OFFICE
FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

Improving City Schools

A report from the Office of Her Majesty's
Chief Inspector of Schools

Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Telephone: 020 7421 6800

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Reference no. HMI 222

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1 INTRODUCTION

The background to the report

This report has been prepared as part of OFSTED's work on social exclusion, in response to the Social Exclusion Unit's publication, *Bringing Britain Together*. It follows up OFSTED's influential report, *Access and Achievement in Urban Education*, published in 1993, and complements a study in 1999 of schools, many in urban areas, which have emerged from special measures.[1]

The report has three purposes:

- to identify and illustrate the features of success in more effective schools serving disadvantaged urban areas;
- to evaluate how these schools engage potentially disaffected pupils;
- to raise questions about the further support schools in disadvantaged urban areas need.

The schools in the survey

The schools covered by this report are those which are more effective than others in similarly disadvantaged areas. The definition of disadvantage used is that the schools have more than 35 per cent of their pupils on free school meals (FSM).[2] The term 'more effective' refers to those schools whose performance in National Curriculum tests or the General Certificate of Education (GCSE) puts them in the top bands of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) benchmark groups – that is, their pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is better than other schools in similar areas.[3]

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[1] *Bringing Britain Together: a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal,* Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, analysed problems in the most disadvantaged wards in England and strategies for dealing with them. *Access and Achievement in Urban Education*, OFSTED, HMSO, 1993, was based on inspection of schools, colleges and other education services in deprived areas. *Lessons Learned from Special Measures*, OFSTED, 1999, reports on the progress made by 250 schools since OFSTED inspections began.

[2] There are some 3,000 primary schools and 457 secondary schools with known FSM eligibility of 35 per cent or more. Ninety-five per cent of these schools are in urban areas. Of all the schools, about 40 per cent in each phase have known FSM eligibility of 50 per cent of pupils or more.

[3] The more effective primary schools were identified as either those in the top bands (A* and A) of the QCA benchmark grade based on the core subjects average points score or schools in bands B and C and with a trend over four years rising faster than the national. The more effective secondary schools were identified as those non-selective schools either in the top bands of the QCA benchmark grade based on average GCSE points score or those in bands B and C with a trend over five years rising faster than the national trend.

In the period of the survey 804 primary schools (26 per cent of those in the relevant free school meal bands) and 178 secondary schools (39 per cent) came into this more effective category: these are referred to in the report as 'the survey schools'. Analysis of the performance of these schools used data and Section 10 reports. The table below gives a breakdown of the characteristics of the survey schools, compared with others.

Primary schools - averages	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All schools
% free school meals	44.9	43.9	19.3
% of pupils with statements of special needs	1.9	2.1	1.8
% of pupils on the special needs register	25.3	27.1	20.9
% of pupils from minority ethnic groups	34.6	32.4	14.0

Secondary schools - averages	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All non-selective schools
% free school meals	48.6	47.5	18.7
% of pupils with statements of special needs	2.9	3.2	2.6
% of pupils on the special needs register	26.3	29.0	19.4
% of pupils from minority ethnic groups	52.4	38.3	12.0
% of girls' schools	24.2	10.5	4.5

The schools visited

Inspection visits were made by HMI over a two-year period to a small illustrative sample of schools selected from the survey group. Detailed reference is made in the report to 20 of these visits to primary schools and 20 to secondary schools (described in the report as 'the schools visited'), with illustrations also being drawn from visits to other schools.

The schools visited had pupil populations with different characteristics but all were in the five per cent most disadvantaged electoral wards in the country, in inner city or urban areas, mostly in London, the Midlands or Merseyside.[4] The primary schools visited had known free school meal eligibility averaging 62 per cent. The secondary schools had known eligibility averaging 57 per cent.

[4] The identification of the five per cent of most disadvantaged wards is based on the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation. This is a measure of relative deprivation for all local authority districts and wards in England. It combines various indicators into an overall score, allowing areas to be ranked.

2 MAIN FINDINGS

- The primary and secondary schools that are the focus of this report serve communities which are severely disadvantaged, although the nature of their disadvantage varies. The schools are doing better than others in similar circumstances but have to work hard to approach national expectations of attainment – although some of the schools exceed them. Similarly, neither good behaviour nor good attendance is easily won.

- What marks these schools out is an upward trend in standards. They are improving, against the odds, often at a greater rate than schools overall. The process is more complex and takes longer in secondary schools, but the schools are taking significant steps on the way to higher achievement.

- There is no single, or peculiar, recipe for improvement in these schools, but some common ingredients are essential to the mix: strong management, a well-focused curriculum, good teaching, close monitoring and effective personal support, together with clear communication with parents. Essentially what make the difference are the clarity, intensity and persistence of the schools' work and the rigour with which it is scrutinised. At best, all the energy of the school serves the same end: raising standards.

- In the most effective schools, positive leadership is exercised by key staff throughout the school and not just by the headteacher. Staff receive the active assistance of governors who are committed to the role of the school in the community. Management is kept simple. The approach to continuous improvement works through systematic monitoring and evaluation, making good use of assessment and other performance data.

- The schools have large numbers of pupils with poor basic skills on entry and many with special educational needs. High priority is given to the development of basic skills, but with no compromise to the provision of the full National Curriculum, and in secondary schools to a range of options at Key Stage 4. Many of the schools put strong emphasis on the arts and sometimes on physical education. Homework has an important place and is supported in secondary schools by supervised sessions and revision clubs.

- The schools show the benefit of comprehensive and detailed collective planning of the curriculum, good use of time dedicated to the basics, and the targeting of pupils through flexible grouping for work to boost their attainment.

- The provision made for pupils with special educational needs is generally well focused and consistent and they make clear progress, although in some of the secondary schools there are too few staff with sufficient expertise to meet the needs of the high numbers involved. Support for bilingual pupils is usually impressive.

- Teaching is better in these schools than in other schools serving disadvantaged areas. A key strength of it is the direct and sustained interaction with pupils. Teachers know that every lesson counts. The schools establish clear routines in well-managed, uncomplicated classrooms. Teachers recognise that pupils need systematic help in accessing information, analysing the task and organising their work. Improving the consistency of teaching is a matter of deliberate policy. The contribution of support staff is of good quality, sustained by their involvement in planning and in training.

- There is no deviation from the demand that pupils give of their best. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils should attain. There are also strong structures in place to monitor and support pupils. A culture of hard work is supported by good relationships and the tracking of progress, and underpinned by constructive criticism and praise. In secondary schools the use of mentors helps examination success.

- These schools are supportive and safe places in which to learn. Deliberate work on improving behaviour is closely allied with work on improving commitment to learning. The challenging behaviour of some pupils is not easily managed, but good discipline is promoted through clear policies understood by all, through the reinforcement of responsible behaviour and through the development of pupils' belief in themselves, respect for one another and loyalty to the school. A great deal of attention is given to creating a stimulating learning environment and one reflecting expectations of good order and high standards of work.

- The schools warrant, and sometimes receive, strong support from community agencies, but more systematic and better-integrated work across the services is needed, based on clear procedures for involvement and communication.

- Efforts to inform and involve parents are marked by straightforward and regular information and a high degree of accessibility.
- The income of the schools in the survey shows a wide range. It is only loosely related to need and there is too much reliance on bidding for short-term grants. Some of the schools do not have enough money to do the job. Where there is scope in their budgets, the schools tend to give priority to investment in staff, improving the fabric of the school and building up information and communication technology (ICT) equipment. The provision of other learning resources is no better than for all schools nationally – that is, often barely adequate and sometimes poor.

- These schools illustrate what schools can do to improve standards within their own expertise and other resources, although there are weaknesses on which they know they need to continue to work. Their achievement in circumstances where improvement is harder won than elsewhere calls for particular acknowl-edgement. The number of such schools needs to grow rapidly and sharply to cut the long tail of poor achievement with which the education service in disadvantaged areas is marked.

3 MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The persistence of the link between low attainment and poverty has been repeatedly highlighted in the Annual Reports to Parliament of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector. It is a point also powerfully made elsewhere.

A recent Treasury report on modernising Britain's tax and benefits system sets out the challenge bluntly.[5] The report confirms that differences in educational attainment between advantaged and disadvantaged children are apparent from a very early age and that educational attainment has a significant impact on success in the labour market. The report emphasises that, although the contribution education can make is substantial, it is only one of the factors which can help to counter disadvantage and exclusion.

Other reports, for example those by the House of Commons Education Committee in 1995 and from the National Commission on Education in 1993 and 1996,[6] have highlighted the impact of a cycle of deprivation on educational achievement, and illustrated how poverty, the physical environment, housing problems, family disruption, health, drugs, crime and racism contribute to that cycle.

OFSTED's report *Access and Achievement in Urban Education* concluded that many pupils in urban schools were not benefiting from educational reforms. Although there were elements of good work in individual schools, their impact was often masked by poor performance in other respects. The report pointed to a need for better long-term planning, dissemination of effective practice, carefully-focused intervention and concerted efforts by education and related services.

The picture has changed and, in some respects, there have been improvements. Since 1995, schools in disadvantaged areas have improved their Key Stage 2 test results and GCSE results faster than other schools. In HMCI's latest Annual Report, 38 schools with free school meal counts higher than 35 per cent feature in the lists of schools which are outstanding or have shown excellent improvement.[7] Nevertheless, the gap remains. From performance data and inspection evidence, two features stand out. First, the variation in

[5] *The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefits System: No. 4. Tackling Poverty and Extending Opportunity*, HM Treasury, 1999.

[6] *Performance in City Schools, Volume I and Volume II*, House of Commons Education Committee, HMSO, 1995. *Learning to Succeed: Report of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation National Commission on Education*, Heinemann, 1993. *Success Against the Odds: Effective Schools in Disadvantaged Areas*, National Commission on Education, Routledge, 1996.

[7] *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 1998/99*, OFSTED, The Stationery Office, 2000. The schools listed are included in the appendix to this report.

the results achieved by different primary and secondary schools serving similarly disadvantaged areas remains striking. Second, relatively few schools with high levels of disadvantage achieve results which reach or are above the national average.

What does disadvantage mean?

The schools covered in this report serve some of the most disadvantaged areas in England, but the educational disadvantage they encounter does not come in the same form. Some of the schools are in inner city areas; others are in outer ring estates. Some of the communities served by the schools are stable; others have much more transient populations. Some are mono-cultural; others much more diverse.

They have in common a preponderance of families on low income, in poor housing and with little experience of education beyond compulsory schooling. Only a small minority of parents work in the professions; many are in low-paid manual or service jobs or unemployed. In some cases families are exceptionally troubled. The communities are affected, to different degrees, by bleak surroundings and poor facilities, by poor health, by dislocation and disaffection, and by high levels of alcohol and drug abuse. Trouble can wait, literally, at the school gates. It sometimes comes through them: one school visited had suffered 274 burglaries or break-ins in one year.

For all of this, the proportion of pupils having a free school meal is a statistical indicator, but a meagre guide to the reality. Nor do inspectors see it all.

The picture, of course, is not of unrelieved gloom. In virtually all the areas visited there are signs of community strength and of action to improve the situation. Education can be very highly prized, at least by some families, and the schools seen as havens of security and hope. Nevertheless, the extent of the challenge the schools face should not be underplayed. Almost all schools, certainly in the cities, know something of it; in these schools, however, disadvantage is multiple, widespread and, in some cases, worsening. They are hard places to teach in.

The schools visited know the effects of disadvantage and what they mean for their work — but, very importantly, they are aware of the dangers of making too much of the effects. Recognising that many of their pupils come to school with low levels of achievement, the schools take a pragmatic and energetic approach to providing education that meets their needs, rather than looking for excuses for poor performance. There is, correspondingly, well-tempered optimism in these schools, derived from improvement. Meeting the challenge to raise standards in disadvantaged communities is not easy, but successes — on the part of individual pupils and those of the school as a whole — are a source of pride for staff, governors, parents and pupils themselves. Two key points flow from this.

The first is about added and absolute value. These schools seek to 'add value' by ensuring good progress by all pupils. But they do not only look to schools in similar circumstances in order to set their sights; instead they compare themselves with the generality of schools nationally. This is based on the belief that, while the value added by the school is an important tool for analysis, the currency which counts is the absolute, not the relative achievement of pupils. That is, after all, what they take on to the next stage of education, training or employment.

The second point is about the place of the school in the community. These schools, in their different ways, are a focus for community development and are often active in schemes for renewal. They cannot themselves be accountable for the deep-seated problems which their communities face and so, by the same token, there are limits to what they can do to resolve them. These schools are conscious of the part they play in the process, and engage their efforts, sometimes very successfully, with those of other local agencies, but in doing so they are not distracted from their basic educational purpose.

4 HOW WELL ARE THE SCHOOLS DOING ?

The schools which are the focus of this report are not effective in all respects - and certainly none would claim to get everything right. They all have to work very deliberately to move towards national expectations of attainment, although some are closer than others and some schools exceed the expectations. Similarly, neither good behaviour nor good attendance is easily won.

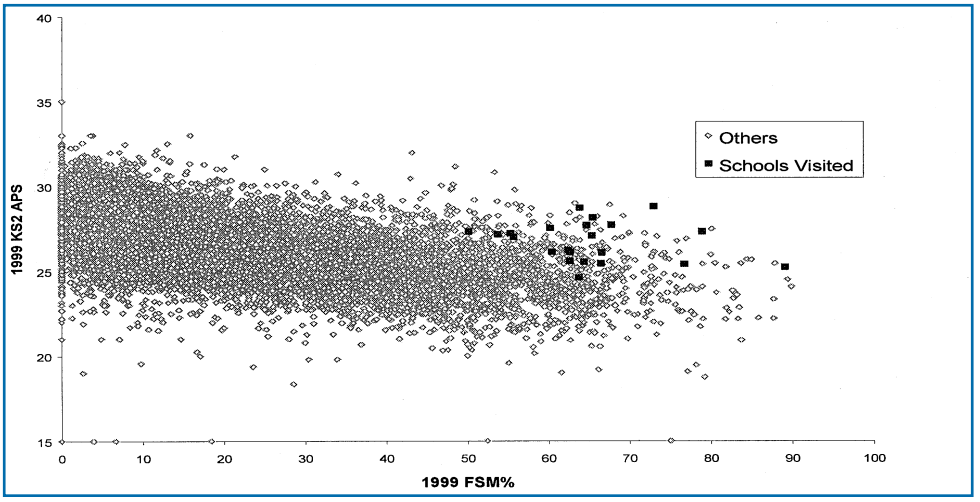
What marks these schools is the clear trend of their progress. Their improvement is rarely spectacular; nor is it always steady, particularly among the secondary schools. Special efforts are needed to sustain what can seem, in absolute terms, small gains - and gains which may not be repeated the next year in the same way. The schools are not discouraged by this: they look beyond the headline figures at what the other indicators show and take action on that basis.

The primary schools

The table below shows the overall picture for school attainment in National Curriculum assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 in 1999. It also gives overall figures for two key judgements made in OFSTED school inspections 1996-99.

	The schools visited	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All schools
Key Stage 2 average points score in core subjects	26.8	26.6	24.8	26.8
Inspection grade for school ethos – % good or very good	83	74	68	77
Inspection grade for management – % good or very good	61	53	45	54

The chart below sets out the relationship between attainment at Key Stage 2 in National Curriculum assessments and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The general pattern is that as disadvantage increases the achievement of pupils reduces.



The schools visited are among the higher-achieving schools in their free school meals range. They achieve National Curriculum results at the end of Key Stage 2 that

generally equal or exceed the national average, although results can fluctuate from year to year. In other words, they hold their own in absolute terms with school nationally and they do better than most primary schools serving similarly disadvantaged areas. A feature of the success of the schools is that pupils from a variety of ethnic groups do well in them.

It is encouraging to see that the schools visited are by no means isolated examples, but discouraging, on the other hand, to see just how many other schools fall way below the levels of attainment of the best. It is striking also that for any particular level of eligibility for free school meals, the attainment of pupils varies considerably, by about one National Curriculum level overall. Given that pupils are expected to progress at about one level every two years, this means that pupils in lower-attaining schools are about two years behind pupils in schools with similar levels of advantage or disadvantage that attain well.

Differences in levels of attainment measured by National Curriculum tests provide one perspective. OFSTED inspections of the schools visited show that the quality of education they provide, their climate and their management and efficiency compare favourably with *all* schools.

The earliest inspection reports on these schools indicate that they have not all been successful over the years. Several have been transformed from schools in which the standards in the core subjects were below national averages three or four years ago, and where a range of other weaknesses were identified, to ones which match national figures for attainment and the quality of education.

None of the schools would claim that the challenges they have faced have now disappeared. The pressures faced by the pupils and their parents remain as great as ever, and continue to influence what happens in school every day. Key issues for action in the most recent inspection reports show that, as in many schools across the country:

- more needs to be done to ensure that standards in all subjects, especially in information communication technology (ICT), are as high as they could be;
- pockets of unsatisfactory teaching remain;
- some policies and schemes of work need to be produced or re-considered;
- in most cases accommodation and learning resources need improving.

Nevertheless, the evidence from these schools illustrates that schools can respond to a change of direction rapidly. Low achievement is not intractable, and, given the right conditions, can be overcome in a relatively short time. Where weaknesses were reported three or four years ago, strong management teams have transformed weak schools into success stories. The basic features of good management and teaching, common to all good schools, are in place and support the drive for continuous improvement.

The secondary schools

The 178 survey schools, including the schools visited, do better on the two key inspection judgements than all schools in disadvantaged areas and exceed national averages. *(See table below)*

As far as attainment at GCSE is concerned, the picture is more complex. The survey schools compare favourably with schools with similar levels of disadvantage. They perform successfully in that:

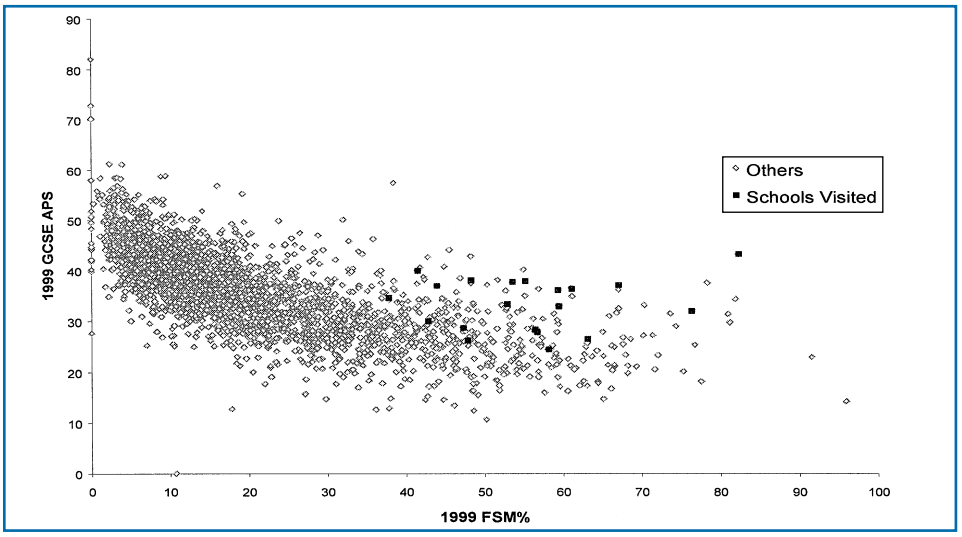
- they have a consistent pattern of improvement in lower grades and thus in average points score;
- 88 per cent of their pupils gained five or more grades A*-G in 1999, compared to 91 per cent nationally;
- 96 per cent gained at least one graded result, which is the same as schools nationally;
- pupils from groups at risk of low achievement elsewhere, including some boys and pupils from some minority ethnic groups, often make good progress in the schools.

However, few of the survey schools come near the national average figures in other respects, and they have particular difficulty in gaining higher grades at GCSE, so that:

	The schools visited	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All schools
GCSE average points score	33.1	32.4	27.6	37.3
Inspection grade for school ethos – % good or very good	94	77	63	76
Inspection grade for management – % good or very good	85	63	49	57

- 11 per cent achieved the mean national figure for average points score in 1999;
- 32 per cent of pupils gained five or more A*-C grades, compared to 46 per cent nationally; and
- only six per cent of the schools reached the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades.

The chart below illustrates the inverse relationship nationally between free school meals and attainment at GCSE measured by average points score.



HMI visits to the schools demonstrated that meeting the challenge to raise standards sharply in disadvantaged areas, while by no means impossible, can take longer in secondary than in primary schools. Despite their successes, the schools visited have more to do. Key issues in their inspection reports refer, not surprisingly, to raising attainment, and sometimes attendance, further. They commonly cover:

- improving literacy in Key Stage 3;
- extending good practice in teaching and assessment to achieve more consistent results across subjects, with better departmental monitoring and other action often called for;
- enhancing learning resources and making fuller use of ICT;
- improving the use of homework;
- developing or rationalising the curriculum at Key Stage 4;
- improving accommodation, particularly specialist teaching rooms.

Less general, but still significant, issues for these schools include the need to increase the level of engagement and achievement by some boys, to extend and focus support for special educational needs, and, in some schools, to work deliberately on higher achievement by one or more ethnic group.

Are the primary schools more successful than the secondary?

The Government has set a target for 2002 of 80 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in English and 75 per cent of pupils reaching Level 4 or above in mathematics by the end of primary school. For 16-year-olds the national target for 2002 is that 50 per cent should achieve five or more higher grades at GCSE or its equivalent.

The 1999 Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test data show that 240 and 294 primary schools in disadvantaged areas achieved the national averages for the proportion meeting the national expectation in English and mathematics, respectively. Only ten secondary schools in disadvantaged areas achieved the national average for the proportion gaining five higher grades at GCSE (46.6 per cent). In other words, secondary schools in disadvantaged areas have even further to go than primary schools to reach the national targets in 2002. A number of factors bear on this difference in performance.

Not least of them is the nature of the targets themselves. Those for 11-year-olds are for English and mathematics only, and separately. For 16-year-olds the target is higher grades in at least five GCSE subjects. If the primary school targets were based on the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 in *both* English and mathematics, the number of schools in disadvantaged areas achieving it now would fall to 135. Even so, that figure represents just under 4.4 per cent of all primary schools serving disadvantaged areas, whereas the ten secondary schools referred to above represent only two per cent of all secondary schools serving disadvantaged areas.

Other differences between primary schools and secondary schools make simple comparisons unhelpful. Primary schools are almost always smaller than secondary schools and have fewer layers of management, so that the impact of the headteacher can often be felt immediately and directly at every level. Whole-school initiatives can have a pervasive influence relatively quickly. Promoting change in larger institutions is generally both harder and slower.

Factors of school organisation can also have a potent influence. All schools in city areas can be affected by the ebb and flow of population movement and by patterns of parental choice of schools. Many of the secondary schools in the survey group are particularly affected, so that coping with varying year group numbers and profiles (for example, in the balance of boys and girls), often in a context of overall falling rolls and surplus places, is a major preoccupation, financial and otherwise. Parental choice can produce great polarisation between schools. So can the existence of single-sex schools, sometimes in a very untidy mix. It is no surprise that, among the survey and schools visited, a relatively high proportion are for girls.

The age of the pupils has its impact, too. The challenges faced by the primary school teacher in introducing very young children to schooling are considerable. A low baseline of achievement on entering school is characteristic of many pupils in disadvantaged areas. Nevertheless, very young pupils respond positively to the security and opportunity provided in nursery and reception classes. Inspection shows that four- and five-year-olds settle quickly to the routines of the school day and respond happily and readily to their teachers.

The problem facing many secondary schools, especially those in disadvantaged areas, is different: they must convince young people that academic achievement is worth the effort. Where the context is marked by a lack of employment opportunities, the realities of life in run-down areas, and a stark contrast between home circumstances and the apparent glamour and affluence evident elsewhere, the task is all the harder. The impact of high turnover among older pupils compounds difficulties.

Finally, there may also be a difference in the degree of consensus, among both teachers and parents, about the appropriate curriculum in the two phases. There is now a widely shared agreement on what primary schools should aim for and provide, with most teachers and parents welcoming the concentration on the essential skills of literacy and numeracy. The debate within and about secondary schools is more fluid, with differences of view, for example, about how to motivate pupils and on the balance to be struck between academic and vocational elements.

What more can be expected?

In the light of the evidence about the links between attainment and poverty, what levels of attainment is it appropriate to expect schools in disadvantaged areas to achieve?

Basic to the answer is that there should be no acceptance of lower expectations based on excuses for underachievement. The point was put, for example, in HMCI's Annual Report for 1997/98:

> 'The rich do not ... have a monopoly on intelligence and poverty can never be an excuse for school failure. It is the children who have no books at home, whose parents cannot or will not read to them, who need school most. More privileged children are likely to be better prepared for education, but the fact that a child is eligible for a free school meal ought not to have any relevance when it comes to learning to read.' [9]

In primary schools, where there is good evidence that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve well when taught by good teachers with high expectations, a strong case can be made for setting ambitious common targets for all schools. In the secondary phase, however, the likelihood that schools in disadvantaged areas will achieve the national target for 16-year-olds is more remote, given that even the more effective schools rarely achieve the current national average now.

This is not at all surprising. Ultimately, however, national targets must apply to all pupils, irrespective of their location or the composition of their schools: the principles of inclusion and entitlement must underpin any set of national expectations. A key question for policymakers — and for the inspection system — is how to combine these common expectations with measures of school performance that enable those schools in disadvantaged areas which make significant steps along the way to demonstrate what they have achieved. There is a positive note to be struck, for example, by the fact that HMCI's Annual Report for 1998/99 records that the schools facing the most disadvantage are now improving more rapidly in test and examination results than secondary schools overall.

A further question, one at the heart of this report, is whether there is a special recipe for improving standards in these schools. And this question leads to another, considered at the end of the report: how to create the conditions to enable many more schools to close the current and long-standing gap.

[9] *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 1997/98*, OFSTED, Stationery Office, 1999.

5 A DIFFERENT RECIPE ?

The survey schools are doing better than schools in similar circumstances. A key question is whether what they do to achieve success is different from what effective schools in other areas do.

No peculiar set of ingredients for improvement emerges from this survey. The same ingredients are potent in the mix in these schools as in any others: strong management; a well-organised and focused curriculum; good teaching; close monitoring and effective personal support of pupils; and good links with parents — all based on high expectations of what it is possible for pupils to achieve.

What is distinctive in the more effective schools is the single-mindedness of the approach: **the clarity, intensity and persistence of the schools' work, and the rigour with which it is scrutinised**. At the centre of that work lie a determination to give close attention to individual needs and progress and a commitment to ensuring that all pupils, including those from minority ethnic groups and others at risk of underachievement, participate in and benefit from school activities.

In these respects, across all key areas, the schools do well what can be done more easily in less exacting conditions elsewhere. They master the art of connecting work on different parts of the school's provision, so that action, informed by a clear and common purpose, is concerted and coherent. The result is greater consistency, between policy and reality, and in the practice of the staff, than is common elsewhere. The brief accounts of development in two schools, given below, illustrate this.

This report concentrates on aspects of development on which the schools tend to work with particular care. These include initiatives designed to address specific challenges in the schools, with the most common of the initiatives contributing to at least one of the following aims:

- improving standards of literacy;
- providing a high level of opportunity in the arts and, in some secondary schools, physical education;
- in secondary schools, engaging and motivating pupils through curriculum modification and enrichment and through mentoring;
- tackling poor behaviour, unauthorised absence and persistent lateness;
- improving links between school and parents;
- developing the school's environment and resources.

In pursuing such initiatives, the schools visited make good use of relevant outside support, where it is available, from the local education authority (LEA) and other agencies, and are keen to take up advice and ideas from elsewhere. In this respect, as well as in others, the schools are outward-looking: they seek help where necessary, they respond to opportunities and they actively seek out involvement in improvement projects. Crucially, however, they do so in ways consistent with the school's overall direction and timetable for development.

What comes over strongly is an approach to change which, while receptive to new ideas, recognises the need to consider their relevance and test out their implications. There is a sense of urgency, but not of the kind of panic which can give rise to taking on any new idea without regard for coherence and sustainability.

There is usually no shortage of schemes in which schools can be involved, although they are unevenly spread around areas of the country. These schemes can bring valuable additional resources, including access to expertise and information. There is also evidence of the complications which they can involve and of the difficulty of managing initiatives which are sometimes overlapping, occasionally vague in their intentions, or poorly administered. As some inspections of LEAs demonstrate, coherence and focus can be hard to achieve. The most effective schools show what can be done when they have control over the resources and their use.

Examples of school development

- The history of one large, multicultural, inner-city primary school shows the impact of well-managed change in a relatively short time. Here, under a new headteacher, radical action transformed the school and achieved dramatic improvements in standards and the quality of education within two-and-a-half years. Two features stand out. First, major changes were made to the management structure, resulting in the creation of new management posts, redefined responsibilities and new support and monitoring arrangements. These changes were accompanied by modifications, brought in over a school year, in the structure and focus of the school, including the curriculum, timetable, teaching methods, and expectations of progress, especially for minority ethnic pupils. Second, the governors took on a much fuller part in the planning and monitoring of the school's work. The leadership and management of the school were described as outstandingly good by the subsequent OFSTED inspection report.

- In a secondary school a range of initiatives has been built up and brought together in a coherent, whole-school approach. Clear priorities, combined with resourcefulness over a long period, have shaped the use of additional funding from a variety of local, national and European sources. A key development was sports college status, building on existing practice in physical education and dance. Interventions have been developed for different stages of the school: bringing up standards of literacy in Year 7; providing new opportunities for pupils who are uncommitted or drifting in Year 8; an in-school guidance unit which focuses on Year 9 and above; a scheme of college placements, the funding of award-bearing community projects and a programme of sports coaching which build up through Key Stage 4; revision classes and mentoring in Year 11. These extra dimensions have been carefully connected with improvements in behaviour policy, pastoral care and with a drive on application and attainment in lessons. There is a strong sense in the school of 'something for everyone' and imaginative and positive action for those tending to fall away. The OFSTED inspection remarked on the confidence and enthusiasm of the pupils as a feature of a rapidly improving school with many areas of outstanding achievement, and one in which improvement in the levels of attainment of pupils in recent years had been marked.

6 HOW DO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT WORK ?

Leadership and management: key features

- a determination to concentrate on changes most likely to lead to improvement, despite the wide range of issues clamouring for attention, and good judgement in weighing up which initiatives will contribute positively to the work of the school;
- high visibility and accessibility of the senior team in the school and its local community;
- simple and pertinent management systems, including well-focused development planning and monitoring;
- good use of data on pupil participation and performance as the basis for setting targets;
- skills in harnessing and managing resources from a range of sources, combined with excellent financial planning and control to ensure that the resources available are used well;
- the ability to establish effective partnerships with external agencies, particularly in secondary schools with education-business partnerships and further and higher education.

The story of the schools visited begins and ends with the quality of their leadership and management. The personalities, the management structures and the school contexts are different, but some common features emerge strongly.

Predictably, the most effective schools are distinguished by leadership that is inspirational, with a strong commitment to the school, its pupils and the community. Inspiration comes in different styles, including a quiet style: charisma of the stunning sort is not essential. Leadership in these schools goes well beyond uttering mission statements, although most schools have one of these, saying, in one way or another, 'we will not sell these young people short'. The source of the schools' energy is high expectations of pupils' attainment and behaviour, and all the energy of the school goes in the same direction. The headteacher's role is central, but leadership is also exercised by key staff through the school.

Leadership in these circumstances creates belief in the possibility of success, effecting a change in attitude among staff and pupils and breeding confidence. It works on improvement with enterprise and

determination, informing all the schools' work with a common purpose. It insists that every lesson, every interaction, counts and sets school-wide standards for their quality. It is committed to continuous improvement through systematic monitoring and evaluation, making full use of performance data to monitor pupils' progress and school effectiveness. Finally, it seeks to make success as tangible and immediate as possible.

- The proportion of good and very good leadership and management (in its different features, including governance) in the survey schools, and especially in the schools visited, was higher than that in all schools in disadvantaged areas. Among the survey secondary schools, the proportion was higher than for all schools. The schools visited in both phases were particularly strong on the implementation of the school's aims, values and policies and in establishing a positive ethos.

Consistency was among the most common words used by the headteachers in the schools visited to describe what they were working on. In primary schools, the main concern is consistency in planning and teaching across the stages of schooling. In secondary schools, work to achieve greater consistency among departments is a major drive. To achieve this consistency the emphasis in both cases is on teamwork. But while the involvement of staff, including support staff, in debate, planning and implementation is universal, difficult issues in the management of staff are not ducked. In almost all the schools headteachers have needed, at one time or another, to insist that staff match the standards set and to take firm action where necessary.

There is a determination to continue to improve, but at the same time an appreciation of the limitations of time and energy. The care in the selection of initiatives to pursue is clear: the schools adopt and shape those which are relevant to the issues it faces and avoid those on offer which would be a distraction. There is attention to detail, but management systems are not mechanical or overwhelming; they are generally kept simple, with the processes of planning, implementation and review used deliberately to the same end. This is evident in the way the school development plan is shaped, priorities are set and funding is linked to them.

Coupled with strong leadership from the headteacher, there is good use of deputy headteachers and other senior managers, who are fully engaged in the planning and pursuit of objectives. Good teamwork enables them to balance day-to-day demands with the need for planning.

By contrast, the leadership skills of middle managers in secondary schools can be rather less well developed. The best have worked out a detailed strategy to raise standards, to monitor teaching and learning and to set targets for improvement. As a result, they achieve standards which outstrip those in some other departments. In most of the schools the headteachers have struck a proper balance between supporting pioneering developments and holding other departments to account for unsatisfactory progress.

In the primary schools there is good delegation to co-ordinators. They are set clear tasks, sometimes involving annual targets for the work in their subjects or regular reports to the governing body. Opportunities for co-ordinators to monitor the quality of teaching depend in part on the school's ability to arrange non-contact time. Other key tasks for co-ordinators are training, consultancy and the selection of resources. Although they sometimes have little time assigned for the job, the influence of special educational needs co-ordinators is significant in promoting good progress by all pupils through a consistency of approach to assessment, to the planning of specific programmes of work and to the use of additional support. The contribution of co-ordinators for support on English as an additional language is often of similar quality. Communication between these co-ordinators and class teachers is usually of a high order.

The commitment and practical assistance of governors are a source of support for the school. Many are long-serving and take great pride in the school's improvement. They have used their influence to enlist the more active support of parents and help win recognition for the school's achievements. To varying degrees, governing bodies have a sense of how to exercise a role in strategic planning and, in all cases, a keen idea of how, where necessary, to fight the school's corner. Their persistence has sometimes led to improvements in funding and accommodation.

School planning identifies raising achievement as the school's central purpose. Ambitious but realistic targets are set, often using very carefully analysed data of a variety of kinds, which highlight, among other things, the participation and performance of different ethnic groups. The process of involving staff and pupils is an important feature and the advertising of targets has itself raised their sights. These targets are writ large through the school and are often translated into subsidiary targets for sections of the school.

Monitoring covers both the school provision and the outcomes for pupils, although some schools are rather better at analysing the latter than the former, and

sometimes more needs to be done to make monitoring sharp and systematic. Evidence of the quality of the school's work includes regular checks by senior staff on planning and teaching.

The skills of leadership and management evident in these more effective schools in disadvantaged areas have parallels in every successful school and are not in themselves distinctive. But there are particular demands, as the management history of some of the schools testify. Lessons are hard won — and perhaps, in some cases, could have been learned with less trouble. There is a strong case for headteachers and other managers new to the role in schools like these to have privileged access to training, particularly in order to study the approaches used in other schools.

Examples of leadership and management in action

- An example of how different elements combine to produce effective management is provided by one primary school. The direction is determined by the rigorous leadership of the headteacher — yet her open and questioning style builds the confidence of others and draws them in and on. The senior management of the school has been deliberately built up and has strength in depth. Intelligent and full use is made of the skills of the governing body. The approach is systematic without being rigid. The keys to the successful management of change are the thoroughness with which ideas and practices are evaluated and the recognition that individual year groups present different challenges. The school's documentation is given life through the quality of discussion, monitoring and development in the school. The school continues to make selective use of external advice, particularly on special needs and on provision for English as an additional language.

  The school has seen a distinct pattern in the recruitment of staff, with newly-qualified teachers staying for perhaps three years before taking promotion elsewhere or moving out of the city. The school's management works with this pattern and invests in it. Appointment and induction arrangements are excellent and the contribution of new teachers is valued. Considerable investment is also made in the involvement, training and development of support staff and this yields benefits in their commitment, their understanding of pupils' learning and behaviour and in the specialist skills they gain.

- As a result of deliberate work to build a unified and professional approach the headteacher in one secondary school has gained the backing of a strong staff for achieving change. This has come about through various strands in the school's renewal: a commitment to involving and giving responsibility to staff; collective development planning; an outward-looking approach to local employers and the community; investment in accommodation and resources to create a better learning environment; and tangible success in improving GCSE results. The changes have contributed directly to the approach taken by staff in their daily work, and through them to the attitudes and response of pupils.

7 IS THE TEACHING SPECIAL ?

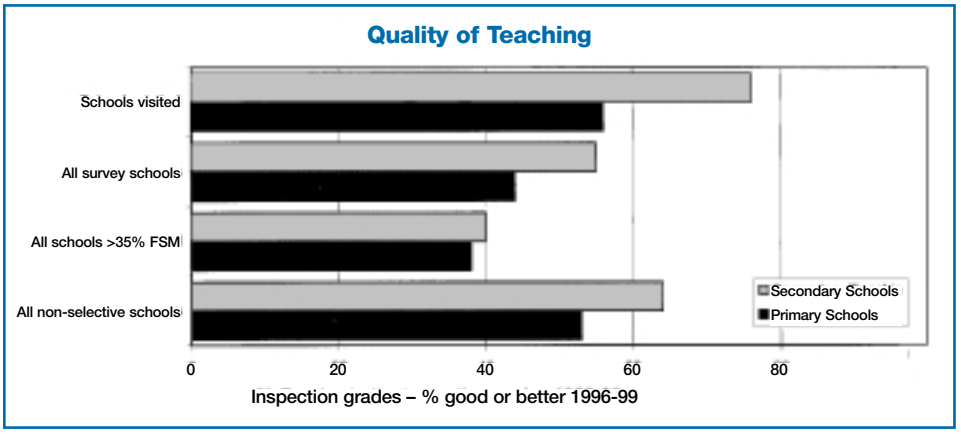
Teaching: key features

- a high degree of consistency across the school;
- high expectations of pupils, matched by well-planned support to help them meet the challenges of the work;
- skilful management of pupils in classrooms and effective use of time and resources;
- motivating teaching methods and materials, planned with the improvement of basic skills in mind.

Effective teaching in these schools demonstrates characteristics which inspection has highlighted elsewhere, but some features are particularly evident. Very important is the greater evenness of the quality of teaching, with fewer trouble-spots than in other schools serving disadvantaged areas. Such consistency is particularly important for pupils whose confidence and concentration can be fragile. Because they often lack the strategies and resources to find out for themselves, they need more good teaching to learn what more advantaged pupils may assimilate more readily. As one headteacher put it, they are 'first-generation academics'.

Teachers in schools serving disadvantaged areas often meet needs which teachers elsewhere do not encounter, at least to anything like the same extent. Teaching has to be especially well planned, systematic and incremental. Work must be purposeful and within the capability of pupils, but it must also move them on in knowledge and understanding. This is a critical factor where pupils' motivation, self-belief and capacity to organise themselves can be low — notably, but not only, on the part of some boys. The impact on the classroom climate of poor concentration and sometimes poor behaviour by even a handful of pupils can be debilitating; astute management and considerable stamina are needed to deal effectively with them.

Not all the teaching in the survey schools is good, although a very high proportion is at least satisfactory. The chart opposite shows the proportions of teaching judged in inspections to be good or very good for the different categories of school. In both phases, the quality of the teaching in the survey schools, and especially in the schools visited, was better than in all schools in disadvantaged areas.



Specific strengths in the teaching contribute significantly to the schools' success. From lesson observation, four features show up as particularly valuable:

- clear and uncomplicated classroom routines, for example on the use of equipment and materials and on the ways which pupils record and present their work;
- good use of time and learning resources;
- an insistence that pupils do their best, coupled with help which enables pupils to meet the challenges set, for example in finding information, analysing the task and organising their work;
- sustained interaction by teachers with pupils, including the skilled use of questions and the call for pupils to articulate their thinking.

At the heart of the matter are the high expectations teachers set for what the pupils will learn and what they will do. Having high expectations is not enough, of course. Teachers provide full and practical help to enable pupils to meet these expectations: they are not left to flounder or to fail. Typically, sessions are clearly introduced and conclude with a review of progress. The structure reflects the emphasis given to encouraging pupils to be explicit about their thinking, to show what they have done and to explain what they have learned. Teachers are adept at focusing and re-focusing the activities of groups and individuals during the lesson, using questions to diagnose difficulties, consolidate learning and extend ideas. A premium is placed on maintaining a good pace. Genuine praise is readily given for small steps forward when these represent significant gains in learning.

The teaching in the primary schools visited was usually consistent across most classes and subjects. Significantly, the quality of the teaching of English and science in the secondary schools visited was invariably at least satisfactory and often good, although mathematics teaching showed less well.

A significant feature in almost all the schools is the skilful use of support teachers or support assistants to create flexibility in grouping and to target groups of pupils for intensive support. As a result of close assessment, the schools are in a good position to develop clear action to address pupils' needs and the quality of one-to-one and small group work is often critical to some pupils' progress.

Improving teaching is fundamental to these schools' success and it is a matter of deliberate policy. The priority is to create the conditions in which teachers can teach well. The connected elements of policy which make the difference include:

- the setting out of agreed standards, signalled in some of the primary schools in a statement of the school's approach to teaching which is the key point of reference for other policy development;
- an emphasis on joint planning by teachers and support staff as a major contribution to the consistency of provision, as well as to reduction in individual workload;
- monitoring of teaching undertaken by senior and middle managers, enabling schools to identify and spread good practice as well as tackle poor practice;
- effective training for both teachers and support staff which focuses on improvements in the practice of teaching, applying principles from particular examples, such as the National Literacy Strategy, to other subjects;

- more use of school time for teaching, with the secondary schools teaching, on average, about 30 minutes more per week than the average for schools in the free school meals band.

In short, the attention to improving teaching on the part of the headteacher and senior managers, combined with the commitment and teamwork of the staff, were consistently identified in the visits as key factors in the success of the initiatives in which the schools were involved. The links between school leadership and the quality of teaching were clear.

Examples of effective teaching

- In a reception class, the focus of a mathematics lesson was the use of a number line to help with counting and ordering numbers to ten. The lesson plan had clear objectives reflecting high expectations of the pupils. The teacher was particularly skilled at keeping the class together in the first part of the lesson and ensuring that everyone was involved; she was sharp-eyed in keeping track of pupils' oral responses and good at cajoling those more reluctant to participate. The pupils were constantly having to count out loud and work out and demonstrate the correct position of various numbers on the line. The teacher made good use of questioning and explanation to keep a lively pace going and pupils who came to the front to demonstrate answers to questions were not allowed to slow things down. The group work that followed was well managed, with good use made of the classroom assistant so that the teacher was able to work intensively with a group of pupils. In an excellent plenary the teacher assessed through good questioning techniques what had been learned and whether there were still misconceptions. The objectives of the lesson were reinforced, with number songs providing a good finish.

- Challenging work on *Macbeth* was the basis of a well-taught literacy hour in a Year 6 class. Previous lessons had covered work on the characters and plot, making good use of a commercial scheme. In the first part of the lesson, there was a good balance between the teacher reading aloud from the text and discussing meanings and events in the play with the pupils. The teacher then focused on Lady Macbeth, engaging the pupils' interest by asking questions about the text to find clues about the character. The discussion that this generated was of high quality, drawing out a range of opinions about emotions and behaviour and providing good support for the individual written responses about Lady Macbeth that followed. Finally, after reviewing what more had been learned about the play in this lesson, the teacher had the pupils chanting lines from the witches' scene, allowing them to engage with the feelings and language of the play and aspects of the genre they had identified — horror, mystery and suspense.

- A two-hour Year 10 geography lesson was ending on a sequence on urban planning. A local planning officer commented on presentations by groups, mostly mixed groups of three, on alternative projects to reclaim derelict industrial land. The presentations, chaired by two pupils, had been neatly guided by the teacher. The use of graphic techniques in maps and plans had been well taught. The teacher and visitor brought out perceptive points from the discussion on building usage, business demands, traffic flow and costs. Most pupils would go on to work up their particular contributions in a coursework assignment which calls for analysis of developments in different urban settings. Aside from source material available electronically the classroom had a good range of books and other printed material and there was a requirement that such material is used in accordance with simple principles on quotation and reference. The teacher rounded up with a reminder of the standards expected of an assignment that would get high marks and with an indication of what work of this kind at A-level would demand. In turn, the planning officer gave a cheerful account of how she ended up doing her job — not, it transpired, with the benefit of having done A-level geography.

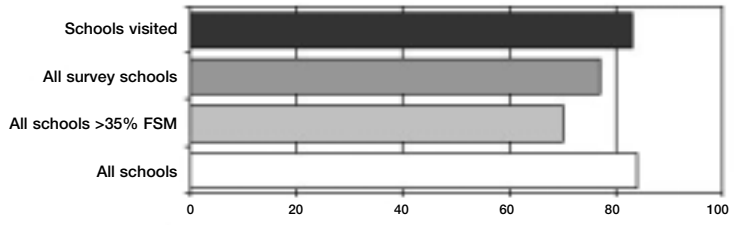
8 HOW DO THE SCHOOLS IMPROVE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND ATTENDANCE ?

Attitudes, behaviour and attendance: key features

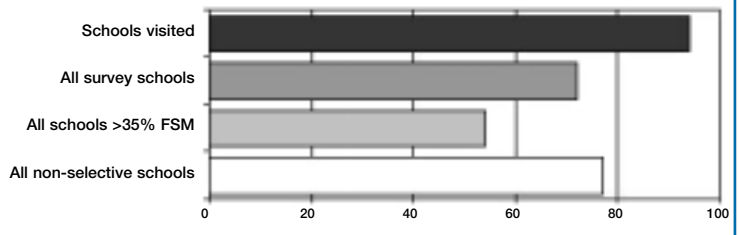
- attention to improving behaviour is aligned with efforts to improve commitment to learning;
- a definite policy on behaviour, embodying clear expectations, is understood and supported by all, implemented consistently and supported by good systems and training;
- a short list of rules is backed up by forthright procedures for dealing with poor behaviour, especially bullying and harassment;
- deliberate steps are taken to develop pupils' belief in themselves, their respect for others, their sense of responsibility and their stake in the school;
- teachers actively support non-teaching staff, especially breaktime supervisors;
- clear lines of communication link teachers with education welfare officers, community workers and parents in efforts to improve attendance and attitudes.

In the schools visited by HMI, the attitudes and behaviour of pupils were generally very good, both in and out of classrooms. These schools are safe, supportive and stimulating places in which to work and learn. In environments that can be haunted by risks and scarred by disaffection, this is of fundamental importance. The inspection judgements on the groups of schools are given in the charts below.

Pupils' Attitudes: Primary Schools



Pupils' Attitudes: Secondary Schools



Primary schools - % good or very good	The schools visited	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All schools
Procedures on behaviour	89	79	75	78
Support, guidance & welfare	61	63	59	67
Provision for social, moral, cultural & spiritual development	83	68	62	70

Secondary schools - % good or very good	The schools visited	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All non-selective schools
Procedures on behaviour	100	81	73	78
Support, guidance & welfare	100	78	66	72
Provision for social, moral, cultural & spiritual development	71	55	48	59

Inspection data 1996-1999

These standards in the schools visited have not been achieved easily; they are the result of a concerted whole-school approach over time, and the efficacy of that approach is sometimes sorely tested. As the tables above show, the schools' procedures on promoting good behaviour and pupil support, and their provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, are judged better in inspections than those in all schools in disadvantaged areas and, in almost all cases, those in all schools nationally.

Access and Achievement in Urban Education pointed to the problem that the schools inspected tended to focus on the care of pupils to the exclusion of attention to their learning. The schools visited for this report strike the right balance: a positive approach to attainment and progress goes hand in hand with a positive approach to behaviour, attitudes and personal development. It is not a matter of working on behaviour and personal development before, or instead of, getting down to improving attainment. Basic to the schools' thinking is that pupils will respond positively to high expectations about *work*. And they are generally right: the sentiments of one eight-year-old, answering a question about what made him happiest about being in the school — 'hard work, loads of it' — were echoed in various ways by many pupils in the schools visited.

Pupils are expected to exercise responsibility for their work, from, at the simple level, organising the work materials, to, among older pupils, assessing their work. Wider responsibilities are also offered, for example: to read with younger pupils; to set up arrangements for a parents' meeting; or to see through from start to finish a project to make the school reception area more attractive.

Progress in learning and personal development is recognised. School occasions are used to celebrate individual and group successes, helping to underline expectations of what can be done and using successful pupils to show the way to others. In the classroom, strengths as well as weaknesses are discussed with pupils in an atmosphere of security and optimism.

In other words, good behaviour is based on good classroom work. There is a chain of connection here: teachers have high expectations of what pupils should achieve and set challenging targets; they support pupils in the work so that they do not lose their way; pupils respond well; their progress is tracked and supported; and success is rewarded. In this way, a culture of hard work is supported by good relationships, underpinned by the monitoring of progress and developed by constructive criticism and praise. Success breeds success.

It is not, of course, as simple as all that; nor is it a complete answer. These schools also work on behaviour directly, with good discipline promoted through clear policies understood by all and the reinforcement of responsible behaviour. The need for self-discipline and, in particular, respect for others is central to the schools' behaviour policies. As many in the schools visited pointed out, consistency on the part of staff is the key, so that behaviour that does not go unremarked in one part of the school does not go unremarked in another. As one boy wryly put it, commenting on the uniformity of approach on the corridors, 'they're all the same, these teachers' — in this case, a compliment.

Winning the support of pupils and parents for the school's approach is vital. In many of the schools, pupils have been involved in devising and reviewing codes of conduct, sometimes through formal school councils. Particularly in primary schools and in the lower years of secondary schools, good behaviour is encouraged by well-established reward systems. The schools have also done a great deal to draw parents into

co-operation with the school. For many this took considerable effort, sometimes in a climate in which some parents were not at first receptive to a school spelling out their own responsibilities.

Things will go wrong, for the challenging behaviour of some pupils is not easily managed. Where there are problems, they are tackled in a consistent way, immediately where necessary, but also through longer-term behaviour management. Careful records of the behaviour of individuals and classes are kept and analysed and steps taken as a result, for example to separate pupils, to isolate individuals and, in some secondary schools which have the provision, to withdraw pupils from ordinary lessons for short periods. Well-planned, graduated sanctions are fairly and sensitively applied. The involvement of parents is enlisted at an early stage and sometimes a school counsellor or outside agency provides additional help.

- Several primary schools visited had adopted the assertive discipline approach, in which pupils are given simple choices, allowing them to see how they are behaving, offering praise, and noting disruptive behaviour. A complementary approach was to give pupils greater responsibility and a say in the policies and practices of the school through the establishment of a school council. For example, one school council met weekly, involved two representatives from each class, and had a display board in a prominent place in a corridor. The council had, for example, designed a quiet area in one of the playgrounds, organised events to raise funds for a project, conducted a survey on bullying and contributed to the establishment of a confidential counselling service for children facing bullying.

- Decisive action was called for in one primary school when the behaviour of a class containing difficult pupils deteriorated markedly after a change of teacher. The headteacher installed a member of the senior management team and a support assistant was temporarily attached to the class. When the new class teacher arrived she was supported both within the school and by the LEA's behaviour support team. The situation was much improved within a short period and the approaches used were then discussed across the school.

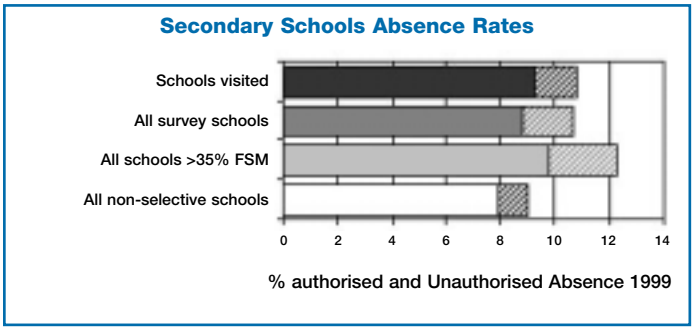
Where they need to be used, procedures for exclusion are followed appropriately. Fixed-period exclusion is used in a planned way in response to specific types of incidents such as fighting and verbal abuse.

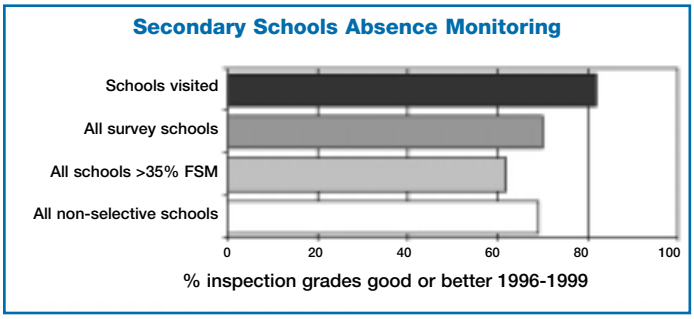
An indicator of the success in the primary schools visited of their approach to poor behaviour is the fact that, in the 20 of them, only two pupils had been permanently excluded in the past three years. This compares well with the position in similar schools nationally.

Permanent exclusion is used only for the most serious of misdemeanours in the secondary schools, but, even so, the more effective schools excluded more pupils than the national average, though fewer than other schools in similar settings. The pattern of exclusion by ethnic group remains consistent across the secondary schools; black pupils are more likely to be excluded than white pupils, who are in turn excluded more than Asian pupils. In some schools very careful analysis has given unquestionable assurance that procedures are applied with strict fairness.

Attendance

Achieving satisfactory attendance and punctuality in most of the schools demands vigilance and persistence. Family responsibilities, poor health, extended holidays and disaffection contribute to poor attendance and sometimes the lack of adequate support from an over-stretched education welfare service exacerbates difficulties. As illustrated by the charts below, the more effective secondary schools are at least as good as others nationally in their procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance, but their absence rates are still above the national average.





However, concentrated efforts on attendance, often over a considerable period of time, pay off in overall gains, even if these are small. The monitoring of attendance and punctuality is thorough, and the schools persevere in dealing with problems. Based on this, the greatest success in reducing unauthorised

absence in secondary schools comes from three measures: rapid and systematic contact with home; targeting individuals and groups whose attendance is sliding, particularly in Key Stage 3; and identifying the link between unpopular lessons and absence from school.

Poor attendance is a less severe problem in the primary schools, but attention to the tendency of lateness to drift into absence produces benefits. One school, for example, runs an annual attendance project in which pupils receive certificates for punctuality. In another, pupils whose punctuality or attendance causes concern are identified, and action plans with targets are set to help them improve.

The issue of condoned absence, including, in some cases, extended holidays in term-time, is particularly difficult to resolve. Some parents, perhaps especially those with unhappy experiences of their own schooling or poor knowledge of their obligations, need regular reminders of the importance of regular attendance. Effective schools try to tackle such problems specifically and to do what they can to mitigate the effects through catch-up programmes.

Working with other agencies

Schools need the back-up of support agencies to ensure that pupils are given every opportunity to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. Schools also need to contribute information on and support for individual pupils in difficulties and to offer advice on systemic problems. Welfare, housing and health, for example, affect pupils' response to schooling. There have been clear successes in relation to local services, including employment and juvenile justice services, in some of the schools visited. However, links with external services are often affected by acute pressures, including on staffing. Liaison can also suffer from poor communication and from a lack of awareness among all parties about statutory requirements and priorities.

The general experience of the schools points to the need for better definition of protocols for effective communication and co-operation and for these to form a basis for joint training to promote understanding of how the different agencies work. The best practice emerging from Early Excellence Centres may offer useful models of how the co-ordination of the different advice and support services can work successfully.

Examples of action on attitudes, behaviour and attendance

- One example of positive work on attitudes and behaviour comes from a primary school that has an ethnically mixed community, with a high proportion of Muslim pupils. Well over half the pupils use English as an additional language. The headteacher knows and is known in the community very well and is sensitive to its concerns and potential flashpoints. A clear commitment against racism is expressed as a determination to see that all children do as well as they can.

  The school takes very seriously its responsibility for promoting positive understanding of and respect for different social and cultural traditions. The school is one of the few places in the community where ethnic groups mix and share common goals. The school has a clear and comprehensive approach to education in and for a multi-ethnic society. It puts a natural emphasis on the variety of cultures represented in a way that accords dignity and develops understanding without condescension. This is reflected, for example, in the quality of displays around the school.

  The school's approach was illustrated in an assembly where the headteacher, working with a bilingual assistant, helped children act out an Indian legend. This challenging task was responded to with enthusiasm by both participants and audience. As one of a range of activities of this kind it underlined the value placed on the different experience pupils bring to school.

- One secondary school visited has a 'guidance unit', which provides a curriculum with 30 periods of specialist staff time for pupils having or causing difficulties in lessons. The pupils referred are discussed at a senior management meeting, sometimes involving education welfare or other service officers, and parents are informed. Daily target sheets are used to record pupils' response and progress. After a short period pupils are returned to mainstream classes. The unit is complemented by an off-site education support centre, in the funding and management of which the school is involved with two other schools. The provision at the centre extends to 20 hours a week. The arrangement is an attempt, in the absence of other provision, to provide for pupils who are at risk of exclusion or have been excluded. In the last school year a number of pupils given fixed-period exclusions had short periods at the unit. Between them, the two forms of provision have significantly helped to reduce exclusions to 15 fixed-period and one permanent exclusion in the last school year.

- In an initiative at a secondary school, pupils participate in the Junior Sports Leader Award scheme. A 12-week course was run after school in 1997/98 for 25 invited pupils. The majority of the Year 10 pupils involved were showing signs of disaffection. Attendance was for four hours a week, including one-to-one half-hour meetings. The programme involved intensive group work focusing on leadership, confidence, motivation and teamwork. Theory and practical modules were covered, in part through work-based placements. A residential weekend was held in Wales and pupils were assessed working with

a group of primary school pupils on the practical delivery of the skills learned. Before the project started, attendance among the group hovered between 70 and 80 per cent. Attendance improved significantly afterwards, as did the pupils' attitudes to school. Several then pursued a Community Sports Leader Award after the normal age requirement was waived, and some intended to apply to summer camp projects in the USA.

- The establishment of a voluntary trust to improve attendance has been a significant factor in another school. This has helped fund two education community workers who identify the needs of targeted pupils and develop links with parents. The pupils selected, a high proportion of whom are white boys, are monitored daily. They are invited to lunchtime clubs where informal support can be given; funds are also available for visits. The aim is to break down patterns of non-attendance by raising motivation and developing social skills. School staff comment positively on the project as an underpinning for the work of form tutors for whom time is often too short to support pupils whose needs can become marginalised. Some 75 per cent of the pupils involved have made significant improvements in attendance.

The attendance project interlocks with other initiatives. A parent support group, again funded from different sources, offers an opportunity for parents to discuss problems, the most common of which are behaviour at night and family conflict. One-to-one support is offered by trained volunteers, who staff a confidential helpline.

9 HOW IS THE CURRICULUM ORGANISED ?

Many pupils come to the schools in this survey with poor basic skills and the schools give high priority to improving them. Nevertheless, they teach the National Curriculum in full: doing so is part of the commitment to not selling these pupils short. Within this, there is a valuing of cultural diversity and a strong emphasis on the arts and physical education in many schools and, beyond it, a rich programme of extra-curricular activities. Overall curriculum planning is a strength.

In most of the schools visited, provision made for the large number of pupils with special educational needs is usually well directed and relates closely to the rest of the curriculum. Bilingual pupils also receive good support. In the provision of support of both kinds, additional teaching staff and support assistants are closely involved in planning and assessment and in other respects fully integrated into the schools' work. This is by no means without costs. One cost is the burden on special educational needs co-ordinators, who often play a key part in the school as a whole and sometimes with little time for the job. In some of the secondary schools there are too few staff with sufficient expertise to meet the needs of the high numbers of pupils involved.

The primary schools

The curriculum in primary schools: key features

- detailed curriculum planning in year group or key stage teams, with thorough monitoring by the headteacher and co-ordinators;
- literacy, numeracy and speaking and listening given the highest priority, with additional support on literacy through individual and small group activity and the promotion of reading at home;
- strong provision for the arts;
- effective use of ICT;
- a clear and well-sustained approach to homework;
- effective use of assessment information to focus attention on groups and individuals.

Strong features of the schools visited are the quality of curriculum planning and its careful monitoring by the headteacher and co-ordinators. The process of planning, although conducted in different ways, ends with a clear framework that promotes consistency and yet allows individual teachers flexibility.

All the schools visited give particular attention to the early development of pupils' speaking and listening skills. Teachers are alert to the need to provide compensation for some children's lack of oral experience, for instance with rhymes and stories as a basis for literacy. From the start, careful arrangements are put in place to ensure good links between the teaching of the areas of learning to under-fives and National Curriculum subjects.

All the schools afford the teaching of literacy the highest priority, and several are involved in additional projects to support it. These focus on one or other of two objectives. One is to augment the teaching of reading itself, using approaches such as Reading Recovery for pupils with special educational needs. The other is to encourage reading in homes in which little of it otherwise takes place.

In the teaching of mathematics particular emphasis is given to number but all aspects of the National Curriculum are covered and the application of mathematics in other areas of the curriculum is taken seriously. The learning of number facts, their speedy mental recall and the use of them with strategies to solve mathematical problems are prominent features. Pupils are encouraged to explain their methods and outcomes and weaknesses are addressed systematically.

Literacy and numeracy are at the centre, but other elements of the curriculum are not neglected. There is no question in these schools of narrowing the experience that pupils have. The curriculum uses a variety of stimulating starting-points and experiences, including visits and visitors.

Most of the schools visited make particularly strong provision for the expressive arts, and have developed extensive programmes of special events and performances. Work in the arts is seen as providing opportunities to demonstrate success, promote pupils' confidence and strengthen their communication skills. Many of the teachers argued that success in the arts has a particular value for those who have little success out of school and that the improved confidence it brings transfers to other subjects. Arts events and performances also provide a collective focus for pupils and for their parents.

Examples of work in the arts

- The range of **dance** projects in the schools visited was considerable and the quality of work, including performance, was on occasion remarkable. Year 5 pupils in one school, for example, worked with the English National Ballet and musicians from the English National Opera on *Swan Lake*. Several schools were involved in dance projects with their local LEA dance centres, regularly making public presentations of dance within the community, as well as further afield in much larger arts festivals.

- **Art** featured prominently in the work of many of the schools; the subject was used to extend horizons, with visits to art galleries, and to enhance the rest of curriculum through illustration and, in several instances, to link directly with the teaching of writing. Artists-in-residence were used in several schools, providing access to high-level skills, for example in three-dimensional work.

- Ambitious **music** projects were seen in several schools, often leading to presentations of the highest quality: one school choir, for example, worked with the London Sinfonia, culminating in a concert at the Barbican. Another school established links with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and was working on a three-year 'Musical Odyssey' project, not only introducing the pupils to classical music and the instruments of the orchestra, but linking to work on the Roman legions.

- **Drama** was also seen, both in grand productions and as a medium for teaching. In one school, for example, a group of pupils presented a scene from *Macbeth* to the rest of the class, confidently expressing themselves and performing without inhibitions. In another example, a class presented to the whole school a representation of life aboard the *Mary Rose*, based on a substantial piece of work involving history, science, technology and art.

Another important feature in the schools is the use of ICT, although not all the schools visited were strong in this respect. The best work demonstrates how ICT can raise standards for pupils from disadvantaged areas by engaging their interest and providing opportunity for skilled and well-presented work. Several schools also included an element of ICT in their work with parents, enabling them to help their own children and others in school.

Special educational needs: key features

- the early identification of needs and immediate intervention;
- well-qualified, well-informed co-ordinators with high status in the school;
- good use of ICT in providing special diagnostic and teaching programmes, for example in auditory and visual discrimination, phonics, word recognition and comprehension, with the work successfully matched to the needs of low-attaining pupils;
- effective liaison with other professionals, such as school nurses, speech therapists and health visitors.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is clear and deliberate. In particular, there is a recognition of the importance of the early identification of needs and of careful attention to them in planning the curriculum. Individual educational plans have realistic targets that are reflected in the teaching, with the frequency of monitoring depending on the acuteness of the difficulties. Above all, there is a common and positive approach by the staff. As a teacher in one school put it: 'what the special educational needs co-ordinator and the support assistants do is what we all do, but in a more concentrated way'.

English as an additional language: key features

- the effective deployment of support teachers and bilingual support staff, who work closely with class teachers on planning, teaching and assessment;
- good models of speech and writing and well-supported opportunities for bilingual learners to try out the use of English;
- support for pupils' work in other subjects, for example through the specific teaching of key words and phrases, the use of visual and other aids, and making use of the first language where appropriate;
- strategies to welcome parents into school, to overcome obstacles to communication and involve parents in their children's learning.

Of the primary schools visited, almost one-quarter had more than half of their pupils for whom English was an additional language. The organisation of the teaching of English as an additional language is a particular strength in those schools. In one, the support teachers usefully prepared pupils in advance of the Literacy Hour by working on the text to be used in the shared reading, identifying key words and phrases in English which were then reinforced in the lesson. On another occasion, a bilingual teacher supported newly-arrived pupils with little English by withdrawing them to prepare for a topic in a Year 6 science lesson.

The schools not only teach English well but are responsive to the wider needs of the ethnic minorities in their local community, for example in providing facilities for adult classes and events and arranging translation and interpretation.

In the more effective schools, homework is seen as making an important contribution to the drive to improve achievement by encouraging extended and independent work and involving parents. Reading is often at the heart of it. Approaches to homework are generally formalised in a policy which sets out expectations for teachers, pupils and parents and which establishes a pattern of development in the use of homework starting in the early years. In the best practice the views of parents on the nature and amount of work are canvassed regularly.

Most of the schools have made considerable strides in using assessment information as a basis for school improvement. Strong features are the discussion of records for each child, including annotated and assessed work, associated with the use of school portfolios of work to show National Curriculum levels. Most importantly, the information obtained from National Curriculum and standardised tests is being used by schools to identify the needs of particular groups of pupils and to make special arrangements accordingly. In general, the schools take a flexible approach to grouping pupils, varying the tactics in relation to different subjects, needs and year group sizes.

The secondary schools

The curriculum in secondary schools: key features

- the development of an effective approach to literacy in Key Stage 3, associated with careful planning of support for pupils with special educational needs;
- the setting and review of academic targets, communicated to all staff and parents;
- curriculum organisation in Key Stage 4 which meets specific needs and aspirations, for example through vocational elements which make links with business and further education;
- structured support for homework and coursework outside normal school hours, particularly at Key Stage 4;
- a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities, for example in the arts and physical education, to extend the interests of pupils, capture their imagination and allow them to demonstrate high-level skills;
- opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to develop personal qualities in adult environments;
- the carefully organised use of trained mentors to help with the organisation of pupils' work and to broaden their perspectives.

Many pupils in the survey schools need systematic help in Year 7, particularly in improving their literacy and their approach to work. Tests, teacher judgements and recommendations from the primary school are used to define needs and determine the level of support. None of the schools relies wholly on information from primary schools.

Notable in most of the schools visited is the care with which timetables are designed with an eye on productive use of time and the minimising of disruptive movement. There is a trend towards more use of setting in Key Stage 3, with some subject departments using tests and teacher assessments to set pupils early in Year 7. Most schools have a mix of organisation. In some cases, whatever the grouping system used, work is not always matched well enough to levels of attainment. The effect of setting on the gender and ethnic balance in classes is not well enough monitored in some schools.

Improving literacy in Key Stage 3 is seen as a key task by the schools, and by no means a straightforward one. Deliberate and comprehensive programmes are needed to bring up standards, particularly among some boys who, even if they became reasonably competent in reading and writing early on, have not developed their skills well enough to cope with the demands of the secondary curriculum. The schools engaged in effective work have created a climate that encourages pupils to read and write at home and at school with confidence and without fear of ridicule. Effective strategies include follow-up from successful summer literacy schools; dedicated time for literacy in Year 7, using the Literacy Hour approach; good use of special needs and language support staff to provide targeted and sometimes short-term support; the engagement of three or four departments in programmes which teach and consolidate the use of reading and writing in subject contexts; purposeful reading during tutor periods; paired reading; reading clubs; a school policy for spelling; and frameworks to help pupils to organise their writing.

In the majority of schools, a small, dedicated team of teachers and classroom assistants supports large numbers of pupils with learning difficulties. The Code of Practice has helped teachers provide better-defined help but the weight of numbers and sometimes the increasing complexity of pupils' difficulties makes it hard for them to respond adequately. Schools concentrate on improving basic skills through programmes of support for individuals and groups. The best examples are when pupils' particular difficulties have been diagnosed and a specific, well-focused and time-limited programme of help is provided, often on a one-to-one basis with a trained specialist. Staff expertise and appropriate resources are essential to improving reading skills in particular. Programmes that rely heavily on published schemes or computer programs can be motivating but show less tangible effects.

An example of provision for special educational needs

- In one school almost half the pupils are on the register of special educational needs. In particular, the number of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is high. Against a background of reductions in its special needs funding, the school uses £100,000 from its budget to maintain the high level of special needs staffing, currently eight teachers.

  Thorough screening procedures for the intake include the collation of information from partner primary schools, external agencies, subject teachers and standardised tests. A menu of support enables pupils to be helped in the mainstream class or by withdrawal for work on basic skills. In addition, support staff help mainstream teachers by looking at pupils' work, advising on methods and modification of subject content and checking resources for readability.

  The demands on the team for in-class support cannot all be met. Support staff decide priority by year group and subject, agreeing a set of objectives and a timescale. For example, support for one term focused on Year 9 pupils in English, specifically the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet,* and on design and technology, where assistance was given with writing project evaluations. Help was also given to a Year 8 class because of the number of pupils with poor literacy skills and the enthusiasm of the teacher to develop ways of meeting the needs of low-attainers.

  Withdrawal work is well established and operates on clear principles: it is time-limited; it is for a specific purpose understood by the pupil and linked to subject learning; it is with subject teachers' agreement; target-setting is part of the process; the teaching is well focused, particularly on literacy, and well resourced. The success of this programme lies not only in the specialist skills of the staff involved but in the high priority given to special needs by other staff.

In most of the schools visited the quality of support for bilingual pupils is impressive and makes a significant contribution to their progress. Support teachers and subject staff plan lessons together well, with close attention to the forms of language and specific vocabulary needed and good use of supplementary material. Bilingual assistants provide valuable help for pupils at the early stages of learning English. In the best practice, class teachers and support staff share

responsibility for the teaching and assess pupils' progress jointly in English and other subjects, a stage not yet reached by all schools.

An example of a Key Stage 3 intervention to counter underachievement

One school started a one-year grant-funded project in 1996 which focused on 60 pupils identified as having the potential to do well at school but at risk of underachievement. Since then the school has sustained and built on the project, using other funding to provide complementary activities. A before-school club has been run since the initiative started; ICT is used for study support and homework sessions; and attention to literacy skills in different subjects has been a consistent focus. Residential trips have helped to develop confidence and social skills, and regular visits to local universities have been designed to open up future possibilities for pupils who may not have considered the prospect of higher education. The school has broadened the scope of the scheme to include the whole year as far as possible, with other interventions being used to focus on a small group of disengaged pupils.

Variations in the balance of time allocated in the schools visited to different subjects enable schools to develop particular strengths, for example to cater for pupils with talents in art, dance, drama and physical education. Formal disapplication of parts of the National Curriculum is rare. There is greater variation in the curriculum at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3, but with some tension between meeting statutory requirements and responding to the needs and aspirations of pupils.

At Key Stage 4 many of the survey schools encourage reluctant learners by making diverse provision, sometimes at GCSE and sometimes with other certification or none. Half the schools include vocational courses, most usually a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), at Key Stage 4. The take-up of these courses is growing, with many pupils wanting to stay on to continue them post-16.

GCSE courses involving short units of work and regular tests can also provide effective motivation, particularly for those pupils who fail to attend school regularly or who have problems in completing GCSE coursework. Schools have found that courses which use short-term goals and practical activities are often beneficial in this respect. Teaching which uses group work and individual tuition can also be an effective way of combating irregular attendance. Work experience and community projects broaden pupils' understanding and form an important link with local employers and services. Through them, pupils are given opportunities to take responsibility in adult environments.

While such mainstream provision can offer a good range of opportunity, some schools have looked to create additional options for pupils, often boys, who are seriously disaffected by the time they reach Key Stage 4 and are at high risk of being excluded or disappearing. Such options can involve practical vocational courses and supervised work placements provided by further education colleges or community service projects. However, the provision is sometimes too *ad hoc*, not well enough monitored and inadequately linked with other courses in school.

Examples of Key Stage 4 provision

- The approach in one school demonstrates well the value of a well thought-out approach to Key Stage 4 options. There are three option blocks. Within one there is a vocational humanities course for low-attaining pupils which uses National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) units. Another option block includes a choice of vocational courses covering media studies, sport and recreation, office studies, travel and tourism, and social care. This has been running for five years, attracts the whole ability range, and is based on Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Initial Awards. Among other steps, the school has substantially improved its careers education programme and introduced mentoring, a counselling service, an attendance support programme and a special literacy project. The success of the Key Stage 4 provision overall derives from detailed knowledge of individual needs and a willingness to take these needs into account in adapting and tailoring programmes.

- Another school's participation in an education–business partnership has made it possible for 30 pupils in Year 11 to have an alternative curriculum involving disapplication of two National Curriculum subjects and consisting of one day at college, one day of work experience, and three days in school. Additional programmes such as Youth at Risk are provided for some pupils. A teacher with much experience in the school has been given time to link with external providers, to liaise with parents and to support individual pupils. His knowledge of the area and of pupils and their families are important factors in the success of the programme, as is the willingness of local business and further education colleges to mount special programmes.

Structured support for homework and coursework outside normal school hours is often a strong feature of the more effective schools' work in Key Stage 4, encouraging pupils to develop a positive attitude to learning and to gain the skills to study alone. At its most basic, a quiet place is provided to study at lunchtime and after school. Important elements of all such programmes

are the quality and stability of the staffing by teachers or other adults. Pupils value the opportunity to work with teachers and others outside normal lessons. Examination results testify to the success of study support, with rises in the number of higher GCSE grades associated with the best programmes.

Aside from study support, many schools provide other out-of-school opportunities for pupils to extend their experience. Often with the support of charities and other donors, some schools invest very heavily in these opportunities, which include field trips, visits and residential courses, as well as arts and sports activities. The best of them enable pupils to develop interests and skills they otherwise might never have.

Despite the difficulties which can be involved in areas where there are few large-scale employers, the schools visited are adept at establishing productive links with local business and agencies, in order to improve the employment prospects of older pupils through work experience and community action projects, as well as inputs into careers education and mentoring schemes.

Examples of additional curriculum activities

- One inner city school goes out of its way to widen the horizons of its pupils through its curricular programme. The expressive arts, including dance, have a high profile. A series of artists and writers in residence have given pupils a quality of experience few pupils can have had. One day on a Shakespeare play, led by an artist and a dancer, involved half the school. Using a variety of resources, mainly from external agencies, the school supports a continuing programme of arts events. It now rarely has to seek funding: its reputation is such that sponsors often volunteer.

- At one school, a study centre supported by European Union funding is in its third year. It is something of a misnomer, since it is much more than a physical centre. A room with ICT equipment is staffed for pupils' use for three evenings a week, with about 15 pupils attending each session. In addition, extension courses in subjects such as mathematics, science and geography are offered. Other courses, such as first aid, football refereeing, drama, design and technology and activities leading to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme are also provided. About 90 pupils a week regularly attend.

Assessment and guidance

Assessment and feedback help to keep parents updated on pupils' progress and show pupils what they need to do to improve. The best practice in primary schools sensitively relates achievement to national norms, and, in the case of bilingual pupils, gives careful attention to their progress in English; it also covers attendance and attitudes to work. It is often linked with target-setting for pupils. One school gives a score for aspects of each pupil's performance, sets a target for the next half-term and informs parents about the current score and the new target. An approach like this is easily understood and can be highly motivating.

At Key Stage 4, when the focus shifts to public examinations, the best practice takes into account teachers' assessment of prior attainment, sometimes supported by standardised test scores. Targets, usually based on predicted GCSE grades, are often used to enlist the support of parents for a tight regime of catching-up and revision, especially where pupils are underachieving.

Mentoring, linking pupils with adults for special advice with their work, proves particularly valuable in schools whose pupils tend to lack study skills. Mentoring is widely used to provide guidance to pupils taking GCSE courses. At best it adds to the network of support, sets targets for improvement and logs progress. Because of its success, some schools are extending it to younger pupils. There are dilemmas for all the schools visited in matching the available resources for mentoring to the range and scale of pupils' needs. Inevitably, some pupils who might have benefited are unable to do so because the resources, both human and financial, are not available.

Given the resource implications, schools differed in their approach to mentoring but there are some common trends. One is to link pupils with staff in the school or community volunteers in order to give them ready personal access to sources of information, advice and support, most often relating to study skills and preparation for examinations. In some schools, the mentoring system is deliberately separate from the academic and pastoral structures and priority is given to offering particular pupils, for example from minority ethnic groups, time to talk about their concerns. Another approach is to promote contact between pupils and adults from the local business or commercial world with the aim of broadening pupils' perspectives. Contact with such adults can have a powerful impact on motivation.

10 HOW DO THE SCHOOLS WORK WITH PARENTS ?

Working with parents: key features

- accessible literature covering what all that parents want to know about the school;
- frequent communication, telling parents clearly how their children are doing and unlocking interest in supporting their work;
- consultations with parents which are timely, flexible, planned to maximise attendance and productive.

The effort to draw in parents is a continuous and sometimes uphill struggle in these schools. This is not to say that their parents do not have interest in education or are not supportive of their children — very far from it in the great majority of cases. But there are obvious problems about how support can be provided by those parents with limited and sometimes very unsuccessful experience of education themselves.

The determination to inform and involve parents in the survey schools is marked by clear, frequent communication and a high degree of accessibility. The style and tone of contacts with parents, designed to unlock their interest in what their children are doing, are set by the headteacher, but essential to success is the consistency with which they are maintained by all staff. Consistency of approach to pupils' work and behaviour also makes a strong contribution to the home-school partnership. The use of home-school liaison teachers or other workers often improves communication with those who find attending meetings at school difficult or intimidating.

The more effective schools generally deal with urgent matters straightforwardly and in a way that parents find refreshingly unbureaucratic. Written communication is well presented and used appropriately to explain matters such as homework and to provide guidance, for example on how parents might support the teaching of reading and number in the early years. Letters home and school brochures are written in an accessible way, with translation where possible and appropriate.

Regular interviews with parents and the production of written reports on pupils' progress are well-established, carefully-prepared events on the calendar. Written reports and reviews include a clear indication of the standards of work expected and, where relevant, National Curriculum levels.

Some primary schools have used special funding to extend their work with parents in imaginative and

purposeful ways. One kind of initiative involves courses for parents, usually provided by external trainers. Courses in the schools visited covered skills such as first aid, but focused particularly on aspects of school work in which parental help can make a difference. In the best examples seen, not only were parents' basic skills improving, but also they were better able to help their children at home, and sometimes to help in classrooms.

An interview with a parent governor in one primary school raised points typical of the best practice. Describing her appreciation of what the school does for its parents, she referred to:

- the friendly and pleasant atmosphere and the welcome given to new parents;
- teachers who are approachable and knowledgeable about their pupils;
- an open-minded attitude in dealing with parents' concerns and requests and, as far as possible, face-to-face discussion;
- a straightforward policy on homework;
- the school as a meeting-place for parents, with attendance at family assemblies and other events.

In most of the secondary schools visited, the pupils are given a personal organiser to record daily assignments and to aid communication between school and home. The timing and nature of consultations with parents is carefully planned, with a distinct move away from the standard regime of parents' evenings. Some schools provide training courses about supporting work at home, reading, the use of ICT and preparing for examinations.

Examples of work with parents

- One school was able to use money from a regeneration scheme to equip a temporary classroom as a base for contacts with parents. The school then took over the running costs, making charges for small-scale community events. Through this facility, the school has been able to offer:
  - a before and after school club for pupils whose parents are unable to take or collect their children from school at the usual times;
  - an early years home learning scheme, providing educational packs to use at home;
  - courses for parents of reception children on shared reading, with over 90 per cent take-up;
  - a course for parents on improving children's writing skills, to be followed by one on writers for children;
  - free courses for parents, with individualised tuition, on basic English and mathematics, tutored by the local further education college.

- In one secondary school which has thought through the timing and dates of parental consultations, review days are now held at the end of each term, when pupils have a half-hour interview with their form tutor and parent. The school is open from 8.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. and focuses entirely on review. In Year 9 this is linked in the spring term with a Key Stage 4 induction day when pupils and parents can meet employers, teaching and careers staff before meeting subject staff in the evening. This is followed the next day by a school review day which gives pupils, parents and tutors a chance to discuss progress and curriculum options. Attendance at these events is very high.

11 WHAT FEATURES OF STAFFING, ACCOMMODATION AND LEARNING RESOURCES MAKE A DIFFERENCE ?

Staffing

A critical factor in the schools visited is the composition of their staff. It varies, but in many schools long-serving staff provide continuity, while less-experienced staff provide fresh ideas. A substantial core of highly competent and experienced staff forms the backbone of all the schools; their energy and commitment are pervasive. Also notable is good, all-round teamwork, based on a recognition of individual expertise and on clear communication. Support staff, both classroom and administrative staff, are fully involved. Levels of commitment are high, with staff proud to be associated with the school; they are not demoralised, despite heavy workloads and sometimes very stressful demands. This situation is not, of course, universal, nor easily won.

In schools where every lesson counts, headteachers know that they cannot afford to settle for anything less than good teaching. Many took on schools where staff morale was low and turnover high. A systematic programme of support and staff development, linked with lesson observation, has helped disseminate good practice among established and new staff.

Teachers in the schools are supported well by classroom assistants and other non-teaching staff. Particularly in the primary schools, headteachers recognise that the needs of the youngest pupils are such that they benefit more than most from a high adult–pupil ratio. This ensures good levels of supervision and enables support to be provided for groups of pupils. Not only are levels of non-teaching support relatively high in these schools, and lighten the load on teachers, but the management of the support focuses on the most important priorities. In particular:

- **breaktime supervisors** are seen as key people in providing consistent approaches to discipline outside the classroom; they receive training, often alongside teaching staff, in how to establish consistently good behaviour, and meet regularly with teachers to discuss issues or individual pupils;

- **home–school workers** establish links with families, support them in times of crisis, help liaise with Social Services, and visit the parents of children whose attendance or punctuality are poor. In primary schools they also, for example, run toddler groups and support adult literacy courses;

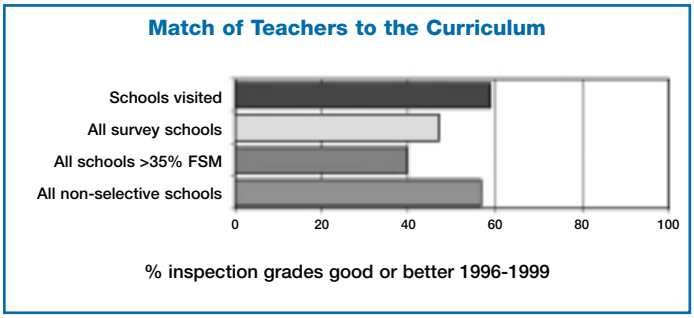
- **classroom teaching assistants** are given status and training. Many in the schools visited are trained to support pupils with special educational needs and to contribute effectively to the teaching of literacy and numeracy;

- **administrative staff** deal with day-to-day issues, including budget matters and routine contact with parents, in order to release teachers for other work.

Basic to the successful use of support staff and of volunteers is that they are brought firmly into the planning process and contribute to the assessment of pupils' progress. Schools rightly attach great importance to training. In one primary school, for example, out of six support staff one was qualified as a nursery nurse, four had been on special courses, including a behaviour management course, and another was attending a course on ICT for pupils with special educational needs.

All the headteachers in the schools visited stressed the importance of appointing staff of the highest quality, but many have found it difficult to recruit teachers. Some deliberately set out to employ newly-qualified teachers; a few use their extensive involvement in initial teacher training as a route to recruitment. All are prepared to pay additional allowances in order to recruit and retain strong teachers, and some can afford to do so. The school's investment in staff development is often a strong selling point.

As the chart shows, the secondary schools in the survey were significantly better at matching staff to the curriculum than less effective schools. This is partly skilful management, but it is also an indicator of the difficulty that some other schools have in attracting appropriately qualified teachers. The schools visited were by no means immune to the problem. Despite well-fashioned recruitment processes and an emphasis on the opportunity and support available for newcomers, several of the schools, predominantly in London, suffered from both high levels of staff turnover and low levels of applications for advertised posts. The headteachers were adamant that they were not prepared to accept applicants who fell short of the requirements, even if the delays proved difficult.



Accommodation

The quality of the buildings in the schools visited varies greatly. In several cases the buildings are in a poor state. Many of the primary schools visited have very limited outdoor facilities, often with no grassed area and only cramped hard-surface playgrounds. Although there are some new and attractive buildings, there are still schools using Victorian three- and four-decker buildings with considerable maintenance problems, high ceilings and access only by long flights of stairs.

In contrast to their often run-down surroundings, all the schools have made good use of the indoor accommodation, irrespective of the age or state of the fabric of the building. Security arrangements have become increasingly rigorous, and although sometimes these can at first sight appear extreme, users of the schools appreciate them. Security for school grounds has often been a costly, but high, priority; when grounds had been made safe from unwelcome visitors and dogs, schools have found it worthwhile to develop the outdoor environment, often through projects involving pupils and parents.

Without exception, the schools emphasised the need to create a physical environment that is welcoming, conducive to learning and reflects expectations of good order and high standards of work. Much has been done to make the accommodation humane, for example

Primary schools – % good or very good	The schools visited	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All schools
Adequacy of accommodation	39	51	49	46
Adequacy of learning resources	33	25	20	30
Use of accommodation and learning resources	56	47	41	54

Secondary schools – % good or very good	The schools visited	All survey schools	All schools with >35% FSM	All non-selective schools
Adequacy of accommodation	31	31	36	33
Adequacy of learning resources	8	22	18	22
Use of accommodation and learning resources	71	53	44	57

Inspection data 1996-1999

through signing and by creating separate areas for quiet socialising and for boisterous games. A striking feature is the extent and the quality of displays as a stimulus to learning and as a record of it. Pupils' work, including photographs, art and writing, is prominent. The energy and commitment schools have given to improving the quality of their environment often contrasts starkly with the limited funding available for programmes of refurbishment or even basic maintenance.

Learning resources

The inspection judgement of the use of accommodation and learning resources in the table on the previous page shows the extent to which the schools visited make good use of what they have. However, the provision of learning resources is by no means generous across the survey schools. This broadly reflects the national picture. The figures demonstrate that, whatever funding premium there might be for some schools in disadvantaged areas, it does not produce a bonus in terms of learning resources.

Most, but not all, of the survey schools have a reasonable overall level of provision of resources for standard classroom use, and, in common with many schools nationally, have invested heavily in ICT equipment, paying for it from a range of sources, including local fundraising and sponsorship. However, inspection reports often call attention to gaps in the provision of materials and equipment for particular subjects.

Most notably, many of the survey schools have shortages of books for use by pupils at home and, in the secondary phase, inadequate library stock. A few schools provide pupils with textbooks to take home but this is not common; many substitute duplicated notes, partly out of concern that expensive books will not be returned. Clearly, without a textbook pupils cannot work easily at their own pace, refer back to earlier topics or revise thoroughly. The extent to which library provision is judged inadequate in secondary schools is also a salutary fact in circumstances where relatively few pupils have access to books at home.

12 WHAT DOES MEETING DISADVANTAGE COST ?

A striking point to arise from this survey is the variation in the income per pupil which the schools receive and the range, too, in the sources the income comes from.

Income

While the quality of data on the basic allocations schools receive through their LEA scheme is improving, there is a lack of national data on what funding schools receive from other sources, such as the Standards Fund, business sponsorship, European Union funds, local fundraising, and regeneration and other grants. On the basis of information provided for inspections it is clear that additional funding from these sources compounds what can be very sharp differences in basic allocations.

As has been well rehearsed, including in HMCI's Annual Report for 1998/99, there is a significant variation in funding from school to school and from area to area. Schools serving disadvantaged populations receive some funding designed to recognise the demands made upon them, but the basis and size of such allocations vary. OFSTED's latest analysis shows, alarmingly, that the greater the level of disadvantage faced by schools the more marked the variation in their funding becomes.

The tables below show a selection of schools serving communities with much the same levels of disadvantage. The figures include all revenue funding except for allocations through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant. They do not include capital funding — an element on which variation among schools can also be wide. In these examples, the variation in total revenue funding means that one primary school (School E) has over twice the income per pupil as another (School A), while one secondary school (School J) has over one-and-a-half times the income per pupil as another (School F).

Examples of school income for schools with over 35 per cent free school meals (FSM)

Primary schools	Roll	% FSM	% on special needs register	£ per pupil - basic budget	£ per pupil - all sources
School A	356	53.0	25.1	1353.93	1417.83
School B	383	50.4	24.4	1358.59	1435.49
School C	158	50.3	13.6	1809.49	2025.52
School D	155	64.2	53.7	2507.28	2585.79
School E	147	69.0	28.7	3018.93	3164.56

Secondary schools	Roll	% FSM	% on special needs register	£ per pupil - basic budget	£ per pupil - all sources
School F	570	42.0	20.0	1917.46	1977.44
School G	561	50.0	44.9	1779.96	2315.17
School H	515	39.4	33.7	2240.15	2321.16
School I	673	46.3	62.3	2720.08	2876.33
School J	436	42.0	49.5	2832.16	3070.42

Inspection data 1998/99

Even when the more extreme examples are removed from the analysis, in all primary schools with over 35 per cent free school meals the variation in funding averages £600 per pupil. Among all the secondary schools the variation is somewhat less sharp, but still substantial.

Most strangely, there can be relatively little difference in the levels of overall funding between schools in disadvantaged and advantaged areas. The differences are particularly small in primary schools, but are only slightly greater in secondary schools, where funding levels can vary by less than ten per cent. In short, it is the school's location, as much as the problems it faces, that often determines differences in funding.

The working of the national system for distributing funding to local authorities accounts for some of the variation. Other parts of it are the consequence of local decisions, including: whether spending on education is above, at or below the Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA); the level of education funding retained centrally; the extent of the allocation to acknowledge additional educational needs made through the school budget formula; and the way additional grants are distributed. The technical issues are complicated. What is clear from inspections is, first, that the variations in funding from school to school are to a considerable degree unfair, and, second, that some schools do not have enough money to do a good job.

The need to spend

If full national data on school income are lacking, there is also an absence of comprehensive information on the costs of meeting educational disadvantage and raising standards in schools. Schools in disadvantaged areas are likely to need to spend more on, for example:

- security, and paying for the results of vandalism and theft;
- providing and replacing books and equipment;
- supporting pupils with special needs or for whom English is an additional language;
- subsidising the cost of visits and trips;
- tackling disaffection and poor attendance.

Beyond these needs, there is a substantial cost in staff time in dealing with exceptional problems of welfare and behaviour, liaising with other agencies, inducting pupils who join part-way through the school, and in acting for some parents as the first point of contact when they need support themselves.

The management of funding

Inspection data and other analysis have long shown that there is no direct relationship between levels of funding and standards of achievement. The demands on these schools mean, however, that they need to secure as much funding as possible, from a wide range of sources, and to use the funding available very well. In both respects, the survey schools were generally successful, providing an efficiency of financial planning and control better than that seen nationally and being judged to provide greater value for money.

- Three-quarters of the survey schools provided good or very good value for money, compared with about

Differences in their budgets notwithstanding, few of the schools visited are spared hard choices about expenditure. What they have been able to do over a period of time is to direct funding to support particular developments or styles of work, although limitations in funding in some schools has restricted the speed of development. Investment in staff is the highest priority, whether in the provision of additional teaching or non-teaching staff or in staff development. A second essential is improving the learning environment in circumstances where its quality is an important marker for pupils about the value the school places on them and on learning. Other priorities are projects to give time to pupils with particular problems, address poor attendance, increase parental involvement, and make extra study support available.

As indicated earlier, a feature of the schools visited is how well they have harnessed resources of all kinds for such purposes. The schools are clear about what they want to do and how to make the best use of additional resources; they are willing to take the necessary decisions about, for example, which pupils would benefit most from involvement in a particular initiative. None of this is unproblematic for managers and governing bodies. Additional grants are often available only for specific purposes and a limited period; the criteria do not always relate closely to the school's needs; securing funding is often time-consuming, with attendant complications in accountability; and the short-term nature of additional funding can lead to problems of how to sustain activity longer than a year or two.

These are undoubtedly difficulties, and they add to those problems of financial management which arise, in many of the survey schools, from fluctuations in roll

from year to year. Those schools which cope best with them demonstrate particular skill in keeping priorities in focus, linking funding streams together, anticipating alternative scenarios and securing defined outputs for the funding employed.

In summary, while issues of school funding are never straightforward, this survey points to the need for greater consistency in the funding of schools to meet the costs of overcoming educational disadvantage, coupled with greater delegation to schools and less reliance on bidding for short-term grants to carry forward programmes of improvement.

13 WHAT MORE HELP DO SCHOOLS NEED ?

Raising standards in disadvantaged areas and, more generally, increasing social inclusion, are at the heart of present Government policy. This survey confirms that schools can achieve considerable progress towards these aims by making good use of their own expertise and other resources, although they still face common problems. Their efforts and success deserve particular acknowledgement.

The best acknowledgement is to learn from their experience. Other schools need to continue to work, as these schools have, on the basics: building strong management; focusing the curriculum; increasing the amount of good teaching; providing close monitoring and good personal support for pupils; and fostering better communication with parents.

Beyond this, the earlier report *Access and Achievement in Urban Education* referred to the need for better long-term planning, deliberate dissemination of effective practice, carefully-focused interventions and concerted efforts by education and related services. We are still some way off the mark in this respect. There are some specific developments on which more support is needed. This survey also highlights the need for investigation of the funding allocated by individual school budget schemes to meet additional educational needs, and into the design, management and impact of grant-funded programmes.

Measures are already in place, including major programmes such as Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones and New Deal for Communities, that are intended to provide particular help to schools serving disadvantaged communities. Other measures planned, arising for example from recommendations by the policy action teams reporting to the Social Exclusion Unit, will have a bearing on the schools' work.[10] The Government's general emphasis on the dissemination of good practice among schools should also have benefit.

Among the further steps, consistent with those measures, to which OFSTED intends to contribute in order to provide better information about and support for the schools, are these:

1 an analysis of the income which schools receive from all sources, and the costs of meeting educational disadvantage in schools;

[10] See in particular the Schools Plus Policy Action Team report for the Social Exclusion Unit, *Building Learning Communities*, Department for Education and Employment, 2000, and the *Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People*, The Stationery Office, 2000.

2 drawing on this analysis, the production of an index of educational disadvantage to give the basis of a formula for allocating additional funding to individual schools. The index should reflect factors which determine exceptional calls on staff time and expertise, learning resources and premises maintenance, and should take into account, among other things, non-statemented special educational needs and pupil turnover;

3 co-ordinated evaluation of the impact of initiatives which bear particularly on educational disadvantage. The evaluation should cover the coherence of the programmes and their relationship to mainstream school improvement policies, and the extent to which they are in practice benefiting those pupils at greatest risk of low attainment;

4 the use of inspection evidence to determine whether new mainstream policies (for example on teacher recruitment, pay and performance management; in-service training; out-of-school learning; the improvement of school buildings) are having the intended benefit for schools serving disadvantaged communities;

5 the highlighting through inspections, of effective links between schools and their communities. This should be associated with a review of how schools work with community services and of what is required in order to mount effective multi-agency support for troubled pupils and families;

6 the creation of a regional programme, linked to existing training arrangements, to prompt improvement by providing opportunities for headteachers, other managers and governors to share good practice in raising standards. Such a programme should include the dissemination of research on successful initiatives, provision for visits and exchanges and the creation of a pool of staff and governors in successful schools serving disadvantaged areas on whose experience others can draw;

7 the setting up of a national programme for improving provision for special educational needs in mainstream schools. The programme should take into account the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, as well as the scope for further simplification of the procedures associated with special educational needs and the potential for delegating more funding to schools.

8 investigation of schemes to provide alternative provision for pupils in secondary schools who are at risk of serious disaffection and exclusion, or who have been excluded from schools;

9 consideration of how to combine common national expectations of attainment with measures of performance that recognise significant steps on the road to higher achievement by schools in disadvantaged areas.

Referring to the schools it surveyed, *Access and Achievement in Urban Education* concluded, six years ago, that 'the rising tide of national educational change is not lifting these boats'. Since then the tide of improvement has risen higher, and there is more evidence now of what can be done to raise standards. Nevertheless, many schools are still not caught by the tide and the number of schools serving disadvantaged communities which are improving and demonstrating success still needs to grow rapidly and sharply. The need for action at the school, local and national level remains. The success of the best schools visited in this survey sets the sights.

APPENDIX

The schools visited

PRIMARY

Anglesey Junior	Birmingham
Avondale Park Primary	Kensington and Chelsea
Banks Road Junior Mixed Infants	Liverpool
Bonner Primary	Tower Hamlets
CE School of The Resurrection	Manchester
Gateway Primary	Westminster
Hague Primary	Tower Hamlets
High Greave Junior	Rotherham
Holy Cross Catholic Primary	Wirral
Holy Trinity Catholic Primary	Liverpool
Mellers Primary and Nursery	Nottingham
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Primary	Liverpool
Our Lady of Reconciliation Catholic Primary	Liverpool
Sir James Barrie Primary	Wandsworth
Sir William Burrough	Tower Hamlets
St. Hugh's Catholic Primary	Liverpool
St. Stephen's CE Primary	Westminster
St. Vincent's Catholic Primary	Birmingham
Sudbourne Primary	Lambeth
Thomas Gray Junior	Sefton

SECONDARY

Alsop High School Technology College	Liverpool
Bordesley Green Girls'	Birmingham
Brookfield High	Knowsley
Cardinal Wiseman RC	Birmingham
Central Foundation Girls'	Tower Hamlets
Challney High School for Boys and Community College	Luton
Challney High School for Girls	Luton
Deptford Green	Lewisham
Haggerston	Hackney
Hurlingham and Chelsea	Hammersmith and Fulham
Litherland High	Sefton
Morpeth	Tower Hamlets
Mount Carmel RC Girls'	Islington
Mulberry School for Girls	Tower Hamlets
Norlington School for Boys	Waltham Forest
Ruffwood	Knowsley
Sion-Manning RC School for Girls	Kensington and Chelsea
Stepney Green	Tower Hamlets
Stretford High	Trafford
Wright Robinson Sports College	Manchester

Schools with over 35 per cent free school meals named in HMCI's Annual Report for 1998/99 as outstanding or having achieved excellent improvement

PRIMARY

Allanson Street Primary	St. Helens
Avonmore Primary	Hammersmith and Fulham
Clara Grant Primary	Tower Hamlets
Easington Lane Primary	Sunderland
Newall Green Infant	Manchester
Oakway Infant	Northamptonshire
Shiremoor First	North Tyneside
Simonside First	Newcastle upon Tyne
Skelmersdale Holland Moor Primary	Lancashire
South Stanley Infant	Durham
St. John the Divine CE Junior Mixed and Infant	Lambeth
St. Mary & St. Pancras CE Primary	Bromley
St. Monica's Catholic Primary	Sefton
St. Sebastian's Catholic Junior Mixed and Infant	Liverpool
St. Stephen's CE Primary	Westminster
Sudbourne Primary	Lambeth
The Cathedral School of St. Saviour & St. Mary Overie	Southwark
West Hill Primary	Wandsworth
Weston Shore Infant	Southampton

SECONDARY

Dormers Wells High	Ealing
Archbishop Tenison's	Lambeth
Rosecroft	Redcar and Cleveland
Sir John Cass Foundation and Redcoat CE	Tower Hamlets
Stoke Newington	Hackney
William Ellis	Camden
Plashet	Newham
Sarah Bonnell	Newham
Falinge Park High	Rochdale