Social Class and Achievement Case studies

department for
children, schools and families

Contents

Acknowledgements

Note on terminology

The schools visited used different terminology. For consistency we have used the terms SLT, headteacher and pupil throughout.

Introduction

The report

This is the second part of a report of a National Strategies investigative project carried out in 2006–07 into the achievement of White British pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The first part of the report (*White British pupils from low-income backgrounds: Part 1: data and research*) looks at data and research findings. This second part summarises the findings from visits made by National Strategy regional advisors in March 2007 to eight schools identified by their local authorities as successful in raising the aspirations and achievement of White British pupils. The aim of the visits was to identify practice that has particular impact.

The visits

A primary and a secondary school were visited in each of four areas: Doncaster, Plymouth, Sunderland and Walsall. All the schools were situated in areas of social housing and most were in areas with high general levels of social and economic deprivation. All had an intake of predominantly White British pupils.

Seven of the schools were achieving contextual value added (CVA) scores above the national average and had raised their national test and GCSE results substantially in the last few years. One school was not in this category: its CVA score was at the national average and its achievement levels had been variable, but it had demonstrated practice which the local authority rated highly in relation to pupils from deprived backgrounds.

Within the report, the schools are identified with letters: A–D for the primary schools and E–H for the secondary schools. An appendix gives information about the schools.

In each school, separate interviews were held with headteachers, members of the senior leadership team (SLT), groups of pupils on track to achieve the expected level for their age cohort, and pupils or ex-pupils in further education, as well as parents and carers.

Summary: What makes the difference?

As is clear from the research evidence about the achievement of pupils from low-income backgrounds and from studies of school effectiveness more generally, a complex mix of factors makes a difference to pupil aspirations and achievement. However, certain characteristics and processes that enable pupils to succeed were common across the schools visited in this study. There were also examples of individual school initiatives that made a positive impact. This report explores these common characteristics and processes in detail and gives examples of effective practice from individual schools.

Many of the features noted during the visits have been identified in the research literature as being prominent in many successful schools. That is, they are features likely to have an impact on all pupils, and not just on the subjects of this report. However, given their intake of pupils predominantly from White British low-income families, the schools visited often had an added focus on features of practice particularly relevant to the needs of this group.

Relevant factors identified by all the schools as important in making a difference are grouped under three broad headings:

- leadership and management;

- teaching and learning; and

- engagement with parents/carers and the wider community.

Leadership and management

In all the schools, priority was given to developing:

- a shared vision, with an emphasis on high aspirations and high expectations;

- clearly maintained boundaries, with high expectations of behaviour and attendance consistently applied and supported by rewards and sanctions; strong, inclusive leadership and effective SLTs;

- excellent relationships among staff, pupils and the community.

Teaching and learning

In all the schools, there was strong evidence of:

- a focus on learning;

- systematic and rigorous use of data, target setting, monitoring and accountability, assessment,

- tracking, feedback and moving forward in learning;

- curriculum innovation and enrichment;

- extra-curricular activities and extended school provision;

- well-developed transition programmes;

- opportunities for pupil involvement and voice.

Engagement with parents/carers and the wider community

All the schools demonstrated:

- an explicit focus on working with parents/carers, moving from developing relationships with them
- to their involvement as partners in learning;
- the use of multi-agency expertise to support pupils in overcoming barriers to learning;
- positive engagement with the wider community.

These factors are explored later in the report.

In order to identify more closely what had made the difference, school leaders were asked two questions. The answers they gave to these two questions are summarised below.

Question 1: What do you think are the most significant things that you do that promote success and achievement for this group of pupils?

The headteachers and leadership teams all agreed that promoting success and achievement for their pupils was the main driver underpinning the ethos and vision of their school – and that their unwavering belief in and commitment to this goal was a crucial keystone for all their actions. They also emphasised that a focus on learning underpinned all they did.

They stressed that there were many things that combined to have a significant impact on achieving this goal. However, they identified three factors as being of particular importance in moving forward.

(1) Establishing clearly maintained boundaries, with high expectations of behaviour and attendance

Behaviour was not a major problem in any of these schools and attendance was given a high priority. There were clear systems of rewards and sanctions, consistently applied uniform policies, swift action on lateness and non-attendance and specific actions to address potential trouble spots; actions such as teaching assistants patrolling corridors during lesson changeovers and breaks; and policies prohibiting pupils going off site at lunch time. Senior leaders, pupils and parents/carers all agreed that insisting on high standards of behaviour and attendance gave strong messages about the importance placed on creating the right conditions for learning.

(2) Using data tracking, target setting and monitoring to ensure every pupil was on track to achieve their best and to identify problems early

Headteacher identified the systematic use of data, target setting and monitoring as key to success in raising expectations for all pupils and raising standards. These techniques had helped them identify specific individuals and groups needing additional attention and specific year groups or key stages not making the expected rate of progress. The impact on staff expectations and accountability was seen as particularly important, as was the opportunity provided to involve pupils and parents/carers.

(3) Adapting the curriculum to ensure that it met the needs and captured the interest of pupils

Both the primary and secondary schools had reviewed their curriculum. They had a high level of commitment to enriching the curriculum through visits, cultural events and sporting activities in order to engage pupils and provide aspirational opportunities. They had introduced new learning pathways such as vocational courses or academic links with other schools to increase choice and make the curriculum relevant to pupil needs. They had experimented with new ways of delivering the curriculum, such as immersion days or themed curriculum links. Parents/carers and pupils strongly supported these changes and appreciated the opportunities on offer.

Question 2: How do you plan, manage and review this work?

Although schools had individual processes, certain aspects were consistent across schools.

(1) Focused priorities with a long-term plan

All the schools had priorities for development, understood by the staff. Leaders commented on how a particular priority was part of a longer-term development plan. For example, in one primary school a focus on improving writing through particular techniques was seen as a stage in the long-term plan to raise standards in literacy, while in a secondary school the focus on building creativity into lessons across the curriculum was part of a longer-term aim to establish greater pupil independence and risk-taking.

(2) Whole-school involvement and consistency

Although individual systems varied slightly, ensuring staff ownership and whole-school consistency around planned focuses for development was an important element of managing the work. This was achieved through continuous professional development (CPD), through systems for distributed leadership and through balancing professional autonomy with accountability. For example, in one school, training sessions and mentoring in the use of data ensured consistency and helped individual teachers take ownership of the data. They then undertook the analysis and planning of intervention programmes for their class and final outcomes were tied to performance management targets. Members of the SLT supported colleagues in this process in their role as data managers.

(3) Headteacher involvement in monitoring

In all the schools, there were clear systems for monitoring and reporting. Headteachers in both primary and secondary schools were personally involved in monitoring as well as receiving reports from others and analysing data trends themselves. They undertook lesson observations and work trails, followed individual pupils or subjects for a day, and so on. Leadership teams and individual teachers were fully informed about and involved in the monitoring process.

Community response to the schools' work

The visits to the schools in this small sample highlighted their often inspirational leadership, their well-developed systems and the creative development work they undertook to bring out the best in their pupils. The schools demonstrated in a variety of ways that they can have a significant impact on the achievement and aspirations, and hence the life chances, of their pupils.

The high expectations and aspirations that the schools had for their pupils were apparent in all aspects of school life. They were strongly focused on supporting learning and ensuring that every pupil was achieving their best. The schools displayed positive attitudes even when faced with difficult problems. They aimed to enrich pupils' lives and make learning enjoyable and important. They involved pupils and parents/carers as genuine partners in learning and worked closely with their local communities. In return, they were highly regarded by their pupils and parents/carers and by the wider community.

Leadership and Management

A shared vision with an emphasis on high aspirations and high expectations

As a leadership and management team we have a strong vision and high expectations. If you preach something you have to do it. (Member of SLT, B)

All the headteachers articulated a clear vision for their schools. There was a 'can do' culture that, while acknowledging challenges within the school and community, displayed a determination not to use pupils' home backgrounds as an excuse for low standards or lack of aspirations.

The key to the school is expectations, an ethos of success, a belief in possibility, a vein of belief and pushing. (Headteacher, G)

Our ethos? Rigour and fun, a caring school and an achieving school. Raising aspirations isn't any one thing. There are lots of things from the moment they get though the door. It's about knowing every individual so they can be inspired, encouraged, cajoled, bribed, pushed, supported…whatever it takes for that individual. We're constantly saying, 'You can do it. Just because your mum/dad/sister/brother didn't do it, doesn't mean you can't.' (Headteacher, H)

The school leaders had worked to ensure that the vision was shared throughout the school and understood within the wider community.

I meant it when I consulted them (the staff) about what our vision should be…When the consultation came in, it went out to them again so they could see what was said and that it was their vision. We also consulted parents/carers and students. Every student in the school can repeat ASPIRE (aspiration, sharing, pride, initiative, responsibility, enjoyment) and tell you about it. (Headteacher, F)

This is a place pupils want to be. There is a sense of pride and the ethos is clear and known to pupils and community. They believe in the school. (Member of SLT, G)

Your mum always tells you you're bright, you're beautiful but now the school is telling them. It's that can-do belief. This is a first for me – the Head's an absolute revelation. (Parent/carer, C)

In several schools, evidence of the shared vision was found in the same phrases being repeated by the headteacher, senior staff, pupils and parents/carers, such as:

There are no invisible students in this school. (Headteacher, H)

The vision is not merely a series of high-sounding ideals but is implemented throughout the curriculum and threaded through other aspects of the life of the school. This will be illustrated in the sections that follow but, as an example, specific initiatives to raise pupil aspirations included:

- e-mentoring of sixth form students by local university students;
- providing positive role models, such as ex-pupils returning to talk to current pupils;
- community-based instructors;
- involving fathers in reading programmes;
- careers aspirations days;
- inclusion in 'Aim High' programmes;
- opportunities for involvement in high-status local and national events, such as performing in London;
- widening horizons programmes with educational visits, sporting, cultural and leisure opportunities.

We get to places and see things and we all see 'I could do that'. (Pupil, E)

The success of the emphasis on high aspirations was demonstrated across all eight schools when most pupils spoke of their plans for careers that would involve post-16 provision, including apprenticeships, further or higher education. Career aspirations ranged from working in leisure and tourism to entering professional careers such as teaching, engineering, law and forensic science. Although there was evidence of gender stereotyping in some responses, all pupils had an image of themselves as economically active and aiming for careers that took them beyond the aspirations of their parents/ carers. As the notes of the visit to school G, for example, put it: 'Pupils' aspirations are high across the age ranges and all would be the first in their families to go to university. They are clear that the school is about them being successful.'

It's costing me a fortune but I'm dead proud that they're both at university – the first from our family. (Parent/ carer, E)

I'm the first person in our family to stay on to the sixth form. My mum laughed when I told her…because we don't do that kind of thing. (Pupil, H)

Clearly maintained boundaries, with high expectations of behaviour and attendance, consistently applied and supported by rewards and sanctions

Our mates tell us about things they do and we say, 'You must be joking. You'd never get away with that in our school.'. (Pupil, H)

Behaviour was not a major issue in any of the schools visited, although it had been so in the past for some of them and all the schools had some volatile pupils with challenging behaviour. Pupils recognised that high standards of behaviour were the norm in their schools. These high standards had been achieved through constantly maintaining clear boundaries and expectations, continuously working on behaviour and applying behaviour policies that were well understood by staff, pupils and parents/carers. In both the primary and secondary schools, behaviour management used both rewards and sanctions.

The tone and atmosphere here is all about rewards and celebrating achievement. (Headteacher, F)

Safe schools

Primary school B

In school B, there was a positive reward system (certificates, stickers and house points) for qualities such as politeness and kindness as well as for attendance and work. The teachers had a pad of 'quick notes' to send home saying when a child had done something particularly noteworthy, including demonstrating good behaviour. Similar schemes operated in the other primary schools, including 'happy teacher/sad teacher' letters.

The teachers in school B kept a record of rewards and sanctions so that they had a long term overview of trends. Their recent Ofsted report noted that:

The behaviour of most children is exemplary and those with behavioural problems are learning how to manage them with the school's support.

A parent/carer at the same school said:

The school has high expectations of the children. They're so polite. They open the door for you and say "good morning" in the corridor. Nobody's standing there making them.

Secondary schools F and H

Both schools operated a similar 'behaviour for learning' policy based on a system developed at a Birmingham school. This involved giving 'levelled consequences' for misbehaviour as well as praise. C1 and C2 were verbal warnings, C3 was a detention and C4 was isolation for a set number of days. Parents/carers were involved at stages C3 and C4. The consequences and praises were monitored (electronically in school F) which enabled patterns to be identified. It also allowed the school to see when a small handful of staff were overusing the system (indicating that they might be struggling with behaviour) and to offer them support.

A similar system operated in primary school D, which shared a campus with school H.

In all these schools, the clear system of sanctions was balanced with a system of praise and rewards.

Bullying was not raised as an issue by pupils or parents/carers during the interviews. When asked about it, they felt that it was not a big problem in their school and that it was appropriately dealt with if it did occur.

If there is some bullying the school's good at stopping it. They tell the bully I'm getting upset. If it carries on, they talk to them again and they can be kept in isolation. (Pupil, H)

Schools did not underestimate the effort needed to maintain good behaviour and they were clear that getting behaviour right was an important step in raising achievement.

Similarly, all schools visited had insisted on clear uniform or dress codes, which they worked to maintain. This was appreciated by both pupils and parents/carers, who felt that this reflected the improved image and success of the school out in the community.

The schools all gave due attention to attendance. Several raised the status of good attendance by awarding points and prizes for regular attendance. One parent claimed that her son wanted to go to school even when he was ill, so that he would get a 100 per cent attendance certificate. In two schools, the importance of attendance was emphasised by setting up formal links to governors. For example, to request permission for holiday leave, parents had to write to governors, rather than the headteacher. Schools acted quickly to follow up non-attendance. Many schools had attendance officers in the school and unauthorised absence was followed up within hours. Similarly, lateness was treated as a serious matter by the schools and dealt with immediately. Such prompt attention ensured that parents and pupils knew what was expected and where the boundaries lay.

Strong, inclusive leadership and effective SLTs

I don't accept that you can't make good leaders. I believe in growing people. (Headteacher, E)

A key feature of all of the schools was the strength of leadership provided by the headteachers, setting high standards for expectations, behaviour, achievement and dress for both staff and pupils.

All of the headteachers recognised the importance of their role, but also stressed the importance of developing leadership throughout the school, building a strong leadership team and constantly pushing forward together with action. They emphasised the importance of creating a climate of respect, developing teachers' professionalism and being clear about professional responsibilities – particularly responsibility and accountability for progress in learning, tied to performance management and CPD. There was a thorough knowledge of the local community, school, staff and pupils.

Ofsted had identified the leadership of the headteacher as outstanding in several of the schools.

My management style is 'coming alongside' the staff. I say 'This is the problem chaps and what are we going to do about it?' I have my own ideas but we share the problem – sometimes their ideas are better than mine. And we do it. (Headteacher, C)

My leadership and management style is collegiate – people are consulted and their strengths used. Leadership is distributed across the school although I accept final responsibility and will act autocratically if necessary. (Headteacher, D)

Teachers are given professional autonomy (For example, in curriculum planning and adapting) but they are accountable to me for pupil progress. (Headteacher, B)

Excellent relationships among staff, pupils and the community

At his last school I felt I wasn't good enough to be in their school. I've never felt like that here. (Parent/carer, D)

A consistent thread throughout all the visits and interviews was the excellent relationships forged within the schools and with parents/carers and the community. In one school, for example, the secondary students gave 'relationships: we know the staff care about us' as the first reason for the success of the school.

Considerable effort had been put into building these relationships through:

- clear behaviour policies
- respectful and caring approaches

The teachers don't rant and rave; they support you. (Pupil, E)

I remember to thank people personally – when our school was selected to do their 'Tempest' at the Peacock Theatre in London, I wrote a letter to each member of the cast congratulating them on their performances. (Headteacher, E)

- pupils and parent/carer recognition and appreciation of the school's commitment and hard work

Teachers will stay back and give you extra help. I'm staying behind tonight to do an extra history class. Sometimes it's just one person, sometimes it's a group. (Pupil, F)

They don't give up on them. Anthony's been in loads of trouble. His tutor has been brilliant. (Parent/carer, E)

Teachers are always on hand at the start and end of the day to speak to you. The school is now well regarded in the community. (Parent/carer, A)

If I look at the work and I think it's so hard the teacher tells a joke and it makes me want to try. (Pupil, C)

- an explicit focus on building trust and communication with parents/carers and the community.

Teaching and learning

A focus on learning

We focused very specifically on learning. This has been significant in raising standards. (Headteacher, E)

All the schools had a very clear focus on improving learning as a core aim and this was recognised by all members of the school community.

Once your education gets better, you get better and better. (Pupil, D)

Learning has high status here. (Parent/carer, A)

Headteachers and senior managers could identify areas of strength and areas for further development in learning and acted quickly to improve matters. There was a sense of practice being reflected on.

We had a problem with the core subjects. We have turned around our English department. They are now doing very well. (H)

There were poor plenaries so we've developed action research with staff – trying new ideas. For example, pupils did not like plenaries with the teacher only picking a few pupils who put their hands up, so we've changed to small whiteboards for pupils for them all to show an answer. (C)

How to learn was actively discussed in these schools. In school D, for example, pupils explained how their teachers talked to them about learning and gave the example of an assembly about working with others and how to support others in their work. In school F, Year 9 pupils talked about sessions looking at learning techniques and how to improve their learning.

Assessment for learning was used by all the schools, and pupils were involved in peer- and self-assessment. Assessment against objectives and targets was a feature of practice and pupils knew what they needed to do to move on.

Our teacher helps me plan it out; talks to us when I get it wrong and tells me how to make it better. (Pupil, A)

All classes have level information on walls so pupils know what to work on that will move them up a level. (Member of SLT, E)

Rewards and praise were used to give learning a high status and to motivate learners. At school C, for example, Year 6 pupils accumulated points to earn time in the 'common room' as a reward for good work, and there were achievement or goal-scoring boards outside each class for pupils' names to be added when they moved up a level. In school A, a 'reading passport' scheme rewarded children for reading a certain number of books.

Now every child wants to do their homework because if you've read ten books you get some points. If we forget the reading book we have to run back to school to get it. The home school reading book is important. They know she (the teacher) will look at it. He says to me, 'Have you wrote in it?' (Parent/carer, A)

Schools had systems to overcome barriers to learning, using a range of interventions. These included learning mentors, homework clubs, revision days, peer mentors and reading buddy schemes. One school had a well-equipped sensory room where targeted pupils spend quiet time with learning mentors. Others had dedicated space to withdraw vulnerable and volatile pupils.

The high status given to learning and achievement in the schools helped pupils withstand any 'boffin' taunts.

If you don't work, you're a loser. (Pupil, E)

Sometimes other kids who don't work say things, but you ignore them because you know what's best for you. (Pupil, F)

Pupils identified many features that made it easier for them to learn, including 'active lessons', the use of ICT and interactive whiteboards. They recognised that teachers pushed them to achieve and acknowledged that teachers were willing to go the extra mile to help them to do so.

All the schools made good use of teaching assistants. The primary schools typically had a teaching assistant for every class and they were highly regarded members of the staff team.

We couldn't do it without the TAs: it's how we have used the budget. They are expected to work with the group and they are now good enough to take the class. Expectations of them are very high. We have higher-level TAs but there is no hierarchy. (C)

Most secondary schools deployed teaching assistants academically to support core subjects and/ or administrative assistants to support year groups. These assistants were frequently parents/carers of pupils who had attended the school and felt themselves to be an integral part of the work within departments.

In one secondary school (G), the headteacher had used the budget to cut class size to 20 ('I wanted less chiefs, more Indians'). This has radically reduced staff absence. They also decided to have no cover or supply teachers. ('We have no cover here: I don't want pupils disrupted with people I don't know in front of them.') Instead, they used a large learning centre well equipped with information technology and individualised learning programmes. The same school used assistants strategically in corridors and outside toilets to minimise opportunities for poor behaviour out of class.

Systematic and rigorous use of data, target setting, monitoring and accountability, assessment, tracking, feedback and moving forward in learning

Schools identified tracking and monitoring as central to their success. In school A, for example, the SLT was clear that the use of data and target setting had had the greatest impact on standards.

Schools had robust systems for these processes. Some of the schools had seen the greater use of data as a 'wakeup call to staff' and all ensured that teachers knew the data for their pupils. All set targets and monitored the progress of pupils. Monitoring and action reports were the norm, although practice varied as to whether these were prepared by the SLT/headteacher for the staff or whether staff were involved in the process. Several schools saw greater staff involvement as the next step and were undertaking staff training and mentoring in areas such as data analysis and increased knowledge of intervention strategies. Pupil performance was part of the staff performance management systems. Senior members of staff such as the heads of year groups acted as data managers. Schools used the target setting and intervention process to ensure that all pupils' needs were identified. In this respect, some schools had moved a long way towards a personalised approach to learning.

We don't want to just focus on C/D borderlines. We don't want to fall into the trap of league tables training. We don't forget some of the higher ability who could be A*. (Member of SLT, E)

School F provided an example of a very thorough Year 9 progress report with graphs, list of targets and progress for every pupil, interventions for individual pupils noted, a timetable for intervention and support at class, group and individual level and with the staff responsible for each action identified.

The schools all used assessment for learning, related to targets set. There was also assessment against success criteria for individual lesson objectives. Most of the schools had an agreed marking policy to support their use of assessment for learning.

A clear shared marking policy has been adopted using 'bubbles' (what pupils have done well) and 'boxes' (targets/next steps to improve). (G)

Self-assessment and peer assessment were established in most of the schools and pupils could talk about this and how they were supported to undertake such assessments in a constructive way.

Use of data, target setting, assessment and monitoring

Secondary school H

Data on every pupil's achievement was held centrally and could be accessed by all staff at individual and class level. Annual targets were set for departments and for every pupil using Fischer Family Trust data. These targets were reviewed each term. The targets were known by all staff, pupils and parents/carers and stuck in pupils' workbooks.

The headteacher's claim that 'every student, parent/carer and teacher knows what sub-level they're at and what level they're aiming for and how to get there' was confirmed in the interviews with each of these groups.

There was a 'traffic light' system used throughout the school. Every year head had individual student 'at a glance' target walls in their office on which pupil targets for English, mathematics and science were highlighted in red (below target), amber (on target) or green (above target). This was updated regularly.

Staff were involved in creating intervention plans and every pupil had an individual education plan (IEP), with SEN staff involved in those for students with statements. All IEPs are online and accessible to all staff. Heads of year and department heads monitor progress.

Traditional parent/carer evenings had been replaced by one-to-one, termly monitoring and academic mentoring interviews. At these meetings targets were discussed with the pupil and parent/carer and new targets set. These meetings had resulted in an increase in parent/carer uptake from 40 per cent to 95 per cent. The termly monitoring and numerical data were included on the reports sent home. These also included information on effort, homework and attendance.

Assessment for learning was used throughout the school. Pupils talked about WWW ('what went well') and EBI ('even better if') marking and this was seen in work samples. Peer and self-assessment were used and pupils talked about the helpfulness of constructive peer criticism (and the guidance they had received in giving such feedback).

Use of data, target setting, assessment and monitoring

Primary school B

The school systematically tracked the data on classes, individual pupils and groups of pupils. Raise-Online was used and the school examined the progress of groups defined by free school meals, SEN, looked-after children, summer-born children, gender, and gifted and talented children. Children failing to make progress were picked up early and interventions put in place. As well as teacher assessment, children were assessed twice a year using optional SATs. The school had undertaken work sampling with staff and pupils to create a clear understanding of what each level looks like.

Each teacher was given the data for their pupils – prior attainment from the Foundation Stage Profile, Year 2 tests, which predict Year 6 targets and expected levels in terms of average point scores for each year. The class teacher analysed the data for their own class and wrote a report on the interventions they planned as a result of this analysis. This made them very aware of their responsibility and accountability for achievement and progress.

It made a big difference. Before, staff had been given the data by the SLT. Now they feel ownership and recognise what the data can do. For some staff, there was a mentoring element to it and we supported them in undertaking the analysis. (Member of SLT)

Following the analysis, targets were set for every child in reading, writing and mathematics and these were shared with children and their parents/carers. Prompts were given for improvement and children had individual targets stuck on their tables or in their books. A booklet for parents/carers was sent home, giving the targets and ideas for how parents/carers could help.

We know the targets for the next six weeks. We get a sheet with the details and how you can help and we talk about them at the parent/carer evening. (Parent/carer)

There were three reporting meetings a year with parents/carers, where targets were shared and the extent to which children had met their targets was discussed. Attendance was very high at these meetings and any parents/carers who did not attend were followed up and encouraged to make a further appointment.

The headteacher monitored the data and also monitored by looking at work, talking to the children and undertaking regular classroom observation.

I do trails…I might go through the school looking at the more able or boys' attainment. I ask the children: do they know their targets and how to get better? Early intervention is the key to making sure that children don't get left behind. (Headteacher)

Curriculum innovation and enrichment

We need a curriculum which every pupil can enjoy and through which they can achieve. (Headteacher, F)

All of the schools had carefully considered the curriculum they offered and had adjusted it to better meet the needs of their pupils. They were developing new curriculum pathways relevant to pupils' aspirations, but clearly focused on academic learning as well as on practical and vocational subjects. For example, one school had linked its sixth form with a local selective school to ensure that a full range of academic options could be offered.

All the secondary schools were offering **vocational pathways** to meet the needs of some of their pupils and motivate them to learn.

Vocational pathways

Secondary school F

Over three years we have developed a number of pathways; for example, vocational GNVQ. We have our own instructors (from the community) for catering, vehicle maintenance and hair and beauty. These have re-engaged kids who are now switched on to other areas. (Member of SLT)

Three Year 11 boys from the school's vocational catering course had prepared the lunch for a conference taking place in the school. The range of hot dishes, salads and desserts would not have been out of place in a commercial restaurant. The boys gave confident, enthusiastic and knowledgeable accounts of how they had prepared, cooked and presented their dishes. Their sense of pride was apparent.

The boys were going on to a local college to take catering courses and spoke of their plans to become chefs – one with the ultimate ambition of running his own restaurant. These three boys were examples of how the vocational pathways offered within the school had enabled pupils to engage with the curriculum, and in one case, turn around a boy at risk of failure. The instructor who ran this course was from the local community and related well to the boys, providing them with a real role model.

Both primary and secondary schools have developed **blocked timetable** and immersion day learning opportunities. Some primary schools have blocked longer sessions for extended writing ('big write') activities.

Redesigning the curriculum

Staff were concerned at pupils' lack of engagement with Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) and made the decision to teach it on blocked 'alternative curriculum' days. This proved to be so successful that PHSE is now completely taught through 12 blocked days across the school in the year.

We made it powerful – to meet the needs of our youngsters. It involved staff in group work and risk taking. We identified the skills our kids needed. (Headteacher)

I don't think my son will take to drink – he still remembers what happened when they poured that alcohol on the liver. (Parent/carer)

The school is now blocking the timetable as much as possible, as this allows greater flexibility to group subjects and pupils. The success of the approach has led to the development of eight 'immersion days', for example, a Year 10 mathematics and construction challenge. The school is now thinking of developing these further next year as thematic blocks of three days. It has done an audit for Year 9 and asked pupils what they would like to do.

Year 10 did an entire piece of English coursework – completed in a day. I said, 'You just need to bring yourselves; you don't even need your pen'. (AST)

Attendance is very good on these days as the pupils are very motivated. The pace and outcomes are clearly defined. The school has evidence that this sort of timed focused learning is particularly beneficial to boys, who enjoy the faster pace and can see the end outputs fairly immediately.

Schools had developed thematic units and/or cross-curricular units of work.

Redesigning the curriculum

Primary school B

In order to move learning on and increase enjoyment, school B redesigned some of its curriculum into one- or two-week blocks around cross-curricular themes. The deputy head monitored the curriculum map overview that ensured coverage and progression through the themes.

We followed the strategies and did all the intervention programmes but we needed to do more. It just wasn't moving. We keep lots of elements of the strategies but wanted an enriched curriculum. We wanted to make the curriculum more enjoyable and give real purposes for writing. (Headteacher)

The school also spent a lot of money on experiential things to enrich the curriculum and pupils' lives.

We bid for funding to get artists and performers, to go to the theatre.

Throughout the school, they used Matthew Lipman's 'Philosophy for Children', which encourages questioning, critical thinking, taking risks and vocabulary development. All staff and TAs have been trained in this approach and the school felt it has had a big impact in these areas and on speaking and listening.

Primary school A

Similarly, school A reorganised the curriculum to meet the learning needs of pupils and enriched the curriculum to provide out-of-school experiences, visits and visitors that pupils would not otherwise have received.

Their curriculum is now designed around rich texts such as Goodbye Mr. Tom and Carrie's War in Year 6 and Narnia and Charlotte's Web in Year 4. The units involve using text scripts and film versions. Links are made to other areas of curriculum. However, the school is not afraid to put in discrete units where links are tenuous. These units run for approximately half a term but are not rigid and depend on the text.

We are willing to experiment and evaluate, taking what works from Strategies, putting it with needs of children and rejecting what doesn't work for us. (Headteacher)

The curriculum in the schools was often enriched with **creative and exploratory approaches**. All the schools mentioned a wide range of enrichment activities both in and out of school hours. For example, school F (which has specialist arts status) had just appointed two young arts graduates as 'arts facilitators' to support the development of creativity in teaching and learning. Their brief was to go into lessons across the curriculum and say 'How we can help?' Currently, they are working with the science/PE departments where pupils have filmed science experiments and are now using these as inspiration for dance. On the day of the visit, the school was engaged in a modern foreign languages enterprise day, involving local businesses. Both primary and secondary schools gave examples of business enterprise days.

Extra-curricular activities and extended school provision

All of the schools had substantial extra-curricular activities and extended school provision. These activities were popular with parents/carers and pupils. Two had official extended school status and others were working towards developing this. School G, for example, was in a community learning partnership and would have a children's centre on site in 2008. They currently open 7 days a week, 50 weeks a year, till 10 pm weekdays, 6 pm weekends. There is a play scheme every holiday, adult learning sessions taking place during the day and evening, a fitness suite, OAP lunch clubs and a scrambling track on site.

The extra-curricular activities aimed to provide enjoyable activities to increase motivation and participation and to widen opportunities. Some were designed to support learning for families as well as pupils.

We've had 50 trips and visits this year so far – five of them have been abroad (Madrid, Paris, New York, Romania, and Washington DC). I call this widening horizons. It broadens pupils' perspectives and gives them something to aspire to. (Headteacher, E)

Parents/carers appreciated these opportunities for their children.

There's a wide range of after-school clubs that give them opportunities that you'd want for your kids. I couldn't afford to take my children to dancing lessons or buy the equipment but they can do dance here. (Parent, D)

Parents/carers also appreciated schools being sensitive to cost implications for low-income families.

Lots of trips and visitors – but the school is very good about paying. They give you lots of warning and you can pay weekly. At my other school you just got a letter and had to find the money straight away. I couldn't do it. You have to budget for it. Then I can manage it. (Parent, D)

All schools also found ways of ensuring that no child was excluded from opportunities to become involved because of lack of parent/carer contribution.

Well-developed transition programmes

When our staff first went into the primary school they were blown away by what the children could do. (Member of SLT, H)

All the schools had some form of transition programme and some had highly developed and innovative programmes. School E had employed a transition mentor who works in primary schools for two terms and who then transfers to the secondary school with the primary pupils for their first term. There are two transition classes at Year 7 with 10–15 more vulnerable pupils in each class and these stay with the same teacher, gradually joining the mainstream over the year. There is also a home-school liaison officer who works with six feeder primary schools.

Fusion project

Secondary school H

School H had developed a fusion programme with its feeder primary schools. As part of the scheme, staff from the secondary school spent time teaching in the primary school. Initially, this was staff from core subjects but the scheme had now been extended to other subjects, partly in response to its impact and staff demand. This teaching was part of the joint transition units of work the schools undertook. Spending time working in primary school had a major impact on staff expectations for Year 7.

When our staff first went into the primary school they were blown away by what the children could do. They came back saying 'We baby these kids too much. They can do so much more. Now they hit the ground running. (Member of SLT)

Another outcome had been that staff trusted information from the primary schools.

We get good information from our primary schools and we use it. We set groups using the primary teacher assessment. We also record our dialogues with Year 6 parents/carers and put this in a different font on our records. (Member of SLT)

Year 6 pupils met their form tutor and spent a few days at the secondary school in the summer term. Targeted pupils were offered a summer school in the secondary school.

He attended a two-week summer school, and was given a buddy from Year 8. (Parent/carer)

Key Stage 3 pupils had recently made a DVD for Year 6 pupils to show them what the secondary school is like, and the kind of experiences they would encounter.

There was a city-wide working party to improve transition and school experience for pupils identified as vulnerable or volatile. Groups of these pupils attended the secondary school for a weekly session throughout the summer term. Volatile students ('mainly white working-class boys') undertook activities to help them understand expectations and rules and to get to know their form tutor and learning mentors. Both groups did activities such as treasure hunts to get to know the school grounds and active learning sessions such as practical science experiments to encourage them to engage with the curriculum.

However, even in schools with well-developed transition programmes, moving to secondary school was mentioned in the interviews as an area of anxiety by parents/carers of primary school children and by some primary teachers. Other than a preliminary meeting for parents/carers, no schools seemed to have developed this area of practice in terms of building their partnership with parent/carers. As some of those interviewed pointed out, more adventurous arrangements, such as joint teaching, exchange visits or 'day in the life' videos for pupils and parents/carers to see what goes on in secondary classrooms might be helpful to reduce misconceptions and allay fears.

Fusion project

Opportunities for pupil involvement and voice

All the schools had developed active school councils who had genuine opportunities to influence what happened in their institution. In primary school B, for example, the school council had one elected representative from each class. They met once a week with the headteacher and had undertaken things such as discussing the catering with a view to healthy eating, putting forward suggestions and testing taster samples before deciding on new menu. They conducted a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the curriculum as part of the curriculum redesign and their interests and opinions were taken into account. In secondary school H, student feedback was taken after lesson observations and after teaching sessions by candidates for teacher appointments.

Schools saw encouraging pupil participation in the organisation of the school and its curriculum as part of developing independence and self-esteem in pupils. Pupils were given many opportunities to take responsibility and run things for themselves.

Pupil voice and responsibility

Primary school A:

Pupils ran clubs and activities themselves; these took place across the age ranges. One Year 6 pupil ran a hip-hop club for all and was having to learn that younger pupils were not quite coordinated enough for the moves so they must simplify them. The library was computerised and run by pupils who issued loans.

Secondary school E

Pupils were given major responsibility for planning events for the school through the year teams and school council, such as the Year 11 Prom, which they had to organise and manage themselves, booking the venue, the band, catering, and so on.

The year council organised and ran a long weekend of team building. 40 students came – about a quarter of the whole year group.

They also took responsibility for raising funds for charities.

The school council was run by elected members and elected leaders (older pupils) from the pupils – staff were not involved. Lead councillors then brought their suggestions to the headteacher and staff.

They have been instrumental in the Sports Hall bid; a social area has been created; and chilled water is now available at all times. Our kids are listened to and all this is negotiated. We say is it possible for this to happen within this budget and timescale? (Headteacher)

Pupils had a remarkable sense of collegiate responsibility – to the extent that the sixth form had voted in a 'uniform' for themselves in the form of a bright blue sweatshirt on which the school name featured.

Primary school D

Following a three-day training course, Year 6 pupils acted as peer mediators in the school playground. Identified by purple baseball caps, they intervened to sort out disputes and squabbles, or could be approached directly by the pupils for their advice and help.

The mediators were very proud of their role and took their responsibilities seriously. Pupils accepted the peer mediation. Overall, the scheme had helped pupils to reflect on and take responsibility for their behaviour. The scheme had had a direct impact on behaviour in the playground, preventing minor playground incidents from escalating.

Before, we had more fights. Now we talk to them and calm them down. (Pupil)

Engagement with parents/carers and the wider community

An explicit focus on working with parents/carers as partners in learning

When I first came here I spent loads of time in the community – sitting on sofas and going into homes, rather than expecting that they would come here. (Headteacher, E)

All the schools worked hard to develop positive relationships with parent/carers. They recognised that some parents/carers' experience of education had made them wary of schools and given them negative views of the value of education. Schools also recognised that difficult circumstances might keep some from playing an active role in their child's education.

Building the trust of parents/carers and encouraging them to recognise that the school had an open-door policy was a vital first step, and the headteachers were proactive in promoting this. They and the staff were visible and approachable and worked hard to build relationships with parents/carers.

I'm out on the playground; they like me, they see my niceness – they see I care! (Headteacher, C)

A lot of the younger parents/carers didn't have a good experience themselves but things are friendlier now. Introducing things in an informal way makes a big difference. The more accessible you are, the more they respond to you, so being really formal doesn't help. (SLT, C)

The Head appeared genuine but it took time to trust her changes. It was a shock to realise how approachable she was. (Parent/carer, C)

Parents/carers responded by showing great trust in the schools, feeling they could approach schools with problems and that they were welcomed. They felt that schools took their concerns seriously and would act on them. A parent/carer in school F, for example, demonstrated a huge sense of trust that the school knew what was best and could give her son the best advice. Others parent/carers made comments such as:

Key words for how I feel about this school: trust, safety. (Parent, D)

In the old days the school and community didn't mix, now parents are actively invited into the school. (Parent, A)

Schools were also proactive in involving parents/carers as partners in their child's learning and ensuring that they knew what their child was doing and how they could help. Schools persisted in these activities even when response was slow to emerge.

Making a positive contribution

School B actively encouraged initially reluctant parents/carers to join a Better Reading Partnership – a family learning programme held at the local football club. Involvement had a major impact on parent/carer self-esteem as well as on pupil learning.

It was good for me. It's built my confidence. I didn't want to go but the Head persuaded me. I thought I'd be embarrassed. I wasn't any good at school. We've done team working, mixing and working together, maths and English. After 25 years I've got a certificate. I'm so proud of myself. I'm going to frame it.

Involving parents/carers in target setting was the norm, along with advice on how they could help at home. All parents/carers appreciated this at the level of information and involvement, but some remained unclear of their role in learning.

I'm informed but I'm a bit ignorant about levels and grades really – I just trust them.

All of the schools offered curriculum workshops, although take-up was often low. Some schools are now experimenting with teaching assistants running these in the family drop-in centres to make them less 'official' and encourage participation. In school B, a former learning mentor has been trained to work as a pastoral adviser working with parents/carers and toddlers. Such activities help parents/carers appreciate the importance of their role.

I didn't think it (i.e. helping their child with reading) would work but it has. We had a folder to keep three times a week and they showed us how to not keep making them sound out every word. (Parent, B)

I feel valued as a parent, so (making sure) my child is being well fed, well rested and well turned out is a valued part. (Parent, D)

Schools also invited parents/carers into the school to help with learning or to work alongside pupils, for example a fathers' reading day and parents/carers taking GCSE foreign language courses alongside Key Stage 4 pupils.

All the schools were very good at communicating with parents/carers via academic review meetings, assemblies, letters, reports, phone calls and newsletters. School H, for example, produces a high-quality, eight-page, full-colour newspaper each term to go home to parents/carers, to feeder primary schools and other outlets in the community. Some schools are beginning to explore electronic communications with parents/carers. School F, for example, has planned a survey to explore parent/carer access to computers and broadband.

The use of multi-agency expertise in overcoming barriers to learning

All the schools worked closely with other agencies and many had other agencies based in the school or on a shared campus. At school B, for example, the police liaison officer was planning to open an office in the school to make good links with children while they were young, the school nurse ran drop-in sessions and the dentist talked to foundation stage children and their parents/carers as dental health is very poor in the area. Several schools had a children's centre on campus. The schools saw the value in this joint working for speedy responses and developing healthy and safe schools, good communication and community links. Again, ensuring that pupils were ready to learn was the prime motive for schools.

Being healthy

School G now has a health adviser working in the school to address directly issues like teenage pregnancy, obesity and smoking. For example, working with the Primary Care Trust, the school is running a joint smoking cessation programme for pupils and staff.

Tobacco abuse is a huge issue here but we will be a no smoking school from June.

Several schools had (or shared) school-based, home-school liaison officers who worked with hard-to-reach families. All of the secondary schools had attendance officers/educational welfare officers on site. Non-attendance was acted on very promptly; several of the schools had attendance reward policies to promote high attendance.

Engagement with the wider community

All the schools provided safe, healthy learning environments, with high expectations of achievement, behaviour and personal conduct regardless of pupils' individual backgrounds. They recognised that for some pupils living in difficult circumstances, the school had an important role in offering a secure, predictable and supportive 'oasis' where learning can take place.

All of the schools offered extended facilities such as breakfast clubs, homework clubs, out-of-hours learning centres, family drop-in centres and the like. However, in all of the schools, although such provision may have a social care element behind it, the schools were also clear that a major purpose of such schemes was to support enhanced learning.

Staff have always been caring here and the headteacher has brought an attainment edge. (Member of SLT, G)

A safe school: being ready to learn

Secondary school H

In secondary school H, a separate building had been developed into a centre for vulnerable and volatile pupils and their families. Some vulnerable pupils from chaotic home backgrounds were encouraged to come to the centre before school to take showers, change into clean school uniforms kept in the centre for that purpose and eat breakfast. Such support enabled these pupils to be ready for the school day ahead and thus more able to focus on learning.

Pupils recognised the importance of the school as a haven from the distractions and demands of their homes and the community. They also appreciated that some of the boundaries in the form of rules and expectations established a calmer and more secure learning environment.

The headteacher has made school more professional – good dress (uniform), subjects run differently, more courses to enable you to stay at school. The bullying has stopped, there's a better reputation in the community – the dress image is better – we look smart. (Pupil, G)

As well as providing an oasis within the community, all the schools visited played an important role as a hub for the community. In this role, they encouraged the community to use the school and its facilities and pupils went out into the community as ambassadors for the school. Many examples were given, including, most commonly, performing drama and music within the community and visiting old people's homes. Other examples include a gardening club planting trees in the area and looking after the garden of an old peoples' home. Such links developed positive relationships and offered opportunities for social and emotional development.

All the schools were committed to becoming extended schools and recognised the value of this in building relationships with the wider community and in supporting learning. In schools A and C, parents/carers had requested clubs and the schools had responded to this. They offered clubs ranging from salsa to bingo.

Lots of clubs. There's always something going on, for parents/carers too – disco dancing, shows for the community, coming into assembly, massage, computer classes. (Parent/carer, A)

Schools had moved to differing degrees towards consciously trying to change some aspects of the community. All schools ran various adult and family learning classes, but some had gone further. Examples include those outlined below.

Activities to raise the achievement and aspirations of the community were common. All of the schools employed members of the community in a variety of roles. School E, for example, was now the major employer within its immediate community. This role enabled schools to directly influence the training and life chances of adults within the community. Some schools explicitly recognised and supported the potential of this for wider community change.

Training for teaching assistants

Primary school B

In the last three years, school B has given a high priority to offering high-quality training opportunities for its teaching assistants. Every class now has a teaching assistant and it was important for the school that these were recruited from the local community. Most had few formal qualifications, but all are now qualified to at least NVQ3+. One teaching assistant has done an access degree and now wants to do a graduate teaching course. Several others have now embarked on access degree courses.

The school feels that this training has an impact beyond the school, as the teaching assistants take their new skills back into the community and their families. They also become positive role models within their families and the wider community.

They didn't have those skills but the school supports them. It's good for the school, good for the community.

Other activities were designed to change attitudes and behaviour within the community.

Changing attitudes and behaviour

Secondary school F

In school F, a youth centre has been opened. One of its specific aims is to bring together pupils from the school and a nearby school in order to tackle the growing gang rivalry between some of the young people from the two schools.

Secondary school E

The school council at secondary school E was involved in plans to build an alcohol-free cafe and social club, 'Shakers', in the area where local young people gathered. Alcohol abuse had been identified as a major issue for young people in the area and a nuisance where young people gathered. The school council has proposed a soft drinks club/log cabin to be erected on one of the estates. They carried out the feasibility study and research. This was envisaged as an alcohol-free place for pupils to meet to keep them off the streets. The design for this is displayed in the school foyer and costing/funding is currently being investigated.

There were also activities aimed at developing a two-way process. Schools drew from the community to work in partnership. One example was a local pensioners' script writing club coming into secondary school F to work alongside Year 10 pupils to develop their scripts into a drama performance. This process has the potential to challenge the age prejudices of both parties. There were also many business enterprise schemes where pupils learned from the local business community. In these schemes, business partners may have preconceptions of the area and the talents of the pupils can challenge and change these, and pupils may have their preconceptions about business changed also.

Appendix:

Information about the schools visited

Primary school A

School A takes pupils aged from 3–11. It is sited within a social housing estate in a former mining area where unemployment is high. Two-thirds of the pupils come from the top 10 per cent band of deprivation. There are many social issues in the community, including the prevalence of drugs. There are many young and/or single parents and large families. Parental experiences of education have made some pupils reluctant to come into school.

An Ofsted inspection in 2002 placed the school in special measures. The current headteacher joined the school as deputy in 2004 and became headteacher in 2006. An Ofsted inspection in March 2007 judged the school to be 'a very good school with outstanding features'.

Primary school B

School B serves a large urban estate of social housing. The school draws all of its pupils, who are almost exclusively of White British origin, from the estate. Almost half of the school population is eligible for free school meals, well above the national average of 18 per cent. At 40.4 per cent, the estate has a very high rate of unemployment. The health of people in the local area is a cause for concern, with over a fifth of the economically active age group not at work due to disabling illness. The area has recently benefited from regeneration through City Challenge grants.

The current headteacher has been in post for three years. Previously, the school was in special measures. It was the most improved school in the north-east in 2006.

Primary school C

School C is a 'fresh start' school that opened under a new name in 2006. It is currently one school with 250 pupils but is expected to grow to three schools with 500 pupils, all on one site. It is situated in an urban area that is among the top 20 per cent of most deprived neighbourhoods. Of the total population, a fifth identify themselves as having a limiting long-term illness or disability that affects their daily lives. The rate of recorded crime in the area is higher than the local average, with criminal damage particularly high. Almost two-thirds of the 16–24 year-old population is economically inactive.

About 27 per cent of the pupils at the school are eligible for free school meals. 85 per cent of children are from White British working-class families, among whom there is a high proportion of young/single parent families. Approximately 25 per cent of pupils have special educational needs.

The headteacher has been at the school for nearly two years. Major changes in the way the school operates have had a significant impact on the results.

Primary school D

School D is a seven-class primary school situated in the middle of a large social housing estate on the outskirts of a city. The estate looks pleasant, with low-rise 1970s housing and many green spaces, but it has few amenities and there are problems with vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour.

Virtually all the pupils are of White British origin. Many of their parents are unemployed or in low-paid,

unskilled jobs. About 32 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. A significant proportion of the families face complex and multiple problems. Five per cent of the pupils are looked after by the council. Over 40 per cent are identified as having special educational needs. The school has a language support centre for up to 20 pupils from Reception to Year 2.

The headteacher has been at the school for 15 years. The last Ofsted inspection judged the school to be good and gave it an outstanding rating for inclusion.

Secondary school E

School E is a five-form entry, 11–18 school with approximately 850 pupils. Situated in a small town, it serves the villages and estates of a former mining community in which the low level of aspiration is reported to be a long-standing issue.

The intake is 99 per cent White British. A total of 86 per cent of pupils live in significantly deprived areas and 37 per cent are from families in the highest bands of deprivation nationally. The school is an extended school with a new community sports hall and fitness room on site. The school is now the largest employer in the locality.

In 2004, Ofsted judged the school to be very good; it has been involved in programmes as a school facing challenging circumstances since the previous inspection in 1998. The school has gained in popularity over the last few years due to rising attainment and an innovative curriculum. It successfully takes pupils from other schools to give them a new start. There was only one exclusion last year.

Secondary school F

School F is an 11–16 community school and specialist performing arts college with 1000 on roll. It is located in an urban area on a large social housing estate and also serves three adjoining estates. The area has high levels of social deprivation, with significant issues of teenage pregnancy, crime and alcohol and drug abuse. There is also a developing problem of gang culture based on neighbourhood patches.

The school intake is 99 per cent White British. There are far more pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than the national average, in part because the school is the local authority centre for hearing and visually impaired learners.

The school is now sited in a community learning centre which was opened in 2002. The school shares the site with a youth centre, community library, sports and leisure centre and health facilities.

Secondary school G

School G is an 11–18 community comprehensive specialist engineering college with 860 pupils, of whom 94 per cent of pupils are White British pupils from the surrounding ward, which is an area of social and economic deprivation and currently a New Deal area. The school serves a large social housing estate and also takes pupils from two smaller estates.

The numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals and the number of pupils with special educational needs are both twice the national average. Pupils enter the school with levels of literacy that are among the lowest 5 per cent in the country.

Secondary school H

School H is a large 11–18 community college. The school is a 'fresh start' school that is now a designated visual arts college as well as an extended school. Its campus is situated within a large, low-rise, social housing estate on the outskirts of a city. Both the estate and the school buildings date from the 1970s. There are plans for the school and the primary school and children's centre (which are all on the same campus) to be rebuilt in a major development starting next year.

Almost all pupils are White British and live close to the school. Although the latest Ofsted report identifies the school population as having average social and economic circumstances, it includes about a third from low-income backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above the national average.

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