	0.38	4.06	0.15
White and Black African	4.25	0.16	2.37	0.08
White and Asian	3.76	0.12	1.35	0.04
Any other mixed background	4.95	0.22	1.95	0.06
Asian	**2.57**	**0.08**	**1.15**	**0.02**
Indian	1.74	0.04	0.65	0.01
Pakistani	2.93	0.09	1.59	0.04
Bangladeshi	2.25	0.07	1.26	0.03
Any other Asian background	2.65	0.07	0.97	0.02
Black	**4.69**	**0.16**	**3.31**	**0.10**
Black Caribbean	6.74	0.35	4.79	0.18
Black African	3.88	0.09	2.61	0.06
Any other Black background	4.96	0.13	3.36	0.11
Chinese	**0.42**	**x**	**0.36**	**x**
Any other ethnic group	3.15	0.10	1.55	0.04

Source: Department for Education (WWC 41)

Cultural clashes and behaviour

70. A number of submissions noted that educational experience is not only linked to the formal curriculum but also to the social interactions that pupils engage in within the school. Based on a two-year research project on working class families in Bermondsey, South London, Gillian Evans's book *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain* highlights the differences in culture which working class pupils often encounter between their home, the street, and their schools.[100] She argues that white working class boys are often pressured to uphold a stereotypical tough 'street' reputation which is linked to concepts of masculinity, and which competes with a positive attitude towards schooling.

71. Gillian Evans describes how this leads to the challenge of a "chaotic school in which a minority of disruptive boys dominate proceedings, a high-adrenaline environment where both children and staff have to cope constantly with the threat of disruption, intimidation and violence".[101] On peer behaviour, she notes that "the unobtrusive children, the ones who behave well but struggle to learn, continue to quietly demonstrate the fallacy that good behaviour means effective learning. Their lack of progress highlights the cost to the whole

---

100 Evans, G., *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan 2006

101 Evans, G., *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan 2006, p 96

class of the teachers' continuous focus on trying to manage the behaviour of disruptive boys".[102]

72. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation referred to a "middle-class ethos" in schools, to which working class children and their parents do not relate.[103] Professor Diane Reay told us that an education system that "accords positive value and meaning to working-classness" was needed, "instead of trying to make [everyone] middle class".[104] Professor Denis Mongon echoed this sentiment: "If you are working class and successful, you have got to abandon your mates and your community, because our system requires you to move on and be different. It is a big cultural ask for some youngsters at that very tense teenage point".[105]

Wider social issues and other factors

Working class engagement with the "marketization" of education

73. The Government has made efforts recently to encourage parents to choose a school for their child based on data published by the Department for Education. A December 2013 report for the Sutton Trust found that although less than half of parents in each social group had made use of school attainment data in choosing schools for their children, it was disproportionately middle class parents who did so.[106] The report notes that "the assumption underpinning 'parental choice' is that parents are all equally informed and engaged in active choice-making", but Professor Francis explained that some working class parents behaved in ways that were more associated with the middle classes.[107] The Minister told us that he wanted to encourage working class parents to be more involved in school choice:

> Sometimes people do complain about sharp-elbowed parents and people who seek to invest a huge amount of money to give their young people opportunities in life, but we should not complain about any parent doing those things, whether they are in the state sector or the private sector. To do all you can to help your children succeed in life is exactly what we want everybody to be doing. I am afraid that we cannot cap any of those opportunities. What we need to do is extend them to young people who are not getting them at the moment.[108]

---

102 Evans, G., *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan 2006, p 92

103 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (WWC 9) para 4.5

104 Professor Diane Reay (WWC 2) para 15

105 Q257

106 Francis, B. And Hutchings, M., *Parent Power? Using money and information to boost children's chances of educational success*, The Sutton Trust, December 2013

107 Q82

108 Q328

The "immigrant paradigm"

74. A suggestion from some witnesses was that those who are new to a country are more willing to work hard or more likely to view education as a route out of poverty. Conversely, immigrants may also have less access to social capital or may be less familiar with the education system. The Minister referred to the "immigrant paradigm"[109] in the following terms:

> We have some evidence that in areas like London there are some higher aspirations that have an attainment impact. Sometimes that seems to be related to immigrant groups, who may be more aspirational by the nature that they have made big efforts to get where they are.[110]

75. The OECD's PISA studies include information on immigration status and socio-economic status, but not ethnicity. In this context, children are classified as immigrants if they or their parents were born outside the country.[111] The OECD's own analysis of PISA 2009 data gives the following messages:

> Immigrant students who share a common country of origin, and therefore many cultural similarities, perform very differently across school systems [...] The difference in performance between immigrant students and non-immigrant students of similar socio-economic status is smaller in school systems with large immigrant populations and where immigrant students are as diverse in socio-economic status as other students.[112]

Written evidence from Dr John Jerrim notes no statistically significant differences in maths test scores between "native" and "immigrant" students in the UK, irrespective of socio-economic status.[113] This is consistent across the ten countries considered in his evidence; only in Australia do disadvantaged immigrant boys outperform disadvantaged native boys. Other studies report higher achievement by second-generation immigrants after control for socio-economic status and country of origin.[114]

Changing labour markets and the effect on engagement

76. The NUT's 2009 report *Opening Locked Doors—Educational Achievement and White Working Class Young People* suggested that changing labour markets might offer an explanation for disengagement in education: "Thirty years ago a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old working class young person could walk out of school and into a decent working class

---

109 Kao, G., & Thompson, J.S. (2003). Racial and ethnic stratification in educational achievement and attainment. *Annual review of Sociology*, 29(1), pp 417-442

110 Q324

111 Institute of Education (WWC 32) p 1

112 OECD, *PISA in Focus (no. 33) 2013/10*, October 2013

113 Institute of Education (WWC 32) p 3

114 Levels, M., & Dronkers, J. (2008). Educational performance of native and immigrant children from various countries of origin. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 31, pp 1404-1425

job. That is no longer the case".[115] David Jones, a primary school headteacher from Bradford, described for us how underachievement in education is now more damaging for young people as a result of this change in labour opportunities over time:

> The impact of educational failure [in the past] was probably that you were condemned to a life of mass employment in whatever regional industry there was. Within that, you could be a fine, upstanding citizen and probably enjoy some of the cultural benefits of being in a brass band, working in textiles and all the other positive things that that working class life brought with it. Now, sometimes, it is to be condemned to the forgotten pile, and to have a life that has multiple deprivation and turbulence. Perhaps that is why we concentrate on it.[116]

Owen Jones described this phenomenon as the "hourglass" shape of the economy:

> […] we have the growth in middle-class professional jobs at the top and then low-paid, often very insecure service-sector jobs at the bottom. That means, if you are a school leaver where you could have got, as a boy, an apprenticeship as a route, therefore, to a skilled job, that does not exist so much. There is a growing need to academically prosper.[117]

Professor Alison Wolf (Sir Roy Griffiths Professor of Public Sector Management, King's College London) noted the regional dimension of this issue:

> We do need to recognise that a lot of the low achievement that is concentrated among white working class children is also related to where they live and, in many cases, to the fact that there are large parts of this country […] where you have got an economy that is still bearing the scars of the end of manufacturing and industrial employment […] a lot of the careers and jobs that were the bedrock of white working class family life for many decades and generations have vanished and have not been well replaced.[118]

Genetics

77. We also explored the role of genetics in shaping educational outcomes. Professor Robert Plomin (Professor of Behavioural Genetics, Kings College London) told us that 50% of the *variation* in children's individual educational achievement were the result of genetic factors, but that this finding could be misinterpreted as suggesting that half of a child's *ability* was a result of their genes.[119] Professor Plomin was also careful not to suggest that any policy conclusions necessarily followed from this result, but that "one thing that would seem to follow from recognising and respecting genetic differences between children is that

---

115 National Union of Teachers, *Opening Locked Doors: Educational Achievement and White Working Class Young People*, 2009, para 45

116 Q164

117 Q246

118 Q185

119 Q66

you do not just blame teachers, and you do not just blame parents. Kids are different; they are different from birth".[120]

78. While genetics may account for a substantial proportion of the differences in attainment between children in the population overall, this does not in itself mean that genetics is an explanation for the differences between different social classes; the effect will apply *within* each subgroup. Nevertheless, Professor Plomin described the role of genetics as "the elephant in the classroom", and told us that "When the chips come out—they are called chips, which can identify people's DNA differences—it is really going to change things fast".[121] The Minister was more sceptical:

> […] we need to do a bit more research to establish whether the professor is right or not. We do not, at the moment, have any solid international database, let alone a DfE database, that would allow us to establish whether he is correct […] In any case, I am not sure what policy implications it would have for us. We can see from places such as inner London the massive impact on young people you can make if you get the school system right. Our focus is on trying to achieve similar big improvements in attainment and reductions in the gap that we have. We would want to do that whatever genetic characteristics particular individuals might have, and we certainly would not want that to be an excuse for accepting low levels of attainment.[122]

We accept that, like social disadvantage, genetics has a role to play in educational outcomes although it is not clear to what extent. This should not deflect attention from the difference a school can make.

---

120 Q73

121 Q70 [Professor Plomin]

122 Q302

4   Addressing the problem

Accountability

79. The headline accountability measure for schools is currently the proportion of children achieving a benchmark at key stage 2 or key stage 4.[123] We have argued previously that this encourages schools to focus on pupils at the borderline of this threshold—the C/D candidates at GCSE level—rather than seek to improve the performance of all pupils.[124] From late 2016, the "Progress 8" measure will be introduced as the floor standard, "measuring students' progress measured across eight subjects: English; mathematics; three other English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects, or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic, or vocational qualification".[125] We welcome this change, and believe that it will be beneficial to all pupils—including white working class children.

80. Ofsted told us that "It is now harder for schools to be judged good or outstanding where the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is below that of other pupils".[126] This is also to be welcomed.

"Closing the gap"

The Pupil Premium

81. The pupil premium is additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England "to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers".[127] Introduced in 2011, the funding is available to both mainstream and non-mainstream schools, such as special schools and pupil referral units. Since 2012 it has been paid to schools according to the number of pupils who have:

- registered as eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years ('Ever-6 FSM')

- been in care for 6 months or longer[128]

In the 2013/14 financial year, schools receive £953 for each eligible primary-aged pupil and £900 for each eligible secondary-aged pupil. "Ever-6 FSM" covers 1.83 million pupils.[129] In

---

123 Department for Education, *Progress 8 factsheet*

124 Education Committee, First Report of Session 2012–13, The administration of examinations for 15–19 year olds in England, HC 141, para 192

125 Department for Education, *Progress 8 factsheet*

126 Ofsted (WWC 23) p 1

127 Department for Education, "Pupil Premium: information for schools", 22 January 2014 (accessed on 12 February 2014)

128 Department for Education, "Pupil Premium: information for schools", 22 January 2014 (accessed on 12 February 2014)

129 Q332

addition, the Government has recently announced a prize fund of £4m to be awarded to schools that best improve the performance of their disadvantaged pupils.[130]

82. The question of how well the pupil premium is performing for disadvantaged children was explored by the think tank Demos, which found that in 72 out of 152 local authorities in England the free school meals attainment gap at GCSE level widened in 2012/13, and that in 66 areas the gap was wider than when the pupil premium was introduced.[131] In a letter to the *Guardian*, Professor Becky Francis, Dr John Dunford and Dr Kevan Collins described a brighter picture at primary level, with the gap closing by 3 percentage points at Key Stage 2 between 2011 and 2012.[132] We asked the Minister for his views on the evidence for the impact of the pupil premium. He told us:

> It is only two years into the pupil premium, so we are talking about the results of young people who have spent most of their time in a school system that has not had this money. We will not really know how successful it has been until two, three, four, or five years down the line.[133]

83. The Minister also told us that the pupil premium would be the appropriate source of funding for parental engagement activity:

> If schools decide that getting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds properly engaged is a big priority—getting parental engagement, getting children to get in through the school gate each day and attend, and having them motivated in the right way—they ought to think about using their pupil premium for that.[134]

> […] the pupil premium is exactly the kind of thing that could be used by schools, particularly where there is a large disengagement problem—if they think there is evidence this works—to employ somebody who could spend quite a lot of their time engaging with families, sorting out problems, making sure parents are supportive of the school and getting children into school each day and on time. As you know, many of the best schools do this already.[135]

84. Nevertheless, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission suggests that "nearly two-thirds of students not getting English and maths GCSE at grades A*-C are ineligible

130 "Schools best at helping disadvantaged pupils to share £4 million prize fund", Department for Education, 1 May 2014

131 "A tale of two classrooms: London results skew national picture as educational inequality on the rise", Demos, January 2014

132 "Positive signs on the Pupil Premium effect", *The Guardian*, 3 February 2014

133 Q329

134 Q365

135 Q327

for the pupil premium […] Schools should have some flexibility to use the pupil premium for disadvantaged students and for low attainers".[136]

85. **We welcome the introduction of the pupil premium and the recent announcement of its extension to early years. The Government should continue to monitor the impact of this policy.**

86. Ofsted produced a report in February 2013 on the way in which the pupil premium was being used by schools, based on visits to 68 primary and secondary schools.[137]

87. *We welcome Ofsted's 2013 report on the use of the pupil premium and recommend that a similar report be produced annually to highlight how effective schools are in using this money, focusing on the impact and highlighting case studies of schools where the greatest progress is being achieved.*

Other disadvantage funding

88. The Minister emphasised that in excess of £6 billion was being spent on deprivation funding in schools, only £2.5 billion of which was the pupil premium. The other funding, distributed by local authorities, was based on IDACI measures of deprivation and low prior attainment, and thus included children who were not eligible for free school meals or the pupil premium but were still underachieving.[138] The Minister argued that the apparent cliff-edge of eligibility for the pupil premium was softened by the use of these measures,[139] but he was willing to consider whether other methods should be used to target money in the future:

> It would be a brave Minister who would say that they could be confident that it would be perfect. So one of the challenges as we go into the next Parliament [...] should be to look at the way we are funding disadvantage.[140]

89. We were particularly interested to learn during our visit to the Netherlands, as part of our Sure Start inquiry, that the level of parental qualifications was used as a means of targeting additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. The Minister told us that he was "perfectly open and perfectly interested in commissioning work on whether there are other characteristics of pupils [that should be used to target disadvantage funding] […] We have, so far, distributed money in the most rational way open to us based on the evidence. It would be useful to go on looking at that evidence and trying to improve the system".[141]

---

136 Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*, October 2013, p22

137 Ofsted, *The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement*, February 2013

138 Q316

139 Q317

140 Q317

141 Q333

90. *We welcome the Minister's willingness to investigate whether other measures of disadvantage may be more appropriate for allocating disadvantage funding and tracking the performance of disadvantaged groups. The Government should move quickly to do this.*

The EEF Toolkit

91. Joint written evidence from the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) highlighted the 'EEF toolkit'[142] as a way of schools assessing the effectiveness of interventions. The toolkit is a synthesis of over 8,000 research studies which identifies high-impact techniques such as improving the quality of feedback to pupils and the use of collaborative learning to raise attainment.[143] The Toolkit currently covers 33 topics, each summarised in terms of their average impact on attainment, the strength of the evidence supporting them and their cost. According to the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER), 36% of school leaders say that their school uses the toolkit to help decide how to use pupil premium funding, with 67% using either the toolkit or some other kind of research evidence.[144]

92. **We see the EEF Toolkit as a positive development which will help schools to make informed decisions about how to make best use of pupil premium funding. This will be particularly important to support the roll-out of the pupil premium to early years settings.**

Tackling regional variation

A national strategy versus area-based responses

93. Despite the existence in the past of a range of targeted strategies for tackling ethnic minority underachievement, relatively few of our witnesses called for a specific national strategy for addressing white working class underachievement. The Minister argued that:

> Circumstances differ markedly from place to place, and depend upon the social mix at the particular school or college. The situation for a white working class pupil in a school with predominantly middle class pupils presents different challenges from that of working class pupils [...] It is important that schools are able to decide at their local level what approaches to take, tailoring them to their particular environment and priorities.[145]

Teach First supported this view: "[...] White working class children are not a homogenous group. The challenges they face vary greatly and are often driven by geographical and economic factors, rather than ethnicity".[146] Buckinghamshire County Council suggested

---

142 http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/

143 Sutton Trust-EEF (WWC 11) para 13

144 Sutton Trust-EEF (WWC 11) para 13

145 Association of School and College Leaders (WWC 5) para 15

146 Teach First (WWC 10) para 7

that "The impact of relative deprivation by comparison with the community you live with is distinct from being a member of a community where a larger number are from a similar social and economic context".[147] The Minister told us that he was "[…] not particularly in favour of devising all sorts of different strategies for different ethnic groups", but that

> […] we do need to learn the lessons of why it is that these ethnic groups, both in and outside London, appear to have better levels of attainment for the same level of deprivation, because that might help us to understand what we need to do for white children to improve their attainment beyond the things that we know work for all children.[148]

Regional programmes

94. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission noted that the performance of poor white pupils in London was much better than in other parts of the country, and that "London is proving that deprivation need not be destiny":[149]

> Children are far more likely to do well in London schools than elsewhere in England. That is particularly the case for the most disadvantaged pupils [...] Although some commentators have suggested that London's performance is driven by the high attainment of particular ethnic groups concentrated in the capital, the effect is still observed when looking at the attainment of white pupils alone.[150]

95. Some witnesses attributed the recent improvement in the performance of children in London to the "London Challenge". This programme was established in 2003 to tackle underperformance in London secondary schools. Primary schools were included in 2008. Ofsted reported on the scheme in 2010, noting that secondary schools in London had improved at a faster rate than the rest of the country in terms of examination results.[151] The model was extended in 2008 to The City Challenge, which included programmes in Manchester and the Black Country.[152] The more generalised 'National Challenge' programme was also introduced by the then Government in 2008 to all English secondary schools whose standards were below the floor target.[153]

96. Ofsted noted that the eight-year time span for the London Challenge was important: "It had sufficient time to make a real impact. It is crucial that any future area-based strategies are not seen as quick fix solutions to complex problems. Along with high levels of

---

147 Buckinghamshire County Council (WWC 18) para 2.5i

148 Q313

149 Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*, October 2013, p176

150 Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*, October 2013, pp175-176

151 Ofsted, "The London Challenge", accessed 20 February 2014

152 Department for Education, *Evaluation of the City Challenge Programme*, 2012

153 The National Archives, Department for Education and Skills website snapshot 1 January 2007, "The London Challenge"

accountability, such approaches must be given time to implement change and bring about sustainable improvements".[154] Total funding for the City Challenge was approximately £160m: £28m for the Black Country, £50m for Manchester and £80m for London.[155] Professor Gorard emphasised the importance of suitable funding for any such approach: "The London Challenge was set up in an era of relative economic prosperity and was reasonably well-funded. In addition to any activities or changes, schools got extra money. It is not reasonable to expect other and poorer parts of England, such as the North East, to achieve the same without the same funding".[156]

97. Ofsted noted in *Unseen Children* that "area-based initiatives are often successful in stimulating local activity and are viewed positively by teachers and parents. However, it is less clear whether they offer good value for money or are accessed fully by the most disadvantaged pupils".[157] The report notes that the London Challenge is a notable exception to this.

98. We heard some evidence which was more sceptical about whether the improvements in London's performance should be attributed to the London Challenge. Professor Gorard told us that the London Challenge was "one possible explanation", but that

> The relative growth of the level 2 indicator (5+ GCSEs including English and maths) in London does not really take off until 2007 and later […] This is confounded with a change in the way this indicator was measured from 2005 onwards, the addition of English and maths to the official metric, and the economic downturn which could have influenced many other factors including who did or did not attend fee-paying schools […] The Challenge took place, unavoidably, in an era of many other interventions for London (including an overlap with preparation for the 2012 Olympics) […][158]

99. **The improvements in London's educational performance suggest that the problem of white working class underachievement in education can be tackled. In determining future policy in this area the Government must carefully assess what positive impact the London Challenge may have had and what its key features were.**

Sub-regional challenges

100. Sir Michael Wilshaw has recommended the development of sub-regional "challenges", aimed at raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils,[159] and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission has also recommended this approach.[160] Ofsted explains that

---

154 Ofsted (WWC 37) p 3

155 Department for Education, *Evaluation of the City Challenge Programme* (June 2012) DFE-RR215

156 Professor Stephen Gorard (WWC 35) p 3

157 Ofsted, *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on* (June 2013), p62

158 Professor Stephen Gorard (WWC 35) p 3

159 Ofsted, *"Unseen Children: HMCI speech 20 June 2013"*, 20 June 2013 (accessed 28 November 2013)

160 Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*, (October 2013) chap 6, para 59

"The potential strength of such an approach would lie in the fact that it would allow different areas to set up coherent and well-focused strategies for improvement that take into account the specific needs of a particular locality".[161] We asked the Minister for his views:

> Our attitude to sub-regional challenges is this: we are very supportive of them as a way of getting schools to work together and challenging underperformance. We are very pleased to see that a lot of regions and metropolitan areas are establishing these themselves. However, both the Secretary of State and I are nervous about centrally determined, top-down initiatives that would single out five, 10 or 15 areas of the country and say, "These are the ones that merit this type of investment and other areas do not". […] You run the risk of having borders that do not make any sense in reality. […] We need to learn the lessons of things like London Challenge and some of the other sub-regional challenges, and then we need to build those into a national system.[162]

101. We agree with the Minister that sub-regional challenges risk prioritising one area over another, but would reiterate the importance of school collaboration and cooperation, and the need to encourage this on a local basis.

Regional funding

102. Sir Michael Wilshaw has drawn attention to the fact that the distribution of underachievement has shifted away from big cities and is now most concentrated in "deprived coastal towns and rural, less populous regions of the country".[163] This makes it all the more important that the school funding formula distributes money fairly according to need, and it is disappointing that the Government has not fulfilled its promise of introducing a new national funding formula. The allocation of an additional £350m in 2015 to 2016 for the least fairly funded areas provides a welcome downpayment, but the problem has not been fully addressed.[164] We recognise the political difficulties of redistribution, but the case for reform is overwhelming and the Government must act further. In the words of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Elizabeth Truss MP), the Government must "ensure that a future national funding formula properly reflects the costs, such as attracting and retaining high-quality staff in rural areas".[165]

103. *Given the changing distribution of educational underachievement across the country, the Government must develop a new funding formula for schools which better matches allocation with need.*

---

161 Ofsted (WWC 37) p 3

162 Q383

163 "Press release: Ofsted: Too many of England's poorest children continue to be let down by the education system", Ofsted (20 June 2013)

164 "Fairer schools funding 2015 to 2016", Department for Education (accessed 1 May 2014)

165 HC Deb, 29 April 2014, col 199WH

Best practice in schools

Ofsted's 2008 good practice report–white boys from low income backgrounds

104. While Ofsted noted that there was a limit to the effect that schools alone can have, its 2008 thematic report identified the following examples of good practice in tackling the underachievement of white boys from low income backgrounds, based on a survey of 20 schools in England:[166]

- Support to develop boys' organisation skills and instill the importance of perseverance; any anti-school subculture 'left at the gates'

- Rigorous monitoring systems that track individual pupils' performance against expectations; realistic but challenging targets; tailored flexible intervention programmes and frequent review of performance against targets

- A curriculum that is tightly structured around individual needs and linked to support programmes that seek to raise aspirations

- Creative and flexible strategies to engage parents and carers, make them feel valued, enable them to give greater support to their boys' education and help them make informed decisions about the future

- Strong partnership with a wide range of agencies to provide social, emotional, educational and practical support for boys and their families in order to raise their aspirations.

105. *We welcome Ofsted's recent focus on the issue of economically deprived white children underachieving in education, and its 2008 report on good practice in this area. We recommend that this continues to be a focus for Ofsted, and that an updated good practice report is produced.*

Providing space to complete homework

106. Data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in Education[167] (LSYPE) includes information on the number of evenings per week young people spend completing homework. Analysis by Professor Steve Strand shows that white British students from low SES homes made the least progress over the course of secondary school, and that the most significant factors in explaining this were the frequency with which young people completed homework, their "academic self-concept" (how good they felt they were at school work), their attendance at school (see paragraph 67), and their educational aspirations (whether they aspired to continue in full-time education after age 16).[168] White

166 Ofsted, *White boys from low income backgrounds: good practice in schools* (July 2008)

167 See Chapter 2.

168 Strand, S., "Ethnicity, gender, social class and achievement gaps at age 16: intersectionality and 'getting it' for the white working class", *Research Papers in Education*, Vol 29 Issue 2, 2014

British low SES students scored lowest on each of these counts: number of evenings spent doing homework, academic self-concept, and educational aspirations:

Table 9: Mean number of evenings per week spent doing homework, by ethnicity, children classified as NS-SEC 6-8 (i.e. "working class")

Ethnic Group	Mean number of evenings per week	% 3 or more evenings per week
White British	2.54	49.3%
Mixed Heritage	2.60	52.8%
Black Caribbean	2.79	64.6%
Bangladeshi	3.02	65.8%
Pakistani	3.13	68.5%
Black African	3.13	66.8%
Any other group	3.18	67.1%
Indian	3.29	70.4%
Average		52.8%

Source: *Strand, S., "Ethnicity, gender, social class and achievement gaps at age 16: intersectionality and 'getting it' for the white working class",* Research Papers in Education, *Vol 29 Issue 2, 2014*

Figure 7: Mean number of evenings per week spent doing homework, by ethnicity, children classified as NS-SEC 6–8 ("working class")
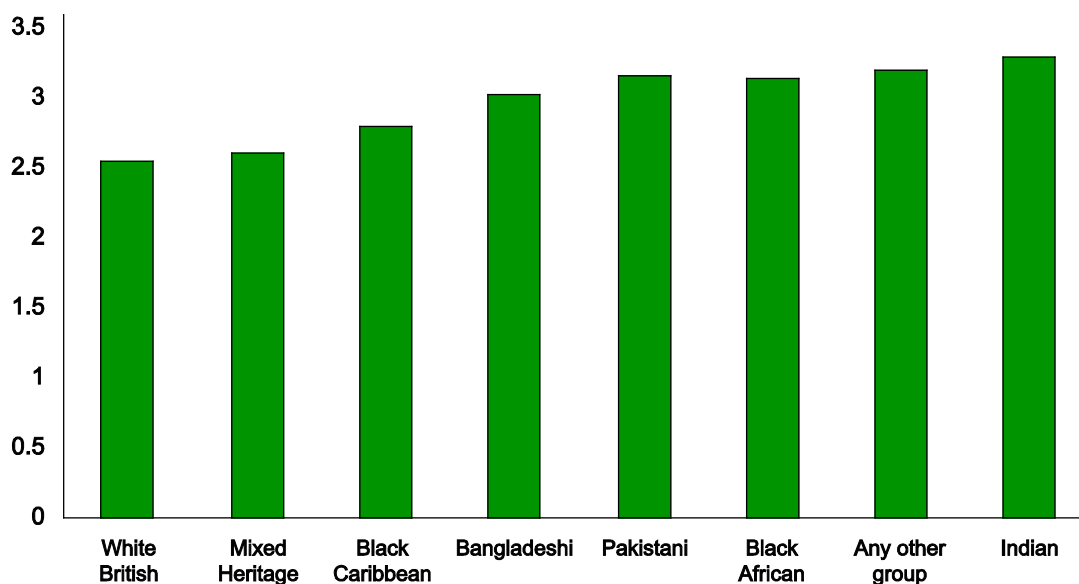
Source: Strand, S., *"Ethnicity, gender, social class and achievement gaps at age 16: intersectionality and 'getting it' for the white working class",* Research Papers in Education, *Vol 29 Issue 2, 2014*

107. The Association of Colleges noted that poorer students often had nowhere to work at home,[169] and Professor Denis Mongon argued that this was a better explanation than a lack of willingness to work:

> […] the evidence shows us that it is much harder for those youngsters we are talking about to do their homework […] in a room where nobody was eating,

---

169 Association of Colleges (WWC 24) para 13

watching television or doing anything except their homework […] I do not think there is any intuitive natural disposition to not do the work.[170]

Owen Jones added that "If you have parents who themselves are professional middle class university-educated people, then they are in a far better position to be able to help with homework".[171]

108. One possible response to this is providing time at the end of the school day for children to complete homework. The EEF Toolkit cites research evidence from the USA which suggests that increasing the length of the school day can add two months' additional progress to pupils' attainment over the course of a year, with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds benefitting by an additional half a months' progress relative to their peers.[172]

109. *The current trend towards longer school days presents an opportunity for schools to provide space and time for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to complete homework, which may particularly benefit white working class children. We recommend that Ofsted publish a best practice report on this subject to provide guidance for schools.*

Spreading good practice and school cooperation

110. Witnesses emphasised that one in seven schools manage to buck the national trend for performance of FSM children.[173] The question therefore is how to spread this good practice. Alex Burghart from the Centre for Social Justice told us that the successful schools "have clearly developed interesting means of working with their pupils and their parents. At the moment, I do not think that we have the mechanisms available to help share the learning that those schools have already developed with other schools that would benefit from it. We should probably start with what is already succeeding in the system".[174] Dr Chris Wood (Her Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted) agreed:

> It is really important that there are more opportunities for schools to share their good practice. In recent fieldwork that we did looking at successful strategies, a common theme amongst those very successful schools was they had had very limited opportunity to work with other schools to disseminate the things that they were doing so well […]. There are insufficient incentives for co-operation and taking the broader view of responsibility for the achievement of those children.[175]

111. In our 2013 report on *School Cooperation and Partnerships* we supported Sir Michael Wilshaw's proposal that an 'Exceptional' rating for headteachers should be introduced to

---

170   Q273

171   Q274

172   "Extended school time", Education Endowment Foundation (accessed 30 April 2014)

173   Q88 [Dr Collins]

174   Q254

175   Qq88-89

incentivise school collaboration. The Government rejected this recommendation, stating that:

> We are keen to avoid creating a proliferation of system leadership statuses. We will continue to explore whether there is more that the Government can do to recognise excellent leadership for those who provide system leadership support for under-performing schools in disadvantaged communities.[176]

The Minister explained:

> […] there is a growing expectation that good practice will be shared. What some people have suggested is that there should be a higher grade given to acknowledge system leadership, but that raises lots of issues, not only about how you would assess the quality of system leadership, but about whether it would be useful for parents to tell them about the job that their school is doing in somebody else's school […] We ought to look, and we are going to look as a Department, at whether there are other ways in which we can, in a high-profile way, acknowledge the good work being done by those schools that are willing not only to concentrate on their own pupils, but to try to improve the system as a whole.[177]

112. **Good leadership and school cooperation are critical to school improvement. We warmly welcome the Minister's commitment to encouraging system leadership and look forward to examining the Government's proposals in due course.**

Deployment of teachers

The Talented Leaders Programme and National Service

113. Ofsted's *Unseen Children* report highlights a significant regional variation in the supply of good secondary school leadership in deprived areas:

> 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. Moreover, leadership and management are 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.[178]

114. A 2008 report for the National College of School Leadership on improving the achievement of white working class children concluded that "more of the best school leaders will need to be encouraged to work in challenging contexts".[179] Written evidence from the Future Leaders Trust supported this view, arguing that "more passionate and

---

176   Education Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2013–14, *School Partnerships and Cooperation: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2013–14*, HC 999, para 11

177   Q345

178   Ofsted, *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on* (June 2013), p70

179   NCSL, *Successful leadership for promoting the achievement of White working class pupils* (November 2008), p4

outstanding school leaders should be placed in posts where their efforts can have the most impact".[180] The Trust places its leaders in areas with high numbers of white working class students such as Grimsby and the Isle of Wight, and is focusing on expanding further into coastal and rural towns.[181]

115. At the North of England conference in January 2014, the Minister said that "We need a better distribution of high-quality teachers and leaders, and support systems across the country. If not, we risk solidifying social divisions, rather than breaking them down".[182] In that speech he announced a tender exercise to identify the "delivery partner" for the Talented Leaders Programme, which would allow schools in challenging areas to "request a high-performing school leader from a pool of some of our brightest talents". The programme is expected to be launched formally later in 2014, but it has been announced that within its first two years it will match 100 high-quality school leaders to schools which need to improve. The Minister argued that:

> This is not about parachuting in 'hero heads'. The objective will be to ensure sustainable school improvement. We expect these headteachers to work with school staff to strengthen succession planning within their schools and to support the development of a long-term strategy to improve standards.[183]

116. The Government's response to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's first annual report noted that Teach First will be training 1,500 graduates in 2014 to 2015 and placing them in the most challenging schools, and that as of 2014/15 Teach First will be placing teachers in every region of England.[184]

117. Dr Kevan Collins (Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation) noted that "we do not necessarily have incentives to encourage our very best teachers or our best teaching to be supporting the children who are hardest to teach or have the most to learn".[185] We asked the Minister whether he agreed that there were insufficient incentives to tackle this problem, or whether a form of "national service" for teachers was appropriate, as is the case in Shanghai. He told us that:

> We need to be realistic; there are many people who have strong reasons for staying in their home area, such as strong family ties or children at local schools who are not necessarily going to move.[186]

> […] we need to make it easy—in a system that does have a lot of passionate, ambitious people who want to do the right thing for young people and help

180 Future Leaders Trust (WWC 21) para 11

181 Future Leaders Trust (WWC 21) para 10

182 Gov.uk, "David Laws speech to the North of England Education Conference", 16 January 2014

183 Gov.uk, "David Laws speech to the North of England Education Conference", 16 January 2014

184 HM Government, Government's response to the annual report of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, (March 2014), p 20

185 Q111

186 Q347

those young people who most need help—for people to get to those schools where they can really make a difference.[187]

118. We explored the specific issue of whether headteachers were placed at significant personal risk to their careers if they take on a failing school, given that they might subsequently be asked to leave if performance did not improve quickly. Ofsted told us that it would not be possible for headteachers to be given a "grace period" unless that was something that was built into the statutory framework.[188] Dr Chris Wood added that:

> […] at Ofsted we have plenty of examples of excellent heads who have gone into schools that were failing and have turned them around. I would argue that the inspection system has within it sufficient flexibility to recognise that. […] We want to see greater incentives for the very best leaders to move to those schools.[189]

119. In considering this issue we note that "good teaching" can be contextual: while a "good" teacher may perform particularly well in one school environment, it is not obvious that transplanting teachers from one area to another will be effective in itself. Nevertheless, we believe that quality within the system should be encouraged to move towards the areas that need it the most, and that challenging schools need to be able to attract the very best applicants.

120. *It is essential that the best teachers and leaders work in the areas that need them the most. The Government should publish an analysis of the incentives that influence where teachers choose to work, and use this to design a system that ensures that the most challenging schools can attract the best teachers and leaders.*

Data on the deployment of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)

121. *Unseen Children* notes that there is a lack of data on where the best teachers are based:

> Until recently, the Teaching Agency collected information about where newly qualified teachers worked through information provided by the now defunct General Teaching Council [for England]. Currently, it does not collect this information, nor does it collect data on where the 'best' teachers go. This is a weakness in the system.[190]

The Minister told us that the DfE had a project underway that would link teacher data from the school workforce census across years and to other datasets, including on initial teacher training, which would "[...] enable analysis of teacher mobility including movers between posts/grade/schools/location and those leaving the profession".[191]

---

187 Q347

188 Q115

189 Q116

190 Ofsted, *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on* (June 2013), p80

191 Department for Education (WWC 39) pp 3–4

122. **We welcome the Government's plans to enable the analysis of data on teacher mobility, and where newly qualified teachers choose to work; this will allow for better monitoring of the effects of incentives in the system.**

Parental engagement

Evidence for the use of this approach

123. Jenny North told us that improving parental involvement and parental behaviour was a "promising" area of intervention, but was cautious about the evidence base for it:

> When I say "promising", I am being quite specific here. There is not a massive, undisputed body of evidence showing a clear causal link for changing behaviours then changing attainment, but there is far more for that than there is for raising aspirations or changing attitudes towards schooling.[192]

A NIACE report on Family Learning argued that engaging the most disadvantaged parents in their children's education, while simultaneously offering them the chance to learn themselves, can improve pupils' attainment by 15 percentage points and improve a child's reading age by six months.[193] Evidence summarised in the Sutton Trust-EEF Toolkit (see below) notes that "higher parental engagement is related with better attainment outcomes, but increasing low parental engagement is challenging".[194]

124. Ofsted produced a short report on Family Learning in 2009 based on themed inspections of 23 local authority providers of family learning and observations of 36 family learning classes on the premises of schools, at Sure Start children's centres and in a library.[195] Ofsted concluded that "Family learning programmes had a considerable impact on the achievements of both children and adults," with the needs of priority groups generally met through well-targeted provision, but "very little provision was available beyond primary education".[196]

125. In 2011 the Department for Education published a review of best practice in parental engagement which encompassed school-home links, support and training for parents, and collaboration with the community.[197] The review stated that "the evidence of the impact of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes on children's academic and learning related outcomes is extensive and robust[...][Literacy and numeracy programmes] can have a positive impact on the most disadvantaged families, including the academic outcomes of the children".[198] Specifically, the Department's review noted that programmes

---

192 Q58

193 NIACE, *Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales* (October 2013)

194 Sutton Trust-EEF (WWC 11) para 21

195 Ofsted, *Family Learning* (2009)

196 Ofsted, *Family Learning* (2009) pp 5-6

197 Department for Education, *Review of best practice in parental engagement* (September 2011), DFE-RR156

198 Department for Education, *Review of best practice in parental engagement* (September 2011), DFE-RR156 pp 7-8

in which parents were trained to listen to their children read produced an effect size of 0.51 (about 4 months of progress), with the largest impacts produced when parents themselves taught specific reading skills to their children, with an effect size of 1.15 (over a year's progress, and over six times more effective than simply encouraging parents to read to their children).[199]

126. The DfE found, however, that there was "little robust evidence on many academic and learning related outcomes, and on many of the specific activities schools and services should undertake in pursuit of the general features of an effective parental engagement strategy".[200] Written evidence from Professor Stephen Gorard explained that while there is a strong *association* between parental engagement and educational performance, this does not necessarily mean that actions to *increase* engagement will have the desired result.[201] He explained that:

> [...] robust evaluations of interventions to increase parental involvement and assess the impact of this on children's attainment are far fewer than the studies of association, and also far fewer than studies that have simply shown that parental involvement can be increased (but without testing whether this makes a difference to attainment).[202]

A report for the Nuffield Foundation based on a meta-analysis of studies of parental involvement criticised the quality of evidence for the benefits of enhancing parental engagement.[203] Professor Gorard described a "mixed and far from encouraging picture" of the benefits of this intervention: "[Some studies] have suggested positive outcomes, some no effect, and some that parental involvement interventions may actually harm children's attainment".[204] Professor Gorard concluded that "interventions are most likely to succeed when they are aimed at young children and involve parents and staff meeting regularly in an institution". However:

> There is very little evidence of promise from evaluations of parental interventions for children of later primary age, secondary age or across phases of schooling. Practical interventions here can be safely abandoned for the present [...] Merely increasing parental involvement is not the answer in itself.[205]

127. The EEF is funding a number of programmes to improve parental engagement, including the Plymouth Parent Partnership, which provides parents with the skills they

---

199   Department for Education, *Review of best practice in parental engagement* (September 2011), DFE-RR156 p 67

200   Department for Education, *Review of best practice in parental engagement* (September 2011), DFE-RR156 p 9

201   Professor Stephen Gorard (WWC 20) para 2.2

202   Professor Stephen Gorard (WWC 20) para 2.2

203   See, BH and Gorard, S. *What do rigorous evaluations tell us about the most promising parental involvement interventions? A critical review of what works for disadvantaged children in different age groups*, Nuffield Foundation (2013)

204   Professor Stephen Gorard (WWC 20) para 4.3

205   Professor Stephen Gorard (WWC 20) para 5.11

need to help their child learn to read.[206] Meanwhile, the EEF Toolkit lists parental involvement as being "moderate impact for moderate cost, based on moderate evidence […] Although parental involvement is consistently associated with pupils' success at school, the evidence about how to increase involvement to improve attainment is much less conclusive. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged families".[207] The Minister told us that:

> We have made assessments of the existing evidence base and that does show that parental engagement, if done in the right way, can have a very positive impact on attainment. What is encouraging and far better than us doing the work is that the EEF is commissioning a lot of evidence-based studies of parental engagement. In some of the first work that it has been commissioning, it has been focusing on this as a theme. That means that, once that is complete, we will have a lot more serious evidence about what type of engagement with parents works, and how it works compared with other educational interventions.[208]

128. In the context of early years education, we recommended in our 2013 Sure Start children's centres report that "research is needed into what kind of engagement with parents in their children's learning in the family home makes the difference in narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their better-off peers".[209] This is particularly the case now that the pupil premium is to be extended to the early years.[210] The Government's response to this recommendation did not refer to the issue of parental engagement,[211] and we therefore reiterate the need to investigate this.

129. *We recommend once again that the Government commission research into what kind of engagement with parents in their children's learning makes the difference in narrowing the gap between the most economically disadvantaged children and their better-off peers, and in particular, identify from specific schools and local authorities examples of best practice that could be shared more widely.*

Early Years

130. In our report on children's centres, we noted the "critical importance of early years for future life chances makes this a fundamental test of the Government's seriousness in closing the attainment gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers".[212] The evidence referred to in paragraph 24 of this report showing the 25 percentage point

---

206 Sutton Trust-EEF (WWC 11)

207 "Parental involvement", EEF Toolkit (accessed 10 January 2014)

208 Q364

209 Education Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, *Foundation Years: Sure Start children's centres*, HC 364-I, para 78

210 HM Treasury, *Budget 2014*, March 2014, para 1.184

211 Education Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2013–14, *Foundation Years: Sure Start children's centres: Government response*, HC 1141, para 17

212 Education Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, *Foundation Years: Sure Start children's centres*, HC 364-I, para 157

gap for white British children by the age of 5 underlines the relevance of our previous findings to this group of children. We endorse the new integrated check for 2½ year olds which should enable professionals to identify those children needing additional help and we welcome the expansion of early education for these age groups which should address this need.

131. As with primary and secondary schools, there is an urgent need to ensure that the best teachers and leaders are engaged with the most disadvantaged children. We support the Government's aim of raising the quality of the early years workforce but we remain concerned at the lack of a strategy towards realising the vision of equality between early years teachers and those in schools.

Vocational education

The impact of the Wolf reforms on white working class boys

132. FSM pupils are more likely to study vocational programmes, including those deemed to be 'Wolf-approved' (i.e. counted towards the achievement of the 5 A*–C threshold measure from 2014, as a result of the recommendations in the Wolf report.).[213] In 2012, 56% of white FSM pupils entered one or more Wolf-approved equivalent qualification, compared to 47% of all other pupils (although this pattern is the same for non-white FSM pupils).[214] The Department concluded that "The [Wolf] reforms [are expected to] have a larger impact on white FSM pupils […] almost 5% of white FSM pupils rely on non-Wolf qualifications to achieve the expected level, whereas 3% of all other pupils and just over 4% of all other FSM eligible pupils [do] [...]". The DfE also noted that the reforms will also impact more on white FSM boys than white FSM girls.[215]

Table 10: Modelled impact of Wolf recommendations on key stage 4 outcomes, 2012

DfE modeling	White FSM	All other pupils	Total
Number of eligible pupils	54,753	511,937	566,690
Number achieving 5+ A*–C inc E&M	16,948	313,340	330,288
% achieving 5+ A*–C inc E&M	31.0%	61.2%	58.3%
Number achieving 5+ A*–C inc E&M (Wolf)	14,298	296,388	310,686
% 5+ A*–C inc E&M (Wolf)	26.1%	57.9%	54.8%
Difference	-2,650	-16,952	-19,602
% Difference	-4.8%	-3.3%	-3.5%

Source: Department for Education (WWC 28) para 55

133. We asked Professor Alison Wolf to comment on this:

---

213 Department for Education (WWC 28) para 55ff

214 Department for Education (WWC 28) para 59

215 Department for Education (WWC 28) para 56

> When they say it will impact on them, what they are actually saying is that this was the group that was most likely to do the sorts of qualifications that we feel were not worth doing. The answer is hopefully it is going to make it much better for them, because there will not be that opportunity, or there will not be such strong perverse incentives, to put people in for qualifications that employers do not, in practice, value.[216]

We consider that vocational education is an important subject that deserves future scrutiny. In particular, a careful balance needs to be struck between ensuring that young people are given access to an academic education while avoiding portraying vocational routes as a second-class option.

Work-related learning

134. We noted in our 2013 report on *Careers Guidance for Young People* that the statutory duty for schools to provide work-related learning had been removed in August 2012,[217] and the NUT raised this again in relation to this inquiry: "Such contexts could help young people learn about and for work through the school curriculum, and could assist in particular those young people who come from homes where there is no wage earner or who come from backgrounds where they lack the social networks to learn about work or to be exposed to employment or work experience opportunities".[218] We note that new guidance for schools has been published recently and we look forward to exploring how well this meets the need for guidance on work-related learning.[219]

135. We are encouraged that the Sutton Trust has commissioned work to investigate the quantitative evidence for the effect of careers education and guidance, including analysis by social class, and we look forward to receiving the results in due course.[220]

136. The consequence of low educational attainment is too often "NEET" status—not in education, employment or training. A report for the Employers Federation found that positive relationships exist between the number of employer contacts (such as careers talks or work experience) that a young person experiences in school (between the ages of 14 and 19) and their confidence (at 19–24) in progression towards ultimate career goals and the likelihood of whether (at 19–24) they are NEET or non-NEET.[221]

---

216 Q201

217 Education Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2012–13, *Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools*, HC 632, para 106

218 National Union of Teachers (WWC 27) para 6

219 Department for Education, *Careers guidance and inspiration in schools: statutory guidance for governing bodies, school leaders and school staff* (April 2014)

220 Q187

221 Education and Employers Taskforce, *It's who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults*, February 2012, p 1

Aligning social and education policies

137. As the Sutton Trust observed, "This problem will not be solved solely through the education system".[222] Given the breadth of issues explored in Chapter 3, it is also relevant to consider how other social policies interact with schools. ASCL told us that:

> Addressing white working class underachievement by setting new targets to schools and colleges, or altering the range and governance of such institutions, or interfering with the curriculum or the qualification system, is to try to treat the symptom rather than the disease. There is a need to address more fundamental issues of inequality, and to intervene at an earlier stage in a child's development to encourage and support parents to value their children's education.[223]

138. Similarly, a background report for Ofsted on the educational attainment of white British students from low income backgrounds as part of its *Access and achievement in education 2013 review* notes that "Systemic solutions will require more than excellence in the application of basic good practice by individual schools, it will require the aligned effort of a range of services and institutions". The paper goes on to explain that "Evidence [...] points directly to the mutual and accumulative benefits which services can bring to one another when improved health, housing, parenting, home learning and schooling operate in a virtuous circle".[224]

139. The National Children's Bureau and Council for Disabled Children propose that the Government should create a Children and Young People's Board, "with full ministerial representation to develop and implement a genuinely cross-government multidimensional strategy to reduce the inequality and disadvantage children and young people face".[225] NASUWT's written evidence to the inquiry observed that:

> A central component of the Every Child Matters agenda involved improving inter-agency working and collaboration across children's services. The implementation of ECM highlighted the difficulties involved in developing effective collaboration and inter-agency working [...] there were significant challenges in developing effective communication channels and difference in organisational cultures and terminology needed to be overcome [...] The NASUWT believes that this highlights the importance of a nationally coordinated, strategic approach to ensuring effective collaboration and inter-agency working.[226]

140. The Minister provided an example of current cross-department working in the form of the new child poverty strategy, which encompasses social policies such as housing and

---

222 Sutton Trust-EEF (WWC 11) para 7

223 Association of School and College Leaders (WWC 5) para 19

224 Mongon, D., *Educational attainment: White British students from low income backgrounds – Research paper for Ofsted's 'Access and achievement in education 2013 review'*, Ofsted (June 2013), pp 4, 37

225 National Children's Bureau and Council for Disabled Children (WWC 22) para 3

226 NASUWT (WWC 26) para 25

healthcare, with links to educational attainment. He told us that "we work closely with other Departments in Whitehall that impact on children's lives".[227] Nevertheless, the Minister told us that he was keen to concentrate primarily on school-based interventions:

> Changing some of those things outside the school gate can be much more challenging than trying to get those interventions right in schools themselves [...] I am more optimistic about making rapid progress in raising attainment for disadvantaged youngsters by really focusing on what goes on in schools and that schools can easily impact upon, rather than trying to change the whole of society, which is a rather big ambition—important, but not easy to do in the short term.[228]

> I suspect that for every pound spent, an intervention within a school with good leadership, using the right interventions, is more likely to be of use than very generic social interventions [...] the more diffuse the interventions are, and the more generic about trying to tackle wider economic disadvantage in society, the more risk there is that we will not focus on the things that make the most impact to young people.[229]

141. **We agree that there is much that schools can do to address white working class underachievement. Broader societal factors also have an enormous role to play, but this should not deflect attention from the central importance of improving school and teaching quality.**

---

227 Department for Education (WWC 39) p 6

228 Q309

229 Q310

5   Conclusions

142. On average, poor white children tend to perform at a much lower level in education than their more affluent peers, and at a lower level than many similarly economically-deprived children of other ethnicities. Meanwhile, the economy has changed in recent decades; while underachievement in education may once have led to a lifetime of employment in traditional routine manual occupations in factories, the consequence now is more likely to be "NEET" status.

143. This problem must be tackled by ensuring that the best teachers and leaders are incentivised to work in the schools and areas that need them the most, and by providing better advice and guidance to young people. Schools face a battle for resources and talent, and those serving poor white communities need a better chance of winning. Poor white children in rural and coastal areas have been "unseen" for too long; unless such steps are taken the potential of white working class children will be left unlocked, and the effects of the current trend will continue to be felt beyond the school gates. White working class children can achieve in education, and the Government must take these steps to ensure that they do.

Conclusions and recommendations

Definitions

1. Statements relating to the underachievement in education of white working class pupils often use eligibility for free school meals as a proxy for working class. Entitlement to FSM is not synonymous with working class, but it is a useful proxy for poverty which itself has an association with educational underachievement. (Paragraph 15)

Trends over time

2. Overall, the evidence from analysing free school meals (FSM) data is that:

    - white British children eligible for FSM are consistently the lowest performing ethnic group of children from low income households, at all ages (other than small subgroups of white children);

    - the attainment "gap" between those children eligible for free school meals and the remainder is wider for white British and Irish children than for other ethnic groups; and

    - this gap widens as children get older. (Paragraph 30)

The general link between economic deprivation and educational achievement

3. Measures of economic deprivation and socio-economic status both suggest that white "working class" children are underachieving, and that the performance of some other ethnic groups is improving faster. But they also show that similar problems persist in a number of other minority groups. (Paragraph 34)

4. *Some other ethnic groups appear to be more resilient than white British children to the effects of poverty, deprivation and low-socio-economic status on educational achievement. Further work is needed to understand why this is the case. The Government should commission a project to assess why some ethnic groups are improving faster than white British children, and what can be learned from steps taken specifically to improve the achievement of ethnic minorities. This research should include, but not be limited to, the effects of historic funding and strategies, parental expectations, community resilience and access to good schools.* (Paragraph 35)

Gender

5. The problem of white "working class" underachievement is not specific to boys; attention to both sexes is needed. (Paragraph 37)

Data quality and availability

6. *Data relating to combinations of ethnicity and free school meals status is not always readily available in Government statistical releases. The Government should ensure*

that data relating to white FSM children is included in its statistical reports. (Paragraph 40)

7. *The Government should consider how data from a range of Departments can be combined in future to develop a more rounded indicator of a child's socio-economic status than FSM eligibility alone can provide for the purposes of targeting intervention.* (Paragraph 41)

8. *The Government should act to ensure that FSM data (and any future revised indicator) is made available to post-16 institutions to allow effective monitoring of the progress of this group of young people.* (Paragraph 43)

Will school improvement alone close the gap?

9. Twice the proportion of poor children attending an outstanding school will leave with five good GCSEs when compared with the lowest rated schools, whereas the proportion of non-FSM children achieving this benchmark in outstanding schools is only 1.5 times greater than in those rated as inadequate. (Paragraph 47)

Parenting skills and language in the home

10. *The evidence we heard related to how the amount of language and breadth of vocabulary used in the home in the early years varies by socio-economic status. It is not clear whether this is a particular issue in white working class homes as opposed to other ethnic groups. We believe that this issue is critical. Further research in this area is needed, given the importance of oracy to child development.* (Paragraph 63)

Absences and exclusions

11. *We welcome the reduction of the school absence rate in recent years. The Government must continue to focus on encouraging reduced absence from school.* (Paragraph 68)

"Closing the gap"

12. We welcome the introduction of the pupil premium and the recent announcement of its extension to early years. The Government should continue to monitor the impact of this policy. (Paragraph 85)

13. *We welcome Ofsted's 2013 report on the use of the pupil premium and recommend that a similar report be produced annually to highlight how effective schools are in using this money, focusing on the impact and highlighting case studies of schools where the greatest progress is being achieved.* (Paragraph 87)

14. *We welcome the Minister's willingness to investigate whether other measures of disadvantage may be more appropriate for allocating disadvantage funding and tracking the performance of disadvantaged groups. The Government should move quickly to do this.* (Paragraph 90)

15. We see the EEF Toolkit as a positive development which will help schools to make informed decisions about how to make best use of pupil premium funding. This will be particularly important to support the roll-out of the pupil premium to early years settings. (Paragraph 92)

Tackling regional variation

16. The improvements in London's educational performance suggest that the problem of white working class underachievement in education can be tackled. In determining future policy in this area the Government must carefully assess what positive impact the London Challenge may have had and what its key features were. (Paragraph 99)

17. *Given the changing distribution of educational underachievement across the country, the Government must develop a new funding formula for schools which better matches allocation with need.* (Paragraph 103)

Best practice in schools

18. *We welcome Ofsted's recent focus on the issue of economically deprived white children underachieving in education, and its 2008 report on good practice in this area. We recommend that this continues to be a focus for Ofsted, and that an updated good practice report is produced.* (Paragraph 105)

19. *The current trend towards longer school days presents an opportunity for schools to provide space and time for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to complete homework, which may particularly benefit white working class children. We recommend that Ofsted publish a best practice report on this subject to provide guidance for schools.* (Paragraph 109)

20. Good leadership and school cooperation are critical to school improvement. We warmly welcome the Minister's commitment to encouraging system leadership and look forward to examining the Government's proposals in due course. (Paragraph 112)

Deployment of teachers

21. *It is essential that the best teachers and leaders work in the areas that need them the most. The Government should publish an analysis of the incentives that influence where teachers choose to work, and use this to design a system that ensures that the most challenging schools can attract the best teachers and leaders.* (Paragraph 120)

22. We welcome the Government's plans to enable the analysis of data on teacher mobility, and where newly qualified teachers choose to work; this will allow for better monitoring of the effects of incentives in the system. (Paragraph 122)

Parental engagement

23. *We recommend once again that the Government commission research into what kind of engagement with parents in their children's learning makes the difference in narrowing the gap between the most economically disadvantaged children and their better-off peers, and in particular, identify from specific schools and local authorities examples of best practice that could be shared more widely.* (Paragraph 129)

Aligning social and education policies

24.   We agree that there is much that schools can do to address white working class underachievement. Broader societal factors also have an enormous role to play, but this should not deflect attention from the central importance of improving school and teaching quality. (Paragraph 141)

Annex: Programme for the Committee's visit to Peterborough, 6 February 2014

Members participating in the visit: Graham Stuart MP (Chair), Alex Cunningham MP, Bill Esterson MP, Ian Mearns MP, Mr David Ward MP

Peterborough City Council

- Meeting with Sue Westcott (Executive Director, Children's Services), Gary Perkins (Head of School Improvement) and Cllr John Holdich (Council member for education)

Visit to Old Fletton Primary School and discussions with headteachers

- Introduction to Old Fletton Primary School with Sarah Levy (Headteacher) and Neal Dickson (Deputy Headteacher)

- Roundtable discussions with primary and secondary headteachers, including Emma Green (Braybrook Primary), Clare Clark (Eye CE Primary), Fiona Perkins (Eyrescroft Primary), Fran Hollingsworth (Gunthorpe Primary), Hayley Sutton (Leighton Primary), Sarah Levy (Old Fletton Primary), Neal Dickson (Old Fletton Primary), Jo Cook (Paston Ridings Primary), Collette Firth (St John's CE Primary / Winyates Primary), Eric Winstone (Ormiston Bushfield Academy), Ged Rae (Stanground Academy), and Jonathan Lewis (Acting Assistant Director (Education), Peterborough City Council)

- Lunch with headteachers

Discussions with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

- Small group discussions with Denham Hughes (NEET Team Manager, Peterborough City Council), Kurtis Arnett, Kai Cowlbeck, Heather Leed, Paige Nicholls and Cameron Quinn (young people who the NEET Team had been working with), Stewart Jackson MP and Cllr John Holdich

Greater Peterborough University Technical College

- Discussions with Angela Joyce (Principal, Peterborough Regional College) regarding Peterborough's plans for a University Technical College (UTC)

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 11 June 2014

Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart, in the Chair

Neil Carmichael	Ian Mearns
Alex Cunningham	Caroline Nokes
Bill Esterson	David Ward
Siobhain McDonagh	Craig Whittaker

Draft Report (*Underachievement in education by white working class children*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 143 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for publication on the internet.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 18 June at 9.15 am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at www.parliament.uk/education-committee.

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at www.parliament.uk/education-committee. WWC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1   Julia Warner (WWC 01)
2   Professor Diane Reay (WWC 02)
3   Richard Burden MP (WWC 03)
4   Professor Steve Strand (WWC 04)
5   Association of School and College Leaders (WWC 05)
6   Karamat Iqbal (WWC 06)
7   Impetus—The Private Equity Foundation (WWC 07)
8   Learning Services, Leicester City Council (WWC 08)
9   Joseph Rowntree Foundation (WWC 09)
10   Teach First (WWC 10)
11   The Sutton Trust (WWC 11)
12   Ruth Mclellan (WWC 12)
13   GL Assessment (WWC 13)
14   Newham College (WWC 14)
15   Centre for Research in Race & Education (WWC 15)
16   City Year (WWC 17)
17   Buckinghamshire County Council (WWC 18)
18   Achievement For All 3As (WWC 19)
19   Stephen Gorard (WWC 20); (WWC 35)
20   The Future Leaders Trust (WWC 21)
21   National Children's Bureau (WWC 22)
22   Ofsted (WWC 23); (WWC 37)
23   Association of Colleges (WWC 24)
24   UCAS (WWC 25)
25   NASUWT (WWC 26)
26   National Union of Teachers (WWC 27)
27   Department for Education (WWC 28); (WWC 39); (WWC 40); (WWC 41); (WWC 42)
28   The Russell Group of Universities (WWC 29)
29   Professor Becky Francis (WWC30)
30   Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London (WWC 31)
31   Institute of Education (WWC 32)
32   Prisoners Education Trust (WWC 33)
33   Feyisa Demie (WWC 34)
34   Educational Endowment Foundation (WWC 36)
35   Professor Denis Mongon (WWC 38)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at
www.parliament.uk/education-committee.
The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2012-13

First Report	The administration of examinations for 15–19 year olds in England	HC 141-I (*HC 679*)
Second Report	Appointment of Chair, Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission	HC 461-I
Third Report	Governance and leadership of the Department for Education	HC 700 (*HC 919*)
Fourth Report	Children first: the child protection system in England	HC 137-I (*HC 993*)
Fifth Report	Support for Home Education	HC 559-I (*HC 1013*)
Sixth Report	Pre-legislative scrutiny: Special Educational Needs	HC 631-I
Seventh Report	Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools	HC 632-I (*HC 1078*)
Eighth Report	From GCSEs to EBCs: the Government's proposals for reform	HC 808-I (*HC 1116*)

Session 2013–14

First Report	2012 GCSE English results	HC 204 (*HC 662*)
Second Report	The Role of School Governing Bodies	HC 365 (*HC 661*)
Third Report	School sport following London 2012: No more political football	HC 364 (*HC 723*)
Fourth Report	School Partnerships and Cooperation	HC 269 (*HC 999*)
Fifth Report	Foundation Years: Sure Start Children's Centres	HC 364 (*HC 1141*)
Sixth Report	Residential Children's Homes	HC 716

Session 2014-15

First Special Report	Residential Children's Homes: Government's response to Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2013-14	HC 305