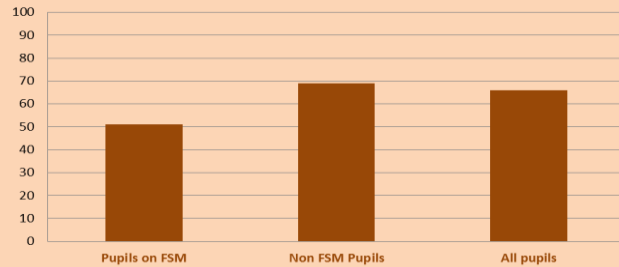


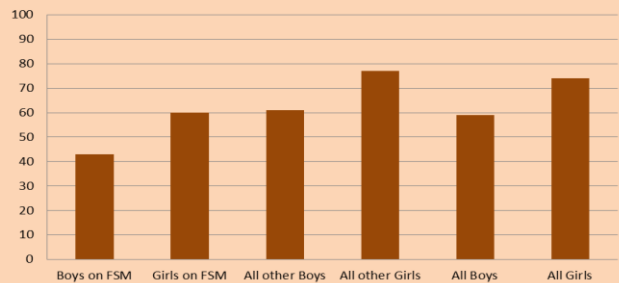
There are significant child development gaps in the Early Years

- ▶ 51% of poor children (those eligible for free school meals) achieved a good level of development at age 5 in 2015 compared to 69% of other children.
- ▶ Boys do particularly badly. Only 4 in 10 poor boys achieved a good level of development at age 5 in 2015.
- ▶ The gender divide means girls from the poorest families do as well at age five as boys not eligible for free school meals.
- ▶ Performance varies considerably across the country. In 2015 only 40% of poor children in areas such as Herefordshire and Leicestershire demonstrated good development at age 5. But in Inner London 60% did so, and in some areas, such as Lewisham, the rate was even higher at 70%.

% of school children achieving good level of development



% of school children achieving good level of development by gender



What happens in the home makes a big difference to early outcomes, but improving parenting gets little public policy attention

- ▶ What parents do is a crucial driver of children's outcomes. The evidence suggests that low income adds to the challenges parents face in parenting well.
- ▶ Opportunities are being missed to influence parenting. There needs to be a response to this policy vacuum in order to support all parents to be good parents.
- ▶ A commission report revealed that 35% of parents from the lowest socio-economic groups do not attend ante-natal classes prior to the birth of their first child; compared to 15% of those from the highest socio-economic groups.

Efforts to prepare children for school are uncoordinated, confused and patchy

- ▶ There is a lack of consensus about what the term 'school readiness' actually means and poor coordination in preparing young children to achieve it. Ofsted has pointed out there is no nationally agreed definition of school-readiness and no set age of child to which it should apply.
- ▶ The current age 5 development check is now non statutory and Government has abandoned its planned reception baseline tests, so it urgently needs an alternative so that we can understand gaps and monitor progress.
- ▶ The lack of a shared understanding of what constitutes school readiness between parents, schools, and early education providers is a wasted opportunity.

The complexity of the childcare funding system is limiting efforts to support parents and increase maternal employment

- ▶ According to a Commission survey, 23% of working class parents of very young children (>3 years) and 17% of middle class parents said that they had **no idea that there was any Government funding for childcare** at all when they had their first child.
- ▶ By 2020, Government will be spending approx. £6bn a year on childcare through a combination of income-contingent tax credits, tax free childcare, free childcare for 3 and 4 and some 2 year-olds, and childcare voucher schemes. This complex set of funding streams leads to a position which is confusing for parents and inefficient for the taxpayer.

Government should address these problems. The Commission recommends:

1. Clear Strategic Objectives

- Halve the development gap between the poorest children and the rest at age five;
- Halve the gap in maternal employment between England and the best performing nations by 2025.

3. School Readiness

- Remove the damaging confusion that exists about the concept of school-readiness by introducing a single, national, easy-to-use definition, and unite all those involved in early years services behind it.

2. Parenting

- Ignore the received wisdom that parenting is beyond the reach of public policy by establishing an innovation fund to road-test and evaluate approaches which aim to help improve parenting skills.

4. Childcare rationalisation

- Increase take-up of free childcare and decrease its cost by radically simplifying the multiple streams which finance it.