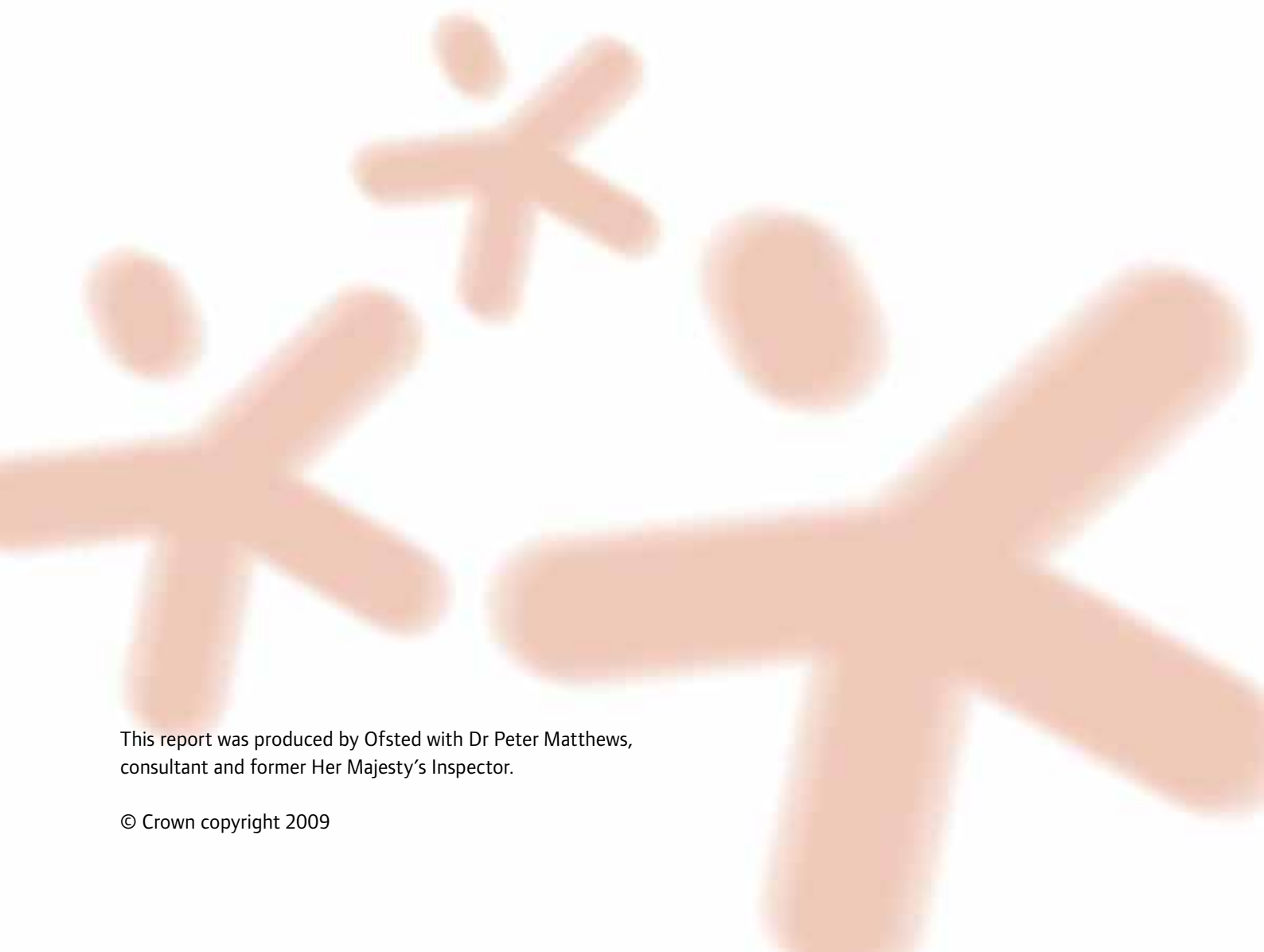


Twenty outstanding primary schools

Excelling against the odds





This report was produced by Ofsted with Dr Peter Matthews, consultant and former Her Majesty's Inspector.

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Foreword

In February 2009, I introduced the first of three reviews of highly successful schools in very challenging circumstances. The synthesis of the evidence from the 12 secondary schools featured in the first review laid down the challenge for less successful schools to emulate them and showed how it could be done.

Twenty outstanding primary schools: excelling against the odds examines a sample of primary schools, including infant and junior schools, which provide great service to highly disadvantaged communities in different parts of the country. As in the previous report, patterns emerge which indicate how these consistently outstanding schools achieved success, how they sustain it, and the extent to which they share their expertise with other schools or with the system at large.

Many of the characteristics of successful practice are common to schools in all phases. These include appointing staff of the highest quality, investing in and developing them. Children are treated as individuals; they are supported well and expected to achieve well. Staff are passionate about finding ways of doing things better. This requires an unremitting focus on learning, development and progress. High-quality leadership is essential to promote, support and sustain the drive to perfect teaching and maximise learning in schools which face tough challenges.

Primary schools, many of which have nurseries, have the dual advantage of receiving children at an age when their drive to learn, expressed through curiosity, engagement and creativity, is commonly more acute than when they get older, and of having daily contact with parents or carers. The stories of many of these schools are inspiring, but what comes across most strongly is the passion of all who work in them for improving the chances and well-being of individual children. Staff spare no effort to give them a foundation of stability, skills and opportunities with which to make something of their lives; the chance to escape the corrosive cycle of deprivation into which many were born.

The schools described here show what can be done when dedicated professional teams place children at the centre of their vocation. They ensure that every child matters. They succeed better than most in reducing the achievement gap between children from different backgrounds. The challenge for other schools is to do the same.



Christine Gilbert
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Summary

This report is written, in a sense, for schools by schools. It reports and interprets what highly effective primary schools give as reasons for their ongoing success. It aims to help all primary schools to become excellent. It does this by showing something of the principles and practice of schools which are not only consistently outstanding but which also serve some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country.

An analysis of consistently outstanding schools raises three questions.

- How did they become outstanding?
- How do they remain outstanding?
- Where do they go from here?

For schools that are not yet outstanding, there is a fourth question which supplements the three above.

- How can we do it too?

This publication is arranged to explore and provide some answers to the first three questions, using specific examples drawn from the 20 schools to illustrate wider generalisations. The main sections explore the three themes of *achieving excellence*, *sustaining excellence* and *sharing excellence*.

Achieving excellence is concerned with some of the most important factors associated with school improvement. It draws particularly from those schools in the group that have emerged from an Ofsted category of concern. The section focuses on the goal of *raising attainment* and achievement. It shows the lengths to which the schools go to make *teaching and learning* consistently effective. It describes

the schools' approach to the *curriculum* and the importance of *assessment* and using data analytically to *track pupils' progress*. The section highlights the importance of *appointing and developing staff* that have the qualities and skills to produce consistently outstanding teaching and learning. It concludes by analysing some of the factors associated with the *transformational leadership* that is a feature these schools have in common. It is not only the vision, values and very high expectations which shine through in these school leaders but also the extent to which they demonstrate and apply them by personal example. They 'walk the talk'.

Sustaining excellence is about more than icing the cake of good practice. It emphasises the centrality of the child in everything these schools do and their approaches to inclusion. Some important strategies which involve gaining the trust of parents and the support of the community are not achieved overnight. They require skilled, perceptive and persistent work in order to open the gates to children's learning and ensure their well-being. The section is about not resting on laurels. It describes the constant development of staff, the honing of teaching and the enrichment of the curriculum which together sustain the excitement and challenge of learning, and stresses the importance of relentless monitoring and evaluation.

Sharing excellence is a characteristic of most of the schools although they do it in different ways and to different degrees. This section illustrates some of these practices and shows how the schools benefit from outreach interactions and partnerships with other educators and their schools. The willingness to share outstanding practice with other schools and help them raise their performance must be one of the indicators of a great school.

Brief portraits of the 20 outstanding schools can be found at the end of the report. These are intended to represent the character of the schools, a little of their history and some striking features, as well as giving their key statistics, including 2008 test and assessment results. They do not supplant the most recent inspection reports on the schools, which are readily available on Ofsted's website.¹

¹ www.ofsted.gov.uk

Summary continued

How to use this report

This report is intended as a discussion document for leaders in all primary schools in England.

Almost two thirds of primary schools are now at least good.² For these many good schools, some already with outstanding features, the aim must be to enable every pupil to succeed. Schools which do this are great schools. The obstacles on the journey to becoming outstanding are not insuperable for good schools. Those who work in such schools now will identify with many of the approaches featured here.

This document, however, is also meant to challenge those who work in less effective schools to improve them urgently. The fact that 37% of primary schools inspected in 2007/08 were judged to be no better than satisfactory, although a marked reduction on the previous year, shows there is still much to be done. Most of these schools have some good features on which to build. This document should be used by leaders in these schools to analyse what makes the difference between their school and those described here. Is it, for example:

- a matter of being more consistent?
- the need for more rigorous tracking of progress and the injection of timely support?
- that teaching is not yet consistently good or learning sufficiently effective?

- that the school has not asked pupils how it could do a better job for them?
- that the school has limited ambitions and needs an injection of leadership?

The challenge for school leaders is to be not only curious about the schools featured here, but also to give their own practice and approaches more reflective consideration, or critical analysis, perhaps starting with the questions above. The text might be considered in sections, through a structured approach, possibly as themes for leadership team meetings. New members of staff could be asked to audit the school in terms of this report. It could be reproduced for governors and key staff and the elements used to inform or support the school's improvement programme. Schools are challenged to use the document in whichever way will have the greatest effect.

If the reader's school is outstanding, the text will hold few surprises. It celebrates the work of other excellent schools. The challenge for outstanding schools is how to sustain their excellence and improve further on it. There may be ideas here that will help.

Characteristics of outstanding primary schools in challenging circumstances



Characteristics of outstanding primary schools in challenging circumstances

Introduction

It is well established that contextual factors have a powerful association with educational outcomes. Equally, the culture and rhetoric of education – from policy makers to educators – have shifted perceptibly in recent years.

1 It is no longer acceptable to use a child's background as an excuse for underachievement. The challenge for schools is to make a difference. Schools know and try to do this; some are more successful than others. Gladwell writes that:

Success arises out of the steady accumulation of advantages: when and where you are born, what your parents did for a living, and what the circumstances of your upbringing were, all make a significant difference in how well you do in the world.³

2 Viewed in these terms, the job of the school may be construed as providing, through education and care for children's well-being, advantage where it is lacking, mentoring and support for parenting where it is needed, and complementary provision in a school community of high ideals and aspirations. Without the efforts of the school, too many young children are destined for a steady accumulation of disadvantage, with little compensation.

3 Primary schools, together with pre-school providers of education and care, are in a pre-eminent position when it comes to having a lasting impact on children's futures. This report identifies 20 schools that do make a difference. In what ways? The following characteristics revealed themselves during visits to the schools.

- They provide affection, stability and a purposeful and structured experience.
- They build – and often rebuild – children's self-belief.
- They teach children the things they really need to know and show them how to learn for themselves and with others.
- They give them opportunities, responsibility and trust in an environment which is both stimulating and humanising.
- They listen to their pupils, value their views and reflect and act on what they say.

- They build bridges with parents, families and communities, working in partnership with other professionals.
- They ensure their pupils progress as fast as possible and achieve as much as possible (outperforming both similar schools and many with fewer challenges).
- In short, they put the child at the centre of everything they do, and high aspirations, expectations and achievement underpin the schools' work.

The schools were selected for this review, however, on far more basic indicators of excellence.

Selecting the schools

4 By July 2008, 588 maintained primary schools had been judged outstanding in at least their last two inspections. Only 135 (23%) of these were relatively challenged by having a proportion of children eligible for free school meals above the national average of 16.6% (Figure 1). These schools include local authority and faith schools, full age-range, infant and junior schools, first schools and middle deemed primary schools.

5 The 135 schools were reduced to fewer than 30 when the following criteria were applied:

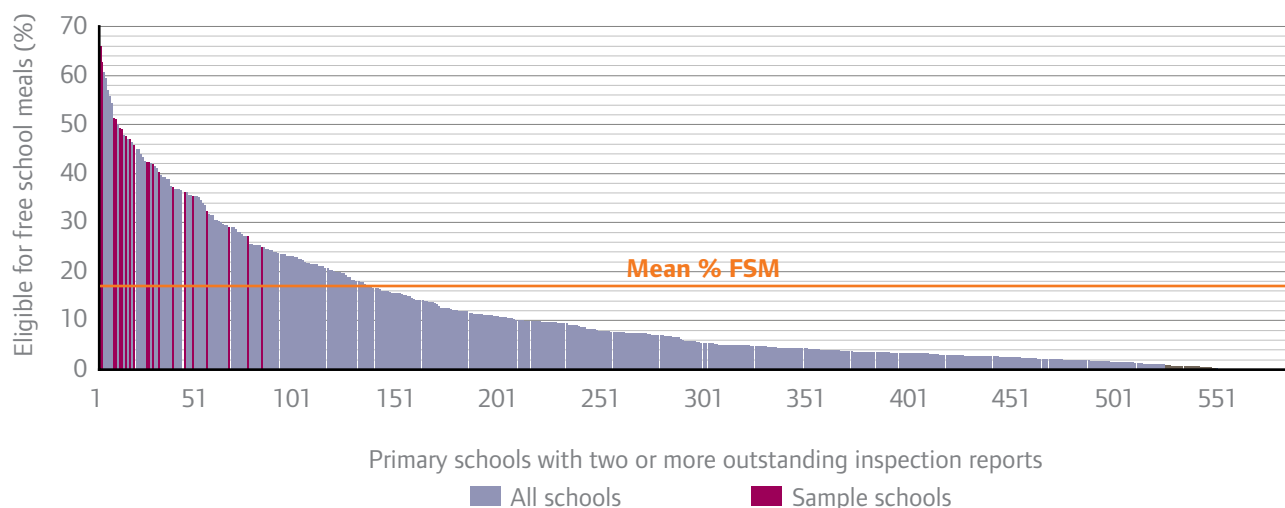
- sustained excellence, indicated by being judged to be outstanding in two or more inspections
- disadvantaged intake, indicated by over a quarter of pupils – that is, 50% above the average – being eligible for free school meals
- being judged outstanding in their inspections in terms of leadership and management and teaching and learning, as well as for overall effectiveness
- standards that compared favourably with national averages and were well above 'floor targets'⁴
- in the schools that had Key Stage 2 pupils, a contextual value added (CVA) score exceeding 100.

6 Twenty schools were finally chosen which met all the criteria. The sample consists of 14 full range primary schools, three infant and three junior schools. There are four voluntary aided or controlled schools. The rest are local authority community schools from 18 authorities. The 20 schools visited are highlighted in Figure 1.

³ M Gladwell, *Outliers: the story of success*, Allen Lane, 2008.

⁴ The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has set floor targets for 11-year-olds (Key Stage 2) and monitors schools' performance against these. For the end of Key Stage 2, the target is for 65% of pupils to attain the expected level (Level 4) in both English and mathematics.

Figure 1: Distribution of the 588 primary schools having two or more outstanding inspection reports according to the free school meals (FSM) indicator (2008)



7 The 20 exceptionally successful primary schools in this report are listed below.

Infant schools

- Cotmanhay Infant School**, Derbyshire
- Ramsden Infant School**, Cumbria
- World's End Infant and Nursery School**, Birmingham

Junior schools

- Berrymede Junior School**, Ealing
- Cubitt Town Junior School**, Tower Hamlets
- William Ford Church of England Junior School**, Barking and Dagenham

Full range primary schools

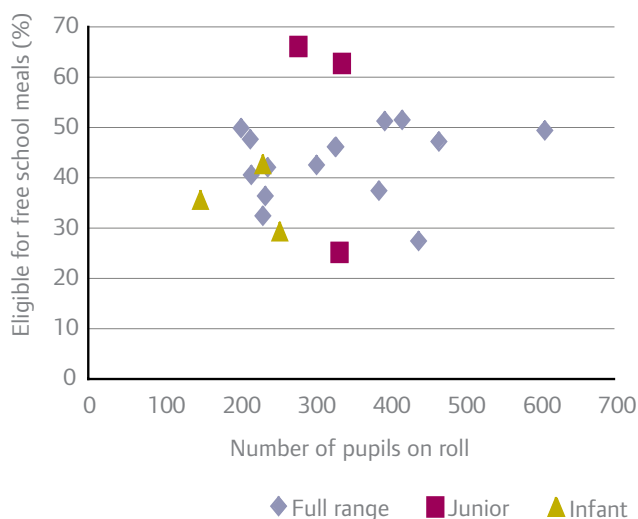
- Ash Green Primary School**, Calderdale
- Banks Road Primary School**, Liverpool
- Bonner Primary School**, Tower Hamlets

- Gateway Primary School**, Westminster
- John Burns Primary School**, Wandsworth
- Michael Faraday School**, Southwark
- St John the Divine Church of England Primary School**, Lambeth
- St Monica's Catholic Primary School**, Sefton
- St Paul's Peel Church of England Primary School**, Salford
- St Sebastian's Catholic Primary School and Nursery**, Liverpool
- Shiremoor Primary School**, North Tyneside
- Simonswood Primary School**, Knowsley
- The Orion Primary School**, Barnet
- Welbeck Primary School**, Nottingham

8 The schools provide for socially and culturally diverse ranges of pupils. Some of the schools are almost ethnically homogeneous; others provide for children and families of a wide range of ethnicity and faith. They range in size from under 200 to over 600 pupils. Many are complex institutions, having nursery classes, sometimes a Sure Start centre, and other care provision on site.

Characteristics of outstanding primary schools in challenging circumstances continued

Figure 2: Classification of sample schools by size and social disadvantage



11 The communities under stress served by these schools contain a disproportionate number of families that find it difficult to function as such. The symptoms, as they affect the young children in those families, particularly but not only where the parents are White British working class, include absent parents – particularly fathers; young carers – children looking after siblings or a parent; grandparents who are carers; alcohol misuse; drug misuse and dealing; domestic turbulence and violence; child abuse; criminality; convoluted and unstable adult relationships; poor diet; social dysfunction and parental ineptitude – ignorance about parenting. Resources are scarce and often not used wisely. There is poverty of hope and aspiration, little productive or creative energy and little emotional stability or moral direction. The children, although they may be loved, are embroiled in and often the victims of their confused circumstances, as the following example illustrates.

Primary schools in challenging circumstances

9 All primary schools are close to their communities. The best are part of them: they see an adult from most families every day. Many have parents’ associations or ‘friends’ of the school, parent helpers and a source of willing volunteers. If schools are fortunate, most parents value education and are keen to support their children’s learning. Teachers can form a productive alliance with them. Parents come to meetings and open evenings and play a full part in the school’s life. Many schools serve balanced communities which may not be particularly prosperous, but which are, in the main and for want of a better word, civilised. They undoubtedly provide for some children who bring problems from home into the school. It is rare for a school to have no children that – for this or other reasons – are hard to teach. But, in most schools, such children are usually in a small minority.

10 In contrast, there is a sizeable body of primary schools serving communities under stress. The most disadvantaged quartile totals over 4,000 primary schools. The 20 schools in this report serve some of the most impoverished electoral wards in England. They excel against the odds and teach children to do the same.

Domestic chaos

The boy came to school talking about his visit to his father. He had been taken to the prison to see him by his father’s brother, his uncle, who now lives with his mother and so is his ‘stepfather’ or ‘other dad’. Drugs are used in the house, which is involved in dealing, and his mother drinks too much. Some of his friends have had many ‘fathers’. They come and they go. Relationships often start impetuously and finish untidily and sometimes violently.

12 Children from other heritages can also present some of these problems, as well as family circumstances that are associated with or exaggerations of their culture, for example: the role of women in the family and perceptions about what that role should be; dominant males and home languages which do not include English. Children of recent immigrants, who may also be asylum seekers or refugees, may come from backgrounds which value education and respect the teacher, but can carry traumas from their past, encounter prejudice and bigotry in their communities, and

be faced with financial insecurity, unsettled accommodation and an immigration status which is unresolved or temporary. The consequences may be as follows.

- Primary schools in challenging circumstances provide for a much higher than average proportion of children who come to school not only from impoverished family backgrounds but from families that may be seriously dysfunctional.
- Some of these children turn up at school distressed, afraid, anxious or in some cases traumatised, or they fail to attend at all.
- Distress can be expressed through a range of behaviours, from withdrawal to aggression, from tearfulness to incontinence.
- The school has to recognise the symptoms and support the children through their bad experiences and try to do something to improve matters and reduce threats to well-being and barriers to learning. This takes commitment, belief, skill and resources.

13 The outstanding schools in this report invest heavily in doing this. They cannot detach themselves from the needs of the child. They never wash their hands of the family, saying ‘We are not social workers’, without trying to organise some support or intervention. They don’t blame the child or home circumstances for lack of engagement or progress. They act out of passion for children rather than compassion. They understand that barriers to learning have to be tackled in order to make learning possible. They are adept at reducing barriers, overcoming emotional and psychological hurdles and creating the right conditions for learning. And they succeed, with most children, for much of the time.

14 When this happens, the rewards are evident not only in the effects on the children but also on the parents, families and the community. This is what one group of parents said about their school, St Paul’s Peel. Other schools in the group received similar commendations.

What parents said

‘It’s a poor area and we don’t always know what is out there for our kids. But because it’s a poor environment, it doesn’t mean they won’t succeed. They will here.’ They added that the school broadens their children’s horizons, which are not therefore confined to what parents can afford. They say the school gives the children ‘the whole world’. It also offers a great deal of support to the parents directly, including curriculum evenings, which are well attended and popular, and the healthy breakfast club. Staff are never put out by parents asking questions or wanting to have a discussion; the school is open, friendly and welcoming to them. The parents say that they also learn from the school. They have been able to observe the positive way it deals with behaviour, providing much more encouragement and praise than censure. They have seen the benefit of this and have been able to learn to do the same at home.

Unearthing the secrets of success

15 The schools in the sample have been gauged repeatedly against Ofsted’s inspection criteria and judged highly effective. The reports and most of their performance data are publicly available. They tend to know their strengths and weaknesses far better than even the best informed visitor and therefore ought to be well placed to identify the most important ingredients of their success.

16 Each of the schools was visited for a day by a current or former Her Majesty’s Inspector who followed a programme designed by the school. The schools chose their own ways of communicating how they had become excellent, what they were doing to sustain excellence, and how they were making what they had learned available to other schools, particularly less effective schools.

Characteristics of outstanding primary schools in challenging circumstances continued

17 There was much in common in what the 20 schools chose to display. World's End, a nursery and infant school in Birmingham, described, in its own words, its main reasons for success as follows.

Success factors:

- a strong and caring ethos and commitment to the children from all staff, coupled with a genuine desire to achieve the very best for our children
- a very positive 'can do' culture where praise and encouragement prevail and self-esteem is high
- outstanding teaching by consistently high-quality staff who show great commitment and passion
- a constant focus on maintaining and improving standards of attainment, emphasising the systematic development of basic literacy and numeracy skills
- high-quality planning, assessment and targeted intervention to enable all children to achieve the best they can.

18 One crucial aspect, without which the above would not be so effective, is the quality of leadership. The majority of the headteachers spread the credit for success widely. However, in talking to school staff, pupils, parents and, in many cases, governors, there was no denying the pivotal role of the headteacher in creating the ethos of the school and exercising strong pedagogical leadership. The faith schools in the sample also generally reflected the ethos, values and vision of their church, although not all had faith-based admission criteria.

19 The report identifies the main reasons for the exceptional quality and performance of the schools in this sample. Its findings are based on visits to the schools, the evidence presented by the schools themselves, performance data and inspection reports. Many examples and case studies are included in order to give a flavour of what schools actually do. These are intended to make the report more useful to other schools that aspire to excellence, as described in the next section.

Achieving excellence

Achieving excellence

Some of the primary schools described here have been excellent for so long that the story of their journey towards achieving excellence is misted by time. Headteachers have changed, staff have changed, and the pupils have reached adulthood. For other schools, though, the journey remains all too real.

20 Remembering what it was like before is a powerful incentive for sustaining improvement. This is particularly true for the headteachers who had to turn a school around, usually having been appointed to do so. This section first highlights some of the important features of highly effective primary schools. It then illustrates some dimensions of transformational leadership through a number of schools which needed urgently to improve.

Raising attainment and achievement

21 It may be stating the obvious to observe that all the schools are strongly focused on their core purpose of maximising children's learning and attainment amid the other outcomes for children, but the fact is that this aim is accompanied by the fundamental belief that every child can succeed. The results of these schools justify this view. All the 17 schools which have Key Stage 2 children (7 to 11 years) reached or exceeded the national average benchmark for the proportion of children attaining Level 4 in 2008, as shown in the school portraits in the last section of this document. In terms of contextual value added scores, three schools were in the top one per cent and 10 in the top decile.

22 Some of the schools are among the highest attaining in the country, remarkable given the barriers to learning many of their children face. Bonner Primary, which is in the top 3% of schools nationally for the value it adds to pupils' learning, has exceptionally high standards, although children enter reception with well below expected accomplishments. When it was inspected in 2007, inspectors were clear about the reasons – which would resonate with the other schools.

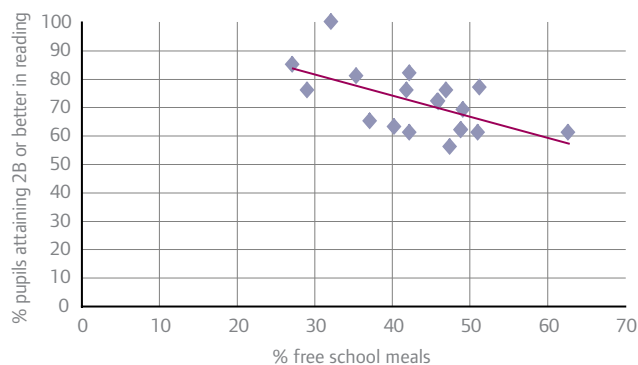
Reasons for high achievement at Bonner

'It is because of consistently high-quality teaching and an exciting and extremely well-adapted curriculum that pupils learn so quickly. Pupils' progress is kept under constant review, and they are often taught basic skills systematically when grouped according to ability, in small numbers. Pupils at risk of not meeting their potential are identified extremely quickly and appropriate support put in place. As a result, very few pupils are listed as having learning difficulties. All groups of pupils do exceedingly well, including those whose first language is not English.'

23 The development of pupils as learners at this school is reflected in the observation that 'they thoroughly enjoy their lessons and have excellent attitudes to school. They behave extremely well and support each other whenever they can.' One pupil said: 'If someone's stuck, we can always help them.'

24 The picture by the end of Key Stage 1 represents excellent rates of progress in schools which are bringing the majority of children, many from an extremely low starting point, to Level 2 competence by the age of seven. Of the 17 schools with Key Stage 1 children, nine exceed the national average of 72% attaining National Curriculum Level 2B in reading by seven years; seven are below average and one is the same (Figure 3). The regression line indicates an association between Key Stage 1 outcomes and relative social advantage.

Figure 3: 2008 Key Stage 1 Level 2B+ results in reading in relation to free school meals indicators of 17 schools providing for Key Stage 1



25 Cotmanhay Infant School and Nursery – judged outstanding against every criterion when last inspected, has certainly narrowed, if not closed, the attainment gap between its children and the national average by the time children reach age seven.

Achievement from three to seven years

Nearly half the children at Cotmanhay School are eligible for free school meals. The area has high levels of unemployment and social disadvantage and many children are on the child protection register. Levels of attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are extremely low. Fifty per cent of the current nursery cohort had significant language delay when assessed on entry; 52% are on the special educational needs register. Despite these low beginnings, children make exceptionally good progress, and although still below national average by the end of Key Stage 1, they hit their targets of 68% of pupils attaining Level 2 reading (61% at Level 2b or above) and 80% Level 2 mathematics, with a number of children attaining Level 3. The staff are determined in their quest to raise standards further, by elevating their expectations and constantly asking: ‘What else can we give them?’

26 Achievement has many other facets. Among these primary schools, children form flute ensembles, perform a Shakespeare play annually, win public speaking competitions and make music with national orchestras. They travel, learn new languages – with a choice of three in one school – have turned a school into an eco-school, and manage school libraries. They even hold their teachers to account; as one child in reception said accusingly when the head walked into the class: ‘Mr Kirk, we didn’t do our phonics today!’

Making teaching and learning consistently effective

27 There are high levels of rigour and consistency in all the schools. In William Ford, for example, this begins with teaching and learning, where teachers plan closely together to ensure that the quality of lessons is consistently very high. It includes behaviour; while pupils are very happy and enthusiastic, they know that staff will not ‘let the little things go’. The rule is that pupils line up after break in silence; consistency means that all pupils do it and all staff enforce it.

Planning excellent lessons

28 When asked about the main reasons for the school’s success, senior leaders at William Ford Junior School point to the consistent high quality of lessons. It helps that the school has a very stable staff and that over half the teachers joined as newly qualified teachers. More importantly, staff at the school plan collaboratively to maintain consistency.

Achieving excellence continued

Shared planning at William Ford School

Very close team work within year groups is seen as the key to the high quality and consistency of teaching and learning. Teachers and teaching assistants in each year group form a tight, close team. They plan all their lessons together and all three classes typically work on the same lessons at the same time. Each year group has a day together each term, without pupils, to plan ahead. They also plan together formally once a week and informally almost every day. The outcomes of lessons are reviewed carefully to inform planning. Lesson plans are very detailed and include meticulous plans for teaching assistants. This thorough and detailed collaborative planning is seen as an important way to ensure consistency and equality of opportunity amongst classes.

Year teams also do their marking together. This ensures that it is consistent across the year group and also enables informal monitoring by the year leader – this very quickly brings new staff to the expected standard. It also raises teachers' expectations, as it allows staff to see the quality of pupils' work across the year group. The rule is that teachers do not give back work that has not been marked. Work is marked that evening, apart from longer English pieces.

29 Collaborative planning and marking on this scale takes a considerable amount of time. The senior leaders acknowledge that staff frequently work very long days. They realise the need to protect and compensate staff in any way that they can, for example by ensuring that they never lose the time allocated for planning, preparation and assessment.

30 Many schools have gone to some lengths to make planning as straightforward as possible. In one school, the headteacher led a review of planning which was initiated by the school's adoption of a more creative curriculum. The previous, detailed mid-term planning has been pared back and a different way of working has been introduced that is led by topics but based on the two questions:

- What do we want children to get out of it?
- What do we want children to learn?

31 It is more streamlined and focused on learning, especially on a grounding in literacy and mathematical skills and enrichment, and is linked to observation and the assessment of children's progress. Some of the other schools in the group have increased the efficiency of the planning process by making as much use as possible of information and communication technology (ICT), for example by storing curriculum plans on the server so that they can be tweaked and revised when needed. This frees staff to discuss new approaches, make interesting resources and teach exciting lessons which they know will improve learning and raise achievement.

Standards for teaching

32 Outstanding schools generally have a very good sense of what it takes for lessons to be outstanding. All the schools are familiar with Ofsted's inspection criteria as well as the national criteria for excellent and advanced skills teachers, published by the Training and Development Agency for Schools.⁵ In World's End School, the headteacher has led discussions with all staff on the question: 'What is high-quality teaching?'

Teaching and learning policy

All staff have a copy of criteria for effective teaching and learning, which are used for observing their teaching. Over the last two years, the headteacher and staff have been discussing and finalising their policy for teaching and learning in order to sustain their high-quality status. They have encapsulated what they believe about effective lessons; what good teaching and good learning look like in their school; what an effective learning environment looks like; what attitudes to learning they want to develop in their school; what competencies, skills and dispositions they want to develop in their children.

33 Similar policies underpin the work of Shiremoor School where the staff use evidence robustly to inform practice. Throughout the school, pupils discuss their learning and learn about learning. In Years 5 and 6, this leads to a consistent ‘incremental learning’ system. Pupils understand this and can explain it; in their words, it ensures that they:

- don’t give up, as learning can be difficult
- don’t let their minds wander
- try and try again
- have a good attitude
- ignore any silliness or low aspirations
- find the learning steps.

An analysis of Ofsted inspection reports on the 20 schools reveals a number of common features of **outstanding teaching and learning**. These include:

- stimulating and enthusiastic teaching which interests, excites and motivates pupils and accelerates their learning
- high expectations of what pupils can do
- consistency in the quality of teaching across the school
- development of good learning habits, with many opportunities for pupils to find things out for themselves
- highly structured approaches to reading, writing and mathematics, with some ability grouping
- well-planned lessons which provide for the differing needs of pupils
- stimulating classroom environment
- frequent praise and a valued reward system
- well-trained and deployed teaching assistants
- a close check on learning during lessons, with effective marking and assessment.

Providing a broad, balanced, relevant and stimulating curriculum

Good foundations

34 The nursery classes in the 16 schools that have them create an environment in which children want to do things and want to learn. They make guided choices about their activities but, having decided, must stick with it and not flit about. Staff foster confidence and self-esteem. Typically, staff work very closely with parents, having first visited every home before the child starts. Entry profiles are completed. Subsequently, the schools put a lot of effort into showing parents how they can help their children to learn.

35 In one school, for example, the children are settled in over a three-week period and parents are welcome to spend the first 20 minutes of each day in the school with their children, working with them, seeing who their friends are and how they are responding. Staff pay attention to the early identification of any speech, language and behaviour problems, achieving secure early identification within weeks. Parents are involved in discussion of significant issues and concerns. Nursery staff give high priority to forming good relationships with each child and setting good working habits from the beginning, starting with such skills as sharing, choosing and persevering, always building confidence alongside capability. Language is developed through demonstration, talk and the engagement of adults in play. There are close links with health and other social provision.

36 The starting point for some children is very low. Pupils often come to the school not toilet-trained, with parents saying, ‘The school will do that’. Many pupils cannot speak on arrival in school at age three and skills are well below age-related expectations. The early years are vitally important if, by the end of Year 6, the children are to achieve high standards academically and socially, as they do. In Banks Road School this is achieved in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Achieving excellence continued

Applying the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum at Banks Road School

- a strong and explicit focus on play, sociability and enjoyment
- ready access to resources so pupils can choose and take responsibility
- curriculum planning which is closely related to pupils' interests, so that it motivates them
- explicit encouragement of cooperation between children, promoted by skilled questioning by and support from staff
- plenty of space, including 'messy' and 'clean' rooms as well as large, accessible, and well-structured outdoor areas
- well-focused speaking and listening activities
- much use of ICT, preparing for a future unknown
- no rush to pursue writing; pupils choose when they wish to start writing; in practice, they all start writing by the end of the reception year.

37 These approaches are strongly augmented by role play and drama, which is used across the curriculum throughout the school. The school has developed its work in this area thoughtfully over many years, making it an integral part of its curriculum. It enables pupils to think more widely and consider each other. It starts in the nursery, where suitable software was purchased to support it. By the end of Year 6, pupils are taking part in a substantial Shakespeare production each year. Each production is different and builds on previous years, raising expectations further.

38 One of the benefits of excellent work at the Early Years Foundation Stage is to reduce the number of children who experience special educational needs from the outset. At St John the Divine School, for example, the proportion of children on the special educational needs register is low (4.7% compared to the national average of 19.6%) because the school tackles concerns early on in the nursery and

reception classes, using additional teaching resources, including staff, to focus early on children's learning needs. The school makes sure that basic skills are taught well and acquired by all children early on. This has a significant impact on children's learning overall through their primary years. The school's target is for every child to achieve at least Level 2b in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 1, unless there are particular special needs, and in 2008, 100% did so. Increasing proportions of pupils are also achieving Level 2a and Level 3 at the end of the key stage, a quite remarkable outcome.

Structure and routines

39 Schools in challenging circumstances know the importance of a coherent strategy for behaviour and very strong continuity between classes. One priority is to provide routine and structures to lessons and to the way things are presented. Children know that only so many of them – two, three or four, for example – can join in particular activities. Assemblies, which are calming in their effect, can also make an important contribution.

Toning up the school

Assemblies are structured and used to promote active learning at Ramsden School. This includes, for example, reciting the school prayer, a reading activity, a period of calm and 'brain gym'. Calmness is encouraged in the school. It compensates for children's very turbulent environment. There is a strong reward system, and all children in the course of time receive prizes and stickers. Friday is the 'well done' assembly. All classes have responsibility for doing things 'the Ramsden way'. Children have a sense of belonging and pride which is always recognised when they go out. The school stopped having an award for attendance because too many children were coming to school when they were not well.

Curriculum design and planning

40 In terms of the design and content of the curriculum, the schools take a variety of approaches. Some organise pupils by ability in the core subjects; others do not. Some cover many of the subjects through themes; others invest a lot of time in the creative curriculum and can demonstrate benefits in writing and other forms of expression. Most make use of the National Primary Strategy's 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL) programme for developing and encouraging children's self-esteem and confidence, although approaches differ widely. Since all the schools have high standards of attainment, the inference is that an interesting, stimulating, well-taught curriculum through which the school interprets statutory requirements is a fundamental principle for effective schools. This point has been stressed previously by Ofsted and Her Majesty's Inspectors before Ofsted.^{6,7}

41 Outstanding schools are confident organisations that weigh up curriculum initiatives and local and national programmes before deciding whether they are right for the school, not being afraid to dispense with them if they are not, as the following example shows.

Shaping Key Stage 2

In Cubitt Town Junior School, the day is very structured: all classes do English and mathematics at the same time and the whole school reads together. However, leaders are not afraid to make bold changes in the interests of their pupils and go their own way. This meant, for example, abandoning the National Literacy Strategy in Year 3 and developing a different approach when the staff found that it didn't meet their children's needs. It also led to the school organising pupils by ability in three sets in each year group for mathematics and English.

42 Common to all these schools, however, is the way in which they understand the needs of their pupils and shape the curriculum to match them very closely. Outstanding schools have the confidence and imagination to take the statutory curriculum and make it their own. While they follow national guidelines and have regard for the work set out by the National Strategies, they typically do not hesitate to adapt the curriculum to make it as effective as possible. The schools share some of the principles set out in *Excellence and enjoyment*.⁸ They place great emphasis on achieving very high standards in the core skills and support these throughout an exciting and relevant curriculum of their own making. Some schools intended to use the review of the primary curriculum as an opportunity to reflect on their own curriculum, but did not expect to make major changes.⁹ For example, Gateway Primary School already has a curriculum with subject integrity and a number of cross-curricular projects which work well, richly supported by ICT resources.

43 The schools demonstrate different ways of managing curriculum planning. Typically, much is delegated to subject, year group or key stage leaders. In the following example, curriculum subject leaders have always had a very influential whole-school role which makes a key contribution to school improvement.

The strength of subject leaders

Teachers at Shiremoor are all managers of subjects or aspects. Subject leaders determine and evaluate the curriculum throughout the school. This leads to a consistently strong curriculum across all year groups. It also means that all staff understand the whole school. They see the cumulative effect of all the school's work. One celebrated example is that although many pupils come to school not speaking or with very low levels of language skill, they move on to become confident public speakers because of the specific teaching programme the school has devised.

⁶ *The curriculum in successful primary schools* (HMI 553), Ofsted, 2002.

⁷ *Primary Education in England, A survey by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools* (DES), 1978.

⁸ *Excellence and enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (DFES/0377/2003), DFES, 2003.

⁹ *Independent review of the primary curriculum: final report* (00499-2099DOM-EN), DCSF, 2009.

Achieving excellence continued

44 In other schools, year or key stage teams – including teaching assistants – provide the engines of curriculum planning, incorporating the framework of the core subjects. ICT can also provide a useful planning tool. At Gateway Primary School, for example, interactive whiteboard technology is not just a resource that is available in every classroom; it is central to the management and transmission of the school's well-integrated curriculum.

ICT-based planning of the curriculum

A cornerstone of the curriculum structure is to start topics or studies in familiar contexts but quickly move the learning on. After an extended trial period and several years of full use, thousands of interactive whiteboard slides have been prepared which help to bring the curriculum to life through links with sources in a range of media. For example, the high definition bright screens enable much better shared reading of stories than using even the best of big books. The clear voice of recorded readers enables the teacher to maintain eye contact with children, and the opportunity to play such effects as film clips of whales sounding and the sounds they make brings the world powerfully into the classroom. Text can be used and manipulated interactively.

45 The use of ICT in this way is very well thought out and managed. Year teams of staff use it as the basic mechanism for structuring and planning the curriculum and, over time, have created imaginative resources of high quality. These are not fixed but can be – and are – used flexibly, modified and updated.

Inspections of the 20 schools report their **outstanding curriculum provision**, including:

- placing a strong emphasis on, and making exemplary provision for, the basic skills
- strengthening English, mathematics and science through applications in other subjects and areas
- writing for purpose in a variety of transactional styles
- developing language by encouraging pupils to communicate their understanding and evaluate their learning
- activities carefully tailored to widen pupils' learning and enrich their lives
- a vibrant and exciting range of visits and stimulating inputs
- planning which tailors activities to individual pupils including the gifted and talented
- well-managed homework carefully communicated to pupils and parents.

Assessing and tracking progress

46 An undoubted feature of all the schools' success is the rigour of their assessment. This starts in the Early Years Foundation Stage classes where the continual observation and assessment of individual children are key activities. Time may also be provided for detailed observation of individuals or groups. With older children, assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.

Rigorous assessment

In World's End Infant School, the nursery staff make continual observations of children. In addition, every day one member of staff has an hour to observe and track particular children in her group. These findings are discussed as a staff team at the end of the day and an overview sheet of evidence kept. These sheets are used to plan activities for each area of learning. 'My Learning Journey' profiles are kept on each child and the teacher in charge of the nursery regularly discusses the progress recorded in these booklets with the reception teachers.

The headteacher also undertakes detailed analyses of reading, writing and mathematics, based initially on the scores in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile, to establish that children are on track to meet their targets at the end of Key Stage 1 and to see which children need further support. Half-termly assessments are done using the local authority's 'signposts' and coded to identify whether a child has improved, stayed the same or regressed. Each class has a tracking sheet for reading, writing and mathematics which includes the actual target for each child, as well as a note of what the child is predicted to attain.

targets are used in all years to promote high expectations, as well as to inform the next steps in learning. Other schools include a wider range of subjects, such as physical education and ICT, in their in-depth assessment.

Knowing a level when you see it

Considerable time at William Ford Junior School has been invested in ensuring that teachers in all year groups can assign a National Curriculum level to pupils' work accurately. Substantial time has also been taken to ensure that teachers understand what is needed to move pupils to the next level: 'If it is a 3b, how do we get to a 3a?' Pupils' progress is analysed carefully. Every teacher meets the headteacher termly to discuss the progress of each pupil in detail. Comprehensive notes are made. Meetings are used to review progress, set targets for the coming term and decide how each child is going to be helped to meet or exceed her or his targets. Where necessary, individual pupils receive additional support or the curriculum is modified for them. For example, the classes of one year group were grouped by ability in English for six weeks to allow teachers to reinforce pupils' understanding of sentence construction.

47 In Key Stage 2, the schools make much use of tests to supplement and benchmark teacher assessments. Some undertake formal tests from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in reading, writing and mathematics in all year groups each term, in parallel with teacher assessments. This allows progress to be tracked through Key Stage 2 and challenging targets to be set.

48 John Burns Primary School also values the end of key stage national tests and other forms of national or benchmarked testing. The headteacher believes these provide rigour and accountability, allowing no excuses, and they have been very valuable on the school's journey to success. The school believes that if pupils learn well, they will achieve their potential in the tests, without the need for teaching to the test. Assessment data and benchmarked

49 Self-assessment by the pupils is a particularly strong feature at Ash Green Primary School. Children are taught to use self-assessment grids, colouring in where they think they are up to. Discussion with a group of Year 5 pupils showed they were familiar with self-assessment and knew exactly what levels they had achieved and the targets they were aiming for. There is a raising attainment plan for each class – as part of the whole school improvement plan – with checklists for recording progress. Literacy targets are tracked within the topic work through which much of the curriculum is organised. Before beginning a topic, teachers' planning links literacy targets to the topic and they return to see how well these have been met at the end of the topic.

Achieving excellence continued

50 Typically, information about pupils' progress is analysed very carefully and used to identify individuals and groups of pupils who need specific help. In one school, children who are not making sufficient progress are grouped and given focused support. There are two sizeable daily slots when this work takes place and, at any one time, approximately four or five pupils from each class will be receiving help. Much of the intervention work is led by the school's highly skilled teaching assistants. Recent intervention groups include a small group of lower/middle attaining pupils who received reinforcement work for mathematics. Another involved a group of four quiet Year 5 girls. They could read fairly well, but could not retain or use the information. They formed a small reading group and active questioning techniques were used to explore and improve their understanding. In the following term, three of the four pupils moved up a whole level in reading.

Attracting and appointing effective staff

51 When appointments need to be made, the process is rigorous. Typically, headteachers and governors have a clear idea of the sort of person they are seeking. In one school, for example, staff are selected explicitly on the basis that they are lively people with ideas. The headteacher does not want 'yes people' but those who are willing to exercise autonomy and contribute ideas within a structure. When it comes to attracting applicants from another school, the headteacher's reputation and the school's success become powerful influences.

Staff are selected explicitly on the basis that they are lively people with ideas.

The magnetism of success

As one headteacher's clear view of excellent practice and high expectations became increasingly established, with outcomes for pupils improving to their current outstanding level, it was possible to recruit staff who shared and could grow within the new ethos and who wanted to work in a relatively underprivileged but successful community. This was a key factor in sustaining the school's success.

Selection is rigorous. All support staff, for example, must have English and mathematics GCSE or equivalent because the school considers that, without this minimum, they cannot demonstrate good practice to pupils. The staff can be helped by the school to achieve such qualifications.

52 Most of the schools are involved in initial teacher education. One advantage is that when they have vacancies for class teachers, they can often recruit from applicants whose work in the school is known. Support for staff and the development of outstanding teachers with consistent approaches reflect on the leadership of the school.

Transformational leadership

53 Several of the schools in the sample were in dire straits in the mid- or late-1990s when a transforming headteacher was appointed. Their predicaments were all too familiar, for example: overwhelmed, exhausted, inept, absent or sick leaders; poor behaviour, low standards, tired and demoralised teachers; antipathetic, anxious or, often, aggressive parents.

54 The cult of the ‘hero head’ is unfashionable and, in most cases, inappropriate in terms of corporate and distributed leadership, and few of the headteachers would fit this mould. Yet heroic they undoubtedly were. They commonly displayed considerable vision, courage, conviction and determination in taking on schools in very challenging circumstances which were either failing to provide an adequate education for their pupils or had serious weaknesses.¹⁰ Transformational leadership is highlighted in this section with particular reference to four such primary schools: Ash Green, The Orion, St John the Divine and John Burns.

Purpose, vision and values

55 When the new headteacher arrived at St John the Divine Primary School in Lambeth in 1995, the school was in special measures and unequivocally labelled by a London evening paper as ‘the worst school in the country’. Long-established staff recall it well. ‘The previous headteacher had left in July and had not been replaced. Inspectors came early in September. The walls were still bare. We had a ‘rough’ Year 6 class...’

Restoring leadership in St John the Divine

The deputy headteacher took on the role of acting headteacher and started to turn the school around. Behaviour policies were established and some improvement was evident. Then the new headteacher came and rapidly made a big difference. He expected everyone to have the same high standards and to work as a team across the school. Children were not to be sent out of class when misbehaving, but encouraged through learning. The appointment of more teaching assistants – one for each class – provided support in the classroom. Above all, he led by example and would never expect anyone to do something he was not prepared to do himself. A year after coming out of special measures, inspection judged the school to be a good school. Inspection reports in 2004 and 2008 have judged it to be outstanding.

56 Underlying this approach one can detect what is commonly described as ‘moral purpose’, a fundamental set of values centred on putting children first and faith in what children can achieve and teachers can do. The mission of transformational headteachers reflects the following unswerving beliefs.

- All pupils can achieve high standards, given sufficient time and high-quality support.
- All teachers can teach to high standards, with the right example, conditions and help.
- High expectations and early intervention are essential.
- Teachers need to learn all the time, and they need to be able to articulate what they do, why they do it and how effective it was.

57 These beliefs recur throughout this report. The outstanding schools demonstrate that it is possible to realise these beliefs in practice, school by school. The challenge for the system is to infect all school leaders with the same sense that their ‘impossibles’ are actually ‘achievable’.

Developing high expectations and aspirations

58 High expectations characterise the leadership of all the schools in this report. If it is demanding to take over one special measures school, then to take over two presents an extraordinary challenge. The Orion Primary School replaced failing infant and junior schools in 2000.

High expectations characterise the leadership of all the schools in this report.

¹⁰ Schools in England which are deemed to be failing to provide an acceptable standard of education are formally classified as requiring ‘special measures’. Until September 2005, ‘serious weaknesses’ was one category less than special measures in terms of the severity of inspection judgement. Since September 2005, a school in this category is judged to require significant improvement and is therefore given a ‘notice to improve’.

Achieving excellence continued

Fresh start school

The new headteacher saw the need and opportunity for a fresh start in every sense. The school chose the name of a constellation and stellar expectations ensued, signalled by recognising star qualities in all pupils (and staff). This was a giant leap considering the background of poor behaviour, low self-esteem, low standards and the disengagement of parents as the prevailing issues which resulted in the closure of the failing schools. Re-branding the school has proved a major success, creating an ethos of high expectations, with all staff working to provide socially and culturally impoverished children with rich and unique learning experiences.

59 In one school, two very long-serving teaching assistants are in no doubt about the common goal of all staff: 'We want this school to be the best.' They stress that it is not a competitive mission but is about care for children and families and holding the highest aspirations for children's progress. The principles and driving motivation of the headteacher are much in evidence. It is clear that expectations are very high; only the best is good enough for the pupils in this school and this is immediately apparent to any visitor.

Quality at first sight

As a new teacher in St John the Divine expressed it: 'You only need to step into the school to know what sort of school it is.' Another said 'You don't need to read any policies to know how things are here.' A walk around the school shows that it is promoting learning at every turn. Displays are fresh, informative, celebratory and often compelling. They challenge and respond to the curious child and are an integral part of learning. There is something to learn in every corner. Valuing work of quality begins in the nursery, where children who have produced something they are proud of will themselves decide to display it.

60 Expectations have to be known, understood and shared to be of value. The school ensured that pupils, parents and the community were constantly reminded of them. The same is true of the challenge of raising aspirations among pupils and parents. This is usually done as a relentless message coming out from the school at every opportunity. It is useful to be able to reinforce the message with role models of successful past pupils.

61 One school sees an opportunity for this in the changing composition of its intake. The school is now a very successful and highly regarded school for local children. While heavily oversubscribed, it now attracts a few middle class children. The headteacher is in two minds about this changing intake. She wants to continue the ethos she established. But part of her approach involves raising ambitions – there is a display in the school hall of ex-pupils who have gone to university or who have achieved particularly well in some way – and she feels that some more middle class families would support her aspiration for the disadvantaged ones.

The schools are relentless in raising the expectations and aspirations of both pupils and parents.

Managing behaviour

62 Ash Green Primary School was in disarray and at risk of requiring special measures when the current headteacher took over in 1997. National test results at the end of Key Stage 2 averaged 39%. Teachers were 'crowd controllers' and bright children were held back by the many who disrupted learning.

The battle for Ash Green

The new headteacher's first priority was to deal with behaviour. He tackled it in two ways. Although the rules of the school were clear, parents, children and staff did not know what they were. So he asked parents and children what they should be and they drew up a code of conduct together. Every child and family had a copy.

The second approach was the tough one – to clamp down on swearing and other anti-social behaviour. He said: 'If children infringed, I took them home and roused them in front of mum and dad before bringing them immediately back to school.'

After he took over in November 1997, the school had a 'shaky' inspection by Ofsted in 1998. The Chair of the Governing Body, who has been at the school from that time until now, gave the headteacher tremendous backing and was prepared to take risks.

The new headteacher's trenchant approach made him very unpopular, but gradually the community realised that he meant what he said and was not going to be intimidated. He led by example. He taught every morning for 18 months, taking the most disruptive and least able children. Even now, he is in and out of classrooms all the time. This constant presence in classrooms led to more formal evaluation of teaching. His role model was the headteacher of his previous school who gave a lot of attention to monitoring, was very visible and a presence about the school.

When he took over at Ash Green, the curriculum was 'all over the place'. He introduced discrete teaching in English, mathematics and science and focused on pupil assessment and tracking. Staff have been inspired by his drive, determination and vision but recognise, as one said, that 'the head won't stand any nonsense'.

63 You cannot expect good behaviour if there is no understanding of what is and is not acceptable. Several of the schools have involved parents and pupils in drawing up codes of conduct, which consolidated the high standards expected. Two main benefits emerge from such

engagement. Families could not dissociate themselves so easily from the school's values and requirements. Moreover, they could choose whether or not to apply similar expectations at home. Some parents have been admonished by their children for speaking or behaving in socially unacceptable ways, for example swearing or using racist language.

Simple rules for the youngest

Care, consideration for others and consistent behaviour are evident throughout the school. Voices are not raised in anger; politeness prevails; systems and procedures are well embedded; documentation is exemplary; and learning is pervasive. Discipline is instilled from the start, where the male nursery teacher insists on four rules which develop and broaden as children develop:

- put your hand up; do not call out
- listen to your teacher
- treat each other nicely
- keep your hands, feet and everything else to yourself.

64 Managing behaviour is typically thorough in Shiremoor. The school has developed clear and well-established rules in collaboration with the children. These are displayed very prominently, along with motivational messages, on professionally produced boards around the school, including in full view at the front of the hall. These are well explained to parents and demonstrated effectively by staff. There is a clear system of rewards and sanctions, with popular rewards being much more important than the sanctions. There is a strong focus on spiritual and moral development and the promotion of a clear and positive school ethos. But the rewards are not what enable the pupils to behave so well; rather, it is the school's positive ethos and engaging curriculum. It has avoided curriculum-induced disaffection. These values are also in evidence at St Monica's Catholic Primary School.

Achieving excellence continued

Motivation through the curriculum

Because it is well managed, practical, aspirational and closely related to the pupils' needs, the curriculum excites and motivates them. Good behaviour is the result. Non-core subjects are often taught in the morning. The school does not achieve its success in English and mathematics by slavishly following literacy and numeracy schemes, although specialist teaching and the adoption of very best practice (quality not quantity) in those subjects is very important. The focus on the whole curriculum and the whole child is, most of all, what brings success and motivation in the basic skills.

65 Exclusions in these outstanding schools are so rare as to be exceptional.¹¹ The schools have a range of approaches to support children whose condition or circumstances give rise to severe behaviour problems. Nurture rooms, time out, work with inclusion or special educational needs staff and, occasionally, specialist advice, liaison with families and other approaches can all help, but the schools themselves will say the main key to improving behaviour is the ability to engage the child through expert teaching and fascinating learning. Some of the schools are so expert that special educational needs largely evaporate.

Personal example

66 Some of the schools were not in an Ofsted category at the time the headship changed but were clearly heading in that direction. John Burns Primary School is one such example.

Headteachers as role models

When the headteacher was appointed to John Burns, the school was very small; classes were not full and it was relatively low-achieving. Behaviour was poor, with much shouting by pupils and staff. The quality of teaching was mixed and usually not good enough. At that time, the headteacher took on a significant teaching commitment herself to demonstrate good practice. Her approach was carefully thought out but more practical than cerebral. It was just: 'This is what good teaching is like and so this is what we shall do.' The headteacher and senior staff personally mentored and coached staff. They demonstrated calm behaviour and had clear expectations about the way to behave, banning shouting by staff and pupils. Staff underperformance issues were tackled and some staff left once they realised what the new expectations were. Opportunities arose to appoint new staff. The school was able to choose carefully, bringing in colleagues who were enthused by the vision and could subscribe to such a culture of high expectations.

67 What we see in all the schools that have been turned around are headteachers who recognise quickly what is fundamentally wrong with their schools, often endorsed by inspection findings, and are determined to put things right. The message, 'Start as you mean to go on,' is borne out in case after case: not for them a honeymoon period or using the first term to take stock before changing anything. If behaviour, for example, is disrupting learning on day one, it needs to be tackled on day two.

68 As time has passed, the style of leadership of the headteacher at John Burns has evolved to suit changing circumstances; it also reflects her own professional development. She started out autocratically because standards were so low. As she has developed her staff team, and there is much greater stability in the staffing, she has been able to be more democratic, involving staff much more in strategic and operational leadership. This also shows her increasing confidence as a leader. The school's journey is hers, too – it is very personal.

From good to great

69 The approaches illustrated by the schools in their journey from good (or worse) to outstanding (or better) differ in their details but have a number of common features. They are all well thought out, implemented, and consistently applied. They make the best use of staff expertise. They set out to give children a worthwhile experience at school in a structured, safe and interesting environment. The following principles and priorities emerge clearly, again and again.

- a. Restore order and calm so that teaching and learning can take place.
- b. Ensure that high expectations are set and that everyone – pupils, parents, staff and governors – is clear what those are.
- c. Get the pupils and parents involved, engaged and committed so that they cannot later complain that they ‘did not know’.
- d. Lead by example; demonstrate the behaviours you expect of others and show that you are prepared to do anything you might ask of them.
- e. Set and demonstrate high standards for teaching and learning.
- f. Look early on at the curriculum, the school day and pupils’ experiences of school.
- g. Monitor and evaluate every aspect of the school’s performance.

Above all:

- h. Gauge the ability of staff to adopt consistent approaches: in teaching and learning, in applying policies – especially behaviour – and in routines and basic practices. As one chair of governors said: ‘Staff need to be aboard the bus’ when the school embarks on its journey of improvement.

70 Many of these features can be established relatively quickly. The practices need to be embedded in the school community, internalised by staff and practised with relentless consistency while always searching for improvements. The school that combines consistent good practice with an ambitious vision for its children towards which it is constantly reaching is well along the road to excellence.

71 Primary schools in very challenging circumstances have a further mission, in reducing barriers to children’s learning and gaining the trust of fractured families and communities so as to help them support their children’s education and development. This takes time, courage and determination. It is the big challenge for schools which seek to make a sustained impact on children and to contribute to restoring community values and coherence. This topic is explored in the next section.

Sustaining excellence

Sustaining excellence

The leaders of outstanding schools are intrinsically motivated to sustain excellence. As one school reported: ‘All the leaders of the school are strongly focused on maintaining and developing further the high standards and achievement across the school.’

The challenge of remaining outstanding

72 Typically, the staff of these exceptional schools are very conscious of the high expectations of them. They feel secure, committed to the school and its pupils, share the high expectations of the leadership team and are keen to ensure these are delivered.

73 For many schools, an inspection report which judges them outstanding brings with it an expectation that they will remain so. Thus, while one school professes ‘not to be in it for external judgements’, others would identify with the headteacher who was ‘uneasy after the last outstanding Ofsted report’. She thought it might mark a point at which good staff began to leave, and decided to set the school on a new course by re-examining and developing the school’s vision. The outcome was a consensus that, to sustain success, they must move forward and be innovative. This has resulted in a new, more fluid curriculum and with new dimensions in the arts, creativity, and information and communication technology (ICT).

74 The schools which adopt a ‘steady as we go’ approach are outnumbered by those that see change as a constant and innovation as a necessity. Sustaining the principles which have led to success is reflected in the ethos of Bonner Primary School.

Key principles:

- the culture of high expectations and no excuses
- the autonomy of and agreement from or ownership by staff
- the focus on detailed data and evidence
- the school’s confidence to pursue its own approaches.

75 Perhaps in contrast, Shiremoor Primary School claims it ‘is always looking for new ideas’. The school is often a pilot for initiatives – if it can see that there is potential to add value to them. This ‘keeps the school fresh’.

76 Inspection and research evidence agree that strong early years education plays a hugely important role in the subsequent achievements of pupils.¹² This is reflected in all 16 schools which had nursery and reception classes, whether infant or full-range primary schools. Cotmanhay Infant and Nursery School is clear about how it sustains excellence.

Strong early years education plays a hugely important role in the subsequent achievements of pupils.

Early years excellence

Keys to the continued success of the Cotmanhay Infant and Nursery School include:

- an insistence on high-quality teaching and learning and continuous self-evaluation
- an absolute commitment to children's progress by all staff, with a constant emphasis on tracking each individual child's progress; keeping a 'promises book' for every child, containing their targets for literacy and mathematics, which are shared regularly with parents
- relentless use of positive reinforcement and language to reward all children's efforts
- teaching children *how* to become learners and *how* to develop self-confidence and believe in themselves
- setting targets for the curriculum, each class and groups within a class, as well as for every child, which are reviewed every six weeks
- providing an exciting and relevant curriculum which makes full use of every space in and out of the school building. Displays of children's work celebrate their achievements but also stimulate further learning, such as work linked to visiting artists and theme weeks exploring patterns across different cultures
- giving children as rich and wide opportunities as possible, for example a range of visits out of school and input from visitors such as Visiting Creative Partnerships, including a theatre and film expert; lunchtime and after-school clubs such as a gardening club
- working as a close-knit team with teaching assistants playing a key role in helping pupils achieve their targets. The teaching assistants are trained and involved in teaching groups for 'Letters and Sounds',¹³ running the Nurture Room, assessing, planning, ICT, reviewing individual education plans, target-setting and the use of positive language and discipline
- providing induction and 'buddy' systems for all staff new to the school including lunchtime supervisors
- rewarding children who demonstrate positive attitudes to work, for example 'star worker' where a child can use a special cushion for the day and take it to sit on in assembly; a 'finer diner' where children eat lunch at a dining table beautifully laid with golden plates and flowers
- involving parents with a shared family liaison worker, home visits, workshops on positive parenting, mathematics and literacy, a parents' notice board in every classroom
- standardisation of assessment across all year groups through the extensive analysis and use of data
- growing leadership skills among senior and middle leaders as part of succession planning.

77 In Berrymede Junior School, the pupils refer freely to the systems in the school and the quality of their teachers. The headteacher feels that continuing success comes from the fact that stakeholders throughout the school community are aware of their responsibilities and the high expectations for academic success, discipline and behaviour. It lists the reasons for its high performance.

¹³ *Letters and sounds: principles and practice of high quality phonics*, Primary National Strategy, DCSF, 2007.

Sustaining excellence continued

Keys to the sustained success of Berrymede Junior School

Teaching, leadership and teamwork

- an insistence on high-quality learning and teaching, and continuous self-evaluation
- excellent communication and team work, with teaching assistants playing a key role
- an induction and 'buddy' system for all new staff, including lunchtime supervisors
- support for succession planning through the development of middle and senior leadership skills

Targets and tracking

- close, termly tracking of each child's progress
- individual targets – every child has a 'promises book' (the name used by a child) which has their targets for English and mathematics
- targets for the curriculum, each class, and groups within a class, reviewed every six weeks

- extensive analysis and use of data, with standardisation of assessment across all year groups

Developing positive attitudes to learning

- rewards for children that enhance positive attitudes, such as 'stars of the week' badges, certificates and team points, Year 6 leaders and elected Head Boy and Girl
- an exciting and relevant curriculum which makes full use of space in and outside the building
- displays of children's work that celebrate their achievements and stimulate further learning

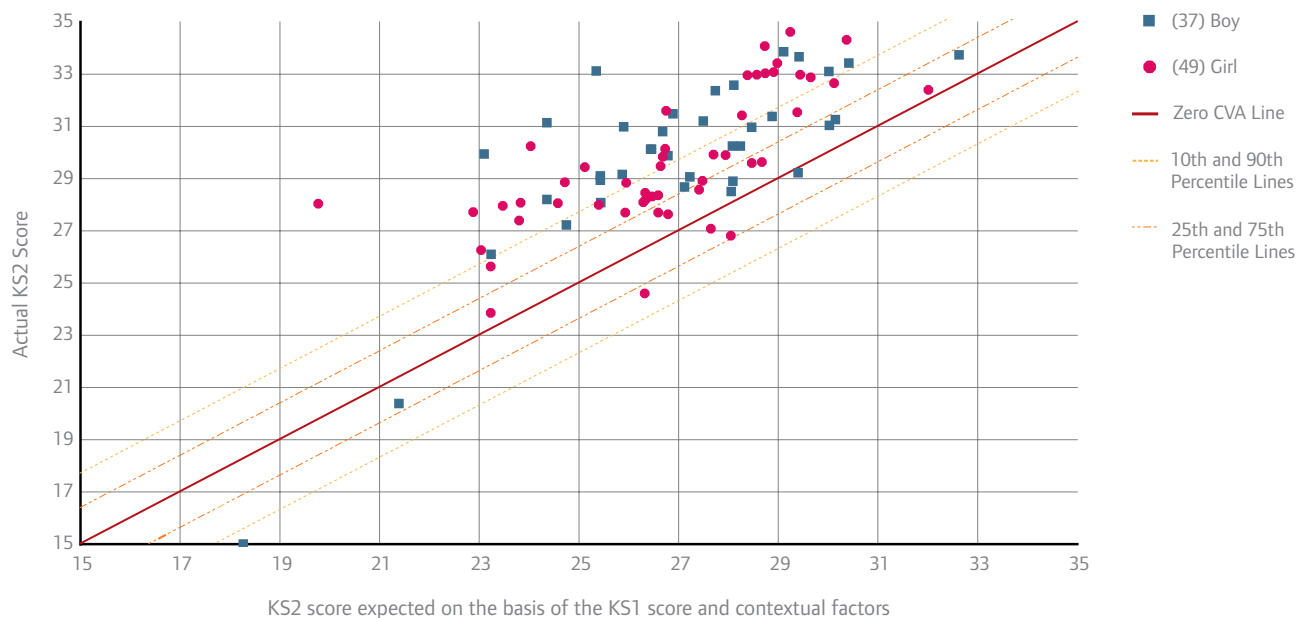
Involving parents

- close links with parents through 'reading record books', two outreach workers who are accessible to parents and pupils at the beginning and end of a school day, and an 'open door' policy.

The inspirational guidance of the headteacher and senior team is key to the consistently high levels of performance in the school.

78 In describing some of the factors associated with sustaining excellence, this report highlights those which take time to grow or develop, such as gaining the trust and confidence of the community or achieving teaching and learning of consistently high quality throughout the school. A school such as Gateway provides an example of what can be done. In 2008, this school – in which almost half the children were eligible for free school meals – had the highest Key Stage 1 to 2 contextual value added score (102.8) of the schools in the sample. Its aggregate results at Levels 4 and 5 are also far better than the national averages. Figure 3 shows the value added for each Year 6 pupil in 2008.

Figure 4: Individual contextual value added scores from Key Stages 1 to 2, Gateway Primary School, 2008



79 The graph shows that 80 of the 86 pupils in this large year group achieved better than expected results at the end of their primary education, exceptional even among outstanding schools. What accounts for this success, which is repeated year after year? The headteacher gives all the credit to others, but it is clear that what the 2008 inspection report described as ‘the inspirational guidance of the headteacher and his senior team’ is key to the consistently high levels of performance in the school. This is reflected in the sustained good teaching and learning; the broad, well-designed curriculum using ICT as a lynchpin; appropriate assessment, tracking and intervention systems; and the closeness to parents and the community referred to earlier. The headteacher’s modest style does not cloak the obvious truth that his leadership and direction of the school are very clear and highly respected. He holds the school’s ‘big picture’ clearly in his mind and knows its needs and characteristics intimately. His deft approach has the effect of including and valuing others, so that all can contribute well, within the school’s overall vision. He sees his role in part as about making other people’s lives less complex, with clear enabling systems, so that they can focus on what really matters. This is clearly recognised and valued by staff and governors.

80 The headteacher has used the resource and flexibility available through workforce reform to invest in more teachers, as far as possible, rather than teaching assistants. Each year group, therefore, is usually staffed by five teachers for the three classes. The teachers who are not class-based are often senior and support in class. Another example is that, while pupils’ progress is carefully tracked, the school does not slavishly follow the interventions recommended by the National Strategies for underachievers, but is rather more choosy, confidently relying on its own judgement and broader knowledge of each pupil. It uses some formal intervention packages but, often, intervention involves ‘professionally judged’ support by teachers in class. It is not mechanistic. The school can show evidence of the success of this work, as pupils’ progress is very fast and results are consistently in the top 1% of schools nationally. These exceptional outcomes would not be possible without concern for the well-being, progress and achievements of individual pupils.

Sustaining excellence continued

Focusing on children, parents and the community

Children first

81 The almost universal refrain of the schools is to the effect that ‘children are at the heart of everything we do’.¹⁴ This is more than a platitude; it shows in their aims, values and practices. The guiding principle is to want and provide the best for children. This means that pupils’ well-being and learning come first and planning, teaching, the learning environment, staffing and systems are all geared to the needs of each child.

The child at the core

Staff at Welbeck are highly committed to supporting children, parents and families. The headteacher and other staff are readily accessible before, during and after school. There is close liaison with the Sure Start provider (a children’s centre), and family support workers follow up concerns that come to the school’s notice. The child is at the core of all the school’s work. This is the top priority. There is much early intervention through which teaching assistants provide nurture and support. Their first role is pastoral, with the second priority being academic support. It emphasises raising self-esteem, engaging children and ensuring they are motivated to learn.

82 The role of pastoral care has been misconstrued at times by those who associate it with using social disadvantage to excuse low achievement. A description of John Burns School, which could apply to the rest, puts care in the right perspective.

Care and achievement

The school is about high standards and outcomes. It could never be accused of allowing its care of the pupils to distract from this, or lower expectations, which the headteacher observes can be true in some ‘disadvantaged’ schools. There are no excuses whatsoever for poor performance. However, the school cares hugely for its pupils and knows them all well. There is a very real understanding of their backgrounds. Any relevant information about a child, except the most confidential, is quickly shared throughout the staff and support or intervention provided as appropriate. Pastoral care is important in its own right, but that is not enough; it is also a key prerequisite for achieving high standards.

83 There are often practical challenges in gauging the needs of children entering the school. Some inner-city schools, for example, include significant numbers of children who are recent immigrants, arriving as asylum seekers or refugees. They do not have any educational records and the school needs to collect as much information as possible about previous educational history from the family. Communication difficulties may be compounded by language barriers and the need for interpreters.

Inclusion and early intervention

84 Most of the schools emphasise the importance of early intervention in the case of children who require extra help from the outset. These needs are identified in the nursery, if the school has one, or in the reception class, as in St John the Divine Church of England Primary School.

Early intervention

One of the secrets of the school's success is the policy of early intervention. Children who require extra support are identified on entry to the nursery. For example, the learning mentor undertakes home visits with the nursery staff. 'I can see how children behave when their parents are there, pick up issues relating to special educational needs, hear them respond to their home language and then, if there are issues, we start to work on them early, together, in the nursery.' The inclusion team and other support staff work closely with colleagues in the nursery to develop speaking and listening skills and early writing skills as well as pupils' ability to relate well to each other and work successfully within the class and school. Where needed, the provision of high-quality additional teaching and focused support ensures that children make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

85 A key worker in supporting provision for pupils in danger of being excluded is the learning mentor, which many of the schools favour. Good learning mentors have experience of working with pupils to overcome some of the emotional 'baggage' many bring with them to school and provide direct support for learning.

Screening for potential barriers to learning

Simonswood has a cycle for such screening in which the learning mentor collates information from screening charts completed termly by class teachers and support staff. Additional information is gathered where needed and a review of special educational needs also takes place. The inclusion team then meets to identify priorities and decide interventions required with individuals and groups, whereupon the learning mentor produces an action plan for interventions which includes key issues shared with staff. This system helps develop a holistic approach for every child, and plans are monitored and evaluated termly.

86 Many of the schools have gone further, using their initiative to employ specialists who can build trusting bridges between school and family to support children who may be at risk. They include family liaison and parental partnership workers, social workers and in one case a trained counsellor who works with individual children and parents to help them find a way through concerns that are troubling them.

Schools build trusting bridges between school and family to support children who may be at risk.

Sustaining excellence continued

Learning mentors

The learning mentor at St John the Divine provides focused support for children with particular emotional or social problems, working closely with the special educational needs coordinator. She supports these pupils individually and in small groups, offering them strategies for maintaining good progress in school and opportunities to discuss their progress. She has established very good relationships with parents with whom she works to help them develop parenting skills and support their children's learning, raising aspirations as she does so. She also plans and works very closely with class teachers. When the class teacher identifies pupils who may not be making progress, the learning mentor investigates, looks at the pupil's profile and contacts parents to enlist their help. She monitors the child and provides support. The learning mentor is at the school gates every morning to greet parents and children. She says: 'I want them to relate to me, to feel at ease and to build up a relationship with them. I am a mother; you want the best for your child. I break down any stigmas, take small steps to reassure parents and seek to raise their aspirations. The school believes that children's learning and engagement benefits when they perceive the partnership between class teachers and home.'

87 The schools generally make themselves very accessible to parents and often find that they are providing informal citizens' advice, parenting advice, counselling and conciliation to parents who have learned to trust them. Ramsden Infant School has research evidence to back its belief that 'to support the child you have to support the family'. The school associates its commitment to doing this with very high attainment by the end of Key Stage 1.

Opening doors to learning

The school invests heavily in the care of children, assessing them and gaining a good understanding of what makes a child behave in a certain way. The school never assumes it is the child's fault or the child's parents' fault and believes that children need attachment to someone to know they are safe and valued. The challenge for the school is to know how to adapt to support them and get them focused on learning. While the school does its best to deal with underlying barriers to learning, its focus remains sharply on providing high-quality education. 'The children need the very best education we can provide; education gives them the chance to escape their circumstances. We have to provide these children with experiences and opportunities that enable them to reach their potential and pursue their dreams.'

Working with parents and the community

88 All the schools understand the dominant educational influence parents can have on their children and strive to make this as positive as possible. It is common practice to visit the home before the child starts in the nursery or reception class and parents are encouraged to attend talks by the staff about the work and expectations of the nursery.

Increasing parental understanding

The expectations of a nursery class or unit can come as a surprise to some parents if their children are still drinking from a bottle and are not yet toilet-trained. The approach of staff at Cotmanhay to parents is warm, friendly and welcoming, encouraging them to stay as long as needed with their child. The school provides many opportunities to share information about children and their progress. The leaders of the nursery say, 'We must smile and be welcoming here as many of our parents may have had negative experiences of school.' The nursery's emphasis is on valuing and respecting parents as the main educator and the importance of involving parents, such as through notice boards where parents wait, giving information about 'What we are learning today and how you can help', 'How you can help your child at home'. These are extended so that parents can add what they do at home and what their child is good at. The school's successful practice with parents has been recognised as 'best practice' by the local authority.

89 Commonly, the White British working class parents are perceived as particularly hard to reach. Many had poor experiences when at school and do not want to come near school unless they have to. Schools in communities like Mixenden (Calderdale), Barrow-in-Furness (Cumbria) and Cotmanhay (Derbyshire) have gradually changed the attitudes of their parents towards education. Parents' responses range from a grudging respect for the school to something close to social dependence on it, and some turn to the school for help and advice on a range of problems in their lives. To do this meant overcoming the residual antipathy to school which many parents bear. One measure of success may be typically high attendance rates at events the school holds for parents – at times which best suit them. Parents tend to come to school when their child is performing, and schools in challenging circumstances ensure that such occasions occur frequently. Schools take such opportunities to raise concerns and questions with otherwise elusive parents: 'While I've got you...' Gradually, parents realise that the school is approachable and supportive.

90 Parents of children in multi-heritage schools may also be hard to involve, for different reasons, although many groups value education and the opportunities it may present for their children. It can be a slow process to involve such parents closely, but the schools serving such communities invest time and effort to do so, finding the best keys to access and involve particular groups. These include involving community leaders, working through pupils and siblings, encouraging parents into the school for social events – often run by parents – and educational opportunities, and to see their children working or performing.

Including parents from a multicultural community

Ten or so years ago, it was difficult to involve parents. Now, parents are welcomed into the school: coffee mornings provide a social bridge; English classes – which may have to be single sex – are among the range of courses for parents in the community rooms. Many parents have high aspirations for their children, which the school encourages. The school employs a significant number of support staff from the local community, but only if they are the right or best appointments for the school. Some parents are active in running after-school clubs. A local councillor has just formed a Scout group. The school shows cultural sensitivity, for example in providing Halal food; and senior staff go out of their way to meet parents at the beginning and end of the school day. The responsiveness of the school and approachability of senior staff are strongly valued by parents.

91 Several schools have parent partnership coordinators who facilitate close links between staff and parents. In Cubitt Town Junior School the objective of developing parents so that they can support their children more effectively is seen as central to the school's success.

Sustaining excellence continued

Profile of a parent partnership coordinator

The parent partnership coordinator is well suited to her role. As a local resident on the Isle of Dogs, she has credibility with parents. As she says, 'I tell them that if I can do it, so can they.' She is also not afraid to badger parents to join in and participate – her natural energy and enthusiasm usually rub off on them. To begin with she had to search out people to offer courses and opportunities in the school. Concerned to improve parents' ability to provide healthy food for their children, she brought someone in from nearby Billingsgate Market to teach parents and children how to fillet fish, and someone from Waitrose to talk about different types of fruit. Knowing that some parents had never even been into central London, she arranged for trips on the Dockland Light Railway, trips down the river, bicycle training and a residential trip to Kent.

The achievements of parents are celebrated and used to send positive messages back to the pupils. Courses provided for parents are certificated and parents' award evenings and assemblies are held which the children attend. The parent learning programme is now thriving. The coordinator works for five days a week and the school is currently refurbishing the old caretaker's house as a parent partnership centre. Her next challenge is to engage more dads.

92 Wider community links are also seen as very important. Given its location and context, the school is very careful to counter any tendency the local community has to marginalisation. There are many links with Canary Wharf and one of the school's governors is its community liaison officer. A local man who started as a cleaner and worked his way up to management is brought in to tell Year 6 his story and make it clear that there are good jobs there for local people. Many Canary Wharf workers also work as volunteer mentors in the school, supporting key work in numeracy and literacy.

93 The schools typically have high expectations of the parents as well as of their children. Parents are often eager to understand more about their children's learning and how they can play a greater part. In Welbeck Primary School, over 50 parents came to a morning session led by a consultant on children's cognitive development – how they learn and how parents can help them learn. Although this talk was quite technical, the parents understood its relevance and appreciated and enjoyed the session.

Parental feedback

These Welbeck parents were in no doubt that it is the quality of the teachers which makes the school so very good. They noted that the teachers are approachable, highly committed and loyal to the school and to learning, adding that 'the head is always there; she speaks directly to parents'. One parent of a child identified, early on, with special educational needs said the school and the special educational needs coordinator 'could not have been more helpful'. There were regular meetings with the parents and the child's progress had been excellent. They also appreciated language programmes for parents which the school had organised, for example for Polish parents with little English. Children have begun to learn Spanish and love it. Parents commented that the school has a homely feel and many parents come in to help the school as volunteers.

Investing in staff

Motivated and stable staff who work as a team

94 All the schools give great credit to their staff, teachers, teaching assistants, supervisors and others who work at their schools for their commitment and the quality of their contributions. Many of the teachers have long service in their current schools. Some schools that have sustained their outstanding quality have done it with some of the same staff who worked in the school when it was less good or even poor enough to be in an Ofsted category of concern. Staff turnover tends to be low in the majority of these schools and is not in any way proportionate to the degree of challenge in the school's context. There are several reasons for this, including the success of the school, job satisfaction and team working.

95 The headteacher of Banks Road School believes that for the school to sustain success the staff have to enjoy their work and feel highly motivated. 'If they are happy, they will give a good return,' she says. This has been achieved in a number of ways. One is that the amount of paperwork the school requires of staff is very small. The involvement of all staff in the school's development process also means that there is no staleness: 'It will be even bigger and better next year.' Fundamentally, all staff take responsibility for all pupils; there is much cross-school working; the quality of discussion and debate among staff is high.

96 Similarly, Gateway Primary School invests in staff and readily gives them leave of absence, for example to go travelling, knowing that they are likely to come back and have more to offer. The school also tries to appoint extra teachers to year groups rather than teaching assistants, wherever this can be afforded.

97 Although these headteachers do not shirk the difficult job of occasionally having to move staff on or out, they are conspicuously successful in helping existing staff to improve their competence, commitment and enthusiasm. Staff either agree to be members of a child-centred team with very high expectations or they move on. The motto at World's End, for example, is: 'In pursuit of excellence, we work together for all the children in our care.'

The greatest resource

The headteacher sees the staff as 'the greatest resource' because the high quality of teaching has an impact on learning and standards of achievement. She feels that the mix of experienced, enthusiastic staff, some of whom have been at the school for many years yet have moved on in their practice, taking initiatives in their stride, and less experienced but equally enthusiastic and talented teachers, is related to the school's continuing success. A member of the senior leadership team said: 'The head is constantly moving us forward; we know we can't rest on our laurels.' A nursery teacher said: 'We know we can't stand still. We don't take excellence for granted and we owe it to these children.'

In addition, the large number of experienced and qualified support staff also contribute greatly to the life of the school; they bring an added dimension and an equally wide variety of skills and talents. The bursar, who completed a diploma from the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (National College) in School Business Studies, manages the budget and a range of other administrative duties, allowing staff to concentrate on teaching and learning.

98 The schools have embraced the principles of workforce reform enthusiastically. In one school, a key teaching assistant is the school's support coordinator. He acts as a single point of contact for pupils with particular needs where multi-agency support is required. He knows all the key personnel. He is able to get key staff together, identify the trigger points for a particular pupil, establish what works and what does not. This information can then be shared with all staff so that everyone is working consistently, thus improving the quality of care for the pupil. The support coordinator provides a wide range of in-house training and also runs courses for pupils, such as anti-bullying. Another common element of staff management is not to use unknown supply teachers for covering staff absence. The schools have many ways of managing their staff cover arrangements.

Sustaining excellence continued

Cover for staff absence

At William Ford Junior School they do not use general supply teachers or non-teaching staff to cover for absence or planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. The view of senior leaders is that this work is, if anything, more difficult than normal teaching and that you therefore need highly effective teaching staff to carry it out. The school has a number of well-qualified, experienced teachers who provide this cover for absence. One is the ex-deputy headteacher of a local school. For PPA, an additional teacher (who covers all the PPA time for a particular class) covers a specific aspect of the curriculum, for example, all the religious education. By doing this, the school knows that all lessons are purposeful and that the transition from the main teacher to the cover teacher is seamless.

99 A common factor in all the schools is a very strong emphasis on team working. The evidence suggests that this is indispensable for sustaining excellence. The ingredients take time to build up. They include a common sense of purpose, shared values, trust, and openness; willingness to share practice and learn from each other; readiness to inject new ideas and take risks. Pupils gain the benefits through a consistent approach, from the quality of teaching and learning and the richness of curriculum, and from the strong values and ethos. Staff feel professionally invigorated by such an environment and staff turnover tends to be low. However, such schools produce future leaders, and they have sufficient momentum to survive changes of key staff.

100 The pupils also come into the equation, sometimes quite assertively, as at St John the Divine Church of England Primary School.

Learning as a school family

A spirit of cooperation is embedded among the pupils as well as the staff of this school. Members of the school council say that 'it works as a family', reflecting the family atmosphere of the school, an attitude which is embedded from the nursery class and which pervades the school. Older pupils have a mature sense of responsibility and are adamant that the school owes as much to the help of pupils as to the cooperation between teachers: 'They help us and we help them.' There is a high level of confidence and a sense of self-worth among these pupils.

Developing staff and growing leaders

101 A picture has emerged of schools that, while focused on their pupils and communities, are alert to initiatives, innovations and best practice elsewhere. All the headteachers realise that it is essential not only to appoint high-quality staff but also to add to their repertoire of skills to sustain their interest, motivation and effectiveness. Given their quality and expertise, the most important resource for these staff for their development is often their own colleagues. The depth and extent of teamwork, openness in sharing practice, and interest in providing new and exciting stimuli for children's learning all contribute to these schools being true learning communities.

102 Staff development begins with induction, which several schools describe in emphatic terms. Most, such as William Ford, tend to recruit newly qualified teachers.

Investment in induction

Senior leaders work hard to develop and retain staff, providing opportunities for them so that they won't want to leave. Induction for new staff is seen as particularly important – it is both extensive and intensive. An unsuccessful teaching appointment a few years ago caused senior leaders to review and reshape their induction and mentoring so that they would be able to pick up and deal with any concerns more quickly in the future. They stress the importance of induction for newly qualified teachers in particular: the school will take only one newly qualified teacher at a time so that it is able to offer extensive support. Senior leaders work very closely with new teachers to 'help them to develop outstanding practice'.

103 Much development inevitably focuses on maintaining a very high quality of teaching. As the headteacher of Michael Faraday says: 'Teaching and learning have a very high priority in the school.' She stresses the importance of valuing staff, encouraging teamwork and providing strong continuing professional development. 'Second best is not good enough; the children need the best possible teaching.' Much of the best professional development comes from sharing, observing and analysing each other's practice.

Learning from each other

Subject leaders are given time to observe lessons. Staff know they have a responsibility to develop themselves and to share this with colleagues. Less confident staff now willingly ask for support, and monitoring is seen as a wider process than simply about holding staff to account. Staff meetings have become a place for professional dialogue – colleagues sharing knowledge and receiving praise for interesting and successful practice. The school is reflective, determined not to become complacent, questioning whether it is still outstanding and keeping up with new developments.

104 In many of the schools, teaching assistants are given every opportunity to gain qualifications. Some eventually become teachers. Provided they are the right people, there are advantages in having a good number of local staff among the teaching assistants. They know the local families well. With experience, many take on significant responsibility, for example, planning and leading intervention strategies for individuals and groups.

105 Good practice in managing the wider workforce is indicated when teaching assistants and higher level teaching assistants feel just as involved and supported as teaching staff and are able to develop their roles, gaining nationally accredited qualifications. In one instance, a mother first came into the school gingerly as a volunteer, then became a midday supervisor, then the senior midday supervisor; she had never believed she could have held this level of responsibility. She then became a teaching assistant, receiving further training. She, like all the staff, is aware of very high expectations in the school, her accountability, and the fact that there is always a new challenge.

106 The schools also work hard to develop the leadership skills of staff across the school and grow leaders for the future. The headteachers typically were accomplished at seeing the potential for leadership and development in both teaching and support staff and nurturing it, thus building the capacity for distributed leadership which is a crucial part of sustaining success. The schools characteristically invest in training and mentoring staff, both internally and externally. This includes National College programmes such as Leading from the middle, Aspiring leaders, and the National Professional Qualification for Headship.¹⁵

¹⁵ The 'National College' is the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.

Sustaining excellence continued

Accelerated development

A typical example of this is the deputy headteacher of one school. She was a newly qualified teacher in the school 14 years ago. She always wanted simply to teach but, to her surprise, became a manager quickly because the headteacher saw the potential in her from the outset and encouraged, trained, mentored and supported her. She took her first whole-school responsibility in the library, then became the behaviour manager, a curriculum leader using her English specialism, and eventually attained her National Professional Qualification for Headship a few years ago. She would like to be a headteacher, and feels ready for it. She has been involved in international conference work, through the school's links, and has contributed to the programme of support for a nearby school. Other staff in the school are following similar programmes of promotion and professional development.

107 In the larger schools, middle leaders who lead several staff can have a significant role in developing the school, providing in-house professional development and promoting consistency. The large team at Gateway means that there are many opportunities for curriculum leadership across more than one site. For example, a 'green coordinator' has recently been appointed as a result of an initiative from within the staff, showing the opportunities that staff have to make suggestions and to make a difference. Phase coordinators who lead 10 or more staff have been involved in the National College's leadership programmes as well as in-house training, coaching and support from the senior leadership team. Within the last year, four senior or middle leaders have left Gateway to become deputy headteachers elsewhere. Teachers are supported in gaining higher qualifications or wider experience.

Sustaining excellent provision

Perfecting teaching and learning

108 Sustaining excellence means aiming for perfection in teaching and maximising learning for every pupil. These schools are at ease in regarding nothing less than outstanding as being good enough. They see it as a source of professional challenge as well as of satisfaction to know that they are giving children the best experience possible. The schools have various strategies for promoting and supporting their ambitions, philosophy and high-level practice.

109 In almost all the schools, the headteacher is a strong pedagogical leader, whose expectations and determination energise the staff. Typically the headteachers lead by example. They lead where the challenge is greatest and are invariably described by their colleagues as not asking others to do something they would not do themselves. As the practice and expectations of the headteachers take root, others on the staff emerge as pedagogical leaders, willing to be accountable for quality in their areas of responsibility. Banks Road School is one example of where the mantle of the headteacher's clear and unequivocal expectations has been taken on by other leaders in the school.

Distributed pedagogical leadership

High expectations are assured effectively as curriculum leaders – in consultation with their colleagues – set the standards in their subjects; they ensure continuity and progression and the integrity of the subjects throughout the school. Staff are held accountable for progress and outcomes, not planning or paperwork. They feel well supported by senior colleagues.

110 At Ash Green Primary School, the headteacher's constant presence in classrooms led to more formal evaluation of teaching which is now also done by the partner headteacher. They answered the challenge of providing development for individuals to follow up their feedback by appointing a teaching mentor, not to be confused with a learning mentor. This is an outstanding young teacher with just five years' experience, whose job is to ensure that all lessons taught by herself and her colleagues are outstanding. She does this in various ways, one being work scrutiny which she carries out with one of the headteachers. They sample pupils' work every term, triggering action if anything indicates that any teaching has been less than outstanding.

111 Support for learning takes different forms in these outstanding schools, but all would share the view of Bonner: 'During a child's primary career, schools build a huge depth of knowledge and understanding about each child. We try to ensure we use this knowledge and understanding to maximum advantage. We have formal systems that ensure key information is shared appropriately and we put great stock on the informal sharing of information. We acknowledge each child's individual starting point. One of the things we pride ourselves on is doing our best to meet each child at the point of need and trying to maximise their potential from there.'

112 Some of the larger schools are committed to setting by ability in English and mathematics, usually but not always in Key Stage 2, as in Berrymede Junior School, which claims that 'the setting in literacy and numeracy throughout the school allows pupils to flourish and those that need support to receive it.' Most, however, believe they can provide the necessary challenge, support and individual attention within mixed ability classes.

113 Many of the children interviewed showed a keen understanding of personal targets and the levels they were aiming for in English and mathematics. They were involved in assessment and in setting their own targets. In Welbeck, for example, children set their own targets each term and these are displayed creatively on the classroom wall as part of a sophisticated target-setting process to motivate them. Children's achievement data and results are put on a 'staff share' management information system to which all staff have access. For every child, the subject leaders look at

overall National Curriculum levels and progress termly, as defined by the Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum from F1 to Year 6. A day is allocated for the two coordinators to analyse the data, and a day for staff follows to examine and reflect on the analysis.

Enriching the curriculum and extending the day

114 It is impressive to arrive at a school at 7.30 in the morning to find two thirds of Year 6 voluntarily attending a 90-minute dance club. It is even more impressive to learn that they have been doing so through the depths of winter. Unsurprisingly, the standard of dance at William Ford Church of England Junior School is very high. However, this is not the main reason why senior leaders are so enthusiastic about the dance club or any other aspect of the school's impressive range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. They see five main benefits.

- More than anything, opportunities like these increase pupils' motivation and enjoyment of education. As the headteacher says: 'It's about making them want to come to school.'
- They provide a great deal of healthy, physical activity for pupils, something they often do not get at home.
- They help staff to build very positive relationships with their pupils.
- In an area where parents may have had a very negative experience of school themselves, they provide numerous opportunities to entice parents into school to celebrate what their children are doing: 'It gets them through the door.'
- These opportunities provide a good way to teach children about their responsibilities.

115 In terms of developing responsibility, pupils are able to attend a taster session for any new activity. After that, they must decide whether they want to continue. If they do, they are taken to have made a firm commitment. They are not allowed to give up an activity or miss a session without discussing it with the teacher and writing a letter of explanation.

Sustaining excellence continued

Clubs and more at William Ford School

The wide range of clubs and other opportunities include golf, gymnastics and boxing (non-contact and run by a local professional boxer – the Commonwealth super-featherweight champion). Every child also learns a musical instrument. The pupils also have opportunities to take on responsibility, for example by acting as sports leaders to children in the local infants' school. This rich mixture of provision is possible only because staff voluntarily give up a considerable amount of their own time. Everyone does something, although newly qualified teachers are actively discouraged from running a club until they are established in the school.

116 It is characteristic of all the schools that, through the curriculum, they provide for pupils a world of possibilities which widens their vision. Michael Faraday School does everything possible to bring the curriculum alive. The inspection report on Bonner Primary School gives a flavour of its 'superb level of enrichment' which gives pupils 'a real appetite for knowledge'.

Lively and relevant learning

The headteacher of Michael Faraday says, 'Our curriculum involves extensive visits to art galleries, museums, theatres and an investment bank, whose graduates are placed here, working alongside our pupils as part of their induction programme. A succession of artists, poets and authors come and work with us in the school. We want our children to develop a love of learning and to understand that there is a big wide world out there and that they are entitled to be a part of it. There is life beyond the estate!'

Enrichment afternoons

In one afternoon session, at Bonner, groups were tasting Spanish food, practising French conversation, using computers to make willow patterns, making model mountains out of polystyrene, making jungle collages, learning contemporary dance and producing 3D mathematical models. At the same time, people from the zoo were showing children an extremely large snake! As one child put it, 'You learn something new that you haven't learnt before.'

Such activities are organised through enrichment afternoons. On Tuesday afternoons the school reorganises teaching groups from Year 2 to Year 6. Years 2 and 3 work together; Years 4, 5 and 6 work together. It takes all the parts of the curriculum not included in the curriculum framework, combines them with other areas of interest or skill and divides them into six subject-based areas. From this menu teachers identify a subject or a topic they are interested in and would like to teach and create a six-week course and decide on the key learning objectives. Children sign up to the course they are most interested in, not knowing who will be teaching it and who the other course members will be. This gives them their first opportunity to gain a high degree of control over their learning. This adds to the excitement around learning in general and is one of the most exciting times of the week. It also gives them an opportunity to work with other children and to experience different teaching styles.

117 Many schools have flourishing international links. At least one headteacher has trained as a British Council instruction facilitator and taken groups of headteachers abroad.

St Monica's international dimension

This started 10 years ago and has been developed through British Council and Comenius projects.¹⁶ Staff and children hosted a visit for one week for 13 pupils from China. Eight staff have visited China on three occasions and in October 2008 a group of 17 children from four local primary schools visited their partner schools in China. The school has also sent staff to Italy, Turkey, Germany, Scotland and Estonia, and staff and children participated in an international children's celebration in Germany in July 2009. Those visits are planned to promote cross-cultural approaches to learning. They also aim to encourage qualities of empathy, tolerance and respect for other cultures. The school believes it is vital that children from a monocultural community meet children from other cultures, so extending the notion of community cohesion to a global level. Pupils return and talk about their experiences with other pupils, and give presentations to governors. Key Stage 1 Spanish is taught to all pupils from Year 3.

Creative Partnerships at Welbeck

The Creative Partnerships programme started with action research involving a group of schools in Nottingham. They explored the design of a creative curriculum with a focus on citizenship. This year the programme has been driven by the desire for curriculum change. The visiting experts include two artists, one dancer and a specialist in drama. Other strengths of the school's programme include capitalising on the cosmopolitan backgrounds of the children to promote internationalism, embedding the global dimension. The school has had links with other schools globally for many years and keeps adding to the list of partners. A second phase of the work has been about pupils understanding and being proud of who they are. Work has included designing their own world. Some groups focused on the world of money, dressing up in gold clothes and depicting this world in other ways. Staff have also become more expressive in their work through working with the artists in residence.

118 Several schools have engaged in Creative Partnerships, an externally funded programme, continued in some cases by local authorities.¹⁷ Its apprenticeship model, in which artists in residence work with teachers through team teaching, has given the teachers confidence in using art very much more creatively in their lessons. Most teachers have responded imaginatively to the freedom to use space in different ways and to develop the curriculum.

Enhancing the learning environment

119 All the schools have sought to make the most of the learning environment, both in and around the school. St John the Divine strives 'to make a difference once you step through the school gate' from the densely built-up surrounding area. The result is an exceptionally stimulating environment, created by staff, with support from the governors to refurbish, modernise and equip the school to high standards. The result is, as one visitor observed, 'no place to hide from learning, wherever you go in'.

120 The headteacher of Welbeck was convinced that her school's new curriculum must be even more active, participative and creative owing to the need to provide for a very challenging Year 3 group which has 20 boys and seven girls. There is a 'very motivational' teaching assistant, and it became clear that the group would benefit from more outdoor activity. The result is they have developed a wildlife garden and involved the children in growing plants, building dens, and linking their outdoor experiences to writing and mathematics.

¹⁶ The Comenius programme is funded by the European Union and aims to promote transnational cooperation between schools and colleges.

¹⁷ The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) set up Creative Partnerships in 2002 to increase opportunities for all children to develop creative skills by enabling children, teachers and creative professionals to work together in both education and cultural buildings such as museums, galleries and theatres. Ofsted evaluated the Creative Partnerships programme in 2006: *Creative Partnerships: initiative and impact* (HMI 2517), Ofsted, 2006.

Sustaining excellence continued

Giving children a say

121 Schools that focus above all on children and their needs also value their views and go out of their way to give them a voice. School council members provided much evidence for this report, not only giving a perspective on their schools and the factors which they most appreciated but also about pupils' contribution to the school. World's End is one of the schools in which even the youngest children contribute.

Involving children in the nursery curriculum

The school has been developing ways in which children can be involved in planning. For example, children in the nursery are asked to reflect on their day – what they have done and what ideas they have about what they would like to do the next day. Digital photos of what is offered each day are put onto digital pens which are used with electronic photo frames to talk about the learning and help children plan their selection. These visual clues are particularly helpful to children speaking English as an additional language and those with visual impairments. Children's ideas are used by staff in their daily planning. Children in Years 1 and 2 are elected to the School Council and meet half-termly, and each class has a monthly council meeting.

Representatives of the School Council said that they suggested ways of improving the outdoor environment and discussed with the school cook the limited choice of food at lunchtime for older children. They surveyed children's favourite food from a menu and the cook agreed that she would cook more of it. There are periodic surveys of children's views of the school.

122 Food and school meals are a natural subject for scrutiny by school councils in primary schools, but they often undertake ambitious and socially responsible projects. In Gateway, the council is leading a sophisticated drive to have an 'eco school'. This began with the council undertaking a range of initiatives in environmental awareness, such as introducing recycling in each class. The council also has its own secure 'blog' in this ICT-orientated school; pupils like and use the school website and never find the dominant use of interactive whiteboards in lessons boring.

Monitoring, evaluating and planning for the future

Planning for school improvement

123 One school starts its annual review and planning cycle by reconsidering its strategic vision and objectives or targets. The review of the school improvement plan begins with an examination of what is hindering or preventing the achievement of these objectives. Previously, it is said, 'Staff did not know what was going on strategically – or how they could help to improve it.' Currently, staff have time to observe lessons in order both to improve their own teaching and to support others. In this way, all staff have a good insight into the quality of learning in the school.

124 The schools generally show sufficient confidence in what they are doing to subject external initiatives to critical scrutiny, extracting what will be useful and discarding ideas and approaches which do not match their culture and pedagogical beliefs. One school, for example, did not readily adopt but first unpicked the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and adapted them to the needs of the pupils. Creative writing, for example, was undertaken within whole-day programmes, linked to drama. Some new initiatives are not used at all as they would not add anything. School autonomy is well illustrated in the following example.

Knowing what's best

The headteacher of Banks Road is broadly in favour of accountability systems, such as national testing and Ofsted. She also says she has a very good School Improvement Partner. She likes to cooperate with others and uses much external material. However, she has the confidence to pursue with her staff and governors what she knows and believes will work with the children in her school, whose circumstances she understands well. This often means not doing what is advised by the National Strategies, for example, or doing it only partially. Staff critically evaluate all external suggestions. The headteacher says she will listen to everyone, but if someone tells her to do something she doesn't think will work or improve the school, she does not adopt it.

The same critical faculty applies to staff. They are used to being accountable for outcomes and trusted to provide well for their classes. This means, for example, that the staff never fully implemented the approach recommended by the National Strategies in which pupils worked in groups, some unsupervised by adults, because they felt the learning in that context would be less than in a more controlled setting where the teacher or teaching assistant maintains more of an overview on the learning of each individual. Their concern is not about behaviour but learning. It is not uncommon, therefore, to see classes in Key Stage 2 arranged in rows facing the front. At other times, the children will be grouped. The learning objectives and approaches determine the form of classroom organisation. If they feel that sitting in rows is the best way to achieve the objectives, they will do it. The school's Key Stage 2 results are above the national average at Level 4 for these very disadvantaged children.

125 The school improvement or development plan provides – or should provide – the map for success for all. A good development plan combines strategic ambition, 'where we want to go', with robust evidence of 'where we are now'. It remains central to the mission of achieving excellence but is useful only if it is owned and understood by those who have to implement it. The schools generally make evaluation and planning at the school level into activities which engage the whole staff, as well as governors, pupils, parents and – to some extent – the wider community. This example from St Paul's Peel Primary School captures the essential ingredients.

Planning in a nutshell

The school improvement plan is clearly and concisely written with a focus on only a few, highly strategic areas. This is built on accurate, positive but very rigorous self-evaluation. Lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and canvassing the views of pupils and parents are carried out routinely. While proud of its work, the school sees clearly how rigorous it must be to avoid any possibility of falling back. Other well-focused action plans exist for individual subjects and aspects, such as the school buildings. The school budget is targeted and linked well to school improvement objectives, meaning that value for money is easier to track and evaluate.

Sustaining excellence continued

126 School development planning at Simonswood Primary School illustrates corporate involvement in the process.

A project approach to the school development plan

Although Simonswood has a senior management team, the school stresses that leadership has been developed at all levels. This is best exemplified through school development planning. The planning for it starts with a conference for all staff. Administrative, catering, teaching and support staff are included, for the school has worked hard to dispel an 'us and them' culture. The priorities are identified and structured as projects which can be led by any member of the staff team. For example, the 2008/09 plan had 11 projects. All were linked to the school's values and included developing a home reading scheme, strategies to raise standards in writing, and developing the school website. The projects are planned across the year with an assigned leader for each one. The headteacher feels that his role is to facilitate: 'I do not need to control things because we trust each other; the structures and systems are in place. But this mechanism provides a good opportunity to give responsibility, enhance experience and so contribute to succession planning.'

Monitoring and evaluating

127 The two terms 'monitoring' and 'evaluation' have a close relationship and are often used interchangeably. In the school management context, it may be appropriate to think of monitoring as a process which keeps track of performance, whether static – as in monitoring compliance with policies – or dynamic, such as monitoring progress towards established targets. Monitoring shows whether a system or process is functioning efficiently, as planned or designed.

128 Evaluation is more to do with effectiveness and improvement, with judging the quality and impact of processes so as to learn from them or identify ways of improving them. Constant evaluation of teaching and

learning was a feature of the work of the transformational leaders described earlier. At school level, this can be captured in the school self-evaluation form. Both evaluation and monitoring are in play in the following example.

The feedback loop: evaluation and monitoring for improved performance

There is a yearly cycle of monitoring and evaluation, which is explicit, and is adjusted according to priorities in the improvement plan. There is a consistent expectation of continual improvement in the quality of teaching. Every member of the teaching staff is involved in evaluating others. This peer approach is both rigorous and very popular, and its style is supportive and developmental. Staff say, 'People will watch you and suggest improvements and they will learn from you.' Another member of staff said, 'These observations seem daunting but actually this is very supportive and purposeful.' Staff add that there is significant continuing professional development in the school which helps them to develop any areas identified.

Ofsted's criteria are used when evaluating teaching, and – crucially – are well understood by staff. Staff are clear that the criteria are much more about learning and outcomes than the activity of the teacher. Results of tests and assessments are analysed in detail. This monitoring means there is no hiding place for anyone – staff or pupils – and this leads to the development of child-centred individual programmes. The pupils' voice is heard clearly, and systematically too. Outcomes of frank interviews with pupils about their learning are used to inform monitoring and improvement. For example, a group of girls said they were often ignored in lessons, which staff hadn't immediately realised. These thoughts were recorded, considered and then rigorously addressed through the school improvement plan. These procedures certainly contribute to standards in national tests, and progress measures, which are consistently very high.

Sustainability and succession planning

129 These outstanding schools have all found a recipe for success which, under current leadership, is sufficiently robust and dynamic to ensure that they continue to improve. Faced with the hypothetical scenario of the headteacher disappearing in an instant, staff and governors generally feel that the schools are well equipped to sustain their excellence. The greatest threats are probably to be found in those schools where key senior staff are of a similar age and will retire over a short space of time, although one or two headteachers and their deputies of a similar age have agreed to stagger their departures so that they do not leave at the same time.

130 Three of the schools are led by acting headteachers or relatively new headteachers, as indicated in the portraits of the schools later in this document. The signs are that they are sustaining the momentum and effectiveness of their schools by continuing to look for improvement, refinement and innovation. In the case of one acting headteacher, she had the twin advantages of having been at the school as long as the headteacher and having had previous experience as acting headteacher when the substantive headteacher was supporting another school.

131 However, there were few opportunities for 'acting up' in these schools. This was because the schools had highly visible and 'hands-on' headteachers, often of very long standing, who had not sought opportunities to contribute more broadly at the wider system level. Often this was because they believed their own schools required the constant presence of the headteacher. Opportunities for the senior leaders in schools such as these to take responsibility for the school for periods of time were therefore limited. In addition, in some cases governing bodies are nervous about any dilution of the headteacher's presence, although it can be of advantage to sustainability if other members of staff have experienced acting headship.

132 Gateway, one of the most effective primary schools in London, is fast approaching the time when the head and a senior deputy will retire. Extensive leadership development of senior and middle leaders, together with the secondment of another senior leader to the local authority for development purposes, has done much to ensure

that there should be one or more well-equipped internal candidates for the top posts. This ensures that governors have good benchmarks against which to measure external candidates.

133 The philosophy of staff development at Shiremoor is similar. The deputy headteacher has been involved in outreach work, partnering a weaker school as well as having extensive experience of leading the school while the headteacher has been engaged in system leadership elsewhere. Here, succession planning applies not only to pedagogical leaders but also to administrative staff. One example is the key post of school administrator. The data technician is being trained for the succession by taking the certificate in school business management while learning from the current incumbent before she retires.

134 The biggest test in appointing a new headteacher to a consistently outstanding school is probably to find a candidate who possesses not only all the qualities, skills and experience required, but who is also sensitive to the deeply embedded culture of the school.

135 Where schools such as Gateway, The Orion and St Sebastian are federated or working in close partnership with others, the opportunities for developing the capacity for senior leadership multiply. Some schools now would not welcome a return to the status of single institutions, regarding that as reducing opportunities for staff and benefits for their pupils.

136 The schools have become consistently high-performing schools through having outstanding leaders who have been willing to project their vision well into the future and made a long-term commitment. All the headteachers, or, if recently appointed, their predecessors, had served as heads for at least 10 years in the same school, often a great deal longer. Some had held other posts in the school before becoming head. Instead of declaring success and moving on after solving the most immediate challenges they encountered, they have stayed long enough to embed the culture of excellence throughout the organisation and establish its integral and valued place in the community.

Sustaining excellence continued

137 These perennially successful schools may no longer need transformational leaders in quite the same mould, but they certainly do not need caretaker leaders without a continuing sense of purpose and commitment. The biggest safeguard for outstanding schools faced with the need to appoint a new headteacher is for the school to have built leadership throughout the organisation, incorporating capacity and team work at every level. Failing that, there may be a case for introducing oversight of the school by another outstanding headteacher in an executive capacity.

Where next?

For the pupils

138 The schools represented here provide only a fraction of their pupils' formal education. In the main, they provide what may be the pinnacle of excellence in the child's education. With rare exceptions, continuity suffers at every point of transition. Pupils leaving these primary schools will not always continue to encounter outstanding teaching when they join their secondary school and there are few models for carrying excellent practice across into the next phase. Many children, having excelled in their educational gains by Year 6, will be tested again a few months later. In the majority of cases, there will be no easy or automatic mechanism for primary school staff to know how their Year 6 pupils progressed thereafter and what they achieved at GCSE level.

139 Occasionally, the intense effort expended to ensure a child thrives is eroded by a thoughtless or unprofessional response at the next stage. The staff of one infant school heard a junior school teacher say about a child: 'He is a lost cause.' The infant school worked long and hard with another child who eventually settled down by Year 2, but within a few days of going to the junior school he was excluded. When the infant school responded to the question 'How did you manage him?', the junior school replied, 'Well, we don't do that here!'

For the schools

140 A report such as this can only offer a glimpse of the work of these schools. Given their success against the odds, not just relative success but also in terms of the absolute standards attained by their pupils, they can lay good claim to be world class. Indeed, the schools fulfil all the McKinsey findings attached to such a status.¹⁸ They appoint the very best teachers they can find, they work continuously to hone their skills, and they focus learning on the individual pupil.

141 Many of the features and practices of these schools will be recognised by other schools as things they also do. The secret underlying the ongoing excellence of these schools is that all the different aspects of their operation are of high quality and work in synergy. Some of the schools are not particularly innovative but they maintain consistently first-rate practice. Innovation often takes the form of finding small incremental improvements in what they are doing. All the schools are imaginative in seeking to provide exciting, memorable learning opportunities. Perhaps of greatest importance, all have deeply embedded values and the determination to do the very best they can for each child, enabling them to make visible progress. This is a tremendous source of satisfaction for those who work in these schools.

142 The challenge for policy makers is how to promulgate the practice of these schools. Fortunately, the keys to their success can be understood by all school leaders. Many schools nationally do some of the same things. The secret appears to lie in the glue which holds them together. This is a powerful mixture of vision, determination, consistency, teamwork, culture or ethos, and high expectations, applied through outstanding leadership, recognised through outstanding teaching and learning, and focused on the needs and progress of each individual child. Some of the mechanisms for sharing these practices with other schools are discussed in the next section.

Sharing excellence

Sharing excellence

When schools like the group of 20 achieve excellence as providers, it is essential to the systemic improvement of education locally and nationally that ways are found to share their practice more widely.

143 Outstanding schools have much to offer other schools. By virtue of overcoming their contextual challenges so magnificently, these schools are resources for school improvement which need to be not only treasured and admired but also used to help others. This section considers some of the mechanisms through which the expertise and good practice of these schools are disseminated.

144 These interactions fall into a number of categories, ranging from the highly localised, in which the school's practice is opened up to fellow professionals, to the highly delocalised, where the headteacher has a system-leading role and the school is a local or national support school. The schools in the sample span this spectrum, although fewer are system-leading schools than might be expected. This mirrors the evidence from the 12 secondary schools featured in the first review.

System leadership

145 System leadership is a rapidly growing but recent phenomenon in the school system in England and as such Ofsted has only small-scale evidence of its effectiveness. System leaders are school leaders who work directly for the success and well-being of pupils and students in other schools as well as their own. The concept goes beyond the normal collaborative activities in which many schools are engaged. The clearest example of system leaders is represented by the increasing number of 'National Leaders of Education' and their 'National Support Schools' drawn from primary as well as secondary and special schools. They are headteachers whose leadership is recognised as outstanding by Ofsted and who meet a number of other searching criteria, including experience of improving a school in an Ofsted category of concern. Their schools have to demonstrate the capacity to support other schools.

146 Only one of the schools in the group is a National Support School, but all the headteachers and their senior colleagues represent, to a greater or lesser extent, aspects of system leadership as defined by the following key roles.¹⁹ These are:

- a. leadership that sustains improvements in very challenging contexts and then shares its experience, knowledge and practice with other schools
- b. leadership of collaborative innovations in curriculum and pedagogy
- c. leadership that brokers and shapes radically new networks of extended services and pupil welfare across local communities
- d. leadership of improvement across a formal partnership of schools
- e. leadership that acts as an external agent of change in other schools that face significant difficulties.

147 Some examples of how the schools illustrate these aspects are given below. With some notable exceptions, however, the system leadership of the 20 outstanding primary schools is drawn upon relatively lightly.

Sustaining improvement in very challenging circumstances and sharing best practice

148 All the schools in the sample have shown an exceptional capacity to sustain their excellent performance for a number of years, spanning two or more inspection cycles. They deserve their local, and in some cases national, reputations. It is natural that other schools come to find out more about what they do. Many of the schools were Beacon Schools, when the classification existed.²⁰ They have continued, albeit informally, their previous Beacon School status since they are frequently visited by others wanting to learn more about aspects of their practice. The range of interest is very wide, from practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage to developments in the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Typically, visitors include colleagues from schools in the same cluster of schools, school leaders prompted to visit by the local authority, external agencies conducting

research, and overseas visitors. Some of the schools are recommended by the National College for placements at the development stage of the National Professional Qualification for Headship. Most of these visits tend to be one-off events rather than the starting point for reciprocal visits and real partnership working. The following shows a typical range of partnership activities in which expertise, knowledge and practice are shared with other institutions.

Sharing its practice, St John the Divine Church of England Primary School

- The school has worked closely with the local authority advisory service to develop the policy, scheme of work and delivery for personal, social and health education.
- An advanced skills teacher, previously a Year 6 teacher, supports other schools in planning for literacy and maintains email contact with them.
- Teachers from other schools visit lessons taught by the advanced skills teacher for mathematics.
- Other headteachers and their colleagues visit and observe lessons.
- Teaching assistants visit for training and shadowing.
- Universities send trainee teachers because of the high quality of professional practice.
- School staff work in teams to moderate literacy assessments.
- The quality of assessment and the provision offered by the Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners are used by the local authority as models of excellence for other schools.

149 Some key staff in the outstanding schools are drawn into their local authorities in school improvement roles. The Early Years Foundation Stage manager at Ramsden Infant School in Barrow-in-Furness was seconded to advisory work with the local authority for a year, although she missed a classroom-based role and returned after the secondment. Several other local headteachers send staff to Ramsden to see what the school is doing. There are very good relations, however, between the headteachers in Barrow; they share good practice and the local infant schools meet regularly.

150 The assistant headteacher at Gateway Primary School recently returned to the school, having been seconded to the local authority as a literacy consultant. Her secondment was part of the authority's contribution to succession planning by providing opportunities for secondment to potential headteachers.

Outstanding schools have much to offer other schools.

Local authority experience for potential headteachers

The school arranged for a potential headteacher to work for the local authority for a period as a literacy consultant. She brought skills to this work that she practised at Gateway School, particularly in relation to teaching children who spoke English as an additional language. The school needed to improve writing. Prior analysis had shown that pupils had:

- poor sentence structure
- poor development of ideas across sentences and paragraphs
- a lack of appropriate subject-specific vocabulary
- an inability to give the reader the necessary information so that pronouns could be used effectively across a text
- difficulties in giving succinct explanations
- a lack of awareness of the impact of writing on the audience.

Results were disappointing until the school incorporated 'scaffolding' in developing a whole-language approach to the teaching of literacy. Speaking, listening and reading were planned to inform writing and cross-curricular links were made.²¹ The school focused development in Year 5, using a multimedia study of Antarctica – already identified as a Year 5 geography project – and taking in literacy, science, ICT and speaking and listening. Teachers developed a plan for layering the skills needed, learning in one area supporting learning in another. The resulting material, a cross-curricular sequence of 32 lessons covering English, science, ICT and geography and supported by a book and CD-ROM was developed within Gateway School and has been supported and disseminated by the local authority, with a significant take-up.

Leading collaborative innovations

151 The teacher mentor at Ash Green Primary School gained funding from the Training and Development Agency for Schools to work with colleagues from her cluster group of schools on developing a handbook for assessment for learning. Her school has embedded assessment for learning in its teaching and learning, much of which is consistently outstanding. The handbook aims to give staff and newly qualified teachers an understanding of assessment for learning, organising it into five strands:

- the learning environment
- learning intentions/success criteria
- effective teacher feedback
- peer support and feedback
- self-assessment/evaluation.

The handbook provides very clear and useful training materials for each of these five strands, containing practical advice on how they can be implemented effectively in the classroom. It is in demand across the local authority and beyond.

152 Most of the schools have contributed expertise through lead teachers to local authority school improvement work, clusters, networks and partnerships. One headteacher acted as a consultant leader for two years on her local authority's 'support and progress initiative', working with four schools as a consultant leader before School Improvement Partners took over this work.

153 Some schools provide training on behalf of the local authority, often on the school premises. One example of Gateway Primary School's contribution is through showing teachers from other schools the potential of ICT in the curriculum and training them to use it. A week-long training programme for teachers has been developed in partnership with the suppliers of the technology and the local authority, with the headteachers of the participants' schools joining the programme on the last day.

154 The local authority recognises the school as an influential partner in its school improvement strategy. Outreach work is rationed by the headteacher, mindful of the needs of the school, but he mentors other headteachers, supports members of his staff in undertaking development projects and constantly makes the expertise of the school available to others.

155 Cotmanhay Infant School is frequently used by the local authority, for both teacher training and National Professional Qualification for Headship placements, as the headteacher is a part-time tutor for the National College.²² For example, the school has excellent 'nurture room' provision for calming and supporting emotionally insecure or disturbed pupils and has places for children from other schools in the authority. The success of this and the Positive Play Programme (for children with behavioural and emotional difficulties) which runs alongside it is shared with other schools in the authority, and the advanced skills teacher and the two teaching assistants involved run courses for other schools. Another advanced skills teacher runs the workshops for parents and has shared these with other schools.

156 St Paul's Peel Church of England Primary School is a lead school for the 'Every child a writer' programme; three of the school's staff are lead teachers within this and work closely with other schools, in whatever way they need, to promote writing. They enjoy this, and have learned from it, expressing surprise that what they see as normal practice is seen as very good or innovative in other places. One of the schools with which they work has now become a lead school in its own right, freeing the staff at St Paul's Peel to work with another two schools. This work, by middle leaders, along with other responsibilities and training in and through the school, illustrates very well the effective way in which staff are prepared for more senior roles within the school or elsewhere. Many staff at the school have moved to promotion elsewhere.

Leading and brokering extended services

157 All the schools work very closely with their children's service partners in dealing with barriers to learning, building links with parents and the community and working with children and parents to reduce barriers to learning. Ash Green Primary School has moved a long way along the path of system leadership in relation to its leadership within the community. The school provides a 'full offer' extended day, with cover organised on a shift system. Having been granted responsibility for the neighbouring Sure Start provision, care is provided from 08.30 to 18.00 for 48 weeks of the year.

158 As well as establishing an inclusion and progress team, which links with families, Ash Green has brought in a qualified social worker to undertake family support work. This was initially an unpopular move with other headteachers who said it was not their job. But the social worker has made a vast difference in working with the headteacher and home-school liaison manager to deal with all sorts of concerns, including domestic violence. The local authority is taking a keen interest in the way this initiative is working and has based the local authority's multi-agency assessment team in the school.

Leading improvement across a formal partnership of schools

159 In April 2006, St Sebastian's Primary School and Nursery became one of the first schools in the North West to federate with another school – St Cuthbert's – forming a 'hard' federation with one headteacher and one governing body, although the schools maintained their own individual staff and identities. The federation has provided many opportunities for sharing expertise, facilities and good practice so as to raise attainment. Staff at both schools feel the federation has broadened their experience and allowed them to develop. The inspections of the two federated schools in 2008 chart the progress and judged the success of this arrangement.

²² The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.

The operation and benefits of federation

St Sebastian's Catholic Primary School

'Despite being judged an excellent school in the last inspection, the school has continued to improve standards... Some parents and staff were concerned that because the headteacher was asked in 2006 to lead two schools, St Sebastian's might suffer as a result. However, his shrewd delegation and very effective training of other senior staff has meant that the school has maintained its excellence. Senior and middle leaders have developed their skills to ensure continuity. The deputy headteacher very ably manages the day-to-day running of the school where necessary. Other senior leaders contribute significantly to rigorous assessment practice, to improvements in literacy standards and as exemplary teachers...' (Ofsted, 2008)

Federated school: St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School

'St Cuthbert's experienced a significant fall in roll and its future appeared uncertain until the decision was taken some two and a half years ago to federate under proven leadership of outstanding quality. As a result of the exceptional commitment of governors and staff, the initiative is a resounding success. Striking features are the beneficial effects of shared expertise through leadership and management, including governance. The work of the senior leadership team in this is exceptional. The best practice in one school, for instance the quality of its intervention strategies, has been successfully introduced into the other, and vice versa, for instance high-quality teaching of Spanish for younger pupils. Since the last inspection, the school has made excellent progress, improved the quality of the learning environment in classrooms and outdoors, and addressed all the areas for improvement noted in its last report. It has outstanding capacity to improve and provides good value for money.' (Ofsted, 2008)

160 In terms of impact, the inspector found that 'standards in Year 6 had improved overall since the inspection of the federated school in 2004. School data show this upward trend continuing thanks to challenging targets and the high expectations of staff. At the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average, with the highest standards in reading. This is because of intensive, individual support which makes sure that no pupils slip through the net. Indeed, achievement across the school in reading is exceptional.'

161 The Orion Primary School has become a very successful 'fresh start' school from the metaphorical ashes of the failing infant and junior schools it replaced. The headteacher took up his post in January 2000. The school was subject to monitoring visits by Ofsted and had an inspection in November 2001 which judged the school as good. The main challenges for the school in raising achievement and standards included poor behaviour, low self-esteem, and the disengagement of parents in a very disadvantaged area. Priorities included behaviour and a focus on teaching and learning. What the governors report as inspirational leadership and the establishing of an ethos of trust, high expectations and a focus on children and their needs and progress contributed strongly to the school's improvement.

162 In late 2003, the headteacher of The Orion was asked by the local authority to move to a nearby school, Goldbeaters, a school with a very similar community to The Orion. The challenges were significant in terms of the decline in standards, behaviour and run-down premises. The Orion's headteacher decided that, rather than move to Goldbeaters, he would lead both schools and share the practice from The Orion. This would also enable his senior leadership team to gain management experience when he was at Goldbeaters. The headteacher divides his time between The Orion and Goldbeaters. Staff across both schools share expertise, in-service training days, ICT, policies, joint meetings, events, and school councils. Both schools are now oversubscribed and claim to have raised expectations and aspirations for children in the community.

163 In terms of their impact, by 2008, St Cuthbert's had become 'a good school with many outstanding features'; Goldbeaters appeared in Ofsted's 'most improved schools' list one year, and the contextual value added indicators of both schools in the Orion–Goldbeaters partnership are good.

Leadership as an external agent of improvement in other schools

164 Headteachers who have transformed their school and now lead consistently outstanding schools may have a great deal to offer other schools. Their schools may also have the capacity to act as support schools, working in partnership with another school to help it improve. About a third of the headteachers in the sample are local or national leaders of education. Others feel either that they need to continue to focus their energy on their own school while expanding the range of opportunities available to it or are ready to help schools when asked but do not necessarily want to make a continuing commitment to such work.

165 The headteacher of John Burns Primary School, for example, is a 'local leader of education' involved in supporting leaders of vulnerable schools within the London Challenge programme.²³ This commitment normally takes her out of her school for one day each week. This helps to keep her thinking fresh and the ideas she gains can be used in her own school.

Overcoming resistance to improvement

The Local Leader of Education often finds some resistance to a focus on raising standards at the expense of what the schools see as caring for their pupils. Her approach is simple: 'Why would they not want their children to be able to write well, read and add up quickly? I don't understand it. What is that doing? If they've got Level 4s, they're much more likely to get GCSEs in the first instance.'

She is very pragmatic. When one school said to her, 'We can't manage to monitor reading', she said, 'Yes you can. Here's how.' Within a few weeks they were doing so. This is typical of the very practical, undogmatic approach taken to improvement in her own school, with high expectations and no tolerance of failure.

166 Other John Burns staff are involved in supporting these links with other schools. This enables them to learn from others, take a wider view, and contribute to improvement. The headteacher can point to a good record of improvement in the schools she has worked with. Being out of school means she has learned to rely on and involve her senior staff much more. Her natural approach, she says, was to do too much herself initially. Now she is much more confident to delegate and does not expect to return to school with a 'to do' list waiting for her. Some outstanding London schools, such as Bonner, are also becoming involved in the London Challenge 'Good to Great' programme, supporting good schools locally to improve.

²³ London Challenge was launched in 2003. It is delivered through a partnership of schools, local authorities, and others working in education in London and has been extended to 2011. See Ofsted, *Improvements in London schools 2000* (HMI 2509), Ofsted, 2006.

Sharing excellence continued

167 Shiremoor Primary School is an example of a National Support School. The school has a record of contributing to school improvement in several spheres, through its Beacon status, taking a leading role in several networks and contributing to developments through the local authority, the National College and the National Association of Headteachers. The headteacher became a National Leader of Education and was asked to support another school.²⁴

School to school support

Shiremoor was commissioned by the local authority to support a school a few miles away which had a Notice to Improve from Ofsted. The headteacher, a National Leader of Education, has found this work difficult as well as time-consuming. As an experienced and independently minded strategic leader, she admits that it was difficult having to work through others, rather than take the decisions herself – until, that is, she became the school's acting headteacher. The partnership succeeded in supporting the school and it was removed from the Notice to Improve category. Many staff from Shiremoor were closely involved in working with their peers in the supported school. This included providing in-service training for staff on aspects such as scrutinising work and assigning National Curriculum levels to it, classroom management and organisation, challenge for the gifted and talented pupils, organisation in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and pace of working.

168 The experience opened the eyes of the Shiremoor staff to what a school working at a lower level is like and what the problems can be. The staff have learned much, which caused them to reflect on the question: 'What could we have done in our school with those pupils (from the other school) who have higher attainment on entry than ours?' Reflection on their own practice was one of the reciprocal benefits that invariably accrue from supporting another school, whatever the differences in effectiveness.

169 Some headteachers and their schools become engaged with schools in difficulty simply because it is the right thing to do. This happened to St John the Divine Primary School in Lambeth which supported another primary school after the sudden departure of the school's headteacher.

Responding to need

The headteacher was approached to take over for a period to support an unsettled staff. Several staff from St John the Divine supported the other school, including the literacy and mathematics coordinators and administrative staff. On one half-term day, the whole staff of St John the Divine – including teaching assistants – visited the school and helped with displays, recreating the learning environment. Systems were introduced, guidance was provided on developing reading and writing, the learning environment was improved and the quality of teaching and learning benefited. This support continued until a new headteacher was appointed.

170 The work of Ash Green Primary School and its leadership provides a fine example of emerging system leadership. The story starts when another primary school in the village of Mixenden faced closure after facing a number of problems, including moving in and out of special measures. After much negotiation with the local authority, the Ash Green governors were asked to take over the running of the other school. There were many challenges. The school had only two governors and very few governors' meetings. There was strong opposition to closing the school across the estate. Eventually it was closed and reopened as part of Ash Green and has now been completely transformed. Numbers were very low to start with at the second site because parents opted for Ash Green School, but they quickly equalised. An associate headteacher was appointed. Most remarkably, there is now identical provision on both sites with joint curriculum planning and a consequent improvement in results.

171 More recently, a neighbouring school, Dean Field Primary School, got into difficulty. Ash Green was asked to help. The executive head then spent two days a week at Dean Field, mentoring and supporting the new headteacher. He is providing strategic leadership and the school is turning itself around. The schools are now loosely federated with an executive governing body as well as separate governing bodies.

Executive headship support for Dean Field

Andrew Midgley, the deputy headteacher of an outstanding school in Halifax, was seconded by the local authority to Dean Field for a year. David Kirk, head of Ash Green, was his mentor and executive headteacher for the school. There was no school improvement plan, special educational needs policy or other systems. The behaviour of both children and parents was of great concern and there were 55 exclusions in the previous year. The school was second from the bottom in the national league table and the building was not fit for purpose.

The school is turning itself around but success has been won gradually. The number on roll has grown from 142 to 198. Ash Green has been very supportive. It has 'skilled up' a special educational needs coordinator, set up an inclusion team and introduced classroom observation, monitoring and a range of policies. David Kirk, now a strategic headteacher, supports future thinking, the development of policies and strategic development. Ash Green also mentored the new site manager and social worker. In turn, Ash Green has benefited from expertise at Dean Field, particularly in the use of phonics in Key Stage 1. There is shared planning, home school agreements and time for planning, preparation and assessment has been organised to allow teachers to meet their counterparts at the same time. Constant random notes to parents have been replaced with a weekly newsletter. The new headteacher has coordinated a restructuring of the staff, in which the support of the executive headteacher in handling grievance procedures and difficult disciplinary and employment matters has been indispensable.

172 The very experienced chair of the governing body at Ash Green describes the strategic headteacher as one who 'leads by example and finds ways of doing things'. In fact, the story is one of building capacity and promoting improvement across a growing number of schools. The associate head at Ash Green is now a second or joint headteacher, giving the substantive head more scope for strategic leadership and outreach. He is now working with two capable heads who are rapidly gaining experience under his mentorship, with schools that are outstanding or rapidly improving. It is little wonder that the primary headteachers are seeking a greater voice in the proposed new North Halifax Academy, which their pupils will attend. They deserve continued access to excellence, a contrast to the past, which was blighted by the shadow of fragility cast by The Ridings School, since closed.

From school to system leadership: the scaling up issue

173 The schools are generally ready and willing to share their expertise to a greater or lesser extent. Few schools in the sample beyond London had advanced skills teachers, either because there was little aspiration by teachers to become one within close-knit staff teams or because of little local authority encouragement. It also appears that headteachers in the most challenging and successful schools tend not to apply for recognition as National Leaders of Education and relatively few were School Improvement Partners. There is no doubt that some are so absorbed by their own school that a wider role holds little attraction; others are too modest to consider what they might have to offer. It is also easy to forget how much vigilance and energy are required. These are necessary to sustain the excellence that ensures that the often complex needs of every child are met.

Sharing excellence continued

174 The work in Calderdale, led by Ash Green, is a good example of the system leadership which is proving to be a reliable and effective approach to school improvement. Together with the other innovations recorded earlier, such as the appointment by the school of a qualified social worker as family liaison officer and a teaching mentor to ensure that teaching remains outstanding, the school is driving policy into new areas of professional autonomy. Such developments are reported to be watched with interest by the local authority and are reflected in the DCSF's White Paper,²⁵ which presents the Government's view that 'the school has responsibilities:

- first, to the pupils on its own roll
- second, to other children and young people in the wider area; and
- third, to the wider community which it serves.'

175 There is no doubt that these schools, by focusing on the first of these responsibilities, are excelling against the odds. The quality of their leadership, of and within the school, is critical to their success. The example of schools like St Sebastian's and Ash Green also shows how such leadership can be used to the benefit of other schools without imperilling the quality and standards of the home school. Moreover, such partnerships provide an excellent incubator for growing school leadership skills at sub-headteacher level. There are different ways in which outstanding schools can reach out a hand to less successful schools and help them up. Should it not be an expectation that all should do this?

Pictures of success: the outstanding schools

These portraits of the 20 schools provide a brief introduction to each school.

The portraits are vignettes, compiled after visiting the schools and meeting their headteachers and others. The narratives give a flavour of some of the values as well as the strategies found in these schools. Inevitably they feature the headteachers, whose leadership is an important part of each story, although in every school there is extensive distribution of leadership and very strong teamwork.

The portraits do not seek to reproduce the schools' latest inspection reports or their own web pages and documentation, as these are readily available online.

Although the 20 headteachers have approved the profiles of their own schools, they did not choose or seek to influence the contents.

Note: In the tables of school data which follow, CVA denotes the Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 contextual value added indicator for the school, expressed within the range denoted by the 95% confidence limits. For example, the CVA indicator for Ash Green Primary School (next page), given as 100.8 ± 0.5 lies between 100.3 and 101.3. FSM denotes the percentage of pupils in the school eligible for a free school meal.

Key Stage 2 results for 2008 are derived from the DCSF Performance Tables; Key Stage 1 and other data are taken from validated RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports produced by Ofsted for each school, to which the school has access, and inspection grades are to be found in the most recent inspection reports published by Ofsted. (RAISEonline – reporting and analysis for improvement through school self-education – provides interactive analysis of school and pupil performance data.)

Ash Green Primary School, Calderdale

'Ash Green is an outstanding school. There is a driving determination to ensure that pupils and adults in the school reach their full potential.' (Ofsted, 2007)

Ash Green Primary School nestles in a hollow of the hills in a sprawling village with much social housing on the northern edge of Halifax. It serves a turbulent White British community where social disadvantage, low incomes, high unemployment and low aspirations make it hard for many families to cope. The school works tirelessly to support them and is prized and respected by the community, which is amazed by its effect on their children.

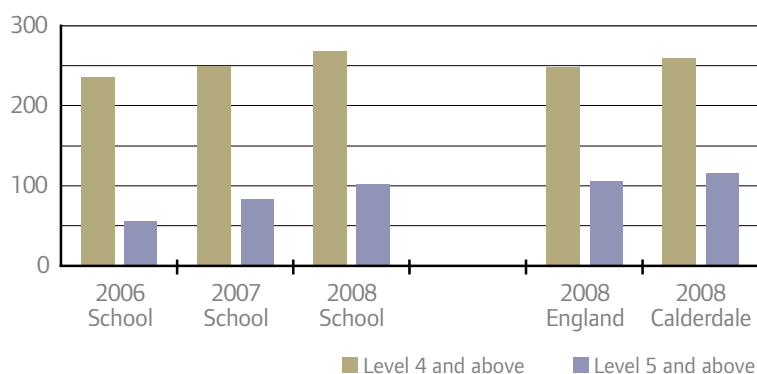
Nothing at Ash Green is quite what it seems. It is a double school, having taken over another nearby school which had been destined for closure. That school was in and out of special measures for nine years before Ash Green was asked to absorb it. The two school entities are led collaboratively by two headteachers: David Kirk and Mungo Sheppard, his erstwhile deputy at Ash Green. They have replicated Ash Green's 'DNA' on both sites, providing the same curriculum, achieving similar

high standards and mirroring the practices which make Ash Green so successful. The executive headteacher, David Kirk, is now supporting a third school which was struggling in this part of Calderdale. The DCSF has allowed Ash Green to take over the running of its neighbouring Sure Start Centre. This further increases the continuity of links with children and parents, as well as the extended day care that can be provided.

The school is highly focused in all it does. Teaching is consistently of the highest quality. Assessment for learning is well established as part of teaching and learning. Every child's progress and well-being are monitored constantly and any wobbles are quickly stabilised. The school is staffed by a very strong team, many of whom are reluctant to work elsewhere, despite the unusually high expectations imbued by the school's leadership. As to the secret of the school's success, the Chair of Governors perhaps expressed it most passionately: 'We don't give up; our children, parents, community and the staff are driven to make sure the kids are achieving. They have the guts not to give up.'

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	396
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	100.8 ± 0.5
FSM	51.1
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	23
Good	3
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Banks Road Primary School, Liverpool

'The high emphasis placed on "being a fully inclusive school where every child matters" is clear in all the school does... The school is extremely well led and managed with a strong focus on creating an exciting learning atmosphere in which pupils flourish.' (Ofsted, 2007)

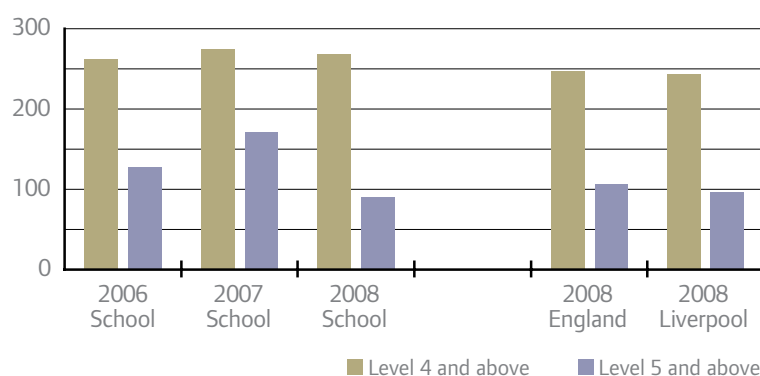
Sue Devereux OBE has been the headteacher of Banks Road Primary School for 10 years. Her long-term leadership, which has a number of distinctive features, underpins the school's success. She is under no illusions at all about the background of many of the pupils, describing family and other circumstances, along with parenting skills in the area, as very poor. Many of the pupils have hardly ever gone beyond Garston, the school's location. At the same time, she sees clearly the goodness in the children and the wish among the parents to do better by them. The ethos is characterised by 'tough love' – the children need to know their boundaries and experience success. This happens in school, which is why they like it.

When the headteacher took over, standards were too low and the teaching was weak and inconsistent. Teaching and planning were monitored; some staff left and more suitable replacements were recruited. High expectations of pupil behaviour were set, and significant improvements were achieved through positive reinforcement and reward systems, as well as a motivating curriculum. Annual Shakespeare productions are a notable feature. It has become the norm for pupils to behave and achieve well and have very positive attitudes. The school is now held in high regard within the community. Pupils take significant responsibility in school; for example, they have complete operational responsibility for the school library, which is theirs. As the school has developed, the headteacher has delegated many key functions to the deputy and subject leaders, including monitoring and lesson observations. The whole school is involved in self-evaluation.

Ten years ago, the school had a new, state of the art building to replace its Victorian building. This was carefully constructed so that, for example, ample space was given to the early years, which is the school's highest priority. The opportunities offered by a new building to create a good learning environment were not wasted; judicious use of funding meant that corners were not cut; the project raised, and continues to raise, aspirations.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	205
Ages	3 to 10
CVA	101.9 ± 0.6
FSM	49.6
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	26
Good	0
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Berrymede Junior School, Ealing

'Berrymede Junior is an extremely happy place where pupils from a wealth of different faiths and cultures feel very much at home and make the most of their learning.' (Ofsted, 2008)

Berrymede is a second home for its pupils, the great majority of whom live in the high-rise estate in Acton that surrounds the school. The pupils represent a wide and multilingual ethnic diversity, coming from homes in which 37 languages are spoken. A high proportion of the pupils are from Black African heritage and from refugee or asylum-seeking families. A common denominator is the relative poverty of the majority of the families.

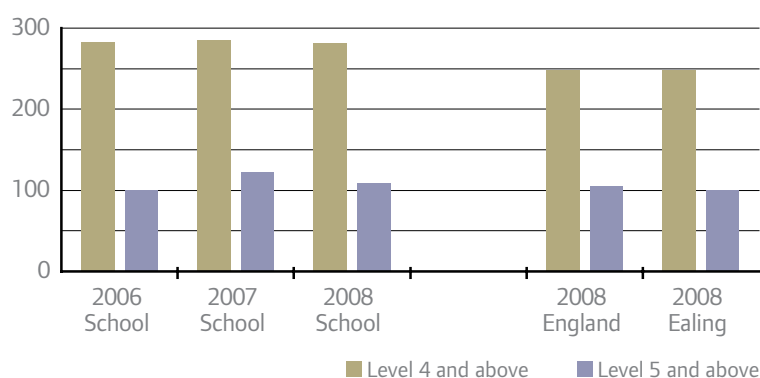
The unusually high level of staff commitment to the school continues with the current headteacher, Mrs Lubna Khan, who took over the headship in 2008 from Robert Macfarlane, who retired after 28 years at the school. Staff are very committed to the school and its community. Although most remain at the school until retirement, there is no complacency. Standards are well above average and almost every child makes good

progress from Year 3 to Year 6. The two Victorian buildings provide splendid facilities including specialist rooms for art, music and French. One of the four halls is a well-equipped gymnasium; there are two computer suites and an excellent library and resources. All parts of the school support learning and excite the enthusiasm of pupils.

Bob Macfarlane's leadership was, from the start, very focused and visible. He spent his lunchtime with pupils with challenging behaviour, set an example in how to manage behaviour, and regularly taught mathematics to Year 6. Distributed leadership is a key strength and the headteacher gave staff the 'trust and opportunities to develop their passions – they developed to the highest level'. This ethos has been continued by the new headteacher, Mrs Lubna Khan. The multicultural school community – pupils and staff – engages in new initiatives 'often while others are still thinking about them'. Systems are robust, tried and tested, providing standard procedures for new staff and consistency for all.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	280
Ages	7 to 11
CVA	102.5 ± 0.7
FSM	66.1
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	21
Good	5
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Bonner Primary School, Tower Hamlets

'The dynamic and incisive leadership of the headteacher and an extremely effective leadership team have created a culture in which children believe in themselves and have the motivation to do their very best.'
(Ofsted, 2007)

About two thirds of the children attending Bonner Primary School, in the heart of Bethnal Green, are of Bangladeshi heritage, the next largest group being White British. Martin Tune says that his biggest challenge, when he became headteacher 14 years ago, was to raise standards in a community he knew well and in which, he believed, children could achieve more highly. There was a good foundation on which to build. At that time, it was a happy and hard-working school with strong values and principles which recognised the importance of individuals and their contribution.

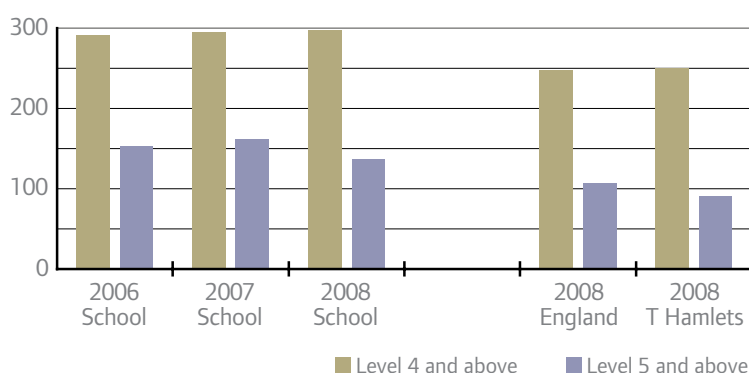
The headteacher raised expectations through challenging everyone to think about the performance of the school, different groups, classes and individuals. The school began to make detailed use of the performance data

which was becoming increasingly available, and now uses class, group and individual targets extensively. Recently the school has moved strongly towards personalised learning, in the context of a curriculum which is enriched by a range of experiences, many beyond the classroom, taught by enthusiastic teachers. Much is also done to involve parents in their children's learning, to explain to them how progress is assessed and how individual children are supported to learn. The school's results show the success of these different strategies.

A strength of the school is the commitment to building consensus. This provides a sense of direction and a structure within which the individual talents and inclinations of staff can be applied: 'autonomy within a framework'. Everyone is committed to the school's ethos and hard-working culture, dedicated to providing teaching and learning which is well informed and carefully tailored to the children's needs.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	419
Ages	4 to 11
CVA	101.8 ± 0.5
FSM	51.3
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	26
Good	1
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Cotmanhay Infant School, Derbyshire

'The school is a happy and welcoming place where children's enthusiasm for learning is very real... Children of all abilities make exceptionally good progress.'
(Ofsted, 2007)

The area serves a very challenged White British community in the village of the same name just north of Ilkeston. There is high unemployment and social disadvantage and many children are on the child protection register. Three staff are trained to deal with such concerns. The current headteacher, Jill Boyle – already an experienced headteacher – took over a good school from a long-serving predecessor and led it to become outstanding.

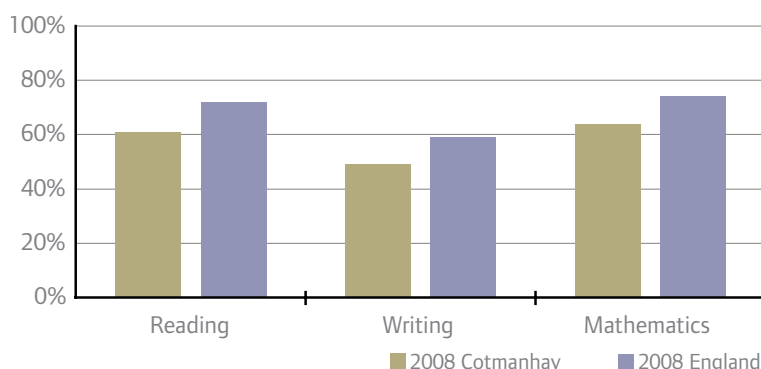
The school is a shining example of putting the child at the heart of all that takes place. Staff have to tackle the very low attainment on entry by building children's self-esteem and showing them how to learn. The school has an excellent 'nurture room' for calming and supporting emotionally disturbed children and has places for other schools in the authority. Staff visit other schools to share their expertise. The staff are seen as the greatest

resource and the head's approach does not entertain failure. Whatever issue the children bring in through the door is dealt with and every step forward is reinforced and celebrated. There is a strong 'can do' culture and ethos for children, staff and parents. High expectations, coupled with positive recognition of staff and children, are the order of the day.

The head and senior leadership team are therefore determined in their quest to find ways of reaching yet higher standards, by raising their expectations and constantly asking: 'What else can we give them?' When the school was inspected in 2007 it was judged to be outstanding in all aspects. The school has the overwhelming support of parents, one of whom commented: 'Our children are achieving beyond our expectations.' Many others wrote of their confidence that the school was giving their children's education a first-class start. The school has workshops for parents, helping them to promote basic skills in a 'fun' way.

School data

Percentage of pupils reaching Key Stage 1 standard: Level 2B or over



2008 data	
Roll	234
Ages	3 to 7
CVA	N/A
FSM	42.3
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	25
Good	0
Satisfactory	2
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Cubitt Town Junior School, Tower Hamlets

'The school's motto, "Only the best is good enough", signifies a determined belief that the children are entitled to the very best in education and sends a strong message to pupils that the school expects the highest endeavour from them... [The result is]... outstanding academic achievement and personal development.' (Ofsted, 2007)

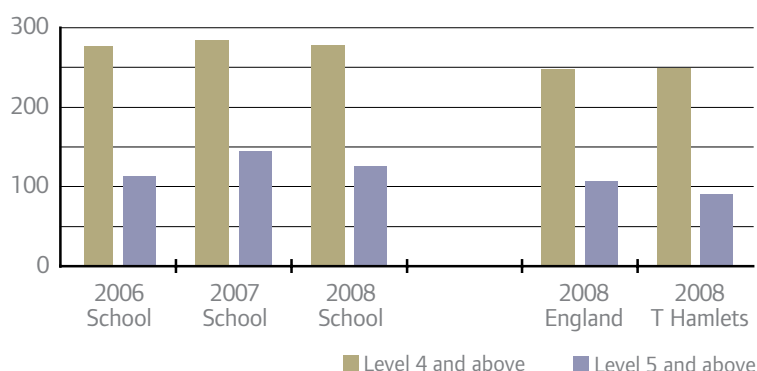
Cubitt Town Junior School has an interesting and unusual context. Situated in the south of the Isle of Dogs, the Canary Wharf towers are close by and some very rich people live close to areas of severe social deprivation. The community has changed radically in recent years. Previously a very white area with long-established families, the school's intake is now ethnically diverse. It is also very slowly becoming more socially diverse, as workers from Canary Wharf move to the area and recognise the school's undoubted quality.

The school is a very different place from the time in the 1990s when Ofsted judged it to have 'serious weaknesses'. National test results have risen considerably since then and the school is now judged to be outstanding in all respects. These improvements have been made with few changes of staff: the school has always had very stable staffing. The headteacher, Ursula Rubery, who took over at this time, recently retired. She was very clear with staff about her main aims: to improve national test results, to ensure that pupils were happy at school, to improve the site and to boost staff morale and training.

The school has a welcoming, caring and very positive ethos. The day is very structured: all classes do English and mathematics at the same time and the whole school reads together. Leaders are not afraid to make bold changes. As the acting headteacher says: 'We've gone our own way.' This meant abandoning the National Literacy Strategy from Year 3 when they found that it didn't meet their children's needs and developing their own rigorous approach to literacy. The school also groups pupils by ability in each year group for mathematics and English. Everything the school does is carefully considered to ensure it is right for pupils.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	388
Ages	7 to 11
CVA	100.8 ± 0.5
FSM	62.7
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	24
Good	1
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Gateway Primary School, Westminster

'For three years running, Gateway pupils have achieved as well as those in the top one per cent of schools nationally... not least because of high expectations and the inspirational guidance of the headteacher and his senior team.' (Ofsted, 2008)

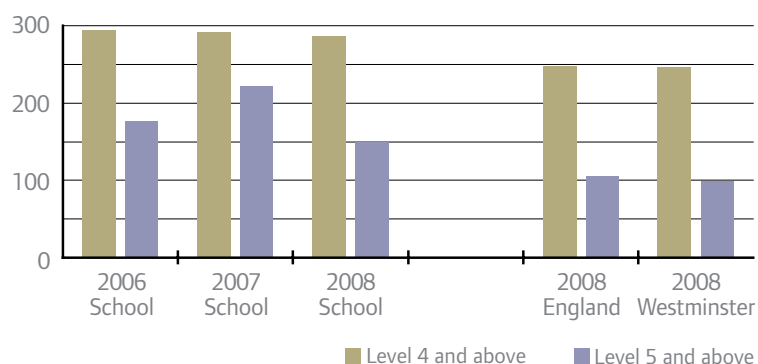
This large school serves an immediate and densely populated catchment area with many homes in flats overlooking the school. The radius of the catchment area in this large and heavily oversubscribed school – once said to be '59 paces from the boundary if you were not a sibling' – is a few hundred metres. The community is an ethnically rich mixture ranging from a Muslim Asian majority, with a sizeable group of Bangladeshi heritage, to a growing population of eastern European immigrants and refugee and asylum-seeking families.

Pupils make very rapid progress throughout the school, achieving outcomes that are well above national average, from a below-average base. Pupils' behaviour, enjoyment

and attitudes are of a high order. To achieve this, the school has been on a long journey, and has many long-standing staff and governors. The current headteacher, Keith Duggan, came to the school in 1990 as a school journey volunteer, eventually becoming the headteacher in 2004. Self-effacingly, Keith sees the development of the school as 'largely based on serendipity: me and others being in the right place at the right time'. This belies a drive for doing the best for children which, together with skilful management and encouragement of people, and rigorous systems and approaches, has established an ethos, loyalty and commitment that give the school its professional identity. The headteacher and his predecessor, Philip Allen, have surrounded themselves with good people, by recruiting, inducting and developing staff well, in line with the school's vision, and allowing them scope to develop their practice. Systems are strong and well honed. The use of information and communication technology is central both to management and to teaching and learning. Characteristically, the headteacher and governors are giving careful attention to succession planning as changes in the school's leadership approach.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	609
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	102.2 ± 0.6
FSM	49.2
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	23
Good	2
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

John Burns Primary School, Wandsworth

'An outstandingly successful school... the sustained improvements owe much to the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, the dedicated senior team and the very committed staff.' (Ofsted, 2007)

John Burns is an oversubscribed one-form entry primary school in an area of dense but low-rise housing in Battersea, bounded by three major roads and a main railway line. The area is very mixed but the school tends to admit children from the poorer families locally, with more affluent families often using schools a little further away. The figures for the numbers of pupils who speak English as an additional language, who have special educational needs or who come from minority ethnic heritages are all high; social deprivation is also high. There are significant proportions of Black Caribbean, Black African and White British pupils.

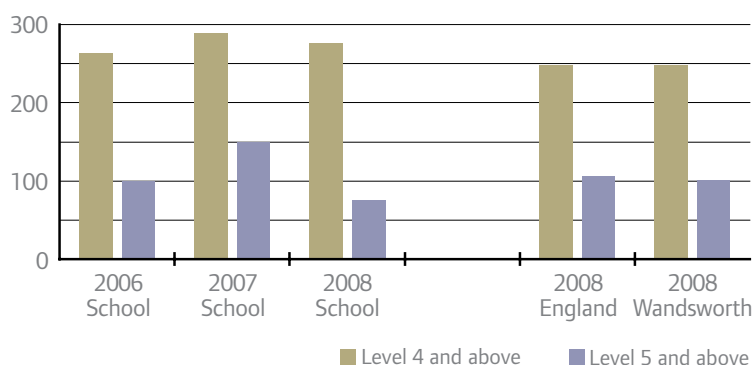
This is a school which has achieved great success for its pupils and community by doing the important basic things very well. These include high expectations and excellent teaching, using well-tested methods. Detailed, shared

knowledge of each child's circumstances enables focused care and personalisation of provision for that child. Much of the school's success is due to the leadership of the headteacher, Maura Keady, over the last 11 years. She knows the area well and has an immediate knowledge of the needs, aspirations, and challenges in the relatively disadvantaged school community.

She has moved gradually from undertaking a lot of teaching in the early days, which demonstrated good practice and tackled behaviour, to a much more strategic role. She coached staff personally, a process which still continues, although less intensively now. The job was tough. She dealt with several staff performance issues at that early stage. Many other staff also resigned once they realised what would be expected of them, opening the way to appoint new staff. They were chosen carefully: people who were enthused by Maura Keady's vision and could subscribe to a culture of high expectations. The school is now a very successful, heavily oversubscribed and highly regarded school for local children.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	218
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	100.7 ± 0.8
FSM	40.3
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	26
Good	1
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Michael Faraday School, Southwark

'Pupils' achievement is excellent... the school is so successful because all adults share in the responsibility.' (Ofsted, 2007)

Michael Faraday is situated on the Aylesbury estate in the heart of Walworth, London. The school serves an area of high social and economic deprivation. The pupils are from a very wide range of backgrounds, reflecting the area's ethnic and cultural diversity. Over 80% of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups. About 29% of the school population is African and over 20 different languages are represented. Most pupils are from the local estate, where housing is provided for families with high social needs.

The school prides itself on its ethos of treating others as you would like to be treated. It teaches pupils to be proud of themselves and the school community. As well as academic achievement the school aims to give the children a sense of social responsibility and respect for others, developing confident children with lively, enquiring minds. Class sizes are kept deliberately small. The school has a policy of employing high-quality support staff throughout each year group. They are then given a school-based training programme, ensuring

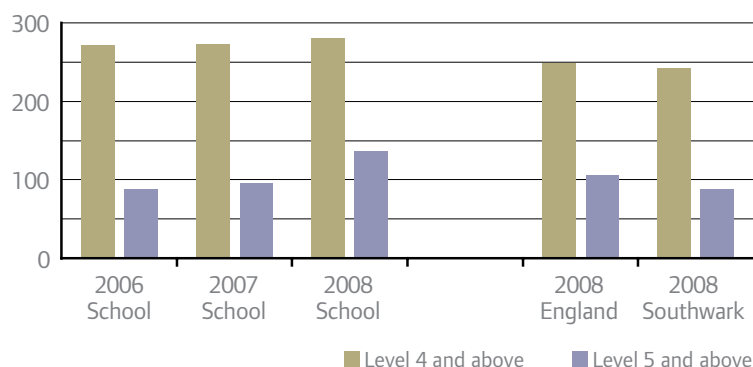
that all children can receive specialist adult support at all times. To finance this, all staff – excluding the headteacher, Karen Fowler – have class responsibilities, even though the school has over 350 pupils.

At the time of the visit, an extensive building programme had just begun to modernise Michael Faraday School into a state of the art primary school, with more pupil places, expanded community facilities and a new, integrated adult learning centre. The new school is scheduled to open in September 2010. The pupils have been involved in planning the building; there are windows in the wooden cladding around the playground for pupils to see the work in progress.

During the rebuilding the corridors are used as teaching spaces and for lunch: the walls display high-quality work by pupils, of which they are very proud. The focus on books and reading is very apparent. Teaching is currently in small rooms but spills into shared areas for each year group; as one pupil pointed out: 'We don't just learn in the classrooms.'

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	331
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	102.2 ± 0.6
FSM	45.9
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	25
Good	2
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Ramsden Infant School, Cumbria

'Pupils achieve extremely well... because teaching, the curriculum and the care, guidance and support provided are outstanding and are carefully tailored to pupils' learning needs.' (Ofsted, 2007)

Ramsden is in the heart of the terraced streets of Barrow in Furness, overlooked by houses on all four sides. This has its advantages, for their occupants – newly united through the local residents' association – can look out for the school. It is seen locally as the rock of the community. It serves a tough white working class environment where hardship is indigenous and the lives of many children are chaotic. The catchment area is in the lowest 5% of wards in terms of deprivation.

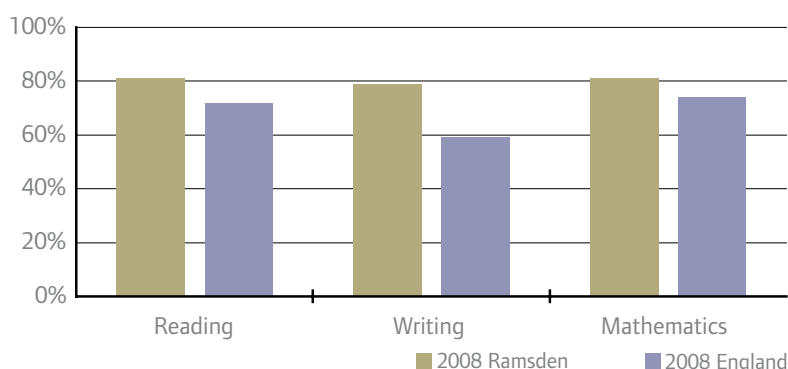
The school has had a good reputation for a long time. This draws families from beyond the catchment area and the roll is rising. Children attain better than the national average by the end of Key Stage 1 and those who are eligible for free school meals do as well as or better than the other pupils. The school has a very close relationship with homes, and there is direct contact with a parent

or carer of virtually every child every day. Although the school does not have an extended day, a National Children's Homes centre provides childcare before and after school. The school provides care before school and there are several after-school clubs. There is a pre-nursery, 'Robins', managed by the governors, and the spring- and summer-born children enter Robins rather than the nursery.

The headteacher, Nicky Brewerton, has been here for the last three highly positive inspections. The essence of the school's success is committed leadership and seamless teamwork. Each member of staff knows every child. They are passionate about the children and about their education and well-being. The children feel safe, loved and secure. Parents who had bad experiences when at school themselves trust the school, and it is seen by them and their children as a place of safety.

School data

Percentage of pupils reaching Key Stage 1 standard: Level 2B or over



2008 data	
Roll	151
Ages	3 to 7
CVA	N/A
FSM	35.4
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	24
Good	3
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

St John the Divine Church of England Primary School, Lambeth

'This is an outstanding school of which pupils and their parents are justifiably very proud. Outstanding teaching and an excellent curriculum are the reasons why pupils do so well academically and personally.' (Ofsted, 2008)

This gem of a school, tucked away behind Kennington Road, could be mistaken at first sight for a Victorian workhouse. The literal description is not too misplaced, for the Victorian facade conceals an industrious school community, dedicated to the business of learning as well as the ethos of helping one another. The unpromising surroundings have been transformed into stimulating classrooms; derelict buildings have been turned into music and drama workshops, and displays at every turn demand attention, thought and a response.

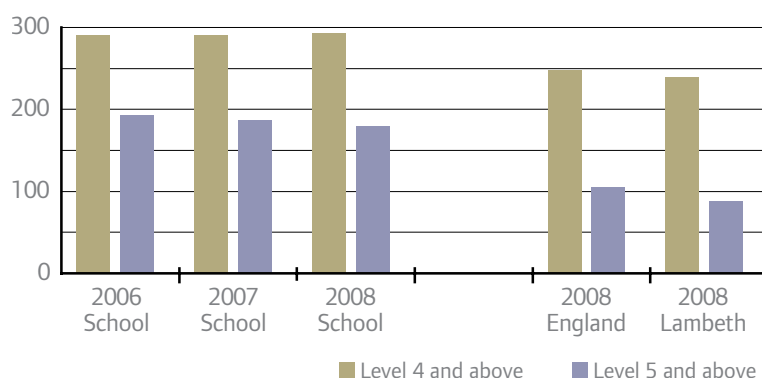
The school has nursery provision and serves adjacent local authority housing estates where social and economic deprivation is severe. Attainment on entry to the school is generally and historically low, often very

low. The school views the challenges of many children's circumstances pragmatically and makes the most of the rich diversity of their cultures to ensure that, by the time pupils leave the school in Year 6, they achieve very highly. Value added at the end of Key Stage 2 is very good despite high scores at the end of Key Stage 1.

The headteacher, Chris Cosgrove, joined the school in 1995, at a time when it had been judged to require special measures. A London newspaper had labelled it as the 'worst school in the country'. The headteacher recognised the skills and expertise of the staff who remained after the school was deemed to be failing its pupils. Even then, teamwork was a strength and staff were determined to tackle problems rather than saying: 'This is not my problem'. The school came out of special measures two years later, when it was judged by Ofsted to be very good, and it has had two further outstanding inspection reports. In 2009, the deputy, Eileen Muresan, was leading the school temporarily. It is clear that, in the headteacher's absence, there is no letting up in the mission to sustain the school's success.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	234
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	101.5 ± 0.7
FSM	32.2
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	27
Good	0
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

St Monica's Catholic Primary School, Sefton

'The headteacher provides strong and purposeful leadership. Staff, children and parents know exactly what is expected of them. The staff are committed to the school and keen to improve upon the very high standards that are achieved.'
(Ofsted, 2008)

The cachet of 'outstanding' provides motivation for this school, which strives to maintain this standard in all it does. The headteacher, Paul Kinsella, and the senior team have brought stability to the school since 2004, following a period when headteachers changed rapidly – although the staff carried on with their excellent work regardless.

The school's intake almost entirely comprises children from White British families from an area in which social deprivation is high. The attainment of children arriving at the school is well below expectations, with children's skills in language and communication being especially under-developed. A strong emphasis on language and literacy early on pays dividends later. Most children have

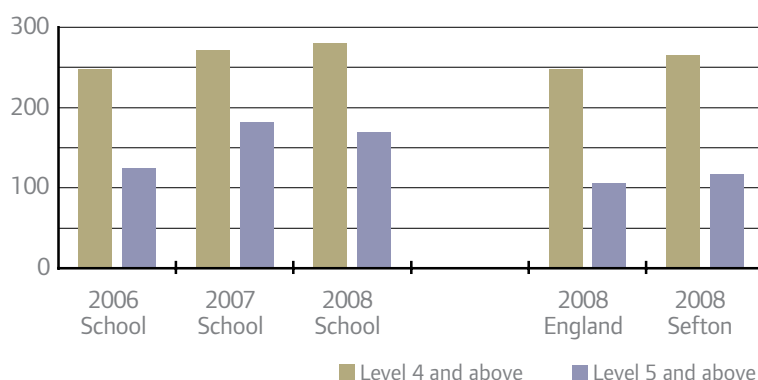
developed early reading and writing skills by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and writing is a highly visible strength of the school thereafter.

The school is very well led and managed, with clear demarcation of responsibilities. The headteacher leads on strategic aspects and the staff on operational matters, although much of the headteacher's time of late has been committed to the building programme for a new school. The disruptive three-year building programme has not been allowed to distract from the core purpose of providing outstanding education for all children.

Keys to success include high expectations, a significant investment in the teaching workforce to ensure that children are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants, and excellent analysis of assessment data for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress. Working practices are highly consistent. The good links with families extend to excellent opportunities for family learning and the school has a number of staff who started as voluntary parent helpers.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	441
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	100.7 ± 0.5
FSM	27.8
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	25
Good	2
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

St Paul's Peel Church of England Primary School, Salford

'The excellent leadership and management help the staff to release the hidden potential in each pupil. As parents say, they go the extra mile to help children to do as well as they can.' (Ofsted, 2006)

St Paul's Peel is an inner-city school in an area of high disadvantage, serving mainly White British families. Despite its name, the school is a voluntary controlled primary school, its intake unrestricted by an admission criterion related to religious affiliation. In September 2004, the headteacher, Rose O'Gara, inherited what she felt was a good school in challenging circumstances.

Continuity is seen as a vital ingredient for the further development of the school. It enjoys unusual continuity of leadership, since two of its previous headteachers continue to be involved as supply teachers with the school, with the support of the current headteacher. Leadership is distributed well, with roles and accountabilities well-defined so as to maintain high standards and promote innovation. Children's horizons are constantly broadened

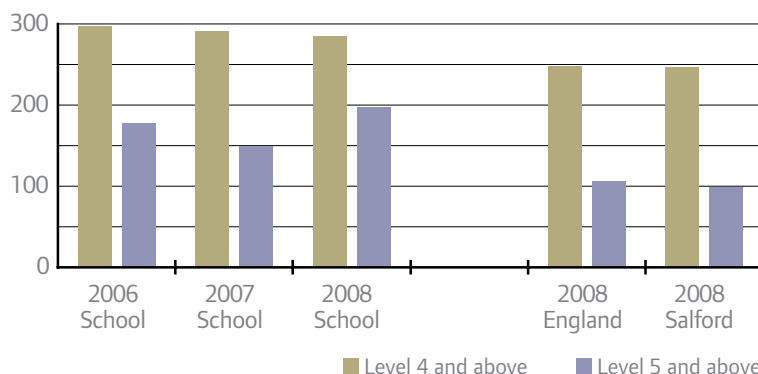
by experiences which range from performing with the Hallé Orchestra to making sushi.

The atmosphere in the school is highly positive, encouraging and affirming. The rarity of any misbehaviour is attributed largely to a very strong ethos based on mutual support and individual responsibility. There is little need to apply the behaviour policy, which is quite an achievement for a school serving a deprived estate with a high crime rate and many dysfunctional families.

All opportunities are taken to raise aspirations. English and mathematics benefit from much specialist teaching, and the exceptional results in the national tests speak for the success of the school's beliefs and practices.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	305
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	102.0 ± 0.6
FSM	42.3
Ofsted report 2006	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	23
Good	4
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

St Sebastian's Catholic Primary School and Nursery, Liverpool

'This is an outstanding school that gives pupils an excellent all-round education. Central to its success is extremely effective leadership, high-quality teaching and a very rich and stimulating curriculum.' (Ofsted, 2008)

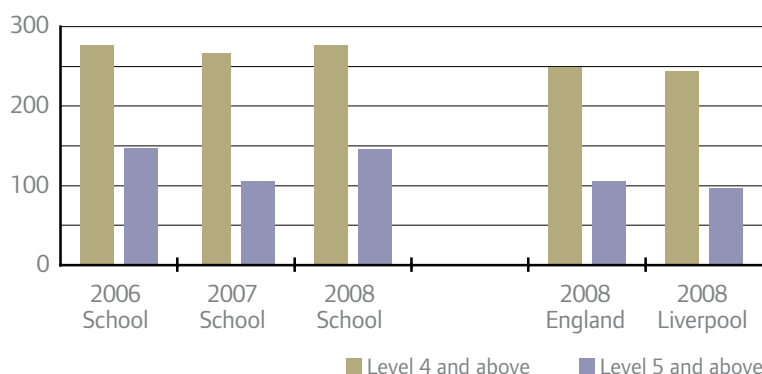
St Sebastian's serves an area of severe social disadvantage, exacerbated by problems of drugs, alcohol and poverty, with many pupils having limited language development when they join the school. A quarter of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Dennis Hardiman has been the headteacher of St Sebastian's for 25 years. The school has been in federation with a smaller Catholic school, St Cuthbert's, since 2006. The inspection of St Cuthbert's in 2008 found 'a school which provided a good education with many outstanding features'. Leadership and management of the two schools are excellent.

The Chair of Governors, who just predates the headteacher, describes the school as it was in 1983 as 'a basic school, with a good spirit but standards that were much lower than today'. The headteacher, in his view, has 'moved ahead of the times and inspired the unique community spirit' which surrounds the school today. The staffing is unusually stable, providing a family atmosphere and much communal working, facilitated by the open-plan building.

As a full extended school, St Sebastian's is a hub for the community, providing integrated, high-quality wrap-around day care from 0 to 11 years. The commitment to the community is embedded – parents took time off work to meet inspectors and to highlight the role the school plays in their lives. The school is involved not only in ensuring high academic success but also in the emotional well-being of the whole family. The pupils will do well if the family and community feel stable and secure. It will go the extra mile to ensure this.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	237
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	101.5 ± 0.6
FSM	36.2
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	24
Good	2
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Shiremoor Primary School, North Tyneside

'The headteacher's visionary and unremitting approach to continually improving teaching, learning and the care that pupils receive is at the heart of the school's success.' (Ofsted, 2008)

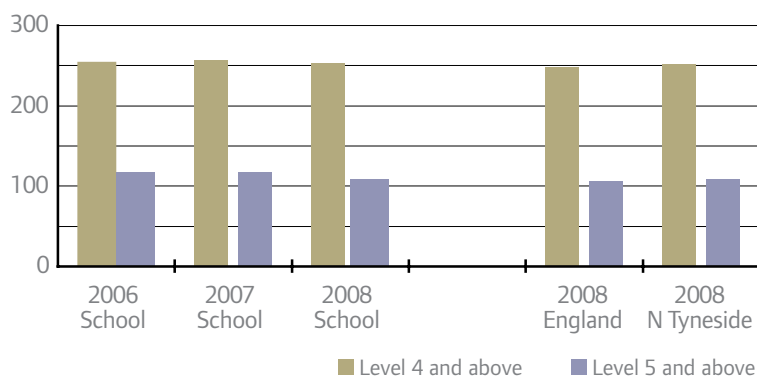
Formerly a mining village, this large Tyneside estate reflects considerable economic disadvantage and social issues. Most children who attend the school are of White British heritage, with fewer than 5% from minority ethnic groups. The school has the vision and commitment to make light of its many challenges, responding readily to the needs of its children – like providing a 'second' breakfast to provide the fuel for learning – and sustaining close links with both parents and the range of services which operate in the area, including police, fire brigade and health services and local businesses. Pupils love the school and know that the adults will sort out any problems they have.

Perhaps the most important vehicle for achieving success is the approach taken to managing behaviour, which began in 1990 when Helen Clegg became the headteacher. This involves strong moral purpose as well as being very practical. It is based on good manners, paying attention and mutual respect. The school has developed clear and well-established rules with the children, accompanied by rewards and sanctions. These are displayed prominently, explained to parents and demonstrated by staff. But the rewards are not what enable the pupils to behave so well so much as the school's positive ethos and engaging curriculum.

The school has exceptionally well-organised management systems where what needs to be done, or adds value, is done efficiently by staff at the right level and what doesn't, isn't. Staff morale at all levels is very high; they see themselves as fortunate to work, with autonomy and enjoyment, in such a rewarding setting. The last inspection reported teachers' enthusiasm for learning as infectious. Pupils like being expected to do things for themselves, which brings a sense of achievement and spurs them on to new challenges.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	388
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	100.8 ± 0.6
FSM	37.2
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	25
Good	2
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Simonswood Primary School, Knowsley

'This outstanding school has considerable strengths, not least the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and pupils' excellent personal development that reflects the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support they receive.'
(Ofsted, 2008)

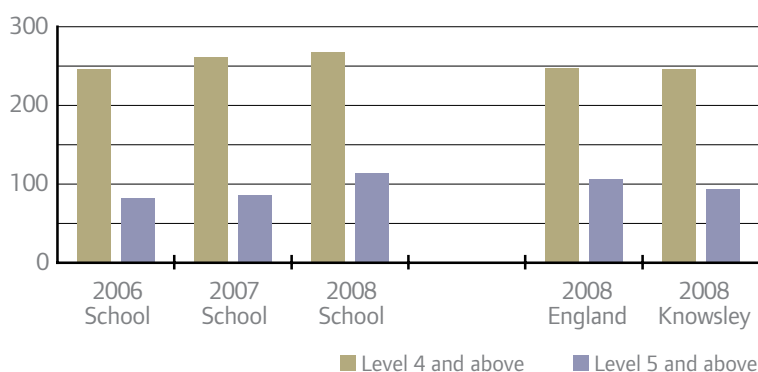
Simonswood serves an urban area of very high social and economic disadvantage. Most pupils are from a White British background but a few Polish children speak English as an additional language. The headteacher, Phil Newton, joined the school eight years ago. He notes that teamwork is essential in this school, 'working together with a shared vision for pupils and staff'. Despite a lot of staff changeover due to promotion, the school remains successful because systems are embedded and staff and children respect each other and work together as a team.

The school had organised non-teaching time for staff before the Government's workforce reforms introduced planning and preparation time. Performance management has also been a feature of the school for a long time, setting targets for staff linked to pupils' outcomes, with a rolling programme of continuing professional development which includes work-life balance. The monitoring of teaching and learning is linked to professional development, provided internally or through the local authority.

Enjoyment, confidence, challenge and support, respect, lifelong learning and quality are the values which underpin developments in the school. These are communicated through high expectations, which deal, for example, with standards, behaviour and relationships, and uniform. 'The pupils are proud to wear the badge of the school; it gives them a sense of belonging.'

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	217
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	100.8 ± 0.7
FSM	47.5
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	24
Good	1
Satisfactory	2
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

The Orion Primary School, Barnet

'This is an outstanding school which is very successful in "recognising a star in everybody".' (Ofsted, 2006)

The Orion School serves an area of high social and economic deprivation. The pupils are from a very wide range of backgrounds, reflecting the ethnic and cultural diversity of the area the school serves. Approximately 69% of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups. About 61% of the school population is Black African, of which 26% are of Somalian heritage, and 21% is White British. Many families are refugees or seeking asylum. The school has a base on its site for re-integrating pupils who have been permanently excluded.

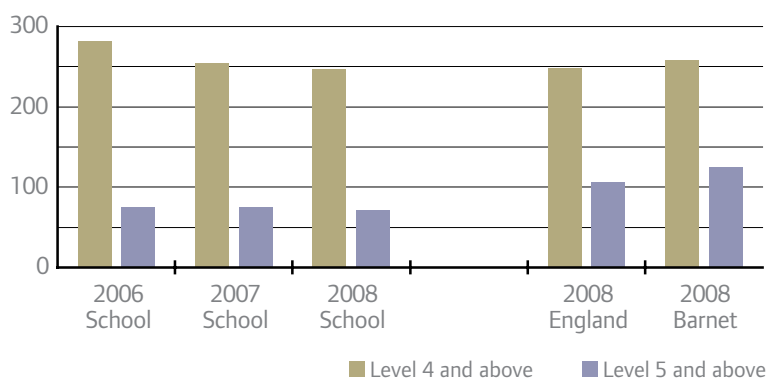
The Orion school is a 'fresh start' school formed by the amalgamation of two failing schools (infants and juniors). The headteacher, Chris Flathers, took up the post, his third headship, in January 2000. The main barriers included poor behaviour, low self-esteem and the disengagement of parents. He appointed the current deputy headteacher and the two schools were 'rebranded' and named the 'The Orion', a name chosen

to reflect the ethos they wanted to create – 'Recognising the star in everyone'. Priorities included focusing on behaviour, teaching and learning.

Establishing the ethos and raising expectations were two main challenges. Some staff needed to overcome an attitude which suggested: 'You can't do anything with these children.' They were expected not only to instruct children but also to guide and motivate them. Members of the senior leadership team are a source of information, advice and support. A problem such as managing behaviour is everyone's problem, not just the individual's. Leaders encourage staff and pupils alike to approach every day as a fresh start. They visit classrooms daily, welcome parents daily and have an open door policy for staff, pupils and parents. 'We have created a family; a family playing music, sharing breakfast (staff and pupils) and celebrating success', with after-school events for staff and pupils.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	468
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	100.5 ± 0.5
FSM	47
Ofsted report 2006	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	21
Good	5
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Welbeck Primary School, City of Nottingham

'As a result of outstanding leadership and management, this is an outstanding school. The school communicates very well with parents and has developed many ways of supporting them in helping their children learn.' (Ofsted, 2008)

This one-form entry primary and nursery school serves the Meadows, an area close to the centre of Nottingham. There is considerable ethnic diversity and over 20 home languages are spoken by children; 68% are from minority ethnic groups, a mixture of Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and some Polish children. The school is popular and heavily oversubscribed. This is due both to the excellence of the school, which has an outstanding reputation, and to the recent reduction of five schools in the Meadows to three.

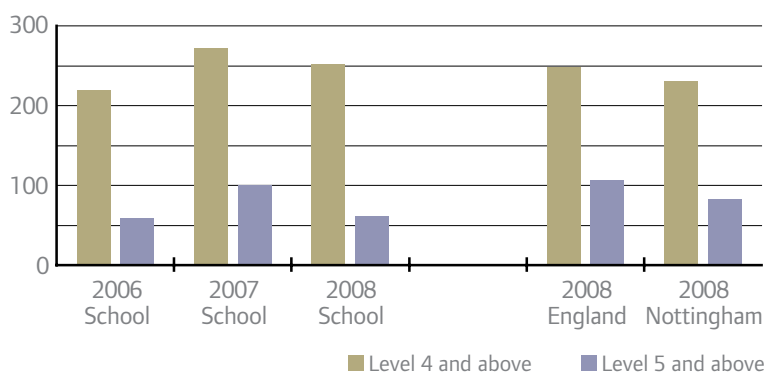
The Meadows is a vibrant and cohesive community, but has occasionally witnessed incidents involving drugs or guns. The headteacher, Carol Norman, and staff share a clear vision and determination that all children will succeed. They aim to give families the belief that

their children can and will achieve. The school reflects high expectations by regarding every child as gifted and talented. It is changing, improving and reinventing itself. This is illustrated, for example, by espousing internationalism in the last few years, and the school now has links with countries as far apart as Sri Lanka and Spain. Staff, including teaching assistants, visit schools in these countries to pave the way for collaboration and exchanges.

None of this detracts from the very strong commitment to children, families and the community. The child is 'at the core' – the top priority in all of their work. Many of the children need nurture and support. There is stable staffing. Staff are highly committed to supporting children, parents and families. As usual, there is a small group of parents who are hard to engage, but in general all parents respect and support the school. As many as 97% of parents attended the school's last open evening. The school follows up if parents don't attend.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	240
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	100.3 ± 0.7
FSM	41.9
Ofsted report 2008	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	24
Good	2
Satisfactory	1
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

William Ford Church of England Junior School, Barking and Dagenham

'This is an outstanding school in which pupils make excellent progress to reach exceptionally high standards [through] a combination of high-quality teaching, care and leadership...'
(Ofsted, 2006)

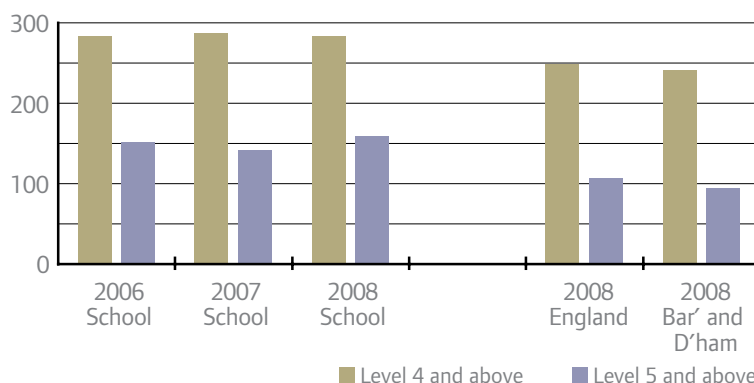
William Ford Junior School has been a highly successful school for many years. Recently, the school's population has changed considerably, from almost all White British pupils to an intake which is much more ethnically mixed. Pupils from different communities get on well together. Levels of unemployment in the local area are high and parents have often had a negative experience of school themselves. Low aspirations can be a problem and staff work hard to persuade pupils that they can 'be anything they want to be'. Successes are celebrated and much is done to enrich pupils' lives and motivate them, but this is also a school where pupils are rigorously challenged. However low a pupil's attainment is when they enter the school, staff expect them all to attain high standards by the time they leave.

There is a powerful culture of high expectations and challenge for both staff and pupils at the school. This begins with the headteacher, Mandy Short, and the governors, who question the school leaders rigorously about the performance of the school and progress of individual pupils on the basis of the data they receive. The outcomes of lesson observations are also shared and subject to critique. If a satisfactory lesson has been observed, the questions for leaders will be: 'How did you follow it up? What did you do about it?' Such high levels of rigour and consistency are keys to the school's success. The quality of lessons is consistently high. The school invests in staff induction, training and development. This contributes to great job satisfaction and staff turnover is relatively low.

National test results remain impressively high, with substantial proportions of children exceeding Level 4 attainment. The relatively recent change of headship has sustained the school's very high level of effectiveness.

School data

Total of the percentages of pupils achieving Level 4 or Level 5 in each of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2



2008 data	
Roll	335
Ages	3 to 11
CVA	102.0 ± 0.4
FSM	25.1
Ofsted report 2006	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	25
Good	1
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

World's End Infant and Nursery School, Birmingham

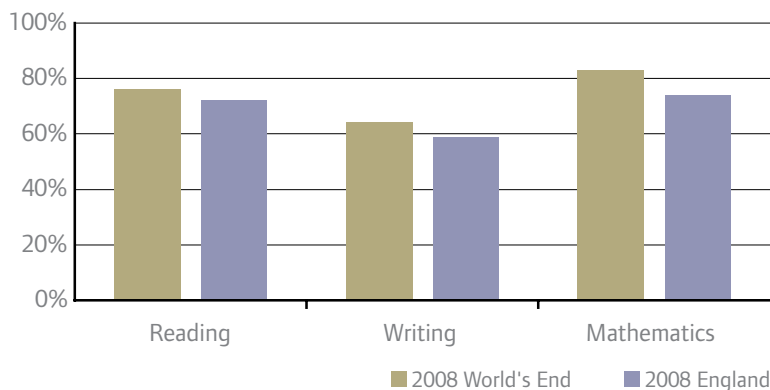
'Children get off to an excellent start in the nursery and reception. Consistently strong teaching and high-quality support mean that pupils make excellent progress across the school.' (Ofsted, 2007)

This school has achieved three outstanding Ofsted inspection reports and the present headteacher, Gillian Griffiths, who took over the school three years ago, has successfully maintained its high quality. The school serves a mixed area in the south-west of Birmingham. Levels of unemployment and social disadvantage are high, and there are problems with drug misuse and child protection. The school has a unit for visually impaired children, which it shares with the attached junior school. Levels of attainment on entry to the 52-place nursery are low, with poor language and social skills. A number of children have social and emotional problems. Children make exceptionally good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and, by the end of Key Stage 1, they achieve above the national and local authority averages in all aspects.

The keys to the school's success are seen by one member of staff as 'working together as a team; talking non-stop about and reflecting on teaching and learning in the staff room; the commitment and quality of the work of the teaching assistants; the leadership of the headteacher; and talking to parents – you've got to meet them face to face'. The school's motto is: 'In pursuit of excellence, we work together for all the children in our care.' The headteacher sees the staff as the greatest resource because the high quality of teaching has an impact on learning and standards of achievement. She feels that the mix of experienced, enthusiastic staff, some of whom have been at the school for many years yet continue to take new initiatives in their stride, and less experienced but equally enthusiastic and talented teachers, is related to their continuing success. In addition, the large number of experienced and qualified support staff also contribute greatly to the life of the school. They add a wide variety of skills and talents that contribute significantly to the children's learning.

School data

Percentage of pupils reaching Key Stage 1 standard: Level 2B or over



2008 data	
Roll	256
Ages	3 to 7
CVA	N/A
FSM	29.1
Ofsted report 2007	
Judgements	Features
Outstanding	25
Good	2
Satisfactory	0
Inadequate	0

Sources of data: DCSF Performance Tables; RAISEonline 2008 Full Reports; the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report.

Further reading



Further reading

Ofsted publishes a wide range of reports on subjects and aspects of education. The following list features a selection of reports published since September 2005. These reports are available from Ofsted's website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

An evaluation of National Strategy intervention programmes (070256), January 2009

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Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures (070221), June 2008

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2005/06 (HMI 20060008), November 2006

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The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08 (080196), November 2008

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